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Racial Profiling as Institutional Practice: Theorizing the Experiences of Black Male Undergraduates

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This article draws upon racial profiling literature as an analytic lens with data collected in a qualitative study of Black males at one university. The authors argue that racial profiling provides a system of assumptions and rules that inform decisions made and attach to interactions between Black males and their faculty, staff, and peers. The authors conclude with implications for practice and future research.

Racial profiling is a disturbingly common concept. Citizens hear “racial profiling” cited regularly in the media regarding police action and immigration debates. For all its ubiquity in some areas (e.g., criminal justice), racial profiling remains nearly absent in the context of education. Educational researchers recognize that deep disparities exist in U.S. higher education regarding the access, persistence, and graduation rates of racial minorities (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003), and ample inquiry into the experiences of Black males at predominately White institutions (PWIs) describes students who feel isolated, marginalized, invisible, and must combat racial stereotypes and negotiate racial tension on a consistent basis (e.g., Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Radloff & Evans, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008).

Explanations for these disparities vary. Some scholars argue that Black male students are disinterested in education, and others focus on educator apathy and ethnocentric pedagogy (Kunjufu, 1995; Livingston, & Nahimana, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting, 2005; Stinson, 2006). Still others argue that explanations for disparities, especially inquiry that explores environmental and cultural (versus individual) factors, generally fail to consider how privilege and racism operate at organizational, structural, and institutional levels to nourish individual behaviors and environmental factors (Ferber, 2012; Harper, 2009; Harper & Davis, 2012; Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Singer, 2005). Harper (2012) observed that Black males’ higher rates of attrition are rarely attributed to “racist stereotypes [that Black males] often encounter in and out of the college classrooms or with the maintenance of White supremacy in their campus environments” (p. 10). Bonilla-Silva (2010)
referred to this “color-blindness” as a “minimization of racism,” an ideology that “consists of broad mental and moral frameworks, or ‘grids,’ that social groups use to make sense of the world, to decide what is right and wrong, true or false, important or unimportant” (p. 62).

Analogous to Harper’s (2012) examination of racism in the context of higher education research, the authors take up this point—the failure to explain the “race effect” or take into account “structural/institutional racism” (p. 10)—in the context of higher education practice. The authors draw upon racial profiling literature as our theoretical framework to analyze data collected in a qualitative study of Black males at one PWI. This theoretical lens reveals how racial profiling provides a system of assumptions and rules that inform decisions made and attaches to interactions between Black males and their faculty, staff, and peers.

**Theoretical Framework: Racial Profiling as Institutional Practice**

Racial profiling is typically associated with law enforcement, such as security following racial minorities in a shopping mall or police officers stopping someone for “driving while Black” (Harris, 1999, p. 265). The term racial profiling originally referred to “the use of race as an explicit criterion in ‘profiles’ of offenders that some police organizations issued to guide police officers’ decision making” (Engel, Calnon, & Bernard, 2002, p. 250). While no singular definition exists for racial profiling, Cross (2001) offered a concise explanation, which is useful for this study: Racial profiling is when “People of Color are targeted, put under surveillance, and treated unfairly and unjustly based on race by those frequently considered well-intentioned cultural/social agents” (p. 5). Several scholars have agreed upon the following basic tenets of racial profiling (e.g., Engel et al., 2002; Gross & Livingston, 2002; Harris, 2002).

- **Surveillance**: Surveillance is a primary mechanism of racial profiling. A global judgment is exercised that a targeted group (e.g., Black males) are more likely than others to enact certain behaviors (e.g., commit crimes). Oversight is thus provided by those in authority or privileged positions over “others.” Surveillance can also produce (self) regulatory effects in that one’s behavior is modified or constrained to conform to global judgments.

- **Deficit-thinking**: Racial profiling is tied to deficiency framing—meaning, racial minorities, in this case, Black males, are blamed by society for their own failures. The barriers and disadvantages that individuals must overcome are less likely to be seen by educators as institutional or structural problems but instead as rooted in the individual who needs support, remediation, or greater motivation to succeed.

