Vol. 27, no. 1, Fall 2024

Surveillance in Schools

Cohering Marginality: A Thematic Analysis of Mentorship and Counterveillance Among Black Women Scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

Christopher J. Morris

Abstract: Racialized workplace surveillance negatively affects many Black women who work and attend school at U.S. colleges and universities. Many Black women profiled, isolated, and aggressed upon on the basis on racial identity have reported both emotional and professional distress in academia. At the same time, however, cultures of Black mentorship in higher education provide professional development and networks of care that counteract racialized workplace surveillance. This article presents a thematic analysis of interviews with 10 Black women scholars in rhetoric and writing studies to further explore the discourses and practices that actively sustain positive Black cultural, scholarly, and professional output at universities and colleges. The results of the analysis: (1) demonstrate Black mentorship as a form of counterveillance called "cohering marginality" and (2) offer themes and categories that can further support additional inquiry into cultures of resistance to surveillance.

Keywords: counterveillance, Black feminism, mentorship, professionalism, thematic analysis

Doi: https://doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2024.27.1.10

Introduction: Black Mentorship and Racialized Workplace Surveillance in Higher Education

Surveillance doesn't only produce victimhood and voyeurism. Surveillance also inspires cultures of resistance, care, and expression. From that perspective, this article presents an analysis of how Black women scholars in rhetoric and writing studies practice cultures of mentorship that invert racialized workplace surveillance. This inversion, which I term "cohering marginality," constitutes a form of counterveillance. Steve Mann defines counterveillance as "camera-blinding technologies" (7). I reinterpret counterveillance, however, through the intersectional lenses of Black gender and Black feminist-womanist rhetoric by conducting a thematic analysis of interviews with ten Black woman scholars. The results of my analysis show counterveillance as sets of rhetorical and cultural practices that develop in the peripheries of institutionalized gaze even as the surveilled are being watched.

Being watched is pervasive, for some more than others. Surveillance in the workplace is consistently used against Black women, especially in predominantly white work environments that monitor, evaluate, and negatively influence Black women through often subtle yet hostile applications of "professionalism." In these hostile environments, Black women's appearances, interactions, emotions, and ways of speaking are often

Christopher J. Morris is an Assistant Professor of Writing at York University in Toronto, Ontario. His research, informed by critical race and ethnic studies, explores rhetoric and technical communication in economic development and has appeared or is forthcoming in *Technical Communication, Technical Communication Quarterly,* and *Organization.* He earned his PhD from The Ohio State University.

policed—through isolation, microaggressions, documentation, and reporting, among other mechanisms—in conjunction with white middle-class norms that legitimate workplace discrimination (Williams). Such workplace policing is a form of "racializing surveillance," which Simone Browne defines as "when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race, and where the outcome of this is often discriminatory and violent treatment" (8). Browne suggests also that racializing surveillance is a "technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies, and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a 'power to define what is in or out of place'" (17). This phenomenon is particularly present in higher education, where "Black women face unfair demotion, threats of job loss, or [have] changed jobs more often… as a result of workplace bullying" (Hollis 83). Those dynamics facilitate burnout and resignation among Black professionals due in significant part to perceived pressures to "work twice as hard" as their white colleagues (DeCuir-Gunby et al.). These factors have been found to reduce the likelihood that Black women educators and administrators actively confront racial discrimination.

Conversely, Black mentorship thrives as a corrective to workplace discrimination and as counterveillance to institutional surveillance. In contrast to racialized workplace surveillance, mentorship among Black scholars and educational professionals fosters community (DeCuir-Gunby et al.). Several scholars highlight these communities and illustrate, correspondingly, how Black mentorship creates and nurtures networks of care among fellow Black scholars and professionals (Brown and Mendenhall; Kelly and Fries-Britt). In technical communication, rhetoric, and writing studies, similar recent work highlights the importance of Black narratives, discourses, and rhetorics in supporting Black mentorship and vice versa (Gonzales et al.; Ore et al.). This article contributes to existing scholarship on the affordances of Black mentorship in academia by examining Black mentorship practices and discourses with surveillance in mind. Simultaneously, I join other scholars (e.g., Cramer; Gonzales and Deckard) who explore Black cultures in rhetorical surveillance studies. In the following sections: I discuss the Black feminist-womanist theories that influence my analysis; next, I provide additional details about the interviews I conducted; then, I present and discuss the findings from my analysis; and, finally, I conclude with brief suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Framework: Counterveillance, Black Gender, and Black Feminist-Womanist Rhetoric

