Enhancing Visibility in Graduate Education:
Black Women's Perceptions of Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

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Qualitative research methods were used to develop a deeper understanding of how nine Black female graduate students described and understood the pedagogical practices they perceived as enhancing their visibility in the learning environment. Framed through Ralph Ellison's concept of invisibility, a modified grounded theory analytic approach was used to capture the complexity in the data. The findings from this study provide insight to educators for enhancing student visibility in the learning environment.

Introduction

According to Gay (2004), graduate students of color have to function in an alien environment in which they are often taught by culturally insensitive and uncaring instructors. She states that "most graduate students of color exist on the periphery of the academy, and their career trajectories are not as unencumbered as many think" (Gay, 2004, p. 266). Since traditional pedagogical practices tend to be in cultural alignment with the White student experience, Gay's conclusions are not surprising. Caldwell and Stewart (2001) argue that the conflict some Blacks experience in Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) stems "from participation in a system of formal higher education that promotes the uncritical adoption of western values and negates a Black cultural knowledge base" (p. 226). This conflict between Black culture and White environments has been at the center of educational research for over 100 years. In 1903, Dubois introduced the theory of double consciousness in this way:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—An American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (pp. 194-195)

Dubois's position suggests that some Black graduate students who attend TWIs enter with the notion of a double consciousness. That is, they enter with a way of thinking, being, and existing that is grounded in their own understanding of what it means to be Black; then there is a way of thinking, being, and existing that is defined by "looking at one's self through the eyes of others [and by] measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Dubois, 1903, pp. 194-195).

In theory, some Black graduate students must continuously negotiate the tension between being true to themselves and/or conforming to traditional pedagogical practices which require they become objective, apolitical, and unemotional intellectual beings (Tuitt, 2003). They end up being trapped in a cage, as Dubois might say—so preoccupied with trying to escape both death and isolation, they are unable to fully use their best powers—unable to become the true geniuses they are. For example, Caldwell and Stewart (2001) argue that Black students who enter TWIs searching for validation, seeking approval, or expecting appreciation are setting themselves up for an internal conflict because "the campus climate, curriculum, and organizational structures were never intended to be inclusive" (p. 233). This internal conflict can have serious consequences for the academic success of Black graduate students.

In response to this dilemma, this study draws on the lived experiences of nine Black women to explore how educators can create classroom environments in which Black graduate students cease to carry the burden of double consciousness and attain visibility. Visibility is especially important for Black graduate students who, according to Gay (2004), need to focus on the power and politics of professional services, to live and learn in the academy without losing their cultural self.

Understanding the Concept of Invisibility

The concept of invisibility/visibility has been applied to the experiences of Black high school students (Carter, 2005) and Native American undergraduate students (Brayboy, 2004) in a variety of educational settings. In the current study, the concept of invisibility (Brayboy, 2004; Ellison, 1980; Franklin, 1999) was used to explore the lived experiences of nine Black female graduate students in a TWI. Ellison's (1980) concept of invisibility suggests that the conflict some Black graduate students experience in TWIs may involve the inability (refusal) of professors (officers) to recognize the humanity of students who are attempting

to master the highly technical skills of researcher, scholar, educator, and/or teacher as a dignified way of serving their community (country) while improving their economic status. According to Franklin (1999), invisibility is a psychological experience in which an individual may feel his or her personal identity and ability are undermined by prejudice and racism. Specifically, Franklin defines invisibility as an inner conflict causing individuals to question whether their talents, abilities, personalities, and worth are under-valued or unrecognized.

