"Am I going crazy?!": A Critical Race Analysis of Doctoral Education

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The graduate school experience for students of color has been theorized as oppressive and dehumanizing (Gay, 2004). Scholars have struggled to document how students of color navigate and negotiate oppressive and dehumanizing conditions in their daily experiences of doctoral education. We provide a critical race analysis of the everyday experiences of Latina/o and black[1] doctoral students. We draw from critical inquiry and critical race theory to establish and describe an overarching and powerful social narrative that informs, influences, and illustrates the endemic racism through which black and Latina/o students struggle to persist in pursuit of the doctorate. We call this social narrative, "Am I going crazy?!" Deconstructing the narrative into its core elements, we provide an extended definition that illustrates a dehumanizing cultural experience in the everyday lives of doctoral students. We problematize these cultural norms to promote a more humanizing experience of doctoral education for black and Latina/o students.

The strength and influence of racial and ethnic minorities continues to increase across sectors of American society (Garza, 2006; Jones & Castellanos, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2008). Trends of increasing enrollments among underrepresented groups can be seen throughout education (National Center for Education Standards [NCES], 2009). However, some racial and ethnic groups, such as Blacks and Latina/os, continue to incur lower rates of educational attainment than their peers (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Solórzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005; Yosso, 2006). Doctoral education is a prime example. In 2007, the enrollment of black and Latina/o doctoral students was 11.5% and 6.1%, respectively (NCES, 2008). In that same year only 6% of doctoral degrees were awarded to black students and only 3% to Latina/o students. An obvious gap between enrollment, persistence, and attainment exists in the doctoral education of black and Latina/o students. While increasing enrollment of racially diverse students in doctoral programs is important and a necessary ongoing effort, scholars must do a better job at understanding the experiences of black and Latina/o doctoral students, particularly those that might contribute to or hinder these students' persistence and graduation (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Gay, 2004; González, 2006; González, 2007; Pruitt-Logan, Gaff, & Jentoft, 2002).

This article is a focused effort to shed light on the experiences of black and Latina/o students by investigating the culture of doctoral education. While there is a growing body of research illuminating black and Latina/o students' experiences with racism in doctoral education (Achor

& Morales, 1990; González, 2007; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Nettles, 1990; A. M. Padilla, 1994; Solórzano, 1998), research has been resistant to interrogate cultural systems that can support such racism. That is, the culture of doctoral education needs to be examined further and such examinations need to account for power, resistance, and agency within and along racialized demarcations. Through our critical ethnographic exploration of black and Latina/o students' experiences in doctoral education, we aim to illustrate the seemingly pervasive racialization of doctoral education. This illustration can, in turn, assist in re-imagining a new reality that might address the social justice concerns of doctoral education for Blacks and Latina/os in American research universities.

We oriented this study around the following research question: How do black and Latina/o students experience the culture of doctoral education? We put forth that doctoral education, as a complex system with many influencing components (Funk & Klomparens, 2006), deserves critical inquiry. As students are a basic component of doctoral education (Wulff & Nerad, 2006), we grounded our critical inquiry in the voices of Latina/o and black doctoral students. We posit that a racialized social narrative exists that reveals the harmful institutional and systemic factors contributing to the possible derailment of Latina/o and Black doctoral students. We call this narrative, "Am I going crazy?!" Using a critical race theory analysis, we constructed an extended definition of this narrative, which, as the primary content of this article, provides a rendering of possible realities experienced by Black and Latina/o doctoral students. We present this illustration of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative to argue that the culture of doctoral education can be dehumanizing and marginalizing for the Latina/o and black students in this study. In order to better support the persistence and graduation of black and Latina/o doctoral students, we make recommendations for re-imagining new realities that can transform doctoral education into a humanizing and successful experience for Latinas/os and Blacks pursuing the doctorate.

CULTURE OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Culture can be understood as the normative ways of participating within a given context or social practice (Gutiérrez, 2002; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Broadly, the culture of doctoral education can be understood as "the social-cultural and institutional contexts in which students live and work" (Lovitts, 2005, p. 150). Put another way, when examining the culture of doctoral education, we are seeking to render visible the inner logics of the social practice of preparing students to earn doctorates. Wulff and Nerad (2006) discuss three major influences on the culture of doctoral education, influences that are "outside the institution . . . within the institution . . . [and] within an individual program" (p. 90). These multiple influences impact the ways in which students experience their time in doctoral education. A primary manifestation of these influences is the doctoral socialization process. As both a social and cultural activity, socialization is the process by which doctoral students learn the customs, traditions, and values of any given discipline or field through mentoring and advising relationships as well as by engaging in research, service, and teaching (Bieber & Worley, 2006; Johnsrud, 1990; Rosser, 2003; Turner & Thompson, 1993). Austin (2002) and Rosser (2003) argue that the socialization process is a major purpose of American doctoral education. This process is wrought with pluralistic outcomes for doctoral students.

In a four-year, longitudinal, qualitative study on socialization and doctoral education with 79 graduate students across two doctoral-granting institutions, Austin (2002) found that "[s]tudents must make sense of the academy and its values, its expectations of them as graduate students, [the academy's] conceptions and definitions of success, and the models of professional and personal life that it offers to those aspiring to join the academic ranks" (p. 103). Within this sense-making process, scholars have ascertained the importance of students assimilating these values and norms into their own to be successful in academic careers (Austin, 2002; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Wiedman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Other scholars have challenged the assimilation perspective in exchange for a socialization experience that holds diverse values and perspectives in high regard (González, 2007; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998).

