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## Making the Invisible Visible: Exploring the Experiences of Black Male Professionals in Postsecondary Education

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MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE:  
EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE PROFESSIONALS  
IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

by

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B.A. University of Louisville, 2001

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts, Applied Sociology  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

College student development literature discusses the challenges faced by historically under-represented groups in college and the role that university personnel play in retaining students from these groups (Brown 2009; Hairston 2013; Kuh et al 2005). Research reveals that Black male students are retained in greater numbers when connected with Black male professionals who: 1) hold them accountable for their choices; and 2) discuss and demonstrate effective coping techniques to deal with race-based challenges that seem to convey colleges and universities are not the appropriate space for young Black men (Bonner and Bailey 2006; Harper 2012; Wynn 2007; Cuyjet 2006). Research does not address, however, the experiences of the Black male professionals who are encouraged to mentor young Black men toward persistence and graduation. Do these professionals experience racism? How do they make visible these acts or communications as racism? How do they encourage Black male collegians and early professionals to recognize and negotiate racism with dignity, strength, and control? This qualitative inquiry, grounded in symbolic interactionism and critical race theory, expands the literature by revealing that Black male professionals in postsecondary education experience racism in the workplace, but their ways of interpreting and responding to the racist acts and communications differ.

I dedicate this work to the Black male professionals in postsecondary education who have mentored, encouraged, and held me accountable in my work. Thank you for showing me how social inequalities can be knowledgably and skillfully destroyed, one word, one person at a time.

For the ones who have gone on to ultimate equality, while I may not have been there to say “Fare Thee Well” in person, I hope this is an adequate “See You Later”.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my husband and daughters who lovingly sacrificed their time with me so that my dreams could be realized;

Thanks, also, to:

- my students, my friends, and my family who unfailingly encouraged me to keep moving forward;
- my friends who are Black male professionals in postsecondary education: you inspire me with your commitment to being a source of supply for every person, of color or not, student or colleague alike; and

Very special thanks to Dr. Liz Grauerholz, who believed in me, encouraged me, and reassured me that I had not lost every bit of my natural mind. Your mentorship, support, and transparent honesty are everything I could ever ask for as I grow and you develop me into a sociologist. I can only hope to one day be all that you are to me.

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## MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE PROFESSIONALS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

I am a Black female professional who has had the pleasure, over the last twelve years, of assisting college students develop into the amazing people, phenomenal scholars, and consummate professionals that they want to become. I am also a graduate student in the final phase of my Master's degree. Shortly after determining the subject of my thesis, still giddy with the possibilities associated with my research, a White male university administrator asked me how I was progressing in my graduate studies. I updated him on my progress and he asked me what I planned to write my thesis about. I paused. I thought about whether to respond truthfully. I considered how my response could potentially shape future interactions with this administrator and his peers and what the impact would be for my career. I processed all of this in less than one minute and decided to share that my thesis would be about microaggressions experienced by Black male professionals in higher education administration. His response (after a rather pregnant pause): "You know, White men experience that also." What could I say? I smiled. I nodded. I told him I would keep that in mind.

That casual interaction, meant to be entirely encouraging and supportive, was uncomfortable. It caused me to question myself, the validity of my research interests, and even whether I was fostering professional discord based on race. That's what microaggressions do: they make people from marginalized cultures and communities question whether what they think, feel, believe, and live are real or just imaginings of their overly sensitive inner self. This passing interaction between a Black, female professional and a White, male administrator crystalized why continued research about

racism - in both overt and subtle forms - and developing inclusive social change models is critically needed in postsecondary education, sociology, and business/public administration scholarship.

This research proposes to provide Black male professionals in postsecondary education a forum through which to describe and discuss their lived experiences. As Black male faculty, staff, and administrators are called to mentor Black male students and newer professionals, it is important to understand the race-based attitudes and behaviors these men encounter and the coping mechanisms they employ.