In an effort to understand Black graduate students' internal struggle for personal identity, occurring as a result of negative cross-racial encounters, Franklin (1999) proposes an invisibility syndrome paradigm consisting of seven dynamic elements. These seven elements occur as a result of racial slights or cumulative encounters with prejudice and racism. They are as follows:

1. One feels a lack of recognition or acknowledgement.
2. One feels there is no satisfaction or gratification from the encounter (it's painful and injurious).
3. One feels self-doubt about her or his legitimacy, asking such questions as: "Am I in the right place?" or "Should I be here?"
4. One feels no validation from the experience, asking: "Am I a person of worth?" or seeking some form of corroboration of experiences from another person.
5. One feels disrespected.
6. One's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged.
7. One's basic identity is shaken, if not uprooted. (Franklin, 1999)

Overall, Franklin's invisibility syndrome paradigm suggests that the conditions contributing to feelings of invisibility may occur in situations where Black graduate students perceive that their professors make judgments about them based on skin color, and ultimately fail to accurately see their students' *real* talents, abilities, and personalities. Reversing Franklin's model of invisibility, we can identify pedagogical practices that produce learning experiences in which Black students feel: (1) recognition and validation, (2) satisfaction and gratification from the encounter, (3) a genuine sense of belonging where their presence is legitimized, (4) validation, (5) feelings of respect, (6) dignity, and (7) supportive identity development. Taken together, Ellison's (1980) and Franklin's (1999) conceptualization of invisibility provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the pedagogical practices that enhance Black graduate students' visibility in the learning environment.

Methods

In this study, qualitative research methods were used to develop a deeper understanding of how Black graduate students describe and understand the pedagogical practices they perceive as enhancing their visibility.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of nine Black women (See Appendix A) at a highly selective, predominantly White, Ivy League graduate school of education (ILGSE) in the Northeast. In the years prior to this study, ILGSE experienced significant growth in the racial diversity of its student population where students of color increased from 10% to 33% of the student body. In an effort to ensure that students were reflecting on current class experiences, participation was restricted to Black graduate students enrolled in classes at the time of the study. Consequently, advanced doctoral students were not eligible to participate.

Data Collection

The data presented in this manuscript emerged from an analysis of three rounds of in-depth, semi-structured (45-60 minute), individual interviews during the spring 2000 and fall 2000 semesters. The purpose of the individual interviews was to gather data on participants' description and understanding of how the pedagogical experience enhanced their visibility in the classroom. The first interview solicited background information and gathered the participants' initial impressions of the academic environment at ILGSE. In the second interview, participants were invited to describe, in detail, aspects of their pedagogical experience at the ILGSE. The third interview served as a follow-up to determine if their impressions regarding their classes had changed over the course of the semester, and allowed participants to review and respond to the transcripts of the previous interviews; a method designed to crosscheck or "triangulate" their accounts (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

Using a modified grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) analytic approach, a set of procedures to capture the complexity in the data was followed to identify themes as they emerged and to make theoretical connections to existing research when possible. After conducting each interview, the researcher wrote analytic memos to synthesize the reading of the data (Rallis & Rossman, 1998). These memos provided a chronicle of the development of

interpretations and theoretical connections, and at the same time a mechanism to examine and re-examine any assumptions (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). In addition, to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher: (a) followed participants over time as their classroom experiences fluctuated, (b) conducted multiple readings of the transcripts from the individual interviews to maintain the authenticity of the students' voices, (c) scrutinized analytic memos to insure identified themes were grounded in the data, and (d) used "member checks" (Maxwell, 1996), allowing participants to review and respond to their individual transcripts after each interview session (Merriam, 1998).

Limitations

The exploration of best pedagogical practices for enhancing visibility is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully studied in one research project involving nine participants, and this article does not pretend to capture the full essence of the experiences of Black students in TWI classrooms. Moreover, since the ILGSE in question is an elite private university, the findings in this study should be weighed with this particular context in mind. Another institutional setting, different in size, geographical location, and/or selectivity, may provide additional considerations and understandings of the phenomenon. Finally, all the participants in this study self-identified as Black, providing an indication that this racial affiliation was highly important to them. Since prior research suggests that the extent to which an individual identifies with a racial group matters, this research does not claim to represent the experiences of all Black female graduate students, nor does it pertain to Black students for whom race does not matter (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997).