Researchers also have found that the socialization process can leave students feeling isolated and frustrated and, as a result, possibly questioning and doubting their academic worth and abilities (Austin, 2002; Gay, 2004; Golde, 1998). Beeler (1991) formulated a graduate student academic adjustment framework to ascertain how first-year graduate students adjusted to their academic studies. The framework includes four stages across multiple dimensions of consciousness and competency. Beeler suggested that in the first year, graduate students progress through four stages, beginning with unconscious incompetence and ending in conscious competence. Golde (1998) specified that doctoral students in the first year of their journey often ask questions, such as, "Can I do this . . . Do I want to be a graduate student . . . Do I want to do this work . . . [and] Do I belong here?" (p. 56). In addition to questioning academic capabilities, other issues found to impact the doctoral student experience are perceptions of faculty support and encouragement (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003), financial support (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988), and personal characteristics, such as previous employment, age, educational background, and family situation (Austin, 2002; Quinn & Litzler, 2009). There is no denying that doctoral education can be challenging in myriad ways for students.

Some critical scholars also have found that black and Latina/o students' experiences in doctoral education is complicated by race, racialization, and racism inherent in the social practice of higher education (Allen, 1992; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Lewis et al., 2004; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986; Solórzano, 1998). Through a qualitative study with four recent Ph.D. graduates and four current Ph.D. students, Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, and Smith (2004) used Beeler's (1991) four-stage graduate student academic adjustment framework to explore the experiences of African American Ph.D. students at a top research, predominately white, institution. They found that in addition to the aforementioned possible issues faced by most doctoral students, African American students dealt with perceived individual and institutional racism. Other scholars include feelings of racialized and cultural isolation and tokenism, often exhibited by experiences such as being expected to represent one's racial and ethnic group, being the lone person of color in class, lack of mentoring, and lack of diverse epistemological perspectives in the curriculum (Gay, 2004; Lewis et al., 2004; McNair, 2003; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Watt, 2003).

The landscape does not appear better for Latina/o doctoral students. In a report to the Lumina Foundation, R. Padilla (2007) uncovered a sobering reality—out of every 100 Latino students in the K-20 educational pipeline, less than one earns a doctoral degree. González (2007), in his qualitative study of 12 recently graduated Latina faculty, illuminated the many issues Latinas/os face in their doctoral experiences. His participants reported facing isolation, alienation, lack of support, low expectations from faculty based on racial and ethnic discrimination as well as linguistic bias, and discouragement from using more culturally appropriate epistemologies, theories,

and frameworks (i.e., Chicana feminism). Several other scholars report similar findings about the educational experiences of Latinas/os (Bañuelos, 2006; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solórzano, 2006; Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solórzano, 2005).

These experiences are part of black and Latina/o doctoral students' socialization processes and contribute to a disheartening state of affairs in doctoral education. Several scholars have looked at both groups simultaneously and yielded similar results: Doctoral education can result in some dehumanizing experiences for Latina/o and black doctoral students (Gay, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Findings from the aforementioned studies suggest that black and Latina/o students, in particular, must endure a socialization process that has the potential to push them out of doctoral education (Gay, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This pushing out inhibits these students' progress toward doctoral degrees and takes shape in the form of failed and insufficient advising and mentoring relationships with faculty, academic and personal invalidation, lack of departmental and institutional support, alienation, and isolation (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Tierney & Bensimon, 2002).

These findings have been interpreted by some to suggest that the pushing out of black and Latina/o doctoral students may be more directly related to who these students are as raced individuals as opposed to what they are capable of academically (Smith, 2004; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006). The tension between who one is (i.e., how they are defined socially) versus what one is capable of, can make the doctoral education experience academically, socially, and emotionally difficult for black and Latina/o doctoral students.

González (2007) stated, "[T]he academy has a history of exclusivity [and] racism . . . that works against people of color . . . to preserve the status quo" (p. 298). Consequently, a need exists for an explanation that involves interrogating the power dynamics at play within and between the culture of doctoral education and the experiences of black and Latina/o doctoral students. This work requires critical theories and methodologies to uncover possible manifestations of these confluences of power across the culture of doctoral education and the racialized experiences of black and Latina/o doctoral students. Thus, we lean on critical race theory as a theoretical foundation for our study.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) recognizes the permanency and endemic nature of race in American education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Through its use, scholars seek to promote increased equity and social justice for people of color (Bell, 1987; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In their pioneering article that outlined a critical race theory for education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) theorized education as rife with racialized and racist cultural constructs and demarcations. Assuming such, critical race scholarship challenges dominant ideologies that support racialized inequalities stemming from hegemonic educational practices.

For example, in their qualitative study of 36 black male students across five major research universities, Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) challenged dominant notions of community and safety

by uncovering specific practices of stereotyping that defined black men "as being 'out of place' and 'fitting the description' of illegitimate nonmembers of the campus community" (p. 551). Smith et al. provide a counter-definition, explaining how racial stereotyping produced "racial battle fatigue (e.g., frustration, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear)" (p. 551), thus creating hostile campus environments for African American men.