Counterveillance comprises practices that render surveillance defective. As previously mentioned, Mann defines counterveillance as "camera-blinding technologies" (7). Jennifer Gradecki and Derek Curry define counterveillance similarly as "measures taken to block both surveillance and sousveillance" including "software for anonymization and encryption, and…going 'off the grid'" (6). Counterveillant output ultimately inverts surveillance. Michael Welch takes up this question of inversion, writing that counterveillance "consists of two major inversions [of surveillance]: (1) turn the prison inside out; and (2) watch the watchers" (304). The first inversion occurs when institutional or unfair conditions are made known to the public or to broader audiences, the second when "key officials governing the penal apparatus themselves are

monitored by a collective of prisoners, ex-cons, and activists" (304). For Welch, these two inversions initiate movements toward reform and toward a kind of counter-ethics against unjust surveillance.

While Welch's theory derives from analyzing a particular political movement in France (the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons), I'm interested in how Black cultures in U.S. higher education develop amid their own moves toward counter-ethics against surveillance. I adopt the concept of *counterveillance* (as opposed to *countersurveillance*) since the discourses and cultural practices of Black women discussed in this project do not explicitly observe, record, or expose oppressors. Instead, interview participants shared stories in which they and other Black scholars were the principal agents and actants in their own worldviews. Thus, I argue that counterveillance comprises also the cultural, technical, and epistemological output generated as the surveilled go unseen and/or make surveillance obsolete or counterintuitive. Further, I introduce a third inversion to counterveillance—*cohering marginality*—which comprises epistemic production initiated and sustained in the coordinated cultures of the surveilled.

Importantly, counterveillance relies on the social coordination of what Michel Foucault termed "counter-conduct" (Welch 305). Foucault assesses that "the tactical immanence of both resistance and counter-conduct to their respective fields of action should not lead one to conclude that they are simply a passive underside, a merely negative or reactive phenomenon, a kind of disappointing after-effect" (Davidson 27). In other words, counter-conduct is not simply disobedience, flight-or-fight, or documentation. Rather, counter-conduct—the world-building inversion of surveillance—is the conceptual, ethical, and attitudinal forces that bring about alternative paradigms in which marginality coheres into a distinct culture. According to Arnold I. Davidson, for Foucault, "gay culture in the widest sense of the term" therefore constituted a counter-conduct because such "relations create a short-circuit, and introduce love where there should be law, rule, habit" (33). Cultures of Black woman mentorship function along similar lines, as mentorship helps Black scholars enact networks of care against anti-Black surveillance in the academy.

Counterveillance, though, is an established tradition in Black and African-American cultural history, wherein spaces like kitchens and barbershops enable Black communicators to engage informative networks of care away from hostile gaze. Olga Idriss Davis explains that, because plantation kitchens were racialized, separate spaces that were at once both surveilled and closed off, "The kitchen provided a space in which black women passed on survival skills to their daughters and helped them develop ways to confront oppressive conditions" (Davis, "Kitchen" 369). This cultural richness prompts comparisons between Black womanist kitchen legacies on the one hand and Black woman mentorship, scholarship, and resistance in the academy on the other. In that regard, due to anti-Blackness that devalues Black cultures and languages in higher education, "As the tenure clock ticks away, oftentimes African American women professors who rise to the challenge of active research, innovative teaching methods, and grantsmanship still are castigated" (Davis, "Kitchen" 377). As a result, Black feminist-womanist cultures in academia take on the structure of the "kitchen"—productive and generative spaces that are simultaneously separate and surveilled. Nevertheless, the kitchen was a locus of Black agency where "the creation of food was a rhetorical act of nurturance and

care, creative genius, and survival" (Davis, "Kitchen" 368). Black feminist-womanist discourse and rhetoric among Black scholars reflect similar functions of care, innovation, and survival. More recently, for example, scholars like Carmen Kynard, Vorris L. Nunley, and Douglas M. Walls have articulated various versions of "hush harbors" in Black educational and professional practice, with hush harbors functioning as Black "safe spaces" that cultivate resistant practices to surveillance.