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the pedagogical practices identified by the study participants as most effective to enhance their visibility are discussed. Visibility is understood as the extent to which the teaching and learning process creates opportunities for students to be seen for who they really are and allow them to be fully present—physically, culturally, intellectually, and emotionally—in the classroom (hooks, 1994). Three types of visibility emerged from the study as effective pedagogical practices:

1. Seeing students as complete human beings. This type of visibility speaks to how faculty-student relationships, in and out of the classroom, help students become visible in the eyes of the professor.
2. Making students visible to each other. This type of visibility centers on how the pedagogical process facilitates students becoming visible to each other in the learning environment.
3. Being a visible and whole professor. This type of visibility focuses on the role a professor's visibility plays in empowering students to attain visibility for themselves, the professor, and each other.

In theory, these three dimensions are crucial for the success of Black graduate students because enhanced visibility allows them to overcome the perception that their participation in the learning process is negatively biased by race.

Seeing Students as Complete Human Beings

The findings from this study suggest that some Black female graduate students view dialogical professor-student interactions (Freire, 2008) and personalized professor-student relationships (Baker, 1998) as two features of the learning process that may deeply enhance their learning and result in faculty members seeing students as fully human. A key component of the dialogical professor-student interaction is that instructors, through the use of generative questions, activate student voices (Darder, 1996; Nagda, 2003). This allows students to become visible participants in the learning process and adds substance to their existence in the learning environment (Tuitt, 2003). Summer captures this dynamic with her explanation that she learns best when she feels "you really want to connect with me while you're teaching, everyday we meet" (Tuitt, 2003, p. 93).

In order for the professor-student interaction to be most effective, faculty members must engage students in a respectful manner. In this dialogical process, professors push students to go further in their analyses and thoughts by combining challenge with support. Candy characterizes this type of experience in this manner:

> You are really listening to what I said and not just kind of nodding and trying to wait until the end of the sentence so you can call on the next student. And more importantly…well maybe not more importantly, but *as* importantly, you find a loophole or something in what I said…So there's a respect thing and you were really paying attention to what I said because you analyzed it and you thought about it. And you found a weakness in it,

and you were pushing me on it. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 203)

This type of respectful engagement allows students to develop their own ideas without having their dignity and humanity compromised. Maintaining dignity and humanity is extremely important because some Black graduate students—weary of participating in an intimidating learning process—look for signs of encouragement from their professors to know that their voices are welcome (Tuitt, 2003). Sometimes a simple nod or physical reaction by the professor can serve as an invitation for students to join the learning process. By engaging students in meaningful and authentic ways, professors can create relationships that move students from the margins to the center of the learning process, and enable them to feel visible because they are recognized, acknowledged and validated.

Another aspect of professor-student relationships identified as important to enhancing student visibility is the opportunity to establish personal connections with their professors who go beyond the call of duty to support students in their academic and professional development. Makaya's experience represents one example in which a professor goes the extra mile to support her. She states:

> She was just like, "Makaya, bring me everything that you have written since you've been at [ILGSE]," and she read everything. And then at the end she's like, "You're an excellent writer; you just need to write like this." And she picked my best writing. I was working full-time, and it was a lot of stress, but she told me, "just write like you wrote in your pro-seminar, and you'll be fine." So, she took the extra time. Not only did she critique me, but it was healing and loving. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 95)

When Makaya's professor requested her previous writings, read them all, and provided feedback, she let Makaya know her growth and development as a doctoral student was a priority to her. Makaya was fortunate to obtain personalized attention from her professor, who could have directed Makaya to the writing center or passed her off to a teaching assistant. By providing the extra time and attention and getting to know this student and her work, the professor was able to give specific advice about Makaya's academic development. Makaya's experience reinforces the notion that professors should get to know their students at a personal level to give them the best academic and professional advice and increase their sense of visibility.

Similar to Makaya's experience, Sydnee found that having personalized relationships with her professors to be reassuring. She comments:

> I felt the connection that I had with my professors; they knew how hard I was working, and they knew my background, and they knew how hard I wanted it. So that helped me, and when I went to tell them I'm working on this paper it's not coming for me they knew me. That way they could help me, and I feel like had I not had a connection with them, and they didn't know where I was coming from, they wouldn't have been able to help me at all. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 108)

Sydnee's statement is a reminder that when professors take the time to engage in out-of-class interactions that are personal in nature, they can acquire a better sense of their students' needs and interests and allow their students to experience greater visibility by knowing they are not alone in the learning process.

