Introducing the Invisible Man: Black Male Professionals in Higher Education

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The absence of Black male professionals in higher education pose a serious challenge to diversity and social justice in colleges and universities. Not only does this paucity reinforce the dominant racial system within these institutions and contribute to the marginalization and discrimination experienced by these men, the lack of Black men in professional positions has serious implications for the retention and graduation of students of color. Yet, despite their important role, very little research exists about their experiences as professionals within institutions of higher education. This study fills this gap by examining Black men working as faculty, administrative or professional staff at a large research university. We found that: 1) these men felt they did experience racism in their workplace; 2) the lack of other Black men in the professional ranks and the disparate treatment they received made them question both the institution's commitment to diversity and themselves; and 3) they were resigned to this being the way of life and believed part of their job is to prepare the next generation. The experiences described by our respondents suggest that higher education institutions in the United States reflect the nation's racialized social structure and the broader society's exclusion of members of nondominant social groups. We conclude with recommendations for making institutions of higher education more diverse and inclusive for all underrepresented groups.

Keywords: black men, racism, higher education, aversive racism, diversity

There is a profound scarcity of persons of color in professional positions within institutions of higher education. For instance, among full-time faculty at degree-granting universities and colleges in 2013, just 20 percent are men or women of color (the largest percentage of those are Asian/Pacific Islander men) (US Department of Education 2016). Black male faculty comprise just 3 percent of full-time faculty at these universities and colleges. Data on black male professionals in higher education outside faculty ranks are harder to obtain, but according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), just 13 percent of education administrators are black or African American (men and women combined) and 34 percent are men. The scarcity of black male professionals in higher education poses a serious challenge to diversity and social justice in colleges and universities.

The lack of black men in professional positions has serious implications for students of color experiencing marginalization in the curriculum, isolation from both campus and home communities, feelings of impostorship, and racism (Hairston 2013; Institute of Higher Education Policy 2010; Jehangir 2009; Nora and Cabrera 1996; Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993). These challenges are particularly difficult for young black men attending college and contribute to them temporarily or permanently leaving college at higher rates than their contemporaries (Gibson 2014; Harper 2009; Harper and Harris 2012; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yasso 2000). Connecting these students to black male professionals through mentoring

relationships at predominantly white colleges and universities helps counter messages that Black students are academically inferior, unqualified to be in college, and in college only because of affirmative action legislation (Bonner and Bailey 2006; Brown 2012; Cuyjet 2006; Pounds 1987 Sutton 2006; Wynn 2007). Mentoring programs offer promising opportunities to increase black male persistence and graduation in postsecondary education (LaVant, Anderson and Tiggs 1997; Lee 1999; Palmer et al. 2014), but they put black male professionals working in higher education on unstable ground. How does a black male professional teach a young black man to recognize and negotiate race-based aggressions with dignity, strength, and control when he, himself, is subject to the same and may not be able to successfully counter it? In the face of post-racial colorblindness, how do black male professionals expose and address invisible, ubiquitous acts or communications that undermine their professional status and agency? How do they educate, advocate for justice, and remain gainfully employed with prospects for advancement? In short, how do they take care of themselves so that they can do the work of taking care of and encouraging the retention and persistence of students?

Research about the experiences of the black men who are charged with mentoring students, particularly black male students, is sparse (Dancy and Gaetane 2014; Harper 2009; Harper and Harris 2012; Hooker and Johnson 2011; Jackson 2002; Jackson and O'Callaghan 2009; Mahoney et al 2008). Thus, we seek to fill this gap by examining how black male professionals make meaning of their experiences in the postsecondary educational workplace. Our research is based on qualitative interviews conducted with black professional men (coordinators, administrators, professional staff members, and faculty) at a large research university in the Southeast to understand how they experience racism in the workplace and how they make sense of these interactions and experiences. We are interested in understanding whether and how postsecondary educational institutions in the United States facilitate and perpetuate the discriminatory ideals and practices of the broader society and whether they empower or disempower professional black men working in these institutions. Our findings shed light on many of the challenges surrounding making college campuses more inclusive and diverse.

