



The University of Texas at Austin  
**Texas Education Review**  
College of Education

Journal Homepage: [Texas Education Review](http://www.review.education.texas.edu)

Published online: February 2020

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## *The Black (W)hole: Examining Institutional Racism in Doctoral Education, an OrgCrit Perspective*

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**To cite this article:** Nagbe, M.N. (2019). The Black (w)hole: Examining institutional racism in doctoral education, an OrgCrit perspective. *Texas Education Review*, 8(1), 6-23.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/7054>

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## **The Black (W)hole: Examining Institutional Racism in Doctoral Education, an OrgCrit Perspective**

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Doctoral program socialization was originally conceived to capture the formal and informal processes or stages by which graduate students become acclimated to the norms, ideologies, values, procedures, and behaviors of their departments and institutions, and ultimately embrace roles as independent knowledge producers in their respective academic or professional fields (Weidman et al., 2001). Given their prominence for harboring most doctoral degree-granting institutions, Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) serve as an essential socialization site for students who wish to pursue careers in the professoriate, academic administration, or other professional fields in non-academic arenas to utilize their expertise as researchers. Because adequate preparation for such careers is required and traditionally fostered through doctoral programs, a student's socialization process during their graduate training is crucial for their successful transition into the job market (Blockett et al., 2016).

### **Black Doctoral Student Socialization in the Matrix of Domination**

While reaching this terminal level of higher education is no easy endeavor for anyone, several overlapping empirical and conceptual research in the literature echoed—for Black doctoral students in particular—the environment, structures, relationships, policies, and practices that fashioned their socialization experiences were plagued with racialized hostility, barriers, and marginalization (Blockett et al., 2016; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Haynes, Stewart, & Allen, 2016). As affirmed in many of the narratives unearthed through these scholars' work, Black doctoral students' individual and collective struggle is permeated by what Collins (2002) identified as a matrix of domination—a concept drawn from her rendition of Black Feminist Thought, which pointed to the phenomenon of an interlocking system of oppression existing in four domains: structurally, disciplinarily, hegemonically, and interpersonally.

Despite its conceptual usefulness, there have been no studies since Collins' (2002) publication that centered the matrix of domination as a theoretical construct to understand the environmental conditions of Black doctoral students' socialization experiences. Instead, the closest attempt to empirically studying such a phenomenon was Gildersleeve et al.'s (2011) work on doctoral student experiences with everyday racism. Here, these scholars raised awareness around the projection of insecurity and doubt onto students of color in doctoral level educational spaces—both through hegemonic and interpersonal formulations of the matrix of domination, although they were not explicitly named as such.

In a similar study, Barker (2016) looked at cross-race engagement between Black doctoral students and their white advisors at PWIs. This scholar found that Black doctoral students endured varying forms of racial socialization by learning how to navigate through racist departmental practices. One students in their study navigated through those racist departmental practices involved them preferring to keep a strictly professional relationship as a defense mechanism around racial boundaries—which exemplified the structural and disciplinary domains of the matrix of domination. Although these students sought connections among faculty with their same racial identity, the

underrepresentation of faculty of color in academia does not lend itself to accommodate this desire—a clear sign that the matrix of domination was at work once again.

Focusing specifically on those pursuing the professoriate after graduate school, Blockett et al. (2016) conducted a systematic literature review on the socialization experiences of Black doctoral students in U.S. higher education institutions. Mentorship from faculty, development around this professional role, and support offered through their program environment were cautioned as key areas of socialization where doctoral students of color felt the most marginalized. Examples of these varying forms of marginalization appeared through Black doctoral students' feelings of isolation and invisibility within and beyond classroom spaces, or within the tensions between finding community in Black student organizations yet having the presence of such groups in historically white institutional contexts deemed illegitimate.

As shown throughout the work of Gildersleeve et al., (2011), Barker (2016), and Blockett et al., (2016), Black doctoral students are seemingly tasked with reconciling the (mis)alignment between their racial and other intersectional identities, interests, and values with the culture, norms, and rituals of their department and institution. It appears as though being a Black doctoral student in a predominantly white institutional space could potentially mean being connected to this matrix of domination that one must actively work against. However, to what extent is this racialized socialization work within the operative context of institutionalized racism made apparent in how researchers and practitioners discuss Black doctoral students' access to and/or their experiences in graduate education?

### **Peering into the Black (W)hole**

Upon reading the existing literature on Black doctoral students' socialization experiences at PWIs, the matrix of domination and institutional racism appeared to be normalized attributes of doctoral education for students with minoritized identities. Yet, these attributes were not accounted for in current models of doctoral socialization. Moreover, in some scholars' work such as Lewis et al., (2004) and McGaskey (2015), I found that their discussions about systematic oppression and structural barriers in the form of institutional racism remained peripheral to their inquiry. While issues of race and racism were key issues raised across the literature base on doctoral education, evidence of researchers grappling with these realities surfaced primarily in the implication sections of their work. This signals a need for scholars to explicitly unpack the manifestations of institutional racism within doctoral education, particularly for students with minoritized identities. Doing so informs important socialization agents (i.e. students, faculty, staff, and administrators) on how to minimize issues such as marginalization, discrimination, persistence or attrition within their programs.