- **Comparative Racialization**: This dimension of racial profiling illuminates how society constructs some groups as “other,” meaning differentiated and subordinated based upon race (Johnson, 2000, p. 633). Black males are measured against a normative (White racial) standard for success, progress, and quality; comparisons (conscious or not) between Whites and racial minorities serve to invoke or require conformity to a standard (that which is “normal”).

- **Stereotyping**: Another aspect of racial profiling is the generalizations based on preconceived notions of societal portraits of Black males. Stereotypes can influence decisions that are made, contribute to bias-based practices that yield disparate treatment of racial groups, and even set the stage for forecasting of individuals’ potential. Educators, for example, may believe that Black males would be less likely to succeed.

While rooted in the legal system, racial profiling is evident in other systems, such as health care. Briggs and Mantini-Briggs (2003), in their ethnographic project, illuminated how racial profiling by public health officials during the Cholera outbreak in eastern Venezuela in the 1990s contributed to
the deaths of hundreds. Another example of racial profiling can be found in mental health services (Fitzgibbon, 2007; Herbert, 2011). “Blackness,” Fitzgibbon (2007) wrote, is “read as an actuarial indicator of likely dangerous mental illness and that this will feed back into the cultural assumptions and stereotypes of practitioners” (pp. 136–137). In this way, Fitzgibbon added, racial profiling becomes institutionalized through individuals’ collective beliefs and practices.

The term “racial profiling” has also entered discussions regarding K–12 policies that disproportionally marginalize Students of Color by way of “zero tolerance” policies and other racially biased practices (Akom, 2001; Ivery & Bassett, 2011; Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001). Racial profiling of Students of Color functions as a norm in the U.S. public education system, which makes it more difficult to identify or “root out” in practices, policies, and behaviors (Cross, 2001, p. 5). The propensity of racial profiling in K–12 public education extends to the experiences of Students of Color who matriculate into the higher education system, whether public or private. Racial profiling leaves those affected in an “oppressive state that creates racial inequities by denying people of color privacy, identity, place, security, and control over one’s daily life” (Cross, 2001, p. 5). This “unleveled” playing field leads to discriminatory judicial and disciplinary actions against Students of Color.

Debate circulates about whether such race-based decision making is appropriate or accurate (Ramirez, McDevitt, & Farrell, 2000), even as individual racial prejudice is understood to motivate racial profiling (Engel et al., 2002). Some researchers (Akom, 2001; Bowser, 2001; Harris, 2002), with whom the authors align, assert that such profiling is distinct from individual prejudice and is instead an institutional practice: “the meanings associated with race,” Bowser argued, become “institutionalized” (2001, p. 120). Racial profiling could be perceived as individual bias, yet it becomes institutionalized when it is tacitly accepted, and possibly even encouraged, by members of an organization (Harris, 2002). Bowser (2001) noted that institutionalized racial profiling refers to “self-perpetuating patterns and practices made in reliance on taken-for-granted background knowledge” (p. 82). Such practices are “unconsciously followed” (Bowser, 2001, p. 98) and individuals act simply because “it is the way that it is done” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 8). Several authors emphasize that the individuals executing decisions, and the organizations within which they work, do not see themselves as discriminating or racist or making decisions that would harm an individual or group (Bowser, 2001; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Lopez, 2000). The routines and practices that are the enactment of the institutionalization of racial profiling “establish identities for members of the organization” (Bowser, 2001, p. 98) and generate “scripts” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 146) for individuals to perform “common responses to situations” (p. 147).