Literature Review

Scholars have suggested that the United States is a racialized social system, wherein race permeates and directs the nation's economic, political, social, and psychological thought and action (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 1994). Feagin (2014, 1991) suggested that this system advantages one race over another and systematically promotes and regenerates hierarchical relations between races. Although "race" is contemporarily understood as far from simply black/white, the racial system established in the United States since the 17th century rested on the idea that blacks and whites defined the ends of the racial continuum. In general, white culture—representing civilized, socially desirable people—occupied one side of the continuum and black culture—representing uncivilized, socially undesirable people—occupied the other, with new immigrant groups being placed somewhere in between (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Palmer et al (2014) proposed that, throughout the nation's history, black men were relegated to the margins of society—a place devoid of power and privilege—and have learned to experience and respond to society from this marginalized space.

Since the second half of the 20th century, racial attitudes have shifted in the United States, but critical race theorists have documented that whites and persons of color continue to see race in very different ways. Whites were more likely than persons of color to hold the belief that all adults have equal opportunities to achieve; that social mobility is based on "…their own hard

work or merit;" (Anderson et al 2012:37) and that people of color, particularly black people, overreact to innocent interactions as malicious, race-based slights (Feagin 1991). Many black individuals and other people of color embraced a different set of beliefs regarding race, namely: 1) color has been and continues to be a master status by which society defines who someone is; 2) race was and remains an unspoken part of every individual and collective verbal and nonverbal exchange; and 3) race-based aggression happened, and continues to happen, in ways that were and are overlooked or minimized because it happened in isolation (Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Feagin 1991; Gaertner and Dovidio 2005). Anderson et al (2012) explained that blacks in the United States:

> . . . must always keep in mind the one-strike rule ['You're Black, so you already have one strike against you'] and its implications, that 1) because Whites can single them out for their race at any time, Blacks need to operate in a defensive mode, distancing themselves from other Blacks or behavior they fear may make them vulnerable to racist treatment and always be ready to resist racist aggression; and 2) each Black person must caution other Blacks, particularly children, about the racial caste system, teaching them where Blacks fit into it and instructing them in how to navigate it. (P. 37)

The importance of learning ways to navigate white society became increasingly important as black people moved into spaces historically occupied by white people (Anderson 2015). Anderson (2015) maintained that such movement reflects social progress because black people are able, currently, to access and negotiate their status and place in the social order in a manner that was previously unacceptable. He cautioned, though, that this movement into historically white spaces triggers visceral reactions in white people which prompt them to speak or act in ways that reestablish the previous social order

(Anderson et al 2012). Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) have referred to the resultant phenomena as aversive racism.

Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) indicated that aversive racism manifests when White people consciously support racially egalitarian principals while unconsciously harboring and acting on negative perceptions of black people. They explained that aversive racists will not discriminate against a member of another race or ethnicity when norms indicating right and wrong are explicit, but will tend to discriminate by other means in the absence of explicit social cues (e.g., choosing to not hire a candidate because he is not a 'good fit'). According to Gaertner and Dovidio (2005), this form of racism stemmed from the development and persistence of civil rights and labor laws that prompted social and workplace changes regarding what is considered normal and acceptable behavior toward black people. This microaggressive form of racism has been seen in multiple social systems, including the primary, secondary, and postsecondary education systems.

Research has found that various black male professionals working in the United States' private sector experience aversive racism through microaggressions, tokenism, and cultural taxation (Flores Niemann 1999; Harvey Wingfield 2013, 2011; Lee and Leonard 2001; Kanter 1977; Pierce et al 1978; Sue 2010; Sue et al 2007). Reseachers define microaggressions as subtle, often unconscious, and seemingly innocuous everyday speech, behaviors, and settings that innocently or intentionally demean or violate a person or group (Lee and Leonard 2001; Pierce et al 1978; Sue et al 2007; Sue 2010). These seemingly innocent, fleeting, and inadvertently oppressive exchanges encouraged the development and persistence of messages that: 1) standardize the experiences and values of the dominant group; 2) minimize the experiences of non-dominant group members as trivial, irrational, or deviant; and 3) urge assimilation of non-dominant group members to the

standardized norm (Sanders 2013; Sue 2010; Sue et al 2007).