This contribution to the literature begins with an exploration of race in America. It continues with an overview of the experiences of Black men in America. It then looks through the lenses of symbolic interactionism and critical race theory at the experiences of eleven Black male professionals working in postsecondary education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

College student development literature articulates the challenges first generation students face in coming to college, including marginalization in the curriculum, isolation from both campus and home communities, and feelings of impostership (Hairston 2013; Institute of Higher Education Policy 2010; Jehangir 2009; Kuh et al 2006; Nora and Cabrera 1996; Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993). Young black men, in particular, drop- or stop-out of college at higher rates than their contemporaries, in part because of their experiences with an institutional culture that they perceive as racist and their confusion about institutional commitment to diversity (Gibson 2014; Harper 2009; Harper and Harris 2012; Smith, Hung, and Franklin 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yasso 2000; Sutton 2006). College student development theory emphasizes the significance of faculty, staff, and administrative mentors in mitigating students' feelings, helping them make meaning of and develop effective coping strategies and techniques, ultimately reorienting students toward persistence and graduation (Cuyjet 1997; Cuyjet 2006; Dahlvig 2010; Harper 2012; Komives et al 2003; Kuh et al 2005; LaVant, Anderson, and Tiggs 1997; Lee 1999; Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates 1989). Black male professionals are specifically sought to mentor Black male students to counter the conscious or unconscious communication from White faculty to Black students that they are academically inferior, unqualified to be in college, and in college only because of affirmative action (Sutton 2006).

Research about the lived 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; Mahoney et al 2008).

This review synthesizes academic research and social commentary about the place of Black males in America and the experiences of Black males in American educational systems. Moreover, it explains the racism and suggests that the current-day experiences of Black male professionals in postsecondary education are exchanges are meant to remind Black men of their pre-defined place in society.

### Race in America

The history of America is one build inextricably on race, “a set of ideals and beliefs ... [that have] the potential to lead individuals to develop ... prejudicial attitudes [which] may induce individuals to real actions or discrimination against racial minorities” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:466). Theorists suggest that America is a racialized social system in which race permeates and directs American economic, political, social, and psychological thought and action, advantaging one race over another, and systematically promoting and regenerating hierarchical relations between races (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2014; Feagin 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). The successful struggle for civil rights for all Americans has minimized blatantly racist exchanges and given rise to more subtle manifestations of racism, including race-based microaggressions, which reinforce the superiority of one race over another.

The concept of microaggressions is not new in scholarship. Pierce et al (1978) defines ‘racial microaggressions’ as the subtle, often unconscious, and seemingly innocuous non-verbal exchanges that, in actuality, minimize or subordinate Black Americans. Sue et al. (2007) and Sue (2010) expand the understanding of microaggressions to include everyday speech, behaviors, and settings that innocently or

intentionally demean a person or group. Microaggressions are classified in three groups: microinsults that unconsciously demean another; microinvalidations that unconsciously call into question the legitimacy of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others; and microassaults that consciously victimize others via “name-calling, avoidance behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue 2010:29). These innocent, fleeting, and inadvertently oppressive exchanges (Sanders 2013; Sue 2010; Sue et al 2007) encourage 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.

Microaggressive exchanges fall under the category of what Bonilla-Silva (2012) refers to as color blind racism. While America can currently boast that all its citizens have the same opportunities, Bonilla-Silva (2012) suggests that non-White people whose culture and environment were largely shaped by policies enacted during America’s overtly racist history continue to be marginalized. He suggests that inferiority based on cultural and environment has replaced inferiority based on race, which is neither legal nor socially acceptable in the American post-Civil Rights era. Bonilla-Silva (2012) provides a context by which to understand how systemic White supremacy has been maintained from the Jim Crow era into the twenty-first century.

Palmer et al (2014) propose that, throughout American history, Black males have been 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.

Anderson (2014) suggests that Black progress into historically White spaces as students, as professionals, and as leaders of industry reflects progress because Blacks have access to and can negotiate their status and place in the social order as they were formerly unable to. He cautions, though, that the access and ability to negotiate triggers visceral reactions in White people which prompt them to speak or act in ways that re-establish the previous social order. These reactions often take the form of microaggressions and manifest themselves in every aspect of society, including the primary, secondary, and postsecondary education systems.

While a significant body of research documents racial microaggression in religion, community, policy, law, and government, work environments (Alexander 2012; Anderson et al 2012; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Hanna, Talley, and Guindon 2000; Ladson-Billings 1999; Purdie-Vaughns et al 2008), emerging research documents microaggressions based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, class, and nationality, finding that continuous exposure to microaggressions throughout a lifespan negatively impacts both victim and perpetrator (Capodilupo et al 2010; Keller & Galgay 2010; Kim and Kim 2010; Nadal 2008; Nadal et al 2010; Sanders 2013; Smith & Redington 2010). Individual prejudices that foster and reinforce perceptions of inferiority produce and encourage individual speech and behaviors that marginalize the “other,” ultimately coalescing into collective, unconscious, institutionalized beliefs and practices that foster systemic social inequities.