Race matters. Reliance on stereotypical assumptions about race can lead to bad advising, poor teaching and learning, and lack of trust between Black males and faculty, staff, and peers. Discriminatory attitudes become part of the normal process of socialization of professionals (e.g., student affairs administrators) into an “occupational culture,” which is sustained by key aspects and practices of the organization (Fitzgibbon, 2007, p. 129). The presence of racial profiling, the authors argue, impacts the ways in which students interact with peers and administrators; it creates an unbalanced learning environment and a gap in the achievement and engagement between Students of Color and White students (Cross, 2001; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Inquiry about the impact that racial profiling has on the lives of students on U.S. college and university campuses is lacking. The theories commonly used in student affairs tend to omit race, racism, and racial realities (Harper, 2012; Patton et al., 2007). To compensate for this “racelessness” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 41), the authors draw upon racial profiling as an analytical lens with a data set involving Black male students at one PWI. From this analysis, the authors offer a theoretical explanation of disparities for Black males at PWIs.
Methods

In an effort to understand the lived experiences of Black male students (Harper, 2007), the authors employed a qualitative focus group study. Focus groups are a method designed to gather information primarily about beliefs, values and understanding (Morgan, 1997), and thus, an appropriate method of data collection for this study (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012) of the experiences of Black male students at one PWI in the Midwest.

Site and Sample

The site for this study was a midsize, public research institution located in the Midwest. This predominantly White university of 22,000 has less than 2,000 African American students, and less than 4% of faculty and staff identify as African American. The authors distributed recruitment materials to student organizations and university departments representing Black students (i.e. Black Greek Council, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and the Black Student Union), yielding 23 undergraduate Black males, representing 20 different majors. All participants had some involvement in campus organizations, and two-thirds had participated in university-supported pre-college (bridge) programs.

Data Collection

After securing human subjects approval, three focus groups were conducted with six to eight participants in each. The focus group discussions were 90 minutes in length, guided by open-ended prompts. The authors asked about participants’ experiences in the residence halls, classrooms, at social events, and interpersonal interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. Participants were encouraged to speak freely, raise issues important to them, and support their responses with examples from their undergraduate experience. Audiotapes were transcribed for analysis and pseudonyms were assigned.

Data Analysis

This analysis is part of a larger project (see Jaggers & Iverson, 2012). The authors conducted a deductive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), also referred to as a framework approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), which has several steps. Following the step of familiarizing oneself with the data, the identified theoretical framework is applied; data are labeled and indexed. The authors coded stretches of text that exposed the tenets of racial profiling: surveillance, deficit-thinking, stereotyping, and comparative racialization. Initially the deductive analysis was completed independently, but then the authors came together to compare their sense-making with the data, to “work out explanations,” and “examine the coded themes to see how they might be linked” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 206), which yielded some rearranging and charting of the data and to the authors’ final interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Deductive analysis is used less frequently with qualitative research; a deductive process served the authors’ purposes as a valuable way of approaching the data when a framework (e.g., theory of racial profiling) is set in advance (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the findings can be seen in the fit and suitability of the data collection techniques to the qualitative research approach, in the careful selection of methods for collecting and analyzing data, and how the authors served as peer debriefers during their analytic process to ensure they had sufficient evidence to justify their assertions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).
Limitations

The findings reported in this paper are drawn from focus groups with Black male undergraduates at one public university. So, while these findings illuminate particular experiences, they are not intended to characterize all Black male students’ experiences. Studies involving different institutional types (e.g., community colleges, private liberal arts institutions) would be beneficial. Further, the authors’ purpose with this qualitative study was to amplify the voices and perceptions of Black males at a PWI. However, the authors acknowledge that this is one perspective—that of the Black males—and additional research is warranted to triangulate these stories. For instance, future research could include document analysis, such as incidents reports from residence life, campus police, and student conduct, or could involve interviews with White educators and administrators to hear their privileged perspectives. Recruitment of interview participants could differentiate those who view their work from a social justice perspective from those who do not self-identify as equity advocates.

Findings

Despite differences among students’ pre-college characteristics, academic achievement, and social engagement, analysis revealed that Black males in this study’s sample were subject to surveillance, primarily by police and residence life staff; were framed as deficient academically and socially, and subject to comparative racialization—meaning, they were measured against a normative (White) standard; and finally, their potential was forecasted based on stereotypes that situated them as athletes, academically ill-prepared and disinterested, and even as criminals. While the authors represent these categories discretely, with data excerpts to illustrate each, the authors acknowledge that these categories do not exist independent of each other. Racial profiling is the totality of these dimensions, and particular aspects are inextricably linked with another.