Beginning in the late 1970s, research emerged discussing the differences in men's and women's work experiences in the United States' private sector. Kanter (1977) introduced the concept of tokenism, explaining how and why women's workplace experiences differ from men's. She suggested that tokens are selected from underrepresented populations within the organization and placed in highly visible positions (Kanter [1997] 1993). With the eyes of all upon them, tokens were pressured to produce at higher standards than their workplace peers while conforming to roles and expectations that socially control them in the workplace (Kanter [1997] 1993). Flores Niemann (1999) expanded Kanter's work, both in scope of topic and in environment. She noted that, in the faculty ranks of colleges and universities across the United States, tokens were expected to and did perform their stated job functions and ad hoc tasks that their White male peers were not asked to do. They did this believing that they would be perceived as: 1) not supportive of the unit and the university if they declined the additional responsibilities, or 2) incompetent if they accepted them but could not satisfactorily execute their stated job functions. Both scenarios heavily taxed the non-white or non-male professional, escalating their workload and making it more difficult to progress to the next step on the career ladder (Flores Niemann 1999).

Padilla (1994) popularized the term cultural taxation to describe what he saw as the prevalent practice in colleges and universities throughout the United States to "assume that [professionals of color] are best suited for specific tasks because of our race/ethnicity or our presumed knowledge of cultural differences" (Padilla 1994:26). Among the forms of cultural taxation he described were: 1) serving as the subject matter expert and educator on all aspects of diversity; 2) acting as role models, mentors, and advocates for minority students; and 3) being the diversity representative for the unit on various internal and external committees (Padilla 1994). These echoed Kanter's and Flores Niemann's work about the experience of tokens.

Harvey Wingfield (2013, 2011) investigated the specific working experiences of black men in the United States. She clarified that many black men working as professionals in the United States experience the same microaggressive exchanges detailed by Kanter, Flores Niemann, and Padilla (Harvey Wingfield 2011). She explained, further, that those exchanges impact their internal and external perception, growth, and advancement as a professional (Harvey Wingfield 2013). Finally, Harvey Wingfield (2013) proposed that the United States' private sector is a racialized social system that promotes and regenerates hierarchal relations between members of different races, advantaging one over another.

Does the United States' postsecondary education system perpetuate the discriminatory ideals and practices of the private sector and the broader society? Does it empower or disempower black male professionals? Research suggests that The United States' racist history and the legacy of actively keeping black people, particularly black men and boys, on the margins of society reproduces racist practices in the postsecondary educational workplace. Further, the psychological impact of racism prompts concern for the mental and physical health of black professional men who are charged with mentoring black male students and young professionals to success (Lee and Leonard 2001; Sue et al. 2007). Postsecondary education administrators must understand the experiences of black professional men in order to begin supporting them and, in turn, black male students, if an inclusive postsecondary education environment is to become a reality.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed intensive interviews to examine the race-based experiences in the professional lives of black men working in

postsecondary education. The study was conducted at a very large, research-intensive university in the southeast United States. At the time this research was undertaken, this university employed nearly 2000 faculty and over 9000 staff members. Of that number, 89 were identified in the University Human Resources records as black men serving in faculty or administrative/professional capacities, specifically at the Coordinator (requiring a Master's degree or a Bachelor's degree and two years of appropriate experience) or above position. These professionals were emailed to request their participation in the study and 10 agreed. Although the number of interviewees was low, the interviews were rich with details and examples. The participants included two faculty members, two administrators, and six administrative and professional staff members. They varied in age from early 20s through early 70s, with seven becoming postsecondary professionals immediately upon completing their degree and three becoming postsecondary professionals in conjunction with or subsequent to pursuing another career. Because the population of black professional men was so low, and given the sensitive nature of these interviews, we did not identify individuals by position or even pseudonym (rather, we use generic labels such as "respondent" or "interviewee").