#### Black Males in America

Blacks have existed on the periphery of society as a result of their individual and

collective marginalization during and after slavery (Harvey Wingfield 2011; Winant 1996). American slavery objectified and commodified people of African descent, systematically reducing them to a racialized “other” (Bell 1992; Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot 2005; Omi and Winant 1994). Slaves received vocational training that ensured they became and remained efficient units of production while informal norms created and reinforced a social order that identified black men as general deficient – simple-minded, oversexed, immoral, and disrespectful beasts with innate tendencies toward violence and immorality (Chesler et al 2005; Hill Collins 1993; Jones 2005). In the aftermath of emancipation, informal norms were codified into laws that systematically restricted opportunities for Black social, political, and economic mobility and consigned Blacks to the margins of society (Aldridge and Young 2000; Anderson et al 2012; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Feagin 2014; Winant 1996).

While southern states systemically legalized racism in the late nineteenth century, forces internal and external to the Black community spearheaded intentional efforts to improve the status of the community. Education arose as a means by which the Black community could elevate its collective status, individuals could establish themselves economically and socially, and individuals and the community could positively alter self-perception (Aldridge and Young 2000; Hardin 1997; Palmer et al 2014). Through the efforts of the Freedmen’s Bureau, missionary societies and religious institutions, and federal legislation, colleges and universities for Blacks emerged throughout the country to train Blacks in the applied, industrial, or vocational sciences on the one hand or in philosophical, social, and legal studies on the other (Brown 2012; Crouchett 1971;

Franklin 1978; Palmer et al 2014; Turner & McGann 1980). The dawn of the American Civil Rights Movement coincided with the enactment of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill of Rights) to facilitate the desegregation of post-baccalaureate education in 1950 and to provide Black America access to formerly White-only postsecondary educational spaces (Hardin 1997; McLaurin v. Oklahoma 1950; Sweatt v. Painter 1950). Access to these 'White spaces' provided a clear avenue to better jobs in the offices of national companies and the chance to demonstrate to White America what the Black community already knew: that Blacks, particularly Black men, were intelligent, intensely ambitious, family oriented, and stable (Anderson 2014; Merida 2007; Harvey Wingfield 2011).

More than a century after emancipation and Reconstruction, though, Black males are still conceptualized as uneducable and good-for-nothing in today's 'post-racial' America (Bowditch 1993; Ferguson 2001; Harper and Harris 2012; Knott and Davidson 2010; Ringeisen et al 2013; Ryan, Testa, and Zhai 2008). Teachers, friends and family, and media sources communicate that: (1) Black boys are intellectually inferior and unable to progress through the educational system successfully; (2) Black boys are immoral and prone to criminality, do not belong in the educational system, and are taking the place of a more deserving student; and (3) Black men do not hold positions of authority, particularly within the educational system (Ferguson 2001; Harper and Harris 2012). Black students, particularly Black boys, experience interruptions in learning – via in-school or out-of-school suspension – at higher rates than other children, beginning a cycle of under-education and continued suspensions that precipitates early entry into the

criminal justice system and exit from the school system (Advancement Project 2005; Children's Defense Fund 2011; Ferguson 2001; Fowler et al 2010; Kaba & Edwards 2012; Ladner and Hammons 2001; Merida 2007; Ringeisen et al 2013; Ryan, Testa, and Zhai 2008). Messages throughout primary and secondary school communicate that young Black males were inherently bad, ill-suited to academic success, and untenable in the White space of American postsecondary education (Ferguson 2001; Harper and Harris 2012; Palmer et al 2014). Much like the educational system in the immediate aftermath of slavery, the contemporary American educational system “identifies pathologies instead of promoting promise” (Bonner and Bailey 2006:24) and establishes a foundation and frame for educational interactions through which few Black male students successfully pass in order to progress to postsecondary education (Dahlvig 2010; Harper 2009). Black students, particularly Black males, who are able to progress through the American educational labyrinth do so because they are socialized to be docile and conforming in educational spaces rather than to think creatively, be inquisitive, and embrace the adventure of learning (Ferguson 2001; Pittman 2012).