To meet the need for explicit unpacking, I conducted this systematic literature review to properly address this conundrum of a "Black (w)hole" in existing scholarship on institutional racism in doctoral education. I bracketed the "w" in whole to represent the dual realization that although there is a whole body of literature on race and racialization in doctoral education, there still remains a hole in research that positions institutional racism as the focal point for empirically or conceptually examining Black doctoral student experiences. Thus, the purpose of this systematic literature review was to apply a critical organizational theory (OrgCrit) perspective on how higher education scholars grappled with the issue of institutional racism within their studies on Black doctoral students at PWIs. My usage of an OrgCrit approach was to foreground institutional racism as a construct embedded within the operations, structure, and environment of organizational entities, including doctoral

programs. The key research questions that guided this systematic literature review were: Within research on Black doctoral students who attend Predominantly White Institutions, 1) How do higher education scholars interpret the manifestation of institutional racism in Black doctoral student experiences? and 2) Where are these manifestations of institutional racism situated in the organizational structure of doctoral programs?

Below, I detail the conceptual framework and methodology used to select and analyze my sample of peer-reviewed journal articles. Next, I offer a thematic presentation of my findings using my conceptual framework. Finally, I conclude with thoughts and implications on how to move our scholarship forward on understanding the manifestations of institutional racism in graduate education, particularly around Black doctoral student socialization experiences.

### Conceptual Framework

This systematic literature review incorporated Griffith et al.'s (2016) model of institutional racism, which was formulated through their study on the functions of racialized oppression through health service organizations. They defined institutional racism as “a systematic set of patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of non-white groups” (p. 289). This model argued that institutional racism operated at every level of an organization, including their features and structures, and offered the following typology:

- A) individual level, racism operates through staff members' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.
- B) intraorganizational level, institutional racism operates through an organization's internal climate, policies, and procedures. These include the relationships among staff, which are rooted in formal and informal hierarchies and power relationships.
- C) extraorganizational level, institutional racism explains how organizations influence communities, public policies, and institutions. Also, institutional racism describes how organizations are affected by larger institutions (i.e., regulatory, economic, political, professional) and are shaped by the sociopolitical and economic contexts that frame an organization's policies, procedures, and functioning (Griffith et al., 2016, p. 289)

In alignment with Griffith et al.'s (2016) focus on health service organizations, higher education can be complex organizations (Bastedo, 2012) that are not immune from the endemic nature of institutional racism. Since our public educational system operates within a broader systemic milieu of racial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998), I applied Griffith's model of institutional racism to undergird my analysis of how higher education scholars make meaning of its presence within their research on Black doctoral student experiences.

To compliment Griffith et al.'s (2016) model, I turned to Becker's (2004) conception of organizational routines to understand the mechanisms of institutional racism that exist within the individual, intraorganizational, and extraorganizational levels of doctoral education. Per Becker (2004), organizational routines are behavioral regularities, or “recurrent interaction patterns” and cognitive regularities, which involve “rules, standard operating procedures, etc.” (p. 662). In this respect, the organizational routines that shape the doctoral education exist within the behaviors of departmental students, faculty, and personnel, along with the formal and informal rules and operative protocols that

regulate the ideologies that drive those behaviors. Becker (2004) emphasized the ability of organizational routines to function as coordinating devices, reduce uncertainty, offer stability and store knowledge. These functions served as the basis of my analysis on the elements and processes that doctoral programs deploy as organizational routines, with the intent to focus on how higher education scholars discuss these dynamics in their research on Black doctoral students at PWIs.

## **Methodology**

### **Epistemology**

I approached this work through a critical social constructionism epistemology to both describe higher education scholars' interpretation of Black doctoral students' experiences and "produce a sociopolitical critique" (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009, p. 689). Because this study focused on researcher interpretations of institutional racism within Black doctoral students' experiences at PWIs, my epistemic and methodological decisions intentionally center their experiences as a marginalized group within this institutional context.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Having traversed the terrains of elite and highly influential public PWIs, I self-identify as a scholar-activist, dedicated to using my scholarship to investigate how institutional racism and other forms of structural oppression hinder the success of graduate students, particularly doctoral students of color. My shared lived experiences as a current doctoral student were useful in crafting this literature review's approach and analysis around the realities and nuances we face in this graduate space, which oftentimes are not captured. Admittedly, my close proximity to this work required careful attentiveness to manage the amount of influence my biases brought to this literature review. In recognizing the multiplicities of researchers' perspectives on institutional racism within doctoral education, I incorporated reflexive journaling as a means of ethical validation (Hayes & Singh, 2012) throughout the duration of this literature review.