Surveillance

Surveillance was evident with this study’s participants in their interactions with residence life staff and through increased visibility of campus police at both on- and off-campus social events. All of the participants were resident students at one point during their academic experience and were cognizant of disparities both in how they were treated by residence life staff as compared with their Caucasian peers and in how incidents were handled. Patrick, a multiracial, entrepreneurship major from a large urban school district, acknowledged that being a racial minority in a space where “everybody else is Caucasian” feels like “everybody else is just there having fun” and students have developed “a bond.” When Black males congregate, “we’re just kicked out of the box.” Patrick described having people in his residence hall room and playing music, when “they [RAs] come looking straight to us.” By contrast, he added, “two days earlier there was a Caucasian with his music up loud, and they [RAs] didn’t say nothing about that. But as soon as we [Black males] do it...they just come straight to us.” Another resident, Terrell, also observed the privileges afforded White residents regarding hall policy infractions, while more attention was paid to minor infractions by residence life staff. Terrell shared that he was not getting along with his roommate who was White. He noted that his roommate would have alcohol in the room, and Terrell does not drink. On one particular occasion, Terrell’s RA entered the room because an alarm clock was sounding. Upon entering the room, the RA found alcohol belonging to Terrell’s roommate. Terrell was called to a meeting with the hall director and told he was documented for the alarm; he was also asked about the alcohol, which he said belonged to his roommate. Terrell was warned; and, according to Terrell, his roommate was never contacted about the incident.
The participants also acknowledged the strong presence of law enforcement when Black social gatherings take place (in contrast to the limited police presence at White organization sponsored functions). An exchange between Xavier and Michael (during a focus group) illustrated this surveillance. These two males are involved in a Black Greek organization that has been on campus for 40 years. Michael shared that when there is a Black house party, campus police are visible and will “shut down” the Black house party, while “the White people [at a similar house party nearby] still get to party the rest of the night.” Xavier added that police “assume that there’s gonna be some type of altercation” with the Black students, to which Michael quickly added that, “We never let them down. There’s always a fight.” Xavier acknowledged that fights may occur, but his frustration is the automatic assumption by police that Black students will initiate the fights. He observed that when Black student organizations use space in the student center for an event, there are “10 to 12 cops...they’re sitting in the balcony...you got one dude sitting in the balcony, two sitting at the stage, three at the door, three at the other door—you feel like you’re in a prison.” Michael added that he felt “pushed to that point where you just can’t take it no more” and that “I’m just gonna call it [attending college] quits.” This surveillance is tied to assumptions by college personnel of deficiencies, which are described next.

Deficit Framing

The Black males in this study indicated they were academically and/or socially unprepared for college, citing racial and socio-economic inequities in secondary school environment. College personnel presumed they were unprepared, their racial identities conflated with deficiency no matter their academic readiness, or ability, or pre-college circumstances. As Quinton observed, faculty and advisors are “looking down at you.” He added that faculty and advisors seem to assume an obligation: “Well, I have to help this Black kid out.” But, Quinton, an out-of-state student, added, “it’s kind of almost embarrassing...You’re not comfortable because...they [faculty and advisors] are not motivated to help you.” Jamal, a high achieving student who attended a private high school, once missed a science lab. He approached the professor to request a make-up. “I got the vibe,” he said. “She thought I was like a slacker.” But when she looked at her grade book and saw “I’m there every day in class and I take every quiz,” her behavior changed and she let Jamal make up the lab. Greg, who matriculated from a private, Catholic high school and had a 3.1 GPA, shared that when he met with his academic advisor, “she looked at my transcript and said, ‘Well, you got an A. That’s kind of surprising that you’re doing so well in writing.’” He wondered, “Why would she say that?” He added that his interactions were a “struggle.” He was always “fighting through stereotypes with more like teachers and advisors.” Evan, a sophomore student with a “B” average, shared his frustration with his professor in a class in which he and one other Black male were the only racial minorities. The professor announced that students should dress “business casual” for a critique exercise in the following class. Evan said “we’re starting to get into the major [and we had] to come dressed pretty nice.” He woke up early, for the 7:45 am class, to get ready. When he arrived he was surprised to see that his White peers “came looking a mess” or even “in their pajamas,” but the professor “didn’t say anything” to them. Rather, she “went out of her way” to approach him and his Black male classmate that “You guys look really nice today. I’m kind of shocked.” Evan realized her back-handed compliment was expressing shock that he was dressed in business casual, and signaled that the professor was expecting him “to look like a hoodlum, and now I feel disrespected.” The assumptions of deficiencies (in Black males) stem from comparisons (perhaps unconscious) to normative groups (e.g., Whites).
Comparative Racialization