The caricature persists in the minds of American gentility, creating and reinforcing concepts of race and guiding interracial exchanges beyond the schoolyard (Anderson 2012; Anderson et al 2012). Anderson et al (2012) discusses the working conception of racism as a legacy of racial caste that confronts Blacks in general and Black males specifically, forcing them to negotiate their individual and collective identities in American society. They posit that White people conceptualize racism as “... (1) a thing of the past and no longer negatively affects people of color; and (2) White

individuals' achievements are due not to the color of their skin or any racial privileges they enjoy but to their own hard work or merit" (Anderson et al 2012:37). Feagin (1991) expands this White conception of race to explain that Whites believe Blacks over-react in their perception of innocent interactions as malicious, race-based slights.

In contrast, the Black working conception of race reflected Blackness as a defining characteristic and reinforced that Blacks:

... 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 (Anderson et al 2012:37).

Black is the master status and facilitates racist aggression in ways as simple as ignoring the presence of or rejecting a person who is part of a specific group, an act that can be overlooked or minimized because it happened in isolation (Feagin 1991). Racist aggression is evident in the continued attribution of simple-mindedness, baseness, and general deficiency to all Blacks and the recognition of Blacks who advance into previously White spaces as extraordinary. It is unmistakable when accomplished Black executives are asked to be subject matter experts on aspects of Black life with which it is

assumed they are familiar only because they are Black (Anderson 2012; Harvey Wingfield 2013). These moments of acute disrespect serve to remind Blacks of their place in a social order "... putatively made hospitable by three decades of civil rights law protection" (Feagin 1991:106). Anderson et al (2012:37) suggests that these moments occur when Whites individually and collectively understand their social order to be threatened by Black advancement into previously White spaces of power and feel the need to re-establish standards that "permits Whites to retain power, privilege, and prestige."

This literature review has defined racism and suggested that racist acts, particularly microaggressions, are used to remind Blacks in general – and Black men in particular – of their predefined place in the established social order. It has suggested, also, that the experiences of Blacks males in the American educational system is one marked by racist aggression that reinforce White spaces of dominance and superiority.

## THEORETICAL TRADITIONS

This research explores the lived experiences of Black male postsecondary education professionals through the lenses of symbolic interactionism and critical race theory. The following explains why these theoretical frameworks are appropriate for this research.

Symbolic interactionism (SI) centralizes the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the collective in making meaning. This theoretical perspective posits that society is made up of individuals (social agents) engaging each other based on mutually agreed upon meanings attributed to their respective actions by the social group with which they identify (Blumer 1936; Mead 1934; Thomas 1928). Thomas (1928) explain that the single most important factor in determining how individuals will behave is their understanding of the situation. Mead (1934) and Blumer (1936) add that individuals derive their understanding of situations from their identification with a social group, internalization of that group's values, and assumptions of what that group expects of its members. They assert, further, that the values and expectations of the group are informed by the collective agreement among the individuals within the group (Blumer 1936; Mead 1934). In short, groups create realities by: (1) synthesizing current social interactions with pre-established social mores; (2) discovering what they individually and collectively will perpetuate; and (3) acting to promote their position. With this in mind, this research asks how Black male professionals make meaning of their experiences in the postsecondary educational workplace.

Critical race theory (CRT) emphasizes the centrality of race as an ordinary, common, and everyday experience in American society wherein pre-existing dominant racial group positioning advantages Whites in every facet of social life (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). This theoretical framework endorses race-based individual and communal experiences (standpoint) as valid knowledge claims in the analysis of dominant and paternalistic attitudes and habits that support racial discrimination (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). By centralizing race, CRT recognizes that people make meaning of their social experiences through the lens of the racial group with which they identify and that the same interaction will mean different things to individuals from different racial groups. Crenshaw (2011) explains that CRT evolved from the desire to decentralize Whiteness as the analytical norm for society. As such, it shifts the lens through which society is viewed so that alternative questions and answers can be developed to explain power and inequality in education (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Ladson-Billings 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Solorzano 1998) and criminal justice (Alexander 2012; Anderson et al 2012). The CRT lens is critical for this research because CRT encourages the voice of Black male professionals in understanding the totality of their postsecondary professional environment.