### **Data Sources**

To explore the literature on Black doctoral student experiences at PWIs, I delimited my search around peer-reviewed articles published from 2000-2018, and ran four queries using combinations of the following terms: African American OR blacks OR minorities OR "minority groups" OR "of color"; doctoral students OR graduate students OR doctoral programs OR graduate programs OR doctoral education OR graduate education; socialization; NOT mentor; PWI OR predominantly white institution; curricular\* OR coursework; undergraduates OR "college students" OR doctoral students OR graduate students OR doctoral programs OR graduate programs OR graduate education OR doctoral education; and (scholarly OR academic OR professional) n1 (identity OR "self concept" OR "self perception"). The aforementioned notations were a compilation of words, letters, symbols, and numbers as shown, to activate specific algorithms that would return the type of articles I intended to find within the literature databases of my search queries.

The initial search returned 443 articles. However, I narrowed down my sample of articles based on the following exclusion criteria of studies that: only had one black doctoral student in their study, but did not offer any interpretations of their experiences; grouped students as underrepresented minorities or students/people of color, but failed to specify the distinct experiences reported by Black

doctoral students in their study; solely discussed faculty level issues about working with Black doctoral students, without incorporating the voices of Black doctoral students themselves; related to graduate support programs external to the department or institution (e.g. bridge program, preparatory institutes, national mentoring initiatives, professional associations); focused on recruitment or prospective Black doctoral students; or provided an annotated review of another research study. Based upon this exclusion criteria, a combined total of 28 peer-reviewed journal articles were selected for this literature review's analytical sample.

## Data Analysis

After locating each article in my analytical sample, I followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to conduct a textual and categorical analysis. Because I was interested in higher education scholars' interpretations of institutional racism in Black doctoral student experiences, I extracted the discussion, implications, and conclusion sections of each article in my sample. Each article was combined into a single PDF document, separated by the articles' author, year of publication, and title to label each section of extracted text, then converted it to .RTF format, and uploaded the file to NVivo for analysis. During the first and second cycles of coding (Saldaña, 2013), I used deductive codes (racism, oppress\*, barrier, interpretation, individual, intraorganizational, and extraorganizational) drawn from my research questions and central phenomena within my conceptual framework to search the extracted text. I encountered one major limitation of incongruity among the articles, as the authors did not follow the same signposting structure of discussion, implications, and conclusion. To correct for this limitation within articles that veered away from those traditional headings, I used subjective judgement to pinpoint which elements constituted discussion, implications, and conclusion sections by extracting the text that immediately followed where authors stated their findings or results.

## Findings

### Scholar Interpretations of Institutional Racism

My first research question asked, "Within research on Black doctoral students who attend Predominantly White Institutions, how do higher education scholars interpret the manifestation of institutional racism in Black doctoral student experiences?" Higher education scholars in my analytical sample of selected literature covered a breadth of focus areas regarding Black doctoral student experiences (Table 1), based upon the organizational levels drawn from my conceptual framework.

At the individual level, scholars pinpointed their interpretations of institutional racism within the ways Black doctoral students attempted to forge relationships and support networks (McGaskey, Freeman, Guyton, Richmond, & Guyton, 2016) through advising and mentorship (Barker, 2016; Felder & Barker, 2013; Grant, 2012; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Kador & Lewis, 2007). Additionally, scholars noted manifestations of institutional racism within Black doctoral students' cognitive realm, as they discussed perceptions of their programs (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Weng and Gray, 2017; Williams Shealey, 2009; Wasburn-Moses, 2007), psychosocial experiences tied to being in those spaces (Shavers & Moore 2014b; Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009), and subsequent feelings of marginalization (Gay, 2004; Green, Pulley, & Jackson, 2018).

Table 1

*Summative Topics Covered in Analytical Sample of Articles and Corresponding Data Sources*

| Organizational Level          | Topics Covered                                 | Data Sources  |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Individual Relationships      | Advising and mentorship                        | Barker, 2016; Felder & Barker, 2013; Grant, 2012; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Kador & Lewis, 2007      |
|                               | Support networks                               | McGaskey, Freeman, Guyton, Richmond, & Guyton, 2016   |
| Individual Cognitive Realm    | Program perceptions                            | Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Weng and Gray, 2017; Williams Shealey, 2009; Wasburn-Moses, 2007              |
|                               | Psychosocial experiences                       | Shavers & Moore 2014b; Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009  |
|                               | Marginalization                                | Gay, 2004; Green, Pulley, & Jackson, 2018   |
| Interorganizational Processes | Navigating doctoral education                  | Green, 2008; McKinley, 2014   |
|                               | Self-presentation and coping strategies        | Shavers & Moore, 2014a; Shavers & Moore, 2014b  |
|                               | Socialization                                  | Ellis, 2001; Felder & Freeman, 2016; Joseph, 2012; McCoy, 2018; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016 |
| Extraorganizational Outcomes  | Persistence and time to degree                 | Ellis, 2001; Kim & Otts; Merriweather, 2008   |
|                               | Dissertation writing and research productivity | Howley et al., 2015; McGaskey, 2015   |