When it comes to racialized surveillance of Black women, intersectionality offers a thought-provoking lens with which to consider the theoretical capacities of Black feminist-womanist discourse to illuminate cultures of counterveillance. Indeed, hush harbors are spatial and rhetorical instantiations of Black counterveillance. Yet, neither hush harbors nor counterveillances are configured or expressed uniformly. Kitchens, for example, have traditionally been typed as predominantly female, whereas barbershops have typically been discussed as male-dominated spaces. The issue of Black gender in surveillance studies warrants further consideration. By exploring how Blackness (un)does gender, we can explore also how Black counterveillance undoes surveillance. Accordingly, what I seek to present in this article is ultimately a Black feminist-womanist theory of surveillance by introducing cohering marginality as a form of counterveillance.

To be sure, Black women's experiences in higher education constitute an ethical imperative with respect to institutional surveillance. Intersectionality has become widely institutionalized in the U.S. academy, such that Black women in university spaces are often profiled and operationalized on behalf of diversity initiatives and curricular "progress" (Nash). From this perspective, racialized workplace surveillance and intersectionality in higher education are thematically and practically linked. On this front, Jennifer C. Nash asserts that "black women are both desired and disavowed in the academy" (19). At the same time, however, Black woman scholars continually develop sets of ethics, discourses, and cultural practices that buttress Black well-being against fetishistic surveillance.

Black gender functions as an organizing principle for anti-Black surveillance as well as for Black counterveillance. Patrice D. Douglass argues, "The core of Black feminist concerns is how to account for the gravity of gender violences that lack a proper name" (116). As a Black (male) writing professor, I want to acknowledge my own perspective here: my interest in Black feminism-womanism with respect to this project is to familiarize the gravity of gender counterveillances. Black gender reveals how Blackness and anti-Blackness operate at more impactful levels than those of sexed difference. Douglass formulates Black gender as "the pinnacle of gendered and sexual (non)being," and offers that, "to bifurcate Black gender, Black women up against Black men, achieves nothing more than reifying gender stratifications that historically and experientially have never been made available to Black people" (107, 109). Thus, in analyzing the discourses of Black woman scholars in rhetoric and writing studies, like Douglass, I view "Blackness as theorem that is not excessive to the concern of gender but essential to its operative modalities," with Black feminism-womanism "as both a corrective to the assumptive logic of nonblack gender concerns and a theory of violence that expands and challenges the manner in which gendered violence is assumed to appear in the world"

(110). Grounded in an understanding that violence and surveillance are concomitant, my theoretical framework rereads Douglass slightly and suggests that Black feminism-womanism undoes the assumptive logic of nonblack gender concerns vis-à-vis surveillance. Black feminism-womanism intervenes in (counter)surveillance in ways that expand and challenge the ways gendered (counter)surveillance is assumed to function.

Black women's rhetoric formulates at the boundaries of seen and unseen, public and private, as Black feminist-womanist responses to surveillance represent a peculiar case of subjectification under surveillance, because of how gender and race occlude Black legibility. Davis offers that Black women's "experience of struggle and survival by way of telling our story in our own discourse continues to illuminate the dynamics between the public and private spheres of social reality" ("Theorizing" 36). Meanwhile, universalism obscures rather than reveals how surveillance operates. John Gilliom agrees: "Until we are able to generate sufficient research to make plausible sense of how differently situated people—welfare mothers, prisoners, students, middle-class professionals—speak of and respond to their various surveillance settings, I would argue that we are fundamentally unable to define the powers of surveillance or, indeed, to devise a meaningful account of what surveillance is" (126). But, while universalism occludes the limits of (or lack of limits to) surveillance, Black gender gives shape to the enveloping boundaries (i.e., cohering marginality) of counterveillance.

In a Black feminist-womanist framework, counterveillance is not merely the act of hiding or of sharing secrets. Instead, Black womanist counterveillance entails a methodization of time and space that push time and space to the outer edges of social relation where resistance can become an ethical and culturally sustaining shape. Rhetorically, this shape manifests as what Evelynn Hammonds calls "politics of articulation" that "build on the interrogation of what makes it possible for black women to speak and act" (Hammonds 141). This project aspires to the politics of articulation and interrogates how Black woman scholars in rhetoric and writing studies use mentorship to make their own possibilities for speaking and acting. The next section discusses my methods for data collection and interpretation for ten interviews about Black mentorship.

Methodology: Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews analyzed for this article were initially collected as part of a separate project conducted by myself and Dr. Laura L. Allen, my current colleague at York University in 2023.The project was titled "Rhetorical Kinship and Narrative Ethnographies of Black Mentorship in Composition Studies." We published our initial analysis as "Black Professional Ethos: Exploring Black Mentorship Through Narrative Ethnography in Technical Communication" (2024). Dr. Allen and I conducted ten semi-structured interviews that featured a protocol of five standard open-ended questions with varied ethnographic follow-up questions. The five-question protocol was as follows:

- Tell us a little bit about yourself. What is your current position and field of study?
- How did you get into your field, and how did Black faculty members or other Black mentors inspire you to join your field?