McLaren (2003) asserts that the individual and the society must be equally and simultaneously analyzed because each creates and is created by the other. He maintains that each can only be fully understood in context with the other. In so doing, McLaren (2003) provides a bridge between symbolic interactionism and critical race theory. His emphasis on understanding the experiences of the individual through the lens of class,

gender, or race in order to create a more equal society fuses the reciprocal nature of symbolic interactionism with the social justice character of critical race theory. McLaren (2003) is especially significant for this research because of the premise that educational institutions empower and liberate individuals while reproducing dominant social structures. It begs the question: Do America's postsecondary educational institutions empower and liberate professional Black men or do they facilitate and perpetuate the discriminatory ideals and practices of the broader society?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF PROBLEM

Young Black men drop- or stop-out of college at high rates: the six-year graduation rate for young Black men is 33 percent, half that of Black female rates and 15 percentage points less than students overall (Harper and Harris 2012; IHEP 2010; US Department of Education 2011). The lived experiences of these students on campus has produced a significant body of postsecondary education literature about characteristics of Black male students and their collective culture, promising practices regarding how to retain and graduate them, and the challenges they encounter on campus (Gibson 2014; Solorzano et al 2000; The Mentoring and Leadership Development Institute). Research about the lived experiences of the men who are charged with mentoring these students is much less plentiful (Harper and Harris 2012; Hooker & Johnson 2011; Mahoney et al 2008).

Student development theory indicates that college students are more likely to persist through to graduation if they are connected to and engaged in the life and culture of the university (Astin 1984; Shuh, Jones, and Harper 2010). Researchers agree that mentoring programs are among the most promising practices for increasing Black male persistence and graduation in postsecondary education because it connects a Black male student with a Black male professional who the student can respect, talk or vent to, and learn mechanisms to cope with the macro- and microaggressions of everyday Black male life in a White world (Bonner and Bailey 2006; Brown 2012; Pounds 1989; Wynn 2007). This elevated place of respect positions Black male professionals in higher education squarely on the same unstable ground that Black men have trod for years in their

communities: how does a Black male professional teach a young Black man to recognize and negotiate racial microaggressions 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 the invisible, ubiquitous acts or communications? How do they educate, obtain justice, and remain gainfully employed with prospects for advancement? As mentors, Black male professionals in postsecondary education: (1) teach young Black men about the false and real baggage surrounding being a Black man and coping mechanisms to successfully navigate dual identities; (2) demonstrate the coolness of being self-determining, responsible, brilliant, visionary, and in control of one's self; (3) encourage service, achievement, and fellowship to community and country; and (4) establish individual and collective standards of responsibility (Merida 2007; Powell 2008).

The psychological impact of racial microaggressions – making the victim question whether they are being overly sensitive; second-guessing interactions and repressing all but the most overtly aggressive behaviors or expressions; and ultimately becoming desensitized to and even replicating the microaggression – prompts concern for the mental and physical health of Black male professionals who are charged with mentoring Black male students and young professionals to success (Sue et al. 2007). Postsecondary education officials must understand the experiences of Black male professionals in order to begin supporting them and, in turn, Black male students if an inclusive postsecondary education environment is to become a reality. This research is significant for its contribution to developing the foundational knowledge, skills, and

attitudes that will encourage persistence and growth of the number of Black male professionals in postsecondary education.

## METHODOLOGY

Critical race theory emphasizes the centrality of race in everyday experiences. With that in mind, this qualitative study sought to examine the race-based experiences in the professional lives of Black men working in postsecondary education using intensive interviews. Research participants answered open-ended questions about the language and behaviors they encountered and how they experienced and negotiated race-based workplace exchanges at a large, research university in the southeastern United States.

### Sample

Forty Black male professionals were identified for this study through the institution's Human Resources office and through participant recommendation. These men were emailed to inform them that I would like to meet with them for 15 minutes to discuss the possibility of them participating in the study. Twelve of the forty responded to the email, one asking to see the Institutional Review Board approval and the list of interview questions and never responding again. Multiple email requests were sent to the group of forty over a one month period; eleven agreed to participate in the study.

These individuals served in professional and semi-professional capacities, as identified by the University Human Resources department, including: faculty (2); administrators (2); administrative and professional staff (6); and graduate students (1). These men varied in age from early 20s through early 70s, with eight becoming postsecondary professionals immediately upon completing their degree and three becoming postsecondary professionals in conjunction with or subsequent to pursuing another career. Two of the participants were raised by immigrant parents, while the other

participants were raised by American parents. Four of the participants were raised in the southeast United States, two in the Mid-Atlantic states, two in the northeast United States, and one in the Midwest. These final factors of where and by whom the participants were raised were believed to impact how the participants perceived and responded to exchanges (Anderson et al 2012).