The interorganizational level encompassed various processes Black doctoral students endured where instances of institutional racism surfaced. In response to those encounters, scholars described the tactics Black doctoral students employed to navigate their doctoral programs (Green, 2008; McKinley, 2014) and socialization experiences (Ellis, 2001; Felder & Freeman, 2016; Joseph, 2012; McCoy, 2018; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016) in other educational spaces beyond the classroom. The navigational tactics included self-presentation and coping strategies (Shavers & Moore, 2014a; Shavers & Moore, 2014b) to protect themselves of the potential harms inflicted by allowing racialized hostility and barriers to get the best of them.

These individual and interorganizational level interpretations help us identify a more nuanced understanding of institutional racism that pushes beyond our tendency to reduce its manifestations to mere “racist acts” between individuals. Resultantly, we see these scholars recognized institutional racism as a phenomenon situated inside and outside the psychosocial arenas of individuals who occupy doctoral program spaces. Additionally, their sensemaking demonstrates how institutional

racism entrenches itself in the ideologies, values, discursive, and behavioral aspects of doctoral program operations. This heightened realization adds another layer of racialized work that Black doctoral students might assume on top of the already demanding workload that any doctoral student would face.

Lastly, at the extraorganizational level, scholars attempted to make sense of the resulting impact institutional racism had on doctoral programs' outcomes through their discussions on Black doctoral students' disparate rates for persistence and time to degree (Ellis, 2001; Kim & Otts; Merriweather, 2008), which lagged behind their non-Black peers. Two particular areas where scholars noted difficulties were in Black doctoral students' research productivity and experiences in the dissertation writing phase (Howley et al., 2015; McGaskey, 2015). Troubling these two areas is crucial because the traditional metrics of success for doctoral students are determined by demonstrating their scholarly aptitude through presentations and publications. Moreover, doctoral students' final milestone for completing this terminal degree is contingent upon their successful progression through the dissertation writing phase. Without proper support and/or in the face of navigating a problematic or racially toxic program environment, doctoral students (especially those with minoritized identities) run the risk of prolonging their time to completion, or being entrapped in the often deficit-based attrition narrative placed upon students who dropped out of their programs.

While this cursory scan of topics covered provided a broad snapshot of the ways scholars in my analytical sample grappled with manifestations of institutional racism in Black doctoral student experiences at PWIs, it also provided insight on how each level of the organizational landscape of doctoral education can be subjected to the effects of institutional racism. In the next portion of my findings section, I answer my second research question through offering a detailed typology of organizational oppression in doctoral education.

### **Typology of Organizational Oppression in Doctoral Education**

Revisiting my second research question, I posed: "Where are these manifestations of institutional racism situated in the organizational structure of doctoral programs? Below, I present categorical findings, based upon my conceptual framework, to formulate a typology of organizational oppression within doctoral education (Figure 1).

**Individual level.** Coinciding with the individual level of Griffith et al.'s (2016) model, the researchers' interpretations supported its claim of institutional racism's operation within the attitude, behaviors, and beliefs of varying doctoral program constituents. Two categorical elements emerged to capture where these dynamics got routinized within the organization of doctoral programs: troubled interactions, ideologies, and environment; along with inequitable program outcomes that adversely impacted the experiences of Black doctoral students at PWIs.

***Troubled interactions, ideologies, and environment.*** Detailing how she maneuvered in her doctoral program as a Black woman with career interest in the professoriate, McKinley (2014) shared several firsthand accounts of run-ins with institutional racism through the ideological realm. In one instance, a white woman classmate ventured to ask her if she spoke Ebonics, and followed up with agitation because McKinley problematized her question as racist. Failing to comprehend how such a comment perpetuated racist ideology, her classmate denied the accusation by explaining it away as sheer curiosity. McKinley (2014) asserted that incidents like this example were exonerated by color-



blind racism, as it leveraged whiteness, a system of privilege, to reconstitute issues like racism and sexism as nonexistent.