- How have you been mentored by other Black scholarship or work in the field? Maybe you've never met these particular people, but you feel mentored by them, having engaged with their scholarship.
- In what ways have Black faculty members or Black educational professionals contributed to your sense of belonging within your discipline?
- How do you see your work in the field as furthering a sense of community or family among Black professionals?

We recruited participants with snowball sampling via email and social media. Participants were recruited under the following criteria: self-identify as Black; have published academic, peer-reviewed research; and possess a PhD in composition studies or related fields. All respondents live and work in the United States or Canada, identified as Black women, and were active scholars in Technical and Professional Communication as well as in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy. Of the ten participants: seven were assistant professors; two were associate or full professors; and one was a full-time contract professor.

I coded and conducted thematic analysis on each interview. My descriptive codes were: <sight>, <sound>, <presence>, <recognition>, and <belonging>. With those codes in mind, the goal of my analysis is to consider how Black woman scholars in rhetoric and writing studies might conceptualize mentorship and professional development as forms of counterveillance, particularly my suggestion of a third inversion—cohering marginality. Summarized in Table 1 and explored in further detail in the next section, my analysis seeks to understand how such conceptualizations might reflect or enrich Black feminist-womanist frameworks in rhetorical surveillance studies.

Analysis: Themes and Categories of Cohering Marginality

Racial Profiling and Institutionalized Isolation: Racialized Workplace Surveillance of Black Women in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

For research participants in this project, racialized workplace surveillance manifested primarily in two related forms: racial profiling and institutionalized isolation. Here, I use *racial profiling* to refer to institutional assumptions and treatment based on racial identity. Racial profiling has the surveillance effect of subjects internalizing being watched while also having their behaviors, identities, and worldviews disciplined in line with carceral ideologies of violence and control. Meanwhile, institutionalized isolation of stigmatized subjects makes surveilling those subjects less difficult (e.g., solitary confinement). Moreover, surveillance of such subjects can create other isolating effects (e.g., electronic monitoring bracelets), cleaving the surveilled from social communities.

Overall, participants in this project shared stories of racial profiling that ranged from name discrimination in applying for jobs to civic neglect of Black neighborhoods in which participants were raised. In higher education, racial profiling often takes the forms of denigration, stereotyping, and linguistic discrim-

ination. One senior scholar says that she and her students feel that "they must master standard American English." "Otherwise," she explains, "they can't even get their feet in the door anywhere to make an impact on people's views about Blacks, about Black language, or anything else." Another participant echoes a similar experience with racial profiling: "For writing in general, the messaging that you get if you are Black from the earliest points is that you can't write like you talk. And because something about how you talk is not proper, not smart…that if you do, it belongs in some creative context." A third scholar mentions that she had been stereotyped based upon the way she speaks, noting "how people are surprised [at] how I sound or trying to figure out, 'why do you sound like that?'"

Meanwhile, for participants, racism and racial profiling are institutional experiences, not just cultural or interpersonal phenomena. One scholar says her predominantly Black workplace struggled at times to attract new faculty because potential hires seem to be "looking for people to be better prepared and white." Another participant expresses that anti-Blackness and profiling can proliferate even amid institutional gestures toward diversity. She describes an occasion in graduate school when an advisor dismissed her concerns as being similar to another Black graduate student who was also dismissed: "We were then just enveloped into this one Black woman. We were gelled as one Black person in the department." For this scholar, the interaction communicated a reductionist message: "Oh, well, you're a Black woman and so you're all kind of the same." One scholar offers her own critique of institutional diversity: "There are particular types of non-white bodies that are embraced." The same scholar also mentions that, as an emerging Black academic with interests in hip-hop, she felt stereotyped and typecast within her department: "Some of the faculty there said I wouldn't make it because I do Black things," she recalls. "I didn't want to be pigeonholed with just hip-hop studies because I find that once you do hip-hop studies, people just think that that's it." Importantly, the racial profiling and workplace surveillance experienced by the participants in this project hinged on hypervisibility brought about by institutionalized isolation.