### Procedure

Initial contact was made via email to inform potential participants that I would like to meet with them for 15 minutes to discuss the possibility of them participating in research being conducted. Fifteen-minute recruitment meetings were scheduled. During that meeting, I explained the research topic, the significance of the research, potential risks to them as research participants and safeguards built into the research protocols to protect research participants. Participants were informed that: (1) an audio recording of the interview would be made in order to obtain an accurate transcription of the thoughts and feelings they expressed; (2) the audio recording would be deleted upon completion of transcription; and (3) their names would not be documented as part of the voice recording and any inadvertent use of their name during the interview would be redacted in the transcript in order to maintain confidentiality. Informed consent forms were provided to participants and interview times scheduled with the eleven who agreed to be interviewed. Information regarding the audio recording procedures and the efforts to maintain confidentiality and privacy were reiterated at the time of the interview.

Semi-structured intensive interviews ranging from 40 minutes to 90 minutes were conducted using open-ended questions to guide one-sided conversations about the

participant's experiences in postsecondary education, their identities, and the thoughts, speech, and actions that frame their understanding of and reaction to their experiences (Charmaz 2014). These semi-structured interviews encouraged participants to: 1) tell their stories using their own terms and 2) 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 were informed by symbolic interactionism and critical race theory to focus the conversation 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. Interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed by the interviewer.

#### Data Analysis

Transcripts and researcher notes were analyzed to identify recurring words, statements, or themes about how race-based bias was experienced in the workplace and, if so, how it was interpreted. Significant sentences or quotes illuminating how participants experienced the language or behaviors that impact their professional identity were identified. Significant statements were combined into themes that are used to develop a textural description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of the context or setting that influenced how participants' experienced the phenomenon. Textural and structural descriptions were incorporated into an exhaustive narrative that expresses the essential components of the participants' common experiences with microaggressive language and behaviors (Creswell 2007).

## FINDINGS

In this study, Black male professionals in postsecondary education reflected on their professional experiences with race in the workplace. Transcripts of eleven semi-structured intensive interviews revealed seven consistent themes, including that these men: (1) worked in a racialized workplace; (2) were questioned about their professional credentials and ability; (3) experienced dueling identities and disparate treatment; (4) were consistently asked to be diversity representatives; (5) negotiated the cost of authenticity; (6) had few Black male role models; and (7) embraced that they were role models.

### Working in a Racialized Workplace.

Participants believed that bigotry and discrimination exists in the postsecondary education workplace, but they disagreed on whether to call it racism. Two participants espoused a definition of racism that revolves around action, not feeling. As one indicated,

...racism speaks to someone's belief that their race is superior to another person's and, as a result, acts to annihilate that other person's race. A racist, therefore, is one who will do their part to advance that agenda every chance they get. I'm not convinced that people want to get rid of African Americans: they just don't want to see us prosper at the same level they are prospering; they don't want us living next door to them. That's not racism: it's just prejudice and ignorance.

Other participants agreed that a covert racism exists in the postsecondary education system. One reflected:

Racism exists when you go out of your way to destroy somebody or to disgrace someone based on their physical characteristics. When you deny someone promotion and tenure based on their physical characteristics. How one is student treated versus another, 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 ....

While all the participants can identify instances in which they have received disparate treatment or response, none spoke of professional experiences that could be identified as explicitly racist: "people know what to say and not to say so that it is difficult for me to say in good conscience. There is a lot of coded stuff that reflects disparate treatment".

#### Questions about Ability and Qualifications

Participants indicated that they felt their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities were consistently called into question. One reflected that his ability and qualifications were called into question because of who he knew: "One of my direct supervisors [the Director] ... 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." He felt that he was penalized for taking the initiative to develop the strong professional network that student affairs professionals consistently tell students to develop.

Several others indicated that they felt constantly challenged “to prove [themselves], to say that [they] are worthy of something.” This often translated into working longer hours, being more and better prepared or informed, and possessing stronger credentials than their White male and female counterparts, as well as their Black female counterparts. One participant revealed:

I’ve been conditioned as an African American, Black male to realize [that I must] take away any excuse that anyone can give.... Even as an undergraduate, anything I did was never good enough; any work I produced was always highly criticized.... As a professional, because they see me as a Black man first, there’s always going to be this second thought, ‘Is he the best candidate? Is he the best choice?’