Given the sensitive nature of the subject, the 40- to 90-minute interviews were conducted in private, often off-campus, locations. Using an open-ended, semi-structured interview schedule, participants were encouraged to tell their stories using their own terms and to make meaning of those stories from their perspective as an individual, a member of a larger group, and a member of a much larger society. Interview questions focused on interactions that made participants feel insignificant, inferior, or invisible; how these interactions defined their power in their professional positions; and how they redefined their power within those experiences.

Theoretical Foundations

Given that space is an active archive and fluid, reporting on a singular version of a study's setting could be considered insufficient. To illustrate this point, I offer two versions of a setting from my own research. The mixed methods study focused on emergent meanings of Asian American racial identities among Asian American college students (Samura 2011). I used data from a large-scale multi-campus survey of undergraduate students' experiences, student-created photo journals (Collier and Collier 1986; Suchar 1997; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Margolis and Pauwels 2011; Samura 2016c), and interviews (Kvale 1996). For the interviews and photo journals, I used a non-probability purposive sampling technique to recruit undergraduate students who self-identified as "Asian" or "Asian American." A total of 36 students participated as interviewees or photo journalers. Interviews focused on students' use of time and their academic, civic, and personal development. Over the course of one week, photo journalers took pictures of their worlds and also submitted pictures in response to eight questions I provided. Representative questions included: "Where do you spend the most time?" and "Where do you not feel comfortable?"

Findings

This study explores the experiences of ten black male professionals at a large, research predominantly white institution (PWI). Their stories reveal several consistent themes: they feel isolated from other black male professionals; their professional credentials are consistently questioned; their positions of authority are challenged or ignored; and they experience tokenism and the cultural taxation associated with it, particularly in terms of representing diversity. In short, these men work in an aversive racist system. Despite, or perhaps due to, these professional challenges they experience as men of color in the significantly white space of

postsecondary education, they negotiate and strive to respect who they are as individuals and as professionals, while still being a role model for students and younger professionals.

The Experience of Working in a Racialized Workplace

It is important to note that the men in our study describe the university as a racialized workplace, but one in which aversive or hidden, rather than blatant racism, is the norm. As one participant shares, "You have to understand [that there is] the thing called open racism and there is hidden racism. I see a lot of hidden racism in higher education." Others note that while they believe the institution to be racist, they perceive their coworkers as simply prejudiced or bigoted. As they explain, racists perpetuate fatally destructive action against members of another race, whereas prejudice or bigotry deprives members of another group of the resources and rewards to which one's own group has access. As one respondent notes:

> *Racism exists...when [the institution] denies someone promotion and tenure based on their physical characteristics.... Failure to intentionally prepare someone for promotion or tenure, or keeping them so busy that they cannot prepare for promotion and tenure, that's racism. But it is hidden...just like when you go to a job interview, you've got all the credentials in the world, and you don't get a call back.*

Participants indicate that it is the systems of actions and inactions that allow people from the dominant subculture to disadvantage and marginalize black male professionals. But these behaviors and attitudes constitute an aversive racist system that has powerful effects on individuals' lives. Aversive racism perpetuates race-based communications and behaviors that, when spoken or enacted, reinforce negative perceptions of black people. These negative perceptions contribute, in turn, to the slow development and promotion of black males in postsecondary educational institutions. It allows well-intentioned white people to unconsciously act or speak in discriminatory ways that reinforce an ethnocentric bias against black people (e.g., sprinkling Ebonics or 'Black English' in conversations or in meetings) and create an environment conducive to microaggression and marginalization (Gaertner and Dovidio 2005; Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn 1993). Our first theme—the experience of working in a racialized workplace—reveals some of the ways (e.g., disparate treatment, tokenism, lack of respect and recognition) aversive racism persists in higher education.