Evan’s experience also illustrated another facet of racial profiling: comparative racialization, which, when coupled with deficit thinking, presented demoralizing challenges. Deon reflected, “If I was a Caucasian male I could be having these exact same troubles that I’m having right now, but...I would have way more options... And people [would] want to see me make it.” Terrell echoed, “if I was a Caucasian student I would know a lot more,” adding “there is nobody [meaning White faculty or staff] reaching out to me,” and reflecting that if he was White, “more doors would be open.” Terrell’s reality was that as a Black male, he did not have access to the same information channels as his White male counterparts.

The added pressure for some of the participants, particularly those who matriculated from urban or inner city school districts, was their perception that they were underprepared to manage the academic rigor of college compared to their White counterparts. Xavier talked about his reality as a Black male, from a large urban school district, “Academically when you come from...the inner city you are not prepared for college hands down. The city schools do not prepare you for college so you’re already behind the eight ball.” Xavier further elaborated that, “as Black men, we’re groomed to be so prideful, we don’t usually go for help...‘cause then you feel like you’re stupid or something...And that’s barrier number one, out the gate as soon as you get here.” He is describing the challenge of academic under-preparedness, real or perceived, coupled with the psychological struggle of being a Black male on a predominately White campus.

For some participants, relationships established during Upward Bound or pre-college bridge programs provided them with allies. When it was time for Terrell to register for the second semester, his advisor, sounding like an immigration officer asking if he has his papers in order (Romero, 2011), questioned Terrell’s enrollment status: “She thought that I was just a regular old Black student who didn’t have [his] papers together.” With an ally in the Upward Bound office, Terrell “told [his advisor] I’m a full time student,” and after the advisor reviewed his documents and spoke with his Upward Bound advocate, Terrell was able to move forward with scheduling his classes for the upcoming semester; he added, “that was the end of that.” Deon described how he got his job on campus through a friend in Upward Bound, but “if I was a White dude, I wouldn’t have had to know him.” Sharing an example of a conversation with a friend, Deon added, “I know a [White] dude who walked in there one day [referring to where he works] and somebody said ‘Do you want a job?’” The comparisons to normative groups (i.e. White males) can contribute to stereotyping.

Stereotype Forecasting

The participants routinely fought against stereotypes. Participants encountered the stereotype that Black males are not academically strong and thus educators assume they will be disengaged and lackluster about their academic work. Sometimes the stereotype is that “minorities are great athletes,” as Patrick shared: Peers “always look at us like we’re Lebron James.” He added, with discouragement, that peers do not expect him to “succeed in books.” Adam explained when he is in a lecture class of 100–200 students—typically the only Black male in the entire class—his White classmates were:

expecting something from [me], like to act up and like speak out of turn or just leave the class altogether or cause a disruption...They expect [me] to have sagging pants or a fitted cap or anything like that on, a 5XL White tee with 6XL hoodie over your head.
He argued, “It shouldn’t matter what I’m dressed in. It should matter that I’m there trying to get my education.” Evan, echoing the racialized assumptions of his White peers, indicated he started self-regulating: “I have to be very conscious about how I look when I walk into the art building because they [White peers and faculty] expect to see me with my pants halfway off my ass…They want to see me with a hoodie on.” He added that he has to “put an act on,” and that “it’s real draining” but “sometimes you have to fight for what you want and I want my degree.”