Many respondents suggest that being the only or one of few Black scholars in particular spaces facilitates racialized workplace surveillance. One scholar notes, "My education has always been in predominantly white spaces, so…I didn't know anything else… just felt like, well, that's just how it is…I will always be the minority in a lot of these professional spaces." For her, such feelings of isolation in her graduate education contributed to an antagonistic relationship with her department. "Even though I was progressing and reading other scholarship," she says, "I still don't feel like I belonged because I was still attending a predominantly white institution." Notably, institutionalized isolation marks some participants for specific, racialized departmental tasks. One scholar expresses that "as a Black woman in the faculty, the only Black woman in the rhetoric and composition faculty specifically, I would be asked to do lots of things."

A senior scholar, however, grounds the work she does mentoring other Black faculty as a corrective to institutionalized isolation. She explains, "There's not enough of us. There needs to be more of us in this field." Several other scholars echo similar sentiments. To further elaborate on Black correctives to surveillance, the next subsection (Table 1) provides greater detail into the themes that emerged, as Black woman scholars dis-

cuss how mentorship sustains their cultural and professional development, which I argue constitutes a form of counterveillance.

Table 1. Cohering Marginality: Categories, Themes, and Sample Coded Text

Theoretical Construct: **Cohering Marginality** *Epistemic production initiated and sustained in the coordinated behaviors and cultures of the surveilled*			
Category 1: **Inverting Profiling** *Embracing rather than avoiding surveilled identities and behaviors*		Category 2: **Inverting Isolation** *Creating new communities and cultures to counteract surveillance*	
Theme	*Sample Coded Text*	*Theme*	*Sample Coded Text*
Visualizing Self in Others. *"Seeing" and "Finding" other Black scholars and faculty convinced emerging Black scholars as to the possibilities of Black academic communities.*	*I go to this conference. I'm seeing all these Black scholars, all these Black faculty. I'm like, "They all have PhDs?!…I had never been around that many Black PhDs, that many Black grad students in the field*	**Methodizing Talk.** *Scholars utilized informal discussion as a way to exchange information and ideas and to provide practical and emotional support.*	*…just those conversations with the two or three Black graduate students. It was really, really important to me. And that not only gave me a sense of belonging, but I hope it gave them a sense of belonging as well*
Activating Aesthetics. *Scholars intended to use Black artistic and visual expressions to raise consciousness.*	*…some of the questions and ideas…about African-American rhetoric and aesthetics, all of those things. I was curious about design and questions in public art*	**Actualizing Solidarity**. *By interacting with other Black scholars in-person, scholars were able to experience Black scholarly communities.*	*…this is not a separate world anymore. It's not just what I read in the classroom. These are real people behind things who are moving and changing the field around me, and I can be a part of that conversation*

Talking Back. *By studying the legitimacy and efficacy of Black languages, scholars sought to counteract linguistic discrimination against Black ways of speaking.*	*…this is not bad English or ghetto speech or any such thing. This language, which scholars call variously African-American Vernacular English, Black English, Black English vernacular and so forth, is systematic*	**Mentoring Multi-directionally.** *Scholars remedied isolation by mentoring and building communities across disciplines and hierarchies.*	*…mentoring goes both ways. It's not just somebody mentoring me, it's me mentoring somebody else. It goes both ways in terms of that sense of belonging and makes the field feel less isolated*

Though the following analysis is typified and categorized (in line with protocols of thematic analysis), for me, perhaps the most edifying aspect of this project was how richly and distinctly each participant's stories emerged. I've extracted commonalities for the sake of theoretical articulation; at the same time, however, a similar project could just as impactfully explicate differences in participant narratives for the sake of theoretical disarticulation—what Evelynn Hammonds might call a "different geometry"—which is its own ethical imperative. Especially where intersectionality is concerned, Nash for example, warns that sometimes "intersectionality produces an account of power that fails to 'historicize and theorize' and instead simply reproduces a thin conception of power invested in precisely the concepts it aspires to deconstruct" (16). While engaging in this research, I've appreciated both the subtle and the profound variations in how each participant inverts racialized surveillance based on their own viewpoints, emotions, and histories regarding mentorship and professional development. The act of noticing and recognizing as much functioned as a conceptual mirror whereby I could also process my own relationship to racialized surveillance and methods used to counteract it. (Writing this article is one such method.) This self-reflexive position also helped me conduct these interviews and read participant narratives with added sensitivity. As I considered the call for papers for this Cluster Conversation and, later, as I coded and analyzed the transcripts, I continually wondered, "What might it mean to be reflected, to be watched, to avoid being seen, to be invisible, or to be disappeared when searching for yourself?"