Disparate treatment

Our participants perceive their work environment to be racialized in various ways, mostly hidden and not obvious to others. This is especially revealed through these men's stories of experiencing disparate treatment. Participants discuss disparate treatment in workloads, in expectations regarding how they express themselves, and in the need to establish their position as a part of the team. One respondent relates his experience when he demonstrates the archetypical characteristics of leadership ("passionate and possessing strong convictions; being a strong leader with a spine of steel; being unwavering in their commitment to their values"). He understands that he is perceived as being "unapproachable, unwilling to compromise, unable to see the bigger picture, aggressive" when he displays the characteristics that are encouraged and praised in his white counterparts. He believes that his experience is not uncommon among black people in general and black males in particular. Disparate treatment challenges the individual authenticity and agency of our respondents, but they recognize that failure to accept the treatment may imply that they are not a good fit for the organizational culture, thus hindering their

opportunities for professional growth and advancement.

Initiative and preparation questioned

In addition, all participants indicate that they feel their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities are frequently called into question and that they are penalized for taking the initiative that all student affairs professionals are encouraged to develop. One participant believes that white male supervisors may want their black male staff member to demonstrate professional incompetence or dependence:

…[supervisors] feel like when they bring somebody up under them, especially when that person is African American and the supervisors are white men, I think …they expect me to need them to accomplish my task. But if I did that, I wouldn't be in a job. So I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't.

Another participant believes his professional peers and supervisors attributed his success to his professional network rather than his ability and qualifications: "One of my direct supervisors was my mentor, so coming fresh out of a bachelor's degree, getting a full-time job...they viewed it as me just kind of hanging onto the coat tails of the Director."

Participants' explanations indicate that they believe others view them as subpar or deficient in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities, a direct contrast to who they are and the credentials they hold. Several express that, as young professionals, their response was to do more as a means of proving they were just as good, an effort that led to added frustration:

I want white institutions to understand that black people are equally capable and in many cases far superior than they are when it comes to problem solving, running divisions, running institutions, those types of things, that they [white professionals] haven't cornered

the market on that, we just haven't been given the same opportunities.

Older professionals and seasoned professionals express anger and resignation about the exchanges that they understood would change nothing. One participant explains,

I don't care if you [earn your PhD] from Harvard, Yale, Oxford, some folks will never ever get respect and we have to learn that we can't let that stop us.... We can't stop, but we can damn sure do our part to make sure that people understand we earned it and I'm a scholar. You show that by your actions and not by arguing.

Another similarly relates, "[It's] that old syndrome of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: you don't exist. So what happens is I raise my voice from where I am and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't work, but I still keep raising it."

The cost of respect

Many feel that they must go "the extra mile" to be recognized but doing so does not ensure recognition of expertise, much less professional respect, from peers or supervisors: "sometimes people don't want to give us respect. A lot of times I see so many young PhDs who have earned that [degree] and earned that respect, and folks still don't give it to them.... There are some people who think, in this day and age, that they [black people] are still inferior to white folks." This lack of respect extends to interactions with colleagues in committee work: "I have sat on several different types of committees and felt as though my opinion has been undervalued at times." Another participant expresses:

It's interesting when you start getting into those spaces where you probably outpaced some of your counterparts and the messages that were previously sent to us (gain a lot of

education and a lot of knowledge, be articulate and thoughtful, become a competent person) are upended in favor of a new message: 'Relax man; loosen up!'; 'Wow, you use a lot of SAT words. Why do you speak like that all the time?' or 'Why are you overthinking things and making them so complicated?' It makes them all the more uncomfortable.

Many participants acknowledge that they do more than their counterparts to earn a respect they remain unconvinced will materialize.

While none of the participants indicated ever being directly questioned about his authenticity as a black man, several talk about receiving looks of suspicion from other black people and having experiences of questioning their own authenticity. Their experience is that the respect which should come with earned credentials and prior work experience from students and younger professionals is not forthcoming. The result is frustration in some ("Why do I have to fight this battle when you have no reason to doubt my skills, my contribution, my knowledge, or anything like that?") and resignation in others:

The reality is that unless you have support networks around and above you that are going to protect you, and often those are not in place, what will end up happening is: 1) you are going to deplete yourself; 2) a narrative will start to form about you—whether it is accurate or not—and that's going to lead to 3) your marginalization and your removal from the system before you are there long enough to bring in other people, create change, and do some good. You have to be there long enough to establish yourself, really establish yourself, as a thinking, thoughtful person, because that benefit of doubt isn't given to you as it is to your other coworkers.