By challenging dominant ideologies critical race theory moves academic inquiry beyond frameworks of individual responsibility and success to discussions around the unexamined institutional and systemic factors that leave oppressive power dynamics intact (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Patton, 2006). Supporting this move from individual to institutional and systemic responsibility, CRT often draws on narrative data to examine discursive understandings of lived experience. As such, CRT values the voices and experiences of those who are least heard in education, especially as they provide counter-understandings to dominant ideologies. In this way, a critical race perspective illuminates the ways dominant ideologies manifest in social narratives.

Social narratives operate to normalize oppressive conditions within society by telling stories from the perspective of the dominant social group in order to sustain their racial and class privilege (Dixson & Rousseau, 2007). They often take shape as assumed rules, folk knowledge, and stereotypes that people cling to, draw from, or resist in order to make sense of their place in the world. According to Yosso (2006), stories from the dominant voices in society "perpetuate myths that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools" (p. 9). These discursive configurations render the perspectives and experiences of non-dominant groups illegitimate and deficient in reference to the dominant group.

Connecting CRT's interest in demystifying dominant ideologies (i.e., social narratives) and centering individuals' narratives of lived experience, Duncan (2006) instructs that "critical race approaches allow us to rethink and reconstruct traditional . . . policy and practices around the insights of the greatest stakeholders—those who experience the brunt of educational injustice" (pp. 191–212). At stake in this article is a particular social narrative that we found captures the culture of doctoral education, as experienced by Latina/o and black students. This narrative, "Am I going crazy?!" illustrates the individual agency students enact as well as the systemic dehumanization and marginalization that can mark Latina/o and black students' persistence to the doctorate.

METHODS

Participants and Sites

Twenty-two students participated in this project and were recruited by accessing our personal networks within research universities. All participants were current doctoral students; 16 were still taking courses, and 6 had completed coursework. Of the 22 participants, 3 identified as Latina, 5 as Latino (with one specifying a Puerto Rican ethnicity), 7 as black females, and 8 as black males. Seventeen of the students were in education, while 5 were in other fields (statistics, agriculture, anthropology, and psychology) (See Table 1). Students were enrolled across three major research universities, all of which are public, primarily residential, comprehensive doctoral institutions with very high research activity according to the Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.). One institution is located in an urban environment on the West Coast. One is in

TABLE 1
Description of Participants

Descriptor	Total N
Race	
Black	14
Latina/o	8
Sex	
Female	10
Male	12
Discipline/Field	
Education	17
Other	5
Degree Progress	
Advanced	4
Not Advanced	18
Institution	
Midwest	13
East	7
West	2

a small city in the Midwest. One is in a small city in the Northeast. The latter two universities are predominantly white institutions. The urban university has over 50% minority student enrollment.

Data Collection

In order to generate data that would answer our research questions related to the everyday experiences of black and Latina/o students and the culture of doctoral education, we chose to conduct ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979). Ethnographic interviews are more conversational in nature than other interview forms because they seek to understand how participants' navigate, negotiate, and make meaning of their everyday practices. They elicit narratives about how people participate in culture. We used an open interview protocol that focused on topics related to students' routine lives in doctoral education (Spradley, 1979). We also drew from critical race theory to establish topics and focus our interview conversations in ways that would elicit responses that might illustrate the way racism was instantiated in students' regular daily participation as doctoral students. Each participant was interviewed for 45–90 minutes. Some interviews were conducted in person, while others were conducted over the telephone. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed by the researchers as well as a graduate research assistant.

Data Analysis

After initial an analytical read-through (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the interview transcripts, we were struck by the recurrence of the phrase "going crazy" across a number of participants' responses. The phrase appeared salient across genders, disciplines, and institutions. We chose to further investigate the use of this phrase and the broader concepts that students were trying

to explain by its use. We sought to establish the defining elements of this emerging narrative. Specifically, we took excerpts from the transcriptions that spoke to the basic "Am I going crazy?!" narrative as it emerged in our sense-making. We then reviewed and coded these excerpts with inductive codes generated to help explain how the narrative took form and shape in students' lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We used concept-mapping (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to generate a conceptual understanding of the social narrative. This mapping activity established in our sense-making the constitution, consequences, and instantiation of what we came to know as the "Am I going crazy?!" social narrative. The elements that give shape to the narrative in everyday life serve as the constitution of the narrative. The consequences refer to the repercussions students faced in their experience as it relates to the constituting elements. The instantiation of the narrative is the manner in which it takes form in students' lives. We present these analyses below, constructing an extended definition of the "Am I going crazy?!" social narrative, which illustrates our argument that the culture of doctoral education is dehumanizing and marginalizing for Latina/o and black students. Following this definition, we problematize the culture of doctoral education in an effort to work toward re-imagining more humanizing and socially just experiences for Latina/o and black students.

Criteria for Quality and Goodness

As collaborators, we worked diligently to ensure rigor in our research process by seeking a reflexive research praxis (Gildersleeve, 2010). Two of the authors are current doctoral students of color, while one is a white assistant professor. The demographic make-up of our research team afforded us emic and etic perspectives in data collection and analysis. We also practiced and modified our interview protocols by interviewing each other. As critical researchers, and congruent with our ethnographic interview method, we preserved time during interviews to engage participants in topics meaningful to them that were not necessarily on our protocol. As our analysis unfolded, we checked in with two key respondents, asking them to reflect on our rendering of their experiences. We asked trusted colleagues (who themselves are black and/or Latina/o and had attained doctorates) to provide similar reflections after we drafted early versions of this manuscript. These reflections helped assure us of the plausibility of our interpretations.