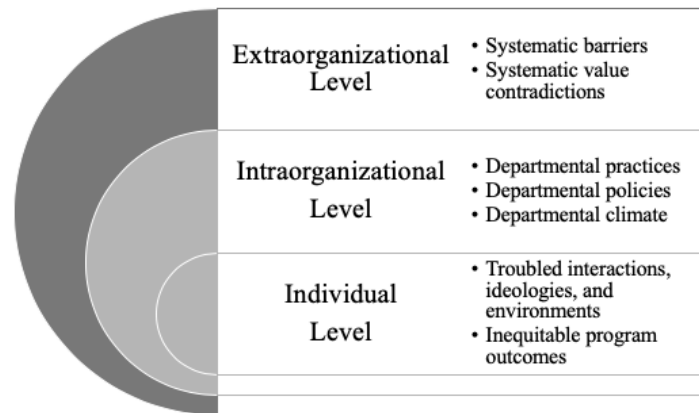


Figure 1. Typologies of Organizational Oppression and its Manifestations in Doctoral Education

Note. This figure's scaffolding of the extraorganizational, intraorganizational, and individual levels is adapted from Griffith et al.'s (2016) model of institutional racism in organizations.

Another study reasoned that oppressive environments fraught with racist ideologies placed constraints on Black women doctoral students, where participants felt their persistence and academic success could not co-exist with their well-being (Shavers & Moore, 2014a). This perception of an unfortunate opportunity cost resurfaced in Felder and Barker's (2013) study, where Black doctoral students viewed the negotiations between themselves, their faculty, and program environment were commonplace. Fostering positive student-faculty and peer relationships are ingredients in the recipe for doctoral success. However, researchers maintained that interpersonal interactions between Black doctoral students and other key individuals in their graduate programs continued to leave them feeling isolated (Green, 2008; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004).

***Inequitable program outcomes.*** Beyond navigating troubled interactions, ideologies and environments, Kim and Otts (2010) demonstrated racial disparities in program outcomes where Black doctoral students lagged behind their white peers in their study on degree completion times. Wasburn-Moses (2007) found another Black-White disparity around the outcomes of receiving leadership training grants, which were funds intended to increase doctoral students' academic focus and heighten their experiences. Despite such provisions and intent, Wasburn-Moses (2007) explained that Black doctoral students "still felt more poorly prepared overall for their positions, and more poorly prepared to publish in refereed journals, than their Caucasian and Latino/Latina counterparts" (p. 463). Furthermore, this scholar contended that such disparities in feelings of preparedness were especially grave because paper submissions in peer-reviewed journals is an outcome of doctoral socialization that directly influenced the trajectory of students' success in the academic job market for faculty positions. In an institutional context devoid of faculty accountability measures that guided the intellectual development of doctoral students, McCoy (2018) called into question how attrition rates for students of color were explained by labeling those students as inadequate. Resultantly, scholars believed that institutions failed to respond when doctoral students of color exited

their programs, instead of acknowledging the reality that some could have suffered at the hands of oppressive socialization tactics (McCoy, 2018; McGaskey et al., 2016; Shavers & Moore, 2014b).

**Intraorganizational Level.** Moving to the intraorganizational level of my conceptual framework, researchers' interpretations confirmed that institutional racism was filtered through the organizational routines surrounding Black doctoral students' experiences with departmental practices, policies, and the climate at PWIs. These intraorganizational features were noteworthy because they got filtered through the ways group members, such as peers and faculty, circulated their thoughts and behaviors around one another, which often maintained existing power structures.

**Departmental practices.** Joseph (2012) publicized, "Institutions of higher education are distinct establishments of history and culture, and that same culture and history may not be conducive to the success all of students in attendance" (p. 136). Twale, Weidman, and Bethea (2016) observed, "Racial dilemmas and microaggressions such as the lack of faculty support of a research agenda that focuses on racial issues is an example of the sociopolitical dynamics in academic programs that can hinder socialization" (p. 90). Gay (2004) and McCoy (2018) recorded instances of racial marginalization for graduate students of color, particularly Black doctoral students, that were rooted within departmental practices. On the cognitive and behavioral regularities that crafted essential academic features of doctoral education, Black doctoral students were left to deal with:

...the implicit lessons embedded in the informal attitudes and behaviors of the caretakers of 'the system.' They encounter discrimination, hostility, isolation, tokenism and marginality. Their intellectual capabilities are doubted, and their research interests are often suspected or neglected. When they try to claim the same prerogatives as granted to their mainstream peers (such as researching and writing about things of personal and cultural relevance to them) they are discouraged, silenced and sometimes even abandoned. (Gay, 2004, p. 267)

McCoy (2018) exposed her own encounters with these affronts to ideas and perspectives she shared in her department. She observed that those disparaging comments to her scholarly ideation and creativity were masked as constructive criticism, when in actuality, they hindered her intellectual growth.