Another aspect of stereotype forecasting is pre-emptive criminalization (Fitzgibbon, 2004): categorizing individuals based on the (stereotypical) likelihood of committing certain criminal acts. Participants were often perceived, or were fighting against perceptions, as criminals. Antonio, a junior from a neighboring state, observed, “you have to prove yourself that you are not this criminal Black man that [will] be raping people at three o’clock in the morning or robbing somebody at the library.” He added that you have to “prove yourself” and fight the “preconception that ‘it’s a Black man, watch you don’t prop your door open too long cause your 32 inch LCD is going to be stolen in five minutes,’ and it isn’t right.” Quinton, describing when he and some friends were stuck in an elevator, explained that when the elevator doors were finally opened, the police officer and the RAs started yelling at the group on the elevator. He thought “Are you serious? It was an elevator full of Black people of course, and so they’re yelling.” He continued, “She [residence hall director] wrote our information down [and I thought] ‘Are we really gonna get in trouble for this?’” He said in the end it was determined, “we did nothing wrong,” but he observed the disparity: “If it was an elevator full of White people or Caucasians…we wouldn’t have been getting yelled at. It would have been ‘oh, are you ok?’…Not, ‘this is all your fault.’”

The authors’ analysis of, and theorizing about, participants’ narratives revealed acts of surveillance, occurrences of deficit framing, comparative racialization, and stereotype forecasting that give rise to Black male students’ consciousness of institutional racial profiling. These findings have the potential to inform how higher education professionals can establish and promote more inclusive and welcoming campus environments.

**Discussion and Implications**

The authors have described and theorized the lived experiences of Black males at one Midwestern PWI, illuminating the complex and deeply rooted dimensions of institutional racial profiling. Inherent in the narratives of participants is a general understanding that their racial identity as Black males on a predominately White campus poses as a barrier to their procurement of adequate knowledge germane to the institutional environment in which they exist (Brown & Davis, 2001). Student affairs educators must create and sustain environments that extend resources, relationships, and knowledge, which can aid in the academic and social integration of Black males.

Student affairs practitioners, more likely to be White, may be resistant to the notion that racial profiling in higher education is institutionalized, in much the same way that attention to racism is “muted” (Pollock, 2004; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Considering that racial profiling is an institutionalized practice in higher education can be challenging. Administrators are far more likely to dismiss experiences as perception or to admonish an incident as an individual act of bigotry, and pledge to have “zero tolerance” for discriminatory acts. An unwillingness to view the individual incidents as a pattern can yield a hostile climate and sustain the institutionalized nature of racial profiling (Ayers, Dohrm, & Ayers, 2001). The authors concur with Harper (2012) that, “In order to get beyond persistent racial disparities…, we must first take account of racism and its harmful effects on people in postsecondary contexts” (p. 22). Rejecting the existence of racial
profiling in the context of higher education environments, a microcosm of the larger U.S. society, dismisses the prevalence of institutional racial profiling in socially constructed environments. Tackling cultural attitudes and individual prejudice is essential to combating the perpetuation of racism—both at the individual and institutional levels. Changing individuals can change institutions, but more than changing one person at a time, we must change broader practices and habits.

**Change Conceptualizations**

Continuing to refer to some groups (e.g., Black males) as “at-risk” can become “a sufficient trigger for suspicion” (Fitzgibbon, 2007, p. 134) that justifies surveillance and sustains views that “others” are risky and need to be managed, that Black males are a risky group to be managed and controlled (Fitzgibbon, 2004). As Milner (2007) indicated, Black males have been “kidnapped into believing that they are inferior and unable to succeed” (p. 245). Student affairs practitioners might “trouble” implicit meanings surrounding risk and ask, “what makes an institution risky for some, and not for others?” (Livingston, & Nahimana, 2006).