As a criterion for goodness, we worked toward strong objectivity (Harding, 1995), a critical methodological notion of rigor that asks researchers to make their participation apparent across the research process. In this effort, we hope to make our meaning-making clear through the presentation of our analysis. In doing so, we hope to achieve what Lather (1991) calls catalytic validity from our transparent engagement in the research process and representation. Catalytic validity measures a research project by its plausible potential to affect real change within the phenomenon under study. Thus, the quality and goodness of our research process, congruent with our critical methodological framework, should be assessed based on the plausibility of our rendering of the "Am I Going Crazy?!" narrative.

Limitations

The analyses that follow do not portend to exemplify nor describe the experiences of all black and Latina/o doctoral students universally. Rather, this study seeks to draw attention to

oppressive practices that inform and co-construct the underlying broad culture of doctoral education. Understanding that culture is dynamic, contingent, and contextual (Rogoff, 2003), the extended definition of the "Am I going crazy?!" social narrative that we present below offers disruptive insights into ways that doctoral education might be problematized in order to better serve black and Latina/o students. Further, our participants were drawn from primarily education programs, and exclusively from public institutions. We expect that the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative might take on a different constitution, consequence, and instantiation across other subjective positions and institutional contexts.

THE "AM I GOING CRAZY?!" NARRATIVE

We begin with a simple definition, which we take as a point of departure in order to provide an extended definition that provides a richer, more substantive context to discuss doctoral education for blacks and Latina/os. The "Am I Going Crazy?!" social narrative was constructed and expressed in participants' personal narratives in variations of the following vignette:

> Janet, a Latina doctoral student, described at length an occasion when students in the class for which she worked as the teaching assistant disregarded her contributions to discussion as well as her evaluations of students' work, instead deferring to the white professor. Expressing the cumulative effect of these types of encounters, Janet shared, "And sometimes I need a confirmation so I know I'm not going crazy and that I'm not the only one noticing—Is it me being hyper-sensitive? Or, did this really stand out and happen?" She continued to explain how these moments happen regularly in her teaching assistantship, and that, "it depends on the day if I just decide to brush it off or not."

Put simply, the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative represents the tentativeness, insecurity, and doubt that can be projected onto doctoral students of color. It also represents the active engagement with struggle and resiliency required by doctoral students of color. The narrative is a mode of participation for students, a way of being and negotiating the racialized terrain of American graduate schools. In sum, the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative operates as a dehumanizing social artifact that ubiquitously shapes the experience of doctoral students of color.

To be clear, the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative is not unitary or static. It does not operate as a dualism against a hypothetical "I am sane" narrative. The narrative is not neutral, but contradictory. It is overwhelmingly constraining, but some consequences from this constraint are not necessarily bad. The narrative is rife with tensions and contradictions in its constitution, consequences, and instantiation. Within and across these tensions, our analysis draws insights about doctoral education for students of color, with the aim of promoting a more humanizing experience.

EXTENDING THE DEFINITION OF THE "AM I GOING CRAZY?!" NARRATIVE

The narrative is constituted by specific practices within graduate education and particular effects that the narrative has on students. These are the experiential dimensions to the narrative that make it known and seen in doctoral education. Further, we have unpacked the consequences or effects of the specific practices that all relate to the dehumanization of students. The narrative becomes

instantiated in two primary modes, exceptional moments when a threshold is broken in students' educations and daily or normative participation in graduate school—the everyday experiences of doctoral education for students of color. These pieces are presented below.

Constitution of the Narrative

Socialization

In graduate education, faculty who are advisors and assistantship supervisors serve in crucial roles for doctoral students, as faculty influence the ways in which doctoral students experience socialization processes (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Their ability to connect students to other faculty, students with similar interests, and research and service opportunities are unparalleled. Based on Ferrer de Valero (2001), it is fair to conclude that doctoral students, despite their particular social identities, can feel disconnected and lacking in support and socialization from advisors and assistantship supervisors (Ferrer de Valero, 2001). However, for doctoral students of color, race plays a more salient role in their interactions and meaning-making. The following vignette speaks to a doctoral student of color's perceptions of his socialization in relation to his faculty assistantship supervisors.

While responding to a question of whether or not he believed his race played a role in his interactions with his advisors and supervisors, Phil, the only black male in his program, shared the following:

> I haven't had an opportunity to mingle and make meaningful connections with a lot of the other people. I mean, I know everybody there and they know me, face value of just being in that space, in the proximity. But, the research assistantship hasn't done much for me in terms of establishing relationships other than with just my singular advisor just because I guess maybe the project I'm working on doesn't require the others. I don't do any work that is general to the whole department there, just whatever my professor and I are working on; just that interaction there. But it hasn't helped integrate me with everyone else there.

When asked to further elaborate on why he believed his relationship with his assistantship supervisor was strained, Phil shared,

> Well she probably just doesn't understand me, so I can do the work, I might be doing it [assistantship work/research] a bit differently, but it doesn't mean it's any less valuable or can't be just as good. It's just not what she wants, and at the same time, I sometimes feel like . . . It's sort of empowering myself behind that, even if she doesn't regard it the same way. But there are also times where I go off between that and the feeling that maybe it isn't or maybe it isn't enough to get through here and give her what she wants as long as it takes to get out.