**Departmental policies.** Kim and Otts (2010) found racialized disparities in the funding support of graduate students of color, which were exacerbated by the financial stratification of academic disciplines whose departmental funds had more constraints than others, like those in STEM fields versus cultural studies or social sciences. In comparison to their peers of other racial identities, Kim and Otts (2010) revealed, "The fact that significantly lower percentages of Black students received research assistantships suggests that Black students are disadvantaged not only in terms of time to degree but perhaps in terms of research experience, as well" (p. 24). Expounding upon this sentiment, McGaskey (2015) remarked, "Given the relatively low levels of research productivity of Black doctoral students, this result may be more of a function of either hindered opportunities to participate in scholarly inquiry or an overall undervaluation of the importance in the practice" (p. 198). According to Weng and Gray (2017), curriculum policies in the field of social work were steeped in Eurocentrism which rendered perspectives outside of this normative frame ineligible and inadequate. They further extended, "Social work education is not immune to this university culture...having been adopted by many social work doctoral programs and infused within the mission statement, curricula, and language" (p. 664). As these scholars substantiated, Black doctoral students were disenfranchised by institutional racism amongst departmental policies on resource allocation, restraints on their research development, and curricular decisions.

**Departmental climate.** Green, Pulley, and Jackson's (2018) sensemaking around the dissatisfaction of Black women doctoral students at PWIs urged, "Though academia is often portrayed as a field that combats inequities, many Black women find it as the field that actually reifies 'racial hierarchies' and gender-biases by marginalizing some groups and privileging others" (p. 306). Joseph (2012) targeted administrators' lack of understanding these dynamics of racial and gender-based biases and their ability to stack additional types of oppression onto doctoral students with minoritized identities.

Black doctoral students at PWIs experienced a climate that applied pressure to succeed amidst adversities imposed upon them by larger structural issues (Kador & Lewis, 2007), yet departments propped fallacies of objectivity in their messages on approaching research impartially and overcoming structural challenges by their own strength (McCoy, 2018; Weng & Gray, 2017). Ellis (2001) uplifted the voices of Black doctoral students who critiqued their department's culture of conformity. A few scholars reasoned Black doctoral students at PWIs harbored feelings of isolation, discontentment, and marginality that pervaded perceptions of their departmental climate, and believed they were left to fend for themselves when navigating these conditions (Gay, 2004; Joseph, 2012; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004).

**Extraorganizational Level.** Entrenched within the extraorganizational level of Griffith et al.'s (2016) model, researchers' interpretations evidenced its assertion that institutional racism effects systemic barriers and contradictory values that shaped Black doctoral student experiences at PWIs. Doctoral education is part of a larger set of societal systems, and must broker the external forces of power, authority, and hegemonic ideals that reify institutional racism in its organizational routines.

**Systemic barriers.** The underrepresentation of Black doctoral students is an issue prevalent across many institutions; however, this lack also seeps into a systemic inability to properly mentor and socialize these students into scholars that do not have to compromise or conform their interests and perspectives into something more palatable to dominant hegemonic norms (Grant, 2012; Weng & Gray, 2017). Williams Shealey (2009) further substantiated this point in describing the academy as, "[not being] welcoming of scholars from ethnically diverse backgrounds and their research agendas, which most often are undergirded by a social justice and equity framework. Thus, African-American scholars face systemic and attitudinal challenges in attempting to counter dominant paradigms that are prevalent" (p. 359). Twale, Weidman, and Bethea (2016) also recognized a disparity in advisement based upon doctoral program types, where Black students shared hierarchical inequalities around access to guidance and support that differed between those pursuing and Ed.D. versus those on a Ph.D. track.

**Systemic value contradictions.** Given the institutional values held at a systemic level in doctoral education, researchers interpreted contradictions between those espoused in rhetoric, but not enacted in their behaviors and decision making. On the subject of doctoral socialization one co-authored study posited:

It is important to note what socialization is not. It is not encouragement and pressure to maintain the status quo and fit into the existing dominant structures. Socialization is not being silent about the broader structures of power within systems that lead to racism and oppression so students feel they fit in. Instead, it is about giving students a voice to be open

about systemic barriers and forms of oppression that impede their motivation, commitment, and ultimately, their success in the program. (Weng & Gray, 2017, p. 670)

Another value contradiction was routinized by university reward structures, where faculty promotion metrics did not incentivize service through student mentorship and advising (Shavers & Moore, 2014). Conversely, doctoral students operated on a value system that viewed research as a form of service (Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Moreover, contradictory values were operationalized by a false systemic belief that access and success were one in the same. Critiquing this institutional perception, Gay (2004) mentioned, “These [‘input-based’] assumptions overlook the other prices that many African, Asian, Latino and Native American students have to pay living through graduate studies, and being faculty of color in academe” (p. 266). As the extraorganizational level within the overall typology of organizational oppression in doctoral education connotes, there is a larger system of racialized disenfranchisement at work. We must enact fundamental shifts on how researchers, practitioners, administrators, policy-makers, and other key constituents in our educational enterprise acknowledge and engage new perspectives on the Black (w)hole to resist the pervasiveness and sophistication of institutional racism and its manifestation within doctoral education. In the following discussion section, I meditate on a few new perspectives I gathered from the findings of my systematic literature review.