The authors contend that in order to eliminate instances of deficit framing and surveillance, educators must reframe conversations around what it means to be a Black male student. Practitioners could design initiatives for students “at promise” rather than targeting students “at risk” (Whiting, 2006). As Howard (2013) asserted, “the monolithic portrayal of Black males needs to be disrupted, challenged, and reframed” (p. 79). A growing body of work describes the heterogeneity of race (including portrayals of the successful and high-achieving Black male) and calls for intersectional analyses of identity (Harper, 2004, 2009; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Howard, 2013).

**Use the Words**

Harper (2012), in his analysis of how researchers explain, discuss, and theorize about race-related findings, found that—even in research explicitly focused on race—the terms “racism” and “racist” were avoided (p. 11). The authors challenge practitioners to use the words that Johnson (2006) asserted we have abandoned. Harper (2012) observed that students, faculty, and administrators adhere “to an unwritten code of silence regarding racism, mostly to avoid making others feel uncomfortable” (p. 23). Student affairs professionals throughout the organizations, from residence hall directors to senior student affairs administrators, must initiate difficult dialogues (Nieto, 1999) that invite not only students but also each other to lean into conflict and dissonance. Such discussions can take place during (or as) a residence hall program, the focus of a student government association meeting, as conflict resolution during a judicial board hearing, a student affairs staff development workshop, or even within a departmental faculty meeting. Higher educational professionals should be equipped for and engaged in structuring discussions during student organization meetings, roommate conflict interventions, or spontaneous interactions with colleagues. With this charge also comes a level of personal accountability on the part of faculty, staff, and students alike to conduct their own due diligence in order to calm the waters of racial profiling in its many forms.

**Enhance Professional Preparation**

Greater attention is needed for how practitioners are prepared to work with Black males (among other disadvantaged populations). The authors echo Harper’s (2012) call for graduate education to “permit deeper examinations and more honest conversations about racism and racist institutional norms” (p. 24). Educators must develop culturally relevant curriculum that extends
beyond a single multiculturalism course and present practical challenges regarding race that future higher education professionals might encounter. Faculty within graduate preparation programs might consider how to ensure future practitioners have direct experience and demonstrated skills working with underrepresented student populations through student practicum experiences.

Developing these skills will not be easy. Others have identified that students in professional preparation will use “distancing strategies” (Case & Hemmings, 2005), such as silence and separation from responsibility, in response to perceptions that they were being positioned as racist. Educators in graduate programs, and practitioners in student affairs, must employ mechanisms (e.g., role playing, metadialogues, and improvisational storytelling) to reveal defenses and resistances and develop one’s capacity for speaking out, using the words, and even taking a stand (Edmiston, 2000; Iverson, 2012; Mulvey & Mandell, 2007; Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, & Hof, 2008). Adequate preparation of future professionals stimulate proactive institutional environments whereby Black male students are able to define success on their own terms and in their own unique ways.

Future Research

Only when educators and administrators acknowledge that, “something is ‘wrong’…can they be motivated to change the status quo to do what is ‘right’” (Bowser, 2001, pp. 129–130). University educators and administrators must be willing to peel back the layers of “racial dynamics” on their campuses to better understand the ways in which persons connect and relate to one another within their institutional environment (Chang, 2007). To disrupt racial profiling as institutionalized practice, practitioners must adopt an integrated and collaborative approach to better understand race and racism on our campuses, from the point of recruitment of students to their enrollment and to the very moment that they walk across the stage for graduation. One strategy is not likely to make visible, much less change, unequal outcomes. Systemic change is needed, from socialization of professionals (i.e. in professional preparation) to professional development opportunities in which practitioners can question assumptions about a problem. Enrollment and admissions staff, student affairs professionals, academic affairs personnel, and intercollegiate athletics staff, among others, should be engaged in dialogue about campus policies, practices, and initiatives. Such engagement can yield a shift in thinking that might create a more inclusive environment for all.

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