In that respect, and with differences and divergences among participants in mind, this project for me (in much the same way mentorship functioned for our participants) is a manifestation of mutual vulnerability and witnessing—those "expansive conceptions of relationality, encouraging us to view ourselves as deeply embedded in the world, and thus as deeply connected to others, effectively exploding the hold romantic and familial have had on conceptions of intimacy, vulnerability, and relatedness" (Nash 117). Indeed, this project initially began with my and Dr. Allen's mutual interest in Black kinships, which have been pivotal to our personal and professional identities. Accordingly, in the analysis that follows, I've intended to present participant voices in ways that reflect interconnectedness, openness, and relationality—qualities that I hope may continue to counter the deleterious effects of institutional surveillance.

Black Women's Mentorship and Counterveillance in Rhetoric and Writing Studies: Themes of Cohering Marginality

Category 1: Inverting Profiling

Theme 1: Visualizing Self in Others

According to participants, "seeing" and "finding" other Black scholars and faculty convinced emerging Black scholars as to the possibilities of Black academic communities. For example, one scholar said, "Seeing a familiar face or seeing a face that looks like me and also the Black technical and professional communication research group…has tremendously made me feel like I belong within this sub-area of technical communication and professional writing, because that also is a predominantly white field historically—still is." Conversely, as exemplified by the sample coded text for this theme in Table 1, social interaction with other Black scholars signified transformative turning points in participant narratives. As this participant shares, the recognition that came to mind was, "They all have PhDs?!" Seeing other Black women in professional contexts encouraged many participants to pursue their own professional goals. One senior scholar described how seeing former politician Barbara Jordan deliver a speech on television inspired her own scholarly interests in Black woman rhetorics. Some scholars also mentioned the benefits of being "seen" by other scholars, particularly being seen by senior scholars who provided valuable feedback on papers, introduced emerging scholars to others in the field, and pointed emerging scholars in the direction of helpful resources.

Additionally, numerous participants identified supportive Black communities and relevant Black scholarship on the basis of their being classified as Black. Indeed, for participants, "looking" for Black scholars functioned as a survival method amid institutionalized isolation. One participant expressed defiance about being isolated in a predominantly white institution. "That shit didn't stop me," she said, "I was about to go find where the Black people was at." For that same participant, seeking out other Black scholars manifested in prioritizing scholarship by Black woman writers in technical communication, because she wanted to engage Black issues in the field. About noted Black woman scholar Miriam F. Williams, the participant recalls, "I used to read all of her work, and I could see myself in this."

Theme 2: Activating Aesthetics

Several participants expressed interest in and commitment to Black art, most notably to music. Some participants study Black art as part of their scholarship. Others noted an intimate, aesthetic relationship to Black music and Black art. For some participants, music is a shared interest that facilitates social bonding. For example, a senior scholar described an informal musical act she produced with other Black woman scholars in their department as part of a group gathering. "We were the 'Motown Mamas,'" this senior scholar reflected. "We had the feather boas and the full-length gloves. And I remember us being out in the English department outer office practicing our choreography." Another participant noted that her scholarly interests are rooted in her passion for music: "I love talking about music and sort of being able to have a conversation through music and unpack those things." Similarly, one scholar expressed a scholarly

and communitarian appreciation for hip-hop, offering that she sees the potential of hip-hop as "a cultural tool in the Black community that is teaching youth responsibility, mentorship, and leadership."

Theme 3: Talking Back

By studying the legitimacy and efficacy of Black languages, scholars interviewed for this project sought to counteract linguistic discrimination against Black ways of speaking. One senior scholar concluded that, with her scholarship, she hopes students will understand that "my language is a real language, so be proud of your language. Don't be embarrassed about your language." Indeed, participants broadly valued "authenticity," "boldness," and "personality" in their academic writing as both resistance and refutation to anti-Black, Eurocentric modes of communication. As one participant explained, "I'm interested in how expertise sounds through the voice of a Black person." These methods of "talking with" reflected scholarly interest in "talking back," with numerous scholars studying how Black communicators use language and rhetoric for social justice. One senior scholar discussed her research: "I was interested in how Black folk use reading and writing to create community [and] how people use writing in their communities." Another participant described her research interest in Ida B. Wells and "how she used language to fight lynching." One scholar concluded that "speaking up or speaking to an issue can also create change."