### **Discussion: New Perspectives on The Black (W)hole**

Explained earlier, the conundrum of a “Black (w)hole” magnified that despite a plethora (i.e. a whole body) of existing scholarship on Black doctoral student experiences at PWIs, we still have a significant gap (i.e. a hole) of empirical and conceptual work where researchers intentionally centered institutional racism as the focal point of their studies. While my conceptual framework shed light on how higher education scholars interpreted manifestations of institutional racism in Black doctoral students’ experiences within their findings, this analytical sample of literature also unearthed three new perspectives on the gradations of a Black (w)hole in doctoral education research writ large. These three avenues of perspectives include: new dimensions of understanding racial socialization, critical approaches to scholarly inquiry, and a cautionary note on assumptions researchers might make when examining Black doctoral student experiences at PWIs.

#### **Racial Socialization**

When one thinks of racial socialization, they may consider the process by which a person understands and embraces the fullness and meaning of their racial identities. However, Barker (2016) defined Black doctoral students’ usage of racial socialization as “those tools and techniques to deal with racism or racial incidences within predominantly White contexts” (p. 136). The tools of racial socialization involved managing tensions between their personal interests and those of their departments (Felder & Barker, 2013), and heightening their awareness of cultural environments that were unwelcoming (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Black doctoral students employed an additional tactic that repositioned their lived experiences with institutional racism as the foundation upon which they built their research agendas. To this point, one scholar noted:

In particular, African American participants came to the study of a topic relating to dynamics of race and/or ethnicity from their own experiences of racism, and they decided to pursue doctoral work in response to their strong belief that the degree would provide them with

both a measure of career security and a platform for continuing and expanding advocacy efforts – beneficial outcomes they saw as inter-dependent. In other words, for these participants the link between advocacy on behalf of self and advocacy on behalf of others tended to be close. (Howley et al., 2015, p. 222)

This revealed resistance tactics that Black doctoral students employed, but more relevant to my research questions, it showed another layer of the manifestations of institutional racism that Black doctoral students attempted to combat or navigate.

Although Black doctoral students developed tactics to traverse the terrains of institutional racism in graduate education, this savviness of racial socialization might come with several costs and risks. Shavers and Moore's (2014b) findings expressed, "the coping strategies used by black women to persist academically might be in direct opposition to their overall mental and emotional well-being when enrolled in [PWI] doctoral programs" (p. 32). From a firsthand vantagepoint, McKinley (2014) explained, "the physical, mental, and spiritual exhaustion associated with teaching a course on social problems, as a black female 'professor in training' was a burden I had to endure on my own and in silence" (p. 41). Correspondingly, two additional authors asserted:

Participants reported using the academic mask as a strategy to overcome oppression and persist academically, but it resulted in feeling incomplete, disconnected, and exhausted...The participants' use of the academic mask was survival-oriented...some of the characteristics they listed for this manner of coping are feeling disconnected from their self and communities of support; an inability to seek assistance and/or show vulnerability; threats to self-efficacy; and chronic stress, anxiety, and oppression (Shavers & Moore, 2014a, p. 404)

This insight on racial socialization, and its respective costs or risks, allow us to clarify new types of targets to hit in the research questions we pose, survey instrumentation we create, enhancements to the theoretical frameworks we select, and improve the methodological tools we employ for data collection.

### **Critical Approaches to Scholarly Inquiry**

The most distinctive approaches to scholarly inquiry used by the researchers in my analytical sample incorporated critical lenses in their theories and/or methodology. Through using Critical Race Theory, McCoy (2018) touted this model's ability to "expos[e] how institutions that support and encourage the intellectual development of White students simultaneously engaged in oppressive institutional practices that threatened my intellectual development" (p. 341). Regarding Black doctoral student attrition, Merriweather (2008) critiqued Tinto's (1993) student departure theory on the basis that it "underplays the role of external communities, race, and racism" (p. 262). As seen here, some researchers provided critical commentary on existing theories popularized in scholarship on doctoral education, which is a vital stance of resistance against pathologizing explanations of Black doctoral student attrition.

A few articles in my sample were autoethnographic (Green, 2008; McCoy, 2018; McKinley, 2014)—which is defined as a methodological approach that employs self-reflection on one's lived experiences as a data source for empirical inquiry—to circumvent their findings as, for instance, Black scholars writing about Black doctoral students (Gay, 2004). In using this approach, one researcher highlighted:

Methodologically, I used autoethnography for ‘describing and analyzing’ my own process of intellectual identity development as an emerging African American scholar...Collectively, both CRT and auto-ethnography allowed me to present specific examples of my identity development within a doctoral program at a PWI that engaged in oppressive institutional socialization (McCoy, 2018, p. 335).