Finally, some students may seek a more personal and intimate relationship with their professors because it reduces the race-related anxiety they may associate with participating in the learning environment (Tuitt, 2008). In theory, this personalized attention allows students to trust that their professors' assessment of them is based on authentic knowledge about who they are, and not solely on the color of their skin. Personalized professor-student relationships make it much harder for students to be invisible or opt out of the learning process. However, in order for these relationships to be effective, professors need to be available and approachable. Students in this study identify replies to emails, phone calls, and invitations to professors' homes as indicating a willingness to interact. These out-of-class activities also signal that they are visible to their professors.

Helping Students Become Visible to Each Other

In addition to personalized professor-student relationships, the Black female graduate students in this study prefer a structured, yet flexible, transparent, and inclusive learning process. When professors make their expectations for the learning process explicit, students are able to frame and structure their participation. Furthermore, through the transparency of goals, objectives, and overall intended outcomes of a course, professors can provide students with an understanding of what to expect. For example, in regard to transparency and structure, Penny states:

> For me, it helps me plan, guide my own learning. So even though I'm taking classes that I'm not particularly psyched about, I know what I can get out of them based on the promise of the class in the syllabus. So I might not be extremely excited about X, but I know within X there's going to be one, two, and three that's going to be helpful to me. I

know when I can relax a little bit in terms of workload. I'm able to gauge that better. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 121)

When the learning process is transparent and structured, professors enable students to determine the kind of presence or visibility they can and want to have in the learning environment. The ability to gauge one's presence in the learning environment is important for students who may be weary of participating in hostile or unwelcoming classrooms.

In addition to a learning environment that is transparent and structured, the students in this study value an inclusive learning process in which professors make a concerted effort to engage all students, letting them know their participation is welcome and desired. Students need to know they are not alone to fend for themselves in the classroom. In an effort to stay attentive to how students are experiencing the learning process, some professors establish ground rules and design process-checks into their courses to reflect on classroom dynamics. When professors are attentive to the needs and experiences of students in the learning process, students are able to acquire a sense of safety.

Rocky comments on the value of classroom environments in which ground rules are created by the professor and students:

If there has been a sense that people have been respecting each others' voices, that would influence [my participation], if I feel like I'm going to be attacked I will not speak. If I felt that there's genuinely been consistency in respecting others' opinions, then I'll speak. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 125)

Like Rocky, other students in this study believe they are less likely to be personally attacked if the learning process facilitates building a sense of community with clear ground rules for how students engage each other.

One possible explanation for why the students in the study value a transparent, structured, and inclusive learning process is that clear expectation facilitates each student's integration into the learning environment; a sense of stability and support is established that comes from generally knowing what is expected. It also allows students to know professors are attentive to their experiences, and that establishing ground rules will guide how students engage each other in the classroom.

Another way students are encouraged to move from the margins of the learning environment and attain visibility is through use of multiple modes of instruction (Tuitt, 2003). Students in this study indicate that they value different approaches to presenting information, such as visual aids or methods of instruction that are interdisciplinary in nature.

Shaharizod describes one of her favorite professors in this manner:

He was very interdisciplinary in his approach. For example, in one of the classes he came in and we listened to Charley Parker and we looked at a piece of Picasso's picture. And first, we talked about the music, like what did we hear, and then we looked at the picture, and then we made some comparisons between the two. And then we did this writing activity, and he made comparisons between all three activities. And then he was able to make a connection with that and building partnerships. So I thought it was really powerful that he got engaged kinetically. He used music and he used art, and then brought us to the very practical in terms of policy…in terms of politics. So he was very interdisciplinary in his approach, and I thought that was very effective. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 128)

By using multiple modes of instruction, like art, poetry, and music, professors can create multiple points of entry through which students can comprehend a concept or subject. Multiple modes of instruction are often part of larger theoretical frameworks enabling students to bring different aspects of their identity into the learning environment (Bruner, 1996).