Category 2: Inverting Isolation

Theme 1: Methodizing Talk

Scholarly conversation is often framed as responding to claims in a series of academic articles. For participants in our project, however, conversation is understood primarily as an informal method of care in which Black scholars exchange critical information about important scholarship, institutional resources and processes, and developments in the field. Moreover, with racialized workplace surveillance in mind, scholars used more intimate, informal discussion to provide emotional support as well as practical guidance for navigating hostile institutional dynamics. One scholar prioritized the need "to actually have conversations with [other Black scholars], like 'how they treatin' you?' kind of discussions. Or meeting the students of other scholars, not necessarily of Black scholars, but meeting their Black students who I got to sit down and have conversations with." Another participant said, "To be vulnerable is really important to have these really tough conversations…with other Black women." That same scholar noted the value of gossip as "being able to strategize outside of the institution…through coffee shops, through going on walks with just another colleague." She described such communication practices as "really helpful." Additionally, one participant stressed the importance of peer mentorship as a dynamic in which emerging scholars could debate, share resources, hold each other accountable, and engage "good Southern conversation"—all of which were key for founding a "community of Black scholars doing the work across institutions and staying connected."

Theme 2: Actualizing Solidarity

As noted in Table 1, this theme references a phenomenon in which, by interacting with other Black scholars in-person, scholars experience Black scholarly communities. The hallmark of this experience is the move from knowing Black scholars based solely on their written work to knowing Black scholars as individ-

uals and later as members of an actual social community. Many participants moved from seeking fellow Black scholars to interacting with Black scholarly communities, which allowed for solidarity and community cohesion. In so doing, moreover, they effectively counteracted institutionalized isolation. One emerging scholar said that, upon meeting an established Black scholar, "I knew from the beginning that I was going to have a community…seeing her in person. Seeing her in the flesh was also an important moment." Participants also noted that mentors emphasized practices of care rather than competition among Black scholars. Such practices of care included creating writing groups, holding social events, and sharing opportunities and resources. As one participant noted, a prominent Black scholar helped students to prioritize that "it was important to stay together, to help each other, to support each other, and to award each other's accomplishments."

Theme 3: Mentoring Multi-directionally

Scholars remedy isolation by mentoring and building communities across disciplines and hierarchies. According to our participants, due to professional isolation and systemically low representation in the general field of rhetoric and writing studies, mentorship and community support rely on a networked ethos that transcends physical location, disciplinary membership, and career status. A senior scholar noted that "particularly at research institutions [and at] predominantly white institutions, one of the ways for me not to feel so isolated was to get to know people in other disciplines." Another participant expressed that "the Black woman mentors in my life are not in the field or not recognized by the field…Black people don't have that privacy or that privilege to stay in a particular place and get those accolades. That's just not our life. Everything is intermingled." For these reasons, that same participant assessed that for Black scholars "our mentorship extends beyond institutionalities [and] being able to go outside of where they can see me has helped develop my strategies and my tactics to get around things." Indeed, for many of participants, Black counterveillance means working beyond conventional institutionality as a way of building mentorship, supporting ethical outcomes, and avoiding institutional gaze. As one participant said, "Our work as researchers shouldn't just stay within the field. It should help the greater good, the greater community."

Conclusion

I believe cohering marginality as well as the categories and themes I've articulated thus far have wide-ranging implications for further consideration in rhetorical surveillance studies. The analysis I present in this article was limited to ten Black woman scholars in rhetoric and writing studies. Accordingly, to further explore issues related to counterveillance and cohering marginality, more work can be done to consider how additional Black communities as well as other surveilled communities in different domains also build cultures of counterveillance. In the case of this project, especially with Black intersectionality in mind, the themes described thus far signal Blackness's "moment of suspension" as respondents detailed how their lived experiences—sometimes willfully, sometimes not—collapsed boundaries between public and private, seen and unseen.

For participants, with their practices and cultures of mentorship, what was silenced was heard. What was isolated was networked. What was denigrated was elevated. What was marginalized cohered. This dynamic further demonstrates how conceptualizing resistance to surveillance "through the history of black enslavement and its attendant practices of captivity opens up the possibilities for fugitive acts of escape, resistance, and the productive disruptions that happen when blackness enters the frame" (Browne 164). More than that, however, cohering marginality gestures toward the valences that flourish outside the frame, displaced by the circumscriptive limits imposed by gaze. In our interviews, relationships within communities of Black scholars and mentors were not simply defined as colleagues or friends. These relationships, taking forms of rhetorical and fictive kinship, were routinely defined as "brothers" and "sisters," with many participants noting a "family connection" with other Black scholars. Cohering marginality was a "family" affair as institutionalized strangers were (un)made into familiar kin, an inversion in the subjectification of surveillance. As one senior scholar in an interview explained, "I think in terms of my scholarship, I hope that when people read it, they feel a sense of, "Oh. That kind of speaks to me. It speaks to my community. It speaks to my people."