One respondent speaks to the personal cost he, a natural introvert, pays in order to earn respect and to maintain his position: "If you are an introvert, you better become somewhat of an extrovert.... It might look easy, but at the end of the day, you might be super tired because you have had to portray and give out that energy to do your job and get that respect that you deserve." Another respondent shares, "You don't always feel like doing it because that's not naturally you, so when you do it, you feel like it's a repulsive act."

Self-expression

Participants realize they must be especially careful about how they practice advocacy, agency, and inclusivity on behalf of underrepresented populations. One respondent believes he is not free to speak and act the way his white male counterparts do, instead needing to "be more hyperaware of how I express myself, when I express myself, and who I express myself to...because I am a black male and no matter how I control the fluctuations and inflections in my voice, people may receive what I am saying in an aggressive tone." He explains that his white counterparts speak their minds and opinions with little reflection and in quick fashion, whereas he has to "take the time to establish myself as someone who is not a threat." Another respondent shares: "I probably listen 95% more than I speak because I want to hear the positions that are being stated in that moment. But when I do speak for that 5%, I make damn sure that I have something profound and powerful to say. I try to make sure that my voice is one that is heard but I do it in an intentional way."

Mixed institutional messages

Another aspect of working in a racialized environment is receiving mixed messages about promoting institutional diversity. Our respondents hear the de jure diversity and inclusion statements, but see the de facto racial discrimination and inequity on campus. Several participants indicate that, regardless of their knowledge-base or proficiencies, they are

consistently asked to be the speaker for or representative of the unit's or the University's diversity initiatives specifically because of the assumption that they are familiar with all aspects of diversity and blackness in particular simply because they are black people. One participant recounts this experience:

Even though my competency level is very deep when it comes to [a wide variety of areas and topics] I'm being [asked] more often than not to have those conversations around inclusion and diversity...or to [help others] better understand underrepresented populations on campus.

It is as if being the unit's "voice for minorities" is an assumed part of their professional position, a function for which there is no direct benefit for the individual but significant detriment should they fail to embrace the responsibility (Anderson 2012; Flores Niemann 1999; Harvey Wingfield 2013). This cultural taxation is the cost of being the token minority in the unit, and requires that the professional: 1) be the subject matter expert on all facets of diversity, regardless of personal knowledge or experience with specific facets; 2) serve on committees with a specific diversity agenda; or 3) act as liaison, educator, problem-solver, negotiator, or general unpaid consultant to external agencies regarding cultural crises (Anderson 2012; Padilla 1994).

It is interesting to note that the legal protections and policies that encourage diversity and inclusion contribute to the cultural taxation and tokenization of these men. A "diversity representative" is legally required on certain committees, particularly search committees. As one of the few black people in their offices and possibly their subdivision of the University, the unit or the University may be forced to call on these men to serve in this capacity, not so much to make the organization look good as to ensure that the organization is in compliance with federal laws and regulations. The legal requirements seem to exacerbate the core issue that there are not enough black men in professional positions, even as it speaks to a different challenge in the assumption that black people all experience the same things, believe the same things, and act in the same way (Anderson 2015).

The Experience of Being One of the Few

Marginalization and institutional racism exist unchecked in part because of the profound lack of black male senior-level professionals in the higher education workplace (Allen et al 2000; Hughes 2014). As previously stated, black male professionals—at the Coordinator level or above in the administrative ranks and at the Lecturer level or above in the faculty ranks—represent

less than one percent of all faculty and staff at the university being studied. These numbers correspond to current and historical data indicating that just three percent of all college and university faculty are black men (U.S. Department of Education 2016) and that, in 2007, just 105 presidents at predominantly white institutions were black people, down from 113 in 1996 (Chenoweth 2007).