Going the extra mile does not ensure recognition of expertise, much less professional respect, from peers or supervisors. As another participant explained:

[s]ometimes 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 [Blacks] are still inferior to White folks. I don’t care if you come from Harvard, Yale, Oxford: some folks will never ever give you the respect you earned and we have to learn that we can’t let that stop us. I have sat on several different types of committees and felt as though my opinion has been undervalued at times.

Going the extra mile could actually start to work against you, according to another participant:

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 you're over-thinking things and making them so complicated?' It makes them all the more uncomfortable, so I have to be that much more cautious and intentional about what I say, how I say it, and when I say it.

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

#### Dueling Identities and Disparate Treatment

One participant spoke at length about the dual identities that Black male professionals must negotiate. Specifically, he acknowledged his male privilege in communities of color ("in predominantly Hispanic or Black communities, [being a man in the community] is an undue privilege that I benefit from...") and his marginalized position in the workplace ("... in my work environment – a university setting that is predominantly White – my male privilege is no longer a privilege. In fact, it becomes a subordinated identity..."). He related that 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” – are applied to Blacks in general and Black males in particular as “unapproachable, unwilling to compromise, unable to see the bigger picture, aggressive.” He felt he was not free to speak and act the way his White male counterparts could, instead needing to “be more hyper aware 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 further explained that his White counterparts could speak their truths 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 participant agreed, expressing:

I’m more of a self-sufficient type of person: you tell me what I need to do and I’m going to get the job done. I’m not going to run to you back and forth with little things that I could figure out myself and I think a lot of the mentality is ... they feel like when they bring somebody up under them, especially when that person is African-American and the supervisors are White men, I think that when they bring me in, 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.

Being the Diversity Representative

Several participants indicated that, regardless of their knowledge-base or proficiencies, they were consistently asked to be the speaker for or representative of the

unit's or the University's diversity. One participant recounted the experience in this manner:

Even though my competency level is very deep when it comes to conflict management, when it comes to crisis response, when it comes to leadership in general, when it comes to group dynamics, when it comes to mentoring, all of those different areas that I'm a very competent professional in, 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.

Participants indicated mixed messaging about promoting institutional diversity, from students complaining that they didn't understand why diversity courses or programs are necessary and that they are offended by the experiences of the presenter, to being questioned about the students they encourage and mentor.

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?'

The difference between diversity and inclusion, several participants agreed, is that diversity is a reflection of all constituent populations in a given community, while inclusion includes constituent populations having a determining voice about what happens in the community. Postsecondary education has emphasized diversity for many

years and participants reflected that they were often called on to diversify committees, but they had to be exceptionally careful about how they practiced inclusivity in their workspace and how they practiced advocacy and agency on behalf of underrepresented populations. As one respondent shared: “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.”

### Negotiating the Cost of Authenticity

While none of the participants indicated that he had ever been directly questioned about their authenticity as a Black male, several spoke about receiving looks of suspicion from other blacks and experiences where they questioned their own authenticity.

Questions about the respect that should come with earned credentials and prior work experience from students and younger professionals: “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?” According to another respondent:

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.

Several participants discussed the cost of authenticity in terms of physical and mental health. One respondent indicated that, as a natural introvert, he had to become a social actor and spoke of the toll the practice takes on him: "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 shared "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."

#### Having Few Black Male Role Models

One challenge that several of the participants highlighted was the lack of senior-level professionals who look like them. "[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 respondent lamented:

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.... It's an exhausting search to find mentors for where you're at.... I talk a lot about Black

absentee fathers, but at a PWI [predominantly White institution], we have absentee Black administrators. The numbers are just that low.... 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.'

### Being Role Models

These gentlemen, to a man, embrace the work of being role models to future generations, both in their communities and on campus. They believe they have a responsibility to all students, and particularly students of color, to counter stereotypical images of Black men and accurately reflect what professional Black manhood looks like: "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.'" Participants mentored students about striking a balance between maintaining authenticity while practicing agency; building relationships that prepares others to defend them (rather than them defending themselves) in the future; and "become more involved and invested in the university so you can build a platform for your voice to be heard".