Above, Phil is acknowledging that his supervisor does not seem to understand him as a person, or as a black man pursuing his own scholarship interests that might deviate from what is considered the norm in his program. Further discussion with Phil indicated that he recognizes that his assistantship and his relationships are places of opportunity and development, but the lack of development in these relationships caused him to question if his work was "enough." To further interrogate student support outside of the supervisor/advisor relationship, students were asked if

there were any resources at the department or university level geared toward assisting doctoral students of color. Michelle, a black, doctoral student, responded:

> I don't really feel like they do anything that's geared toward minority graduate students, nothing that I am aware of anyways, maybe the different, like BGSA [Black Graduate Student Association] or LGSA [Latino Graduate Student Association]. But I don't know if that's necessarily a university thing or just grad students who decided to get together.

Here, Michelle makes an important point and distinction about department and institution-wide efforts. Across our study, students found the process of identifying either department or institution initiated resources to assist them in their doctoral experience difficult.

While students may not have used the specific terminology associated with socialization, their racial identities were evidently salient for them within their experiences as they discussed aspects of departmental culture. Additionally, it is clear they understand the importance of the relationships they have with their faculty advisors and supervisors and the opportunities their experiences can afford them. Nevertheless, throughout our interviews, black and Latina/o students reflected on the ways in which their race plays a role in the interactions they are having with others often in their daily lives.

Racial Aggressions

On top of the already constraining socialization process, black and Latina/o doctoral students in this study also experienced racial aggressions. We are conceptualizing racial aggressions as representing both racial micro- and macroaggressions. One working definition represents racial microaggressions as "commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278). Racial macroaggressions are "large-scale, systems-related stressors that are widespread, sometimes becoming highly publicized, race-related, traumatic events" (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 554). Combining these concepts assists in understanding the intentional and unintentional, covert and overt, observed and personally experienced race-based assaults that black and Latina/o students face in higher education.

Rudy, a black, male, doctoral student, provided his perspective on educating others about black people and black culture in America.

> In one of my classes as a graduate student, we were going over black identity theories, and I was the only black person in the class. So when questions from the students were asked everyone looked at me like, "Okay, well, you're the only one in here so I guess we're going to have to ask you questions to get some answers." And so they asked questions about black people that I felt uncomfortable about. I felt a little tense because I felt as though they were stereotype questions like, "So, is it really true that black people eat a lot of fried chicken?" I felt the need to counter such thoughts in class.

Rudy illustrates a common scenario (Smith et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) for black and Latina/o students, particularly when they are the only one in a class. Being asked to provide answers to classmates about an entire race of people and/or culture presents added pressures for them that their white peers do not have.

As previously mentioned, black and Latina/o doctoral students experience macroaggressions, or overt, direct attacks geared toward their racial identities, that affect the ways in which they experience their graduate education. Nicole, a black, doctoral student, who spoke of two separate occasions where the "n-word" was used in her presence and directed at her and her other black colleagues, shared examples of these macroaggressions. "We were walking . . . and my group was all black, and one person actually said the n-word to somebody in our group. Then a white guy behind us said, "I'm not a nigger. Don't call me that.'" These types of macroaggressions are important to consider in the context of graduate education, as the fall-out from these experiences can take a damaging toll on the students. This fall-out from experiences that constitute the "Am I Going Crazy?!" narrative manifests as consequences, which we turn to next.

Consequences of the Narrative

Racialized consequences surfaced in the doctoral experiences of these Latina/o and black doctoral students from the specific socialization and racial aggressions practiced within the logic of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative. Through the socialization practices, students engaged in self-censorship, questioned whether they fit in with their programs, and struggled to fully adopt the rules and norms of their academic departments and programs. Within the racial aggressions, students found their scholarly endeavors stifled when it related to research with communities of color as well as a need to find peers who could process and debrief complicated situations.

Self-Censorship

Self-censorship emerged as a consequence of constantly negotiating when to outwardly acknowledge the racialized exceptional and normative parts of the narrative. When students were faced with racism, questioned in the classroom, excluded from support of their academic unit, and negotiating when and where to defend one's self or simply let it go, the consequence was self-censorship,

Kyle, a black, doctoral student, explained that he engaged in self-censorship because of the stress and intense amounts of work associated with doctoral education. Kyle explained how he decides to self-censor in situations that question his ways of knowing or perspectives as a black student, "It depended on the day if I just decide to brush others off or not, and in most cases I do because I don't really want to deal with it, so I just chose to ignore certain negative situations." If black and Latina/o doctoral students are constantly quieting their reactions to powerful and racialized occurrences then students may compromise their own well-being in the name of education, which appears contradictory to education's broader purpose.

Questioning Ability or Worth

What makes this consequence different in the "Am I going crazy?" narrative is that black and Latina/o students can have their previous life experiences, interests, and worldviews dismissed or invalidated as a doctoral student because of the racialized nature of their existence. Hostility is communicated to the students through questioning their research interests, commitment to rigor, valued and undervalued worldviews, and previous personal and professional experiences

and ways of knowing. Black and Latina/o students in this study found themselves questioning whether they belonged in their doctoral program and if they were capable of doing the work associated with the program requisites (i.e., writing, research, class work, presentations, etc.).

Lupe, a Latina, doctoral student, when discussing professors who did not see value in her research interests and questioned her indigenous approach to research, explained how constantly being under a microscope increased her insecurity in graduate school.

> Yes, I think within yourself you start to develop certain insecurities and certain feelings that are not necessarily healthy. When you deal with thinking someone is judging you because of the way you look or your skin color, it begins to take a toll on you and not always in a positive way.