Our respondents feel the lack of diversity acutely. One participant shares: "we are mainly a few numbers on a spreadsheet so I mean you got to search out other universities, you got to search out people who retired, you got to search out people, and it's an exhausting search to find mentors for where you're at." Another explains: "we promote diversity, but when you look at senior management, that doesn't include black males. There's one at a time at any given time, so you only have one person able to contribute to making decisions and advocating for the rest of us in the mid- and entry-levels." Another says:

You struggle to find others that you identify with... [for those times] when things get hard, you need those people, if not for the simple fact of just being able to relate to something you are going through, [then] for groundedness. [But] we are so scattered around, to find other black males is a struggle. We are few and far between.... I talk a lot about black absentee fathers, but at a PWI [predominantly white institution], we have absentee black administrators.

He goes on to talk about the impact the absence of black male administrators has on his own aspirations:

If I aspire to be the president of a university, I should be able to identify black presidents of PWIs from whom I can learn what matters most in my preparation to address the corporate issues of a PWI. I don't want to be limited to just the ranks of an HBCU. I want to sit there as a black man. I want people to

see me as the head of a PWI and say, 'Wow, there's a black man, and this man is incredible.'

When asked how to recruit and increase the number of underrepresented senior-level professionals, these men echoed what we know from previous studies: that hiring managers and search committees recruit and hire people who look like them (Kayes 2006). One respondent explains, "By social conditioning, we tend to look at people that look like ourselves and if you sit at that table, people tend to think of people in their own image." The lack of black male professionals in the candidate pool is justified by the lack of qualified candidates in the pipeline (Allen et al 2000; Louis et al 2016; Wolfe and Freeman 2013). This inability to recruit, retain, and promote black male professionals into senior-level faculty or administrator positions creates a space in which search committees can promote egalitarian concepts of diversity and inclusion while intentionally or innocently perpetuating aversive racism (Allen et al 2000; Bonilla Silva 2006; Embrick 2011). These practices reflect Bonilla Silva's (2006) naturalization frame of colorblind racism: this is just the way things are right now and it is no one's fault, there are simply not enough qualified candidates.

Commitment to the Future

Though they lack role models, each participant is committed to mentoring and empowering future generations of black, college-educated professional men. They embrace the work of being a role model believing they have a responsibility to counter stereotypical images of black men and accurately reflect what professional black manhood looks like. According to one participant:

I work for the other black males who attend this school. I've got to be here so they can see someone like them here, so they can have

someone who has been through a whole lot, who, when they come and say, 'Hey, this and this happened,' I can say, 'You know what? That didn't exactly happen to me, but this and this happened, so I understand how you feel.'

Yet serving as a role model comes at a cost. Participants discuss how they negotiate their responsibility to mentor future generations and their responsibility to their job. Mentoring black students attracts a high level of scrutiny to which their white counterparts are not subject. One participant explains:

There's a different type of look when there's too many black students around my office. There's that look of 'Oh, you advise organizations. Well, what organizations do you advise? Only the black organizations?' And I get that look of, 'Oh, are you about diversity or are you about inclusion?'

Nevertheless, participants mentor students—all students, but particularly students of color who seek them out—about striking a balance between maintaining authenticity while practicing agency; building relationships that prepare others to defend them (rather than them defending themselves) in the future; and as one respondent puts it: "becom[ing] more involved and invested in the university so you can build a platform for your voice to be heard."

Discussion and Conclusions

The experiences of this sample of black male professionals in postsecondary education suggest that these men experience discrimination and marginalization in their work space. They understand that prejudiced people perpetuate their marginalization and undermine their agency and authority by questioning their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. Expecting this, they practice doing more than what is formally required to prove their expertise and commitment. At the same time, they struggle to balance the pressure of being an expert while not outshining their counterparts within a racist social system that restricts opportunities, resources, and networks for them to progress through the professional ranks. Nonetheless, they seize opportunities to reflect the university's commitment to diversity and to mentor and model critical thinking and behavior for future generations of students and professionals, all the while questioning their authenticity for the professional choices they make.