In situations where professors align their instruction to draw upon personal experiences, students are empowered to make internal connections to a particular subject and/or concept (Sealey-Ruiz, 2007). At the same time, discussing the experience helps students share a part of who they are with other students. Consequently, the use of personal narratives as a pedagogical tool can increase Black graduate students' visibility in the learning environment.

Class discussion also positions students at the center of the learning process (Tuitt, 2003). Several of the students report higher levels of engagement in the learning process when taught by professors skilled at facilitating class discussions. For example, Penny notes "it's important for the professor to be a good facilitator of discussion" (Tuitt, 2003, p. 34). Likewise, Candy emphasizes that classroom discussion helps her engage in the class:

Some classes no one's really talking, nobody really cares, just watching the clock for [when] this hour and a half will be over with. And then others you know that the dialogue is actually an integral part of the learning process. You want to be a part of that, and you want to contribute. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 135)

When professors are competent at facilitating classroom discussion, they create a learning process

that allows students to dialogue with their peers under their direction and care (Giroux & McLaren, 1996). In the successful facilitation of classroom discussions, professors assume the role of dialogue conductor, skillfully blending student voices as if they are musical instruments. In an ideal situation, student voices may blend, reverberate, or stand alone, allowing the spotlight to illuminate one student on center stage. By activating student voices in classroom discussions, professors create yet another vehicle through which students can attain visibility.

Smaller class sizes and opportunities for small group interaction are two other pedagogical practices and learning conditions students report as increasing their classroom participation. In smaller classrooms, it is harder for students to hide or withdraw from the learning environment and easier to engage with their peers and the professor. Makaya contends that large classes don't work for her. She states:

> Sometimes I don't know enough about the students to know how much I can share. I've been burned in the past where people have taken what I say the wrong way. And when you're in such a big space you don't have enough time to reflect back with people. And so I tend not to speak much in the bigger classes because of that specific issue. And maybe it's just a little uncomfortable because you don't know exactly what you're dealing with, and people that don't share you don't know what's going on so it's just awkward for me. In the smaller classes I have a more intimate relationship with other students, an understanding what they're about. And it's easier to share and you get more access to the professor in a lot of ways. The distribution of attention is better. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 137)

When students have the opportunity to get to know each other, they have a better understanding of who they are interacting with in the learning process. This understanding of peer group interaction can make self-disclosure easier.

If creating smaller classes is not possible, another option is to create discussion sections that meet in or out of class, so students can engage each other more directly. Rocky finds it particularly helpful when her professor divides the class into small groups. Moreover, she appreciates her professor making a conscious effort to check in with each of the groups. Specifically, she favors:

> Breaking into small groups, but not just breaking the students into the groups and letting us discuss, but making rounds to each group. And this professor would actually sit in the groups and

actively be an observer for a while, but also participate in those discussions. So that's a little different, because some professors that I've had will break the students into small groups, but don't necessarily get involved with us. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 140)

Rocky's comment highlights the importance of professors being visible to their students by interacting in their small groups as well. In smaller settings, students are encouraged to engage their peers in a collaborative learning process and make visible and meaningful connections with each other.

Creative assignments are another way in which professors can shrink large classes and increase student visibility. For example, Penny found a creative writing exercise helpful to establish her voice and develop a sense of focus in her work; the exercise forced her to think and write down how she wanted to focus the content and design of her research, and connect her research interest to the literature, and to the various frameworks she was expected to apply. She notes:

> The exercises—just the assignments—were about thinking and forcing you to articulate your theories etc.…that was very engaging to me. I wanted to do my own work in a structured way. I was sort of creating the content and putting it into a structure that I could get feedback on. That was so helpful.… It was just easier to engage because it was important to me. So, the exercise was helpful because then it helped me communicate it to other people. (Tuitt, 2003, pp. 142-143)

While Penny appreciates the opportunity to use creative writing to establish her voice, other students find that creative assignments are also a good way to force them to communicate with classmates. For example, Sydnee feels that some of her professor's assignments help her engage in the class and communicate with her peers. She states:

> We did a lot of group activities. It was the only class that I shared my paper.…We wrote up what we found. We shared with the rest of the class, which was something that I had wanted [to do] the entire time because…if you can just hear what somebody else found then it may help you a little bit. (Tuitt, 2003, pp. 143-144)

Creative assignments help some students engage in the learning process and communicate more directly with their peers, while others find this intimidating. Makaya explains that one of her favorite professors made her get up in front of the class and present when she didn't want to:

That was interesting because [professor] saw value in something that I did and I didn't necessarily see the value that she saw. So I presented. And it was interesting because of the feedback [where] several people told me how important it was to hear my presentation. This class was the most challenging for me, but the professor asked me to speak, to help her [create] dialogue and I did. And it was very hard for me to do that in this particular class, but I did it. And it was really liberating. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 144)

Makaya's words serve as a reminder that when professors are thoughtful, creative, and compassionate with the assignments they choose, they can help students overcome some of their fears and feelings of isolation, and help them find their voice.

Overall, when professors use creative assignments, students are encouraged to collaborate with their peers in the co-construction of knowledge. Creative assignments can also result in individuals taking center stage during class presentations, reinforcing the notion that students are vital and central components of the learning process. This can also create important opportunities for students to become visible to each other.

The various pedagogical practices and learning conditions described in this section help to position students at the center of the learning process and increase their chances for visibility. When professors create opportunities for students to engage with each other, they are able to get to know their classmates in real and meaningful ways. There is a better chance to create conditions that alleviate Black graduate students' concerns about being judged by the color of their skin in classes with high levels of student engagement, because their peers have a better sense of who they are as individuals. However, to increase student visibility in the learning process, professors must be willing to share power, demystify their image as all-powerful or all-knowing, and be fully present in the classroom.

Visible Professors Produce Visible Students

The findings in this study support previous research indicating that some students have racially-based perceptions and expectations of their professors (Steele, 1999). To counter the negative impact that perceptions like these can have on student participation in the learning environment, professors need to do a better job of giving students a sense of who they are as faculty and how their identity impacts the way they teach (Tuitt, 2003). Professors who are politically and racially conscious are more attractive to students in this study due to the clarity they provide regarding their values, beliefs, and norms. For example, Stacy describes one of her professors in the following way:

He is sincere, fairly transparent, committed, and action-oriented. He states what he's interested in doing, and he uses the first person in his writings, his academic journal articles. He doesn't hide behind words; he doesn't hide behind theories, and other people's words. He makes it clear that he has an investment in making change. He has political clarity, which you can see through the lines of the syllabus, and directly [in] the articles he chooses and how he arranges it and the categories. And he identifies strongly as being a Black person, and with Black and Latino people. He's proving it with action. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 181)

When students can detect the political ideology of their professors, they can make informed judgments about how they want to engage in the learning environment.

Some students find it helpful to know if their own views and perspectives are aligned with those of their professor; knowing where the faculty member stands allows students to determine the amount of risk that may be associated with interjecting opposing views. In other words, if students sense a professor is open to diverse perspectives, they may be more inclined to take risks. Additionally, when professors are conscious of their own racial identity, students are able to understand how this identity impacts their research interests and teaching approaches. In theory, racial consciousness allows professors to signal their awareness and sensitivity of racial identity to their students.

Another way professors can increase students' visibility occurs through the use of diverse content and perspectives. For some students, the mere fact that professors included race-related content in their courses suggested they care enough about the subject to require their students to read and discuss it. Using diverse content and perspectives also lets students know their perspectives are welcome, especially if the content aligns with students' interests. Stacy describes her experience with diverse course content and how it helps her find her voice in the classroom. She argues:

The political orientation of the professor is reflected in their readings on the course syllabus. So if I see that they have readings that reflect marginal political beliefs, then I feel comfortable expressing those beliefs in my paper or in class. And if my professors' syllabus actually reflect a majority people of color, then that shows that they're centering on people of color, and that they actually value what people of color have to say. And perhaps even value it over the dominant perspectives. So for me that's very important, and because that's my sensibility, I'm more comfortable in the classroom. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 196)

As with racial consciousness, the content of a class can give students insight into their professors' political orientation (Castenel & Pinar, 1993). When professors make their ideological and political orientations visible in the learning environment, they act as role models for how students can attain their own visibility.