Further, black and Latina/o students in this study who question their ability and worth also dismissed their achievement of admission to a doctoral program. Gabriela, a Latina doctoral student, shared that she gets insecure in graduate school because she questions whether she is deserving or worthy enough to be a doctoral student. She spoke softly and explained her thoughts:

> Internally, I am also struggling with wondering if I am smart enough to be here, you know, to run with the more intellectually driven people around me or people I feel that are very intelligent. Just struggling internally with not believing that I belong in this environment and questioning if it is even necessary for me to pursue a Ph.D. in order to have a successful career or to even feel like I am successful.

Unfortunately, students who question their ability and worth in education run the risk of developing perceptions of themselves that can be destructive and invalidating (Rendón, 1994; Vasquez, 2007). A further destructive possibility of this consequence could be the development of insecurity in a time when black and Latina/o could be developing increased self-confidence and appreciation for knowledge.

Adopting the Rules and Norms

Adopting the rules and norms of an academic program is a key premise to socialization. As a consequence of this, students in this study were often forced to adjust their behavior and natural forms of expression. Michelle a black, doctoral student, was given clear directions by a more advanced student as to how one should speak in class and what basis is needed to provide an opinion or comment to the class and professor. Michelle described these rules as a protocol of "don'ts," when she stated:

> Some of the other don'ts were to not be overly aggressive in classroom settings with professors. For example, if you have an opinion, speak your opinion, but there are certain ways to go about it. Like if you disagree, there are certain ways of approaching a disagreement with professors. You don't want to be real aggressive like getting strong with your voice. Just state your opinion, and state why you don't agree with what others are offering. Sometimes, what my fellow student told me was that professors can see criticism from students as trying to bump the system [challenge].

These types of suggestions become pollutants for black and Latina/o doctoral students who may want to challenge dominant-centered epistemological and philosophical ideologies.

Further, students, as valid knowledge-holders and creative individuals, are dismissed and academic expression can be repressed.

Stifling Scholarly Endeavors

Consequences emerged when students perceived their academic departments and programs to be absent of scholarship that focused on the experiences among people of color.

Damien, a Latino doctoral student, encountered an academic program that lacked research projects that explicitly explored race and underrepresented groups, which communicated to him that his interests were not worthy or valid research projects. He stated:

> There isn't a lot of people doing research on minorities and so, as a consequence I don't think a lot of minorities come here. I feel that a lot of minorities are interested in their own communities, and a lot of the research here is not representative of those communities.

This places a burden on them to be the sole advocate and ambassadors of research and scholarship on communities of color. Further, students would refrain from pushing the issue for fear of being viewed as "the angry black student" or "the militant Latino student" in their departments.

Peer-Support Networks

While the consequences above represent harmful or burdening effects on doctoral students of color, the well-substantiated consequence of peer support networks (e.g., Vasquez, 2007; Yosso, 2006) is less about forming the group than it is about processing the normative and exceptional racial aggression occurrences in their doctoral experiences that were often racialized and isolating. A black, doctoral student named Lynn explained how she and her fellow black students do not feel comfortable being present in their department without having specific tasks to complete. In other words, while other students might feel comfortable spending extra time in their departments, Lynn provided perspective on how students of color created spaces outside of their academic units that serves as an escape from their academic environment by sharing the following:

> Not too many of the black people in my program spend their free time over there [academic department], they don't hang around the area like a lot of the other students do. I think us students of color have these relationships where we text message outside of class, call outside of class, and so on and so forth. It's just that being up there doesn't act as a hub for us because none of us want to spend much time up there, but I do find myself connecting with other students outside of that realm or outside of the program space.

Forming peer support networks also existed inside academic spaces. These networks provided an immediate outlet for students who needed to express their feelings, frustrations, opinions, or thoughts while working. For Damien, a Latino doctoral student, forming a peer support network with his lab partner proved to be beneficial:

> The individual I work with in lab has been there for me to connect with. We talk daily about the issues that happen to us in school. I guess an outlet for him and myself is that we can come to each other and say, "Yeah, that was out of line" or "I understand where you're coming from," stuff like that.

Overall, a peer support network allowed these students to affirm one another and to form a community in which they could openly share their experiences. This particular consequence sheds light on the idea that while doctoral education is structured as an individualist endeavor, many students of color are actually interdependent on one another and engage socially with their learning in doctoral education.

We interpret these consequences as contributing to a dehumanizing culture for black and Latina/o doctoral students. Because some students self-censor, question their ability or worth, are expected to assimilate rules and norms that preclude non-dominant epistemologies, have their scholarly endeavors stifled, and are at times countering the dominant individualist paradigm of doctoral education, black and Latina/o students are subjected to the hegemonic logic that constitutes the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative. As explained earlier, and will be expanded upon through the rest of this article, that hegemonic logic vacillates on the tension between how one is defined socially (i.e., racialized) and what one is capable of academically. Put plainly, consequences of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative, such as those illustrated above, perpetuate racist ideology in doctoral education. To further clarify this dehumanizing dynamic and continue to extend the definition of the narrative, we next discuss how the narrative—its constituent practices and their consequences—operates in students' daily experiences.