Autoethnography and autoethnographic techniques were ways that researchers evoked Cooper’s (2017) notion of embodied discourse, which she defined as a “[f]orm of Black female textual activism wherein race women assertively demand the inclusion of their bodies and, in particular, working-class bodies and Black female bodies by placing them in the texts they write and speak” (p. 3). Uqdah, Tyler, and DeLoach (2009) encouraged researchers to utilize data collection instruments that were created to assess issues of institutional racism and its byproducts, such as discrimination. These are powerful methodological strategies for fostering resistance-based sense-making of one’s navigation through the landscapes of systemic issues like racism.

### **Cautionary Note on Assumptions**

The final new perspective drawn from this literature review led me to identify dangerous assumptions and subsequent practices that could lead to institutional negligence if not handled properly. For instance, two scholars shared:

[T]here was an incredible notion of ‘self-reliance’ among the students we interviewed. They persisted in spite of all of the difficulties encountered...At this university, this ‘communalism’ evolved for the African-American students due solely to their own initiative...And an appreciation of the importance of self-reliance for the African-American students implies a need for considering this aspect of personality as part of a recruitment strategy. (Lewis & Ginsberg, 2004, pp. 243-244)

Identifying self-reliance as a characteristic embodied by Black doctoral students can be a productive action, as possessing a sense of agency and initiative are important for pursuing doctoral education. However, if doctoral departments base their reward structures and resource allocation solely on students who possess this trait of self-reliance and demonstrate behaviors that fit a narrow prototype of that trait, consequences might ensue. A major consequence of this practice is the risk of maintaining structures of inequality against students who might be introverted, slightly passive, or may believe that faculty and administrators are the gatekeepers of opportunities and do not want to overstep boundaries on how those dynamics are negotiated. This establishes the importance of doctoral departments making their values explicitly known to students, while also self-assessing their institutional culture to ensure the environment is conducive to equitable practices.

A second cautionary example stemmed from McGaskey et al.’s (2016) suggestion to increase the presence of student and faculty of color on the basis that, “...structural conditions and practices continue to create challenges for Black male doctoral students in finding support and being effectively socialized into their field” (p. 155). Although they acknowledged this suggestion as insufficient by itself, but a step in the right direction, the underlying assumption of this as a solution can be interpreted as problematic because it perpetuates the normalcy of racial oppression—a rationale that positions equitable representation of diverse faculty of color as an unattainable goal. (Mis)interpretations like this reinforces an earlier point I debunked on the false assumption that access does not necessarily equal success for doctoral students with racially minoritized identities. It takes

comprehensive, structurally-centered, and intentional efforts on all fronts of organizational change to reverse institutional racism's tendency to leave Black doctoral students behind.

### Conclusion

I conclude by echoing a poignant statement that Dumas (2014) articulated in his work on the cultural politics of Black education, "I simply want to create a space in which to meditate on the idea that black people suffered, and suffered dearly in the midst of our efforts to pursue a range of educational and racial reforms over the past half-century" (p. 3). In solidarity with his sentiment, I hope that my work in this systematic literature review magnified the types of struggles that Black doctoral students were subjected to as a result of the effects of institutional racism in graduate education. Existing research on Black graduate students pursuing doctoral studies at PWIs revealed issues within several aspects of their graduate education: academic experiences (Haynes, Stewart, Allen, 2016; Platt & Hilton, 2017); interactions with faculty (Blockett et al., 2016; Gildersleeve et al., 2011); cross-race faculty advising (Barker, 2016); and same race-gender advising (Pope & Edwards, 2016). As these scholars pinpointed, not only were the experiences of Black doctoral students racialized in academic, social, and professional contexts, but they also tended to be problematic.

Socialization was a central focus for many of the articles within my sample, which signifies the importance of including this construct in future studies on institutional racism within doctoral education. Although the scholars in my analytical sample did not incorporate organizational theories in their analyses, they did offer recommendations for change at the organizational and institutional levels in their discussion and implications. The collective interpretations offered in their research illustrates how Black doctoral students oftentimes expended extra labor and energy to combat the effects of institutional racism on their own due to inadequate interventions from their departments and institutions. As Gonzales, Kanhai, and Hall (2018) noted, "When non-dominant students are forced to take up such labor, it means they are doing the work that organizations have failed to do, often at the cost of their academic, mental, and emotional well-being" (p. 506). My hope is for future scholarly inquiry to bear in mind the purpose of this systematic literature review as a launching pad into the innumerable possibilities for advancing important discourse around empirical research, and translating this work to policies and practice.

A main implication drawn from using a critical organizational perspective to conduct this systematic literature review points to the dire need for research that dives directly into the Black (w)hole of institutional racism in doctoral education. Doing so enhances the abilities of students, scholars, practitioners, policy makers, and administrators to recognize the embodied complexities of higher education stakeholders, and positively transform our institutional approaches to protect our most vulnerable groups.

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