Feedback is another vehicle that can help students enhance their visibility in the learning environment. For example, Colette has a professor who lets her know he is paying attention to her development by commenting on her work. She states:

> He makes a point to say "This relates to your subject [Colette]." He knew that without me having gone into his office hours or presenting it to the class. So [it's] the recognition of really knowing what each person in the class is doing, the recognition of our interpersonal strength. He's never said to me you're not doing good in this class because you don't speak. He says you have a really strong writing style, I'm glad you're using your voice. And you're good at using passion to get across a point. So he recognizes those kinds of things. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 213)

This professor makes it clear that he is commenting on Colette's work and not simply giving what Sydnee and Shaharizod refer to as "Black feedback," that is, feedback based in racial misperceptions. More importantly, this professor's feedback focuses on Colette's academic development and lets *her* know—as well as those around her—that she is doing good work. Even though Colette did not participate a great deal in class, the professor manages to make her visible through his feedback.

Feedback also allows students to get a sense of how their professors view them. Many students in this study claim that feedback is an effective mechanism to let them know that their professors are aware of their presence. For example, Penny appreciates the extensive amount of feedback she receives in one of her favorite classes. She says:

> I felt like I got a lot of feedback from the professor, good, positive feedback. I feel like the issues we engaged in were important to my development, and sort of in what I want to do later in life. I felt very much like a teacher's pet in his classroom, very much…so maybe that correlates to why it was such a good class for me. But, I felt like I got a lot of attention and a lot of feedback in the class, and outside of the class. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 191)

Penny receives a lot of this feedback through written comments and in meetings outside of class. This feedback allows her to assess how her professor views her. Overall, students appear to value feedback from their professors because it provides a foundation for their participation in the learning environment and lets them know that their professors care about their academic and professional development.

In summary, the student voices in this study indicate that professors can increase their Black graduate students' visibility by:

1. Engaging them in an interactive dialogical professor-student relationship in the classroom;
2. Establishing personalized faculty-student relationships outside of the classroom;
3. Designing learning processes that are transparent, explicit, structured but flexible, and inclusive;
4. Being conscious, transparent, self-actualized, and humanistic in their teaching;
5. Being aware and sensitive to their students' diverse backgrounds;
6. Maintaining high standards and providing clear, direct, and timely feedback;
7. Including diverse content in their instruction to give students a sense of what subjects are valid.

Although these pedagogical practices and learning conditions provide some direction as to how increased visibility—where professors see their students, students see each other, and students see their professors—can strengthen the learning experience for Black graduate students, professors must keep in mind that not all visibility is received openly.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

Professors' attempts to increase student visibility can further alienate students in classrooms where they have grown accustomed to being invisible. Ultimately, professors need to be thoughtful in their efforts to make students visible in the learning environment. Colette characterizes her reactions to one professor's attempt to create visibility for her as mixed. She states:

> It's a compliment, because it feels like they're seeing something in me, but it's a lot more pressure for me to perform in a setting [that] I'm not very comfortable in. And then in my other class I think one of my professors just started seeing me. I was embarrassed because it really hit home to me how much he's been waiting for me to say something. It was just a slight hand raise. I wasn't even sure if it was a formulated thought yet. I thought well I'll raise my hand now, and these six other people will get asked before me. And he just jumped right on.

So, I was nervous, and I was a little embarrassed like I said. But then again I felt good that he even knew me. I felt good that he had been waiting for me to talk. Even though that's a lot more pressure on me now to say something. I felt, at least he knew that I was there. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 217)

Colette's experience of being noticed by her professors generates a sense of pressure and at the same time a sense of validation. The pressure comes from feeling she has to perform at the highest level because the spotlight is on her; the sense of validation comes from the awareness that her professor recognizes her and wants her to participate in the learning process. Sometimes how a professor recognizes a student makes all the difference.