The Instantiation of the Narrative

As previously mentioned, the narrative is instantiated in both exceptional and normative ways. As an exceptional experience, the narrative emerges in poignancy at particular moments in students' lives. We see this happening when a threshold of resistance is broken. These are particular moments marked by an acute saliency of the narrative when students' self-questioning comes to the fore and forces them to pause in reflective uncertainty over their participation in graduate school. From a temporal analysis, we find that the narrative appears to stick out in students' everyday lives at particular moments when they simply cannot or will not tolerate the incongruence between their own experiences and what appear to be the dominant experiences of going to graduate school.

Michelle, a black doctoral student, described how there were moments in her graduate education that stood out in her experience and commanded not only her attention, but that of her peers, specifically other students of color. She considered these moments of struggle when she thought something was just off or inappropriate or out of context for doctoral education. Yet, amazingly, to Michelle, the experience went unchecked and consequently was completely normalized by everyone else. After these moments had passed, Michelle explained that she and some of her friends, "will go sit in one of our apartments and have to debrief and say, 'What!? Did this just happen?' And then—'what just happened?' . . . I balance that . . . to make sure I am not crazy."

These moments are often accompanied or precipitated by other racialized experiences. For example, a series of racial microaggressions might build up to a tipping point when students find themselves frustrated with their regular resistance practices (Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Michelle explained,

> In class, if we're talking about anything to do with race, ethnicity, diversity, . . . white students in the
> class will just dance around stuff or really carefully craft the [racist] words they are saying, and we'll

[other students of color] just look at each other and . . . "Say what you want to say. But just say it or don't say it. Don't pretend to say it." . . . those kinds of things.

Michelle related these racially charged moments of discomfort (for all involved) to moments, "when students will try to relate their struggles as an overweight person [or other oppressed subjectivity] to my struggles as a black woman." In essence, Michelle suggested that it made no sense to make different struggles seem like they were the same, and cumulatively, these experiences drove her to resist what seemed to be the accepted mores of the classroom. Michelle shared, "those kinds of things . . . we [she and her fellow students of color] would see that and give each other that same eye. Like, 'I hear what you're saying. You don't even have to hear me say anything.'" The narrative, taking acute effect on her, leads Michelle to a breaking point wherein she must find a way to make sense of an incomprehensible reality—that some students might really think their struggles are the same as hers.

This threshold moment leads students to stop analyzing others and start analyzing themselves. This form of self-analysis can be self-deprecating and destructive toward students' self-efficacy. Nicole, a black doctoral student, explained:

Those experiences in particular created a whole [set of] new questions that I didn't have questions about before. . . . I mean, things that people say about me are: strong administrative skills, goal-oriented, "gets it done." Things that, in these situations . . . were saying the complete opposite . . . so it made me question, "Okay. Like, these are things I know I'm good at." . . . These are just things [racialized criticisms of her performance] that I don't regularly hear, and so, in actuality, for me it wasn't that it made me question or enhance questions that I was already asking, it made me ask completely new questions.

Nicole's questions constructed a new sense of doubt about her ability and sense of belonging in graduate school.

As a normative experience, the narrative colors students' lives in their daily practices. It is, in some senses, a state-of-being, or way-of-doing graduate school. In this sense, the narrative is omnipresent. From a spatialized analysis[2] (Kuntz, 2010a, 2010b), we find that the narrative appears to permeate students' everyday practices in doctoral education.

Nicole juxtaposed her everyday lived experience to the experience she perceived others from dominant groups might share. She advised:

When you look [around and] aren't constantly questioning yourself in that environment, I think it makes it easier for me to feel like I belong there. I think, "That [the academic learning environment] is the space for me." But I think when you're constantly questioning either thoughts that you have or behaviors or whatever, whether they are internally or externally driven, I think it makes it hard. Like this is a place for *you* [the dominant other]. And not to say that you can't—or won't be challenged. But, when you're challenged all the time, or every day, or in each different environment that you go into—I think it becomes a struggle.

These struggles are responsive practices, engaging with an environment that questions students' authority over their own experiences. Such an environment is marked by the "Am I going crazy" narrative, making doctoral education a space wherein students must confront and negotiate the narrative as part of their everyday experience in graduate school. Such negotiation might go unnoticed to students in the moment, as it has become ubiquitous in their daily interactions with others as well as in the bureaucratic processes of their schooling.

Understanding that black and Latina/o students participate in a normatively racialized environment (Dixson & Rousseau, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) is key to understanding these two instantiations of the narrative. Without accepting the basic assumption of critical race theory that racism is endemic in society, and therefore, also found in graduate education, the social ubiquity of the narrative falls apart. Yet, we find the personal narratives, like those exemplified in this study, provide additional empirical support for such an assumption, that racism is endemic.

POST-DEFINITION: RECOGNIZING AND RE-IMAGINING DOCTORAL EDUCATION FOR BLACK AND LATINA/O STUDENTS

To summarize, the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative is constituted in the graduate socialization practices and racialized aggressions in students' everyday experiences. Consequently, the narrative assists in producing black and Latina/o students who self-censor, question their self-efficacy, adopt or refute rules and norms of their discipline, feel stifled in their scholarly endeavors, and rely on peer support networks to make sense of the contradictory constituencies that define their experiences within the narrative. The narrative gets instantiated in exceptional moments when a threshold of resistance is broken. It also permeates students' experiences as a normative characteristic of their graduate educations. Indeed, black and Latina/o students struggle to persist through a social space that constantly reinvents the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative.