The result of these experiences is that the participants perceive the need to be circumspect in their actions and their communications with white and non-white colleagues: they are alone on the margins of their workplace culture and any professional misstep can result in their removal. This seems to echo Anderson et al.'s (2012) one-strike rule, wherein black people are socialized by their community to understand that the color of their skin is one strike against them, so they have to be hypervigilant that they do not do anything to invite racial aggression.

We see a clear example of participants defining themselves and being defined by the system in which they work, whether for good or for bad, in agreement or in protest. Participants act in ways they hope, vainly, will change others' perceptions of them. The hope that they can act as white people act and receive the same recognition, praise, respect, and acceptance that white people receive constitutes a violation of the white racial frame. Consequently, they experience moments of acute disrespect that remind them of their place in the social order. The difficult conversations these participants reveal suggest that they embrace and live with the fact 1) that the color of their male skin will forever be held against them; 2) it is unfair; and 3) it is a seemingly losing battle. They continue to encourage students and young professionals, though, to embrace the same, fight the good fight, and speak their truths and tell their stories in ways, in times, and in spaces that will accomplish individual and collective long-term good.

BLACK MALE PROFESSIONALS

The psychological impact of working in a racialized workplace—where there are few people who look like them, around people who question their abilities, and in which they are clearly treated differently—prompts concern for the mental and physical health of black male professionals (Smith, Hung, and Franklin 2011; Sue et al. 2007; Sue et al. 2011). Challenged, strained, and pushed to the edge, these black professionals suffer isolation, stress and burnout. In turn, everyone suffers—administrators, students, staff and faculty who would benefit from the experiences, perspectives and mentoring of these talented professionals.

What implications does this study have for moving forward towards making colleges and universities truly diverse rather than simply adopting an ideology of diversity that has become so common in corporations and universities yet means little in terms of real change (Embrick, 2011)? We offer a few strategies to further the conversation:

- Acknowledge that institutions of higher education are racist and that established practices serve to reproduce inequality. Colleges and universities are characterized by colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006) making it difficult to confront and challenge discrimination and microaggressions. Diversity workshops should shift away from focusing on individual behavior and interactions, and focus instead on how to recognize and remediate privilege, colorblind racism, and institutionalized racism.

- Recognize and reward professionals who contribute to diversity efforts and mentoring of staff, faculty and students. Though such mentoring is often informal, and therefore unrecognized and unrewarded, some institutions have begun investigating ways to document these efforts with the intention of making it a formal part of the professional review and promotion process. Release time and monetary rewards for individuals engaged in such efforts would help increase

recognition of individuals and chip away at the university's colorblind structure.

- Create meaningful conversations about diversity. Embrick (2011) notes that the term "diversity" has no common meaning and that race and gender are often excluded from discussions of diversity. This type of thinking gives rise to arguments about reverse discrimination and challenges to affirmative action in admissions policies. Rather than talking about diversity as a generic goal that encompasses all voices and peoples, organizations can frame individual and collective conversations around the goal of achieving equity for historically marginalized populations in the United States.

- Create and fund professional networking groups. All the men in our sample expressed feeling isolated and that they lacked a safe space to share experiences and strategies. Building such networks can help combat such isolation.

- Intentionally and aggressively develop relationships with organizations that target professionals from the United States' historically marginalized populations in order to expand recruitment efforts. One respondent noted that search committees at predominantly white institutions rarely produce professionals of color, yet historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, and Native American serving institutions have no problems recruiting and retaining senior level professionals from historically marginalized communities. Developing relationships with professionals associated with those organizations and communities would significantly diversify candidate pools, individual institutions, and the postsecondary education system.

Of course, there are no easy solutions to confronting the deep-seated systems that perpetuate racial inequality within educational

institutions, but conversations such as those in this issue are a start toward broadening and deepening our understanding of what diversity and social justice might look like.

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