Colette's experiences with exposure are symbolic of a type of visibility that Ellison (1980) discusses in *The Invisible Man*. In reference to "high visibility," Ellison writes:

While the darker brother was clearly "checked and balanced"—and kept far more checked than balanced—he glowed nevertheless, within the American consciousness with such intensity that most Whites feigned moral blindness toward his predicament. Thus despite the bland assertions of sociologists, "high visibility" actually rendered one un-visible. (Ellison, 1980, p. xv)

Ellison's conception of high visibility—what I call *hyper-visibility*—suggests that efforts to create exposure for students can lead to more invisibility if it leaves the students to interpret the intervention as racially motivated. When Black graduate students believe their professors view them in stereotypical ways, some may attempt to seek refuge by disengaging from the learning environment, hoping not to be seen, noticed, or detected. For some, disengaging provides an alternative to participating in an alienating learning process that does not feel safe. Sometimes being invisible can have its advantages, especially when students feel there is no satisfaction to be gained from engaging in the learning process.

Like the main character in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, some Black graduate students may find solace from being invisible:

I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. (Ellison, 1980, pp. 3-4)

Whether it's finding solace in the familiarity of being invisible in the classroom or choosing invisibility as a coping strategy to avoid hostile interactions, some Black graduate students find refuge in being left alone:

I've definitely learned to be invisible in a classroom, and that's very comfortable. And I'm like "don't talk to me." Let me just come into the room, check out when I want to check out, and of course I will do the assignments, but it's become very comfortable to be invisible. (Tuitt, 2003, p. 119)

Despite the perceived benefits that some of the participants feel they acquire by being invisible, the voices inside this ILGSE propose that students learn best when they are actively involved and visible in the learning process. These findings suggest that professors can improve the educational experience of Black graduate students by using pedagogical practices that enhance their students' visibility in the learning process. Specifically, seeing students as complete individuals, making students visible to each other, and being visible and whole professors are three types of visibility that are essential for facilitating Black graduate students' successful integration into the learning environment.

In conclusion, the pedagogical practices identified in this article provide some strategies for consideration. It is important to note that inclusive pedagogical practices benefit all students and faculty alike, including those from dominant cultures (Salazar, Norton, & Tuitt, 2010).Tatum (2003) states, "We cannot be blamed for learning what we were taught. Yet as adults, we have a responsibility to try to identify and interrupt the cycle of oppression….We have a responsibility to seek out more accurate information and to adjust our behavior accordingly" (p. 141). Faculty members have to be intentional and strategic about identifying and incorporating pedagogical practices that promote inclusive learning experiences. In order for these interventions to work, professors need to develop teaching and learning strategies based on their knowledge and understanding of their own strengths and limitations as well as the unique backgrounds of their students. By aligning their instruction to account for the unique cultural needs their students bring to the learning environment, professors will be able to enhance their students' and their own visibility, and as a result, empower their students to become the true geniuses they are.

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Appendix A
Demographic Profile of Participants in this Study

	Name	Gender	Degree Sought	Year in Program
1	Candy	Female	Ed.D	1
2	Colette	Female	Ed.M	1
3	Makaya	Female	Ed.D	2
4	Penny	Female	Ed.D	1
5	Rocky	Female	Ed.D	1
6	Shaharizod	Female	Ed.M	1
7	Stacy	Female	Ed.D	1
8	Sydnee	Female	Ed.M	1
9	Summer	Female	Ed.M	1

The nine participants presented in this article are represented by pseudonyms as shown in the above table. These nine students are a subset of a group of 12 Black graduate students who participated in a dissertation study (Tuitt, 2003). Of the 12 participants in the dissertation study, nine were female and three were male. The proportion of females and males in this dissertation study was consistent with the gender demographics of the ILGSE, which was approximately 70% female and 30% male. All of the students attended PWIs for their undergraduate degrees. Overall, the selection of participants was based on their degree status, year in the program, and courses they had in common.