Cumulatively, we see the narrative as a ubiquitous experience in the doctoral education of black and Latina/o students. It is ubiquitous whether as an accumulation of temporal moments or the everyday negotiation of the racialized space of doctoral education. Key to these understandings is recognizing the self-analysis that the narrative imposes on students. To be clear, self-analysis is not inherently negative in graduate education. We argue that the self-analysis embedded within students' experiences of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative are undue burdens and unjust practices imposed on students of color.

We argue they are unjust because the self-analyses prompted through the narrative are overtly racialized self-analyses: doubts about their self-efficacy because of their race. Further, the environment that produces and is reproduced within the narrative fails to support black and Latina/o students in navigating and negotiating the narrative. These environmental elements are most clearly seen in the consequences that force students to engage with academic rules and norms that might stifle their scholarly creativity and development. Thus, the self-analysis incumbent in the narrative can cause students to question their ways of knowing, rather than their ways of thinking. The narrative, and its subsequent consequences, invalidate who black and Latina/o doctoral students are, not what they do. Dealing with these self-analyses under the omnipresent influences of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative frames black and Latina/o students' persistence as a constant struggle in doctoral education. We contend that the culture of doctoral education that produces this struggle is therefore a dehumanizing culture. Critical scholars who want to support social justice in doctoral education should recognize that this struggle persists and serves to command them (us) to problematize and redress these dehumanizing cultural practices.

After recognizing persistence as struggle in the everyday lives of black and Latina/o students, faculty and administrators can begin to re-imagine more equitable environments, relations, and instantiations of culture in doctoral education. Although grounded in the voices of black and Latina/o students, critical race theory also demands that as we center race in analysis, we use

these voices to challenge organizational and systemic relations of power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Recognizing the racialized "Am I going crazy?!" narrative in the culture of doctoral education as experienced by black and Latina/o students and redressing the socially unjust narrative become incumbent upon those who can exercise power to do so.

To these ends, we offer a set of problematized assumptions about doctoral education, as informed by our critical race analysis. Congruent with our critical inquiry and CRT framework, we offer these problematics as points of departure for other scholars and practitioners invested in supporting the success of Black and Latina/o doctoral students. In lieu of providing prescriptive recommendations that might end up perpetuating and reifying the hegemonic ideology of the narrative that we hope to dismantle, we offer these points of departure as reflective recommendations to assist others in asking tough questions and self-assessing how they should address the dehumanizing culture of doctoral education in their own contexts.

Problematizing the Canon

Critical race theory argues that dominant modes of scholarship have disenfranchised people of color over time and serve to reproduce social inequalities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Our extended definition of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative suggests that part of the struggle for black and Latina/o doctoral students relates to the ways that their scholarly development is stifled. Recognizing this and heeding CRT's call to challenge dominant ideologies provides an opportunity for faculty and administrators to raise questions about faculty recruitment, graduate student support, and existing opportunities for engagement with non-dominant modes of scholarship (e.g., critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and arts-based methodologies). Each of these areas has been linked to the retention and persistence of graduate students of color (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Lewis et al., 2004; Tierney & Bensimon, 2002).

Problematizing Socialization

Traditional doctoral socialization relies on the normative assumptions of any given discipline. Chief among these are ruling ideologies about objectivity and meritocracy that critical race theorists have long battled to dismantle (Bell, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Tate, 1997). Yet, as illustrated by the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative, the culture of doctoral education seemingly continually expects students to adopt these norms and rules outright, which can undermine their self-efficacy and potentially exclude them from participating in other normal practices of the academy. Faculty and administrators can ask how might educational practices and processes expand the possible ways of knowing and coming to know as well as acting on academic culture?

Problematizing Doctoral Student Support

Part of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative, as constituted in our study, was the consequential development of peer support networks. These networks served as powerful coping strategies for

black and Latina/o students, providing safer spaces from which to confront their racially-charged everyday experiences in doctoral education. Although these are laudable exercises of agency on the part of students of color, CRT's core tenet that racism is endemic to U.S. society (Bell, 1987; Tate, 1997) helps shed light on the institutional exercises of power that demand this type of support. The peer support networks developed and used by black and Latina/o students in fact were not institutionalized efforts; rather they were self-initiated interventions into the normative practices of doctoral education. This tension illustrates the endemic nature of racism, making clear that doctoral education is no haven from the polluted (racist) environment. Faculty and administrators involved in doctoral education can ask what assumptions guide the infrastructure of student support?

CONCLUSION

Socialization practices and racialized aggressions constitute a social narrative that consequently dehumanizes students in their journey through doctoral education. This narrative, that we named "Am I going crazy?!" is instantiated in the everyday experiences of students and in exceptional moments when their resistance to such racialized cultural practices reaches a breaking point. Critical race theory reminds us that racism and dehumanization are historical phenomena (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005). As such, we end our analyses by pointing to the long-standing inequities of participation in higher education and to doctoral education, in particular, for black and Latina/o students. The process of re-imagining doctoral education as a more socially just cultural experience for all students must be a systemic effort, and it must recognize the everyday instantiations of race, racialization, and racism that our extended definition of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative documents. Further research needs to attend to these concerns broadly but can begin by attending to the specific micro-examples of the different conceptual components of the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative that we presented.

NOTES

1. We chose to use "Latina/o" and "black" throughout this manuscript because it was the common identifier used by our research participants.
2. Spatialized analyses in education seek to make visible the subjective experiences that transcend time and place and operate as social space in students' lives. See Gildersleeve and Kuntz (2011) for an extended discussion of spatialized analyses and embodiment in educational research.

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