Works Cited

Brown, Nicole M., and Ruby Mendenhall. "Communal Conversations: Black Women World-Making Through Mentorship." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2023, pp. 698–704, doi.org/10.1177/10778004221124015.

Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke UP, 2015.

Cramer, Linsay M. "Cam Newton and Russell Westbrook's Symbolic Resistance to Whiteness in the NFL and NBA." *The Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2019, pp. 57–75, doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1439421.

Davidson, Arnold I. "In Praise of Counter-Conduct." *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2011, pp. 25–41, doi.org/10.1177/0952695111411625.

Davis, Olga Idriss. "In the Kitchen: Transforming the Academy through Safe Spaces of Resistance." *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1999, pp. 364–81, doi.org/10.1080/10570319909374647.

———. "Theorizing African American Women's Discourse: The Public and Private Spheres of Experiences." *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*, edited by Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis. Hampton Press, 2002, pp. 35–51.

DeCuir-Gunby, Jessica T., et al. "African American Professionals in Higher Education: Experiencing and Coping with Racial Microaggressions." *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2020, pp. 492–508, doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1579706.

Douglass, Patrice D. "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying." *Theory & Event*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2018, pp. 106–23, doi.org/10.1353/tae.2018.0004.

Gilliom, John. "Struggling with Surveillance: Resistance, Consciousness, and Identity." *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility*, edited by Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, University of Toronto Press, 2018, pp. 111–130.

Gonzales, Laura, et al. "Narratives from the Margins: Centering Women of Color in Technical

Communication." *Equipping Technical Communicators for Social Justice Work: Theories, Methodologies, and Pedagogies*, edited by Rebecca Walton and Godwin Y. Agboka, Utah State UP, 2021, pp. 15–31.

Gradecki, Jennifer, and Derek Curry. "Crowd-Sourced Intelligence Agency: Prototyping Counterveillance." *Big Data & Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–7, doi.org/10.1177/2053951717693259.

Hammonds, Evelynn. "Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2–3, 1994, pp. 126–45, doi.org/10.1215/10407391-6-2-3-126.

Hollis, Leah P. "Bullied Out of Position: Black Women's Complex Intersectionality, Workplace Bullying, and Resulting Career Disruption." *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2018, pp. 73–89, doi.org/10.1353/bsr.2018.0004.

Kelly, Bridget Turner, and Sharon Fries-Britt, editors. *Building Mentorship Networks to Support Black Women: A Guide to Succeeding in the Academy*. Routledge, 2022.

Kynard, Carmen. "From Candy Girls to Cyber Sista-Cipher: Narrating Black Females' Color-Consciousness and Counterstories in 'and' out 'of School.'" *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2010, pp. 30–53.

Mann, Steve. "Veillance and Reciprocal Transparency: Surveillance Versus Sousveillance, AR

Glass, Lifelogging, and Wearable Computing." *2013 IEEE International Symposium on Technology and Society*, 2013, pp. 1–12, doi.org/10.1109/ISTAS.2013.6613094.

Morris, Christopher J., and Laura L. Allen. "Black Professional Ethos: Exploring Black Mentorship Through Narrative Ethnography in Technical Communication." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2024, pp. 358–372, doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2024.2340441.

Nash, Jennifer C. *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*. Duke UP, 2019.

Nunley, Vorris L. *Keepin' It Hushed: The Barbershop and African American Hush Harbor Rhetoric*. Wayne State UP, 2011.

Ore, Ersula, et al. "Symposium: Diversity Is Not Enough: Mentorship and Community-Building as Anti-racist Praxis." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2021, pp. 207–11, doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2021.1935157.

Walls, Douglas M. "The Professional Work of 'Unprofessional' Tweets: Microblogging Career Situations in African American Hush Harbors." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2017, pp. 391–416.

Welch, Michael. "Counterveillance: How Foucault and the Groupe d'Information Sur Les Prisons Reversed the Optics." *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2011, pp. 301–13, doi.org/10.1177/1362480610396651.

Williams, Brittany M. "'It's Just My Face:' Workplace Policing of Black Professional Women in Higher Education." *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, pp. 67–89, doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2023.2172730.