The lived experiences of this sample of Black male professionals in postsecondary education reflected that these men experienced discrimination and marginalization in their work space. They understood that their peers and supervisors questioned their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities, so they practice doing more than what is formally required to prove their expertise and commitment. They understood, also, that prejudiced people perpetuate their marginalization. At the same time, they struggled to be an expert but not outshine their counterparts within a racist social system that restricts opportunities, resources, and networks for them to progress through the professional ranks. Nonetheless, they seized every opportunity to reflect the university's commitment to diversity. They questioned their authenticity for the professional choices they made but continued to mentor and model critical thinking and behavior for future generations of students and professionals.

## DISCUSSION

I began this research wanting to know what experiences Black male professionals in postsecondary education had with racial microaggressions and how they negotiated those experiences. Over time, my interest began to focus on their experience with race in the postsecondary educational workplace and I intentionally designed the solicitation and the interview questions to reflect that focus. When I first contacted the participants about this study, I was explicit about the purpose of the study being to explore their experiences with race. When I interviewed the participants, I asked about different kinds of attitudes, behaviors, or communications they encountered in the postsecondary educational workplace and whether they could attribute those experiences to race. It is possible that the emphasis on race skewed the responses of the participants. Their responses about specific experiences wherein their knowledge, skills, or attitudes were called into question based on their identification as a Black man, however, emphasize that they understood they had no documentable evidence of racism – they just had a feeling, if even that.

I think I anticipated an anger and frustration, but I did not realize the level of discomfort and pain that the interviews could and, in some cases, did evoke from these professionals who had dealt with being a Black boy and Black man in American for their entire lives. Sometimes the hurt was palpable, while at other times it resembled a wound that no longer hurt but was thickly-scarred. This discussion attempts to relate their experiences to the established theories and explanations of how individuals make meaning of their lives, particularly their professional lives, and of their place in society.

Research in sociology and in higher education led me to hypothesize that America's racist history and the legacy of actively keeping Black people, particularly Black males, on the margins of society would reproduce racist practices in the postsecondary educational workplace. This study supported that hypothesis and revealed several consistent themes, specifically that these men worked in an aversive racist system in which they are isolated from other Black male professionals, their professional bona fides were consistently questioned, and their positions of authority challenged or ignored, even as they experienced being the token or singular demonstration of the Department's or the University's commitment to diversity. In addition to the professional challenges they experienced as men of color in the significantly white space of postsecondary education, they found themselves constantly negotiating and striving to respect who they were as individuals and as professionals, while still being a role model for students and younger professionals.

The experiences of the study participants suggest that the racialized social structure of American society extends to America's postsecondary educational institutions (Bonilla Silva 1997), as does the broader society's exclusion of members from non-dominant social groups (Bonilla Silva 2006). Participants discuss being one of very few Black male professionals and how it seems that very little can be done at this juncture because there are not enough Black males to assume senior or executive level positions. This reflects Bonilla Silva's (2006) naturalization frame of color-blind racism: this is just the way things are right now and it is no one's fault, there are simply not enough qualified candidates. Participants discuss also how they negotiate their

responsibility to mentor future generations and their responsibility to their job.

Mentoring Black students attracts a high level of scrutiny that their White counterparts are not subject to (i.e., being asked if they really promote inclusivity if the majority of the students they work with are Black, yet their White counterparts are not asked the same thing when they work with White students). The result 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) 1-strike rule, wherein Blacks are socialized by their community to understand that the color of their skin is one strike against them, so they have to be hypoervigilant that they do not do anything to invite racial aggression.

Study participants seem to experience what Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) defines as aversive racism, a form of racism in which Whites consciously support racial egalitarian principles while unconsciously harboring and acting on negative perceptions of Blacks. Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) theorize that the development and persistence of civil rights and labor laws prompted workplace changes and, more broadly, social changes regarding what is considered normal and acceptable behavior toward Blacks and other historically marginalized groups. They explain that aversive racists will not discriminate against a member of another race or ethnicity when norms indicating right and wrong are explicit, i.e., failing to hire the best candidate for a position based on color. In the absence of explicit behavioral cues, where action or response is based predominantly on personal judgement, aversive racists tend to discriminate and use

factors other than race to justify it, i.e., choosing to not hire a candidate because he is not a 'good fit' for the culture.

Some participants perceived their coworkers to be prejudiced or bigoted, but not racist: racists perpetuate annihilative action against members of another race, whereas bigotry or discrimination deprives members of another 'group' of the resources and rewards to which one's own group has access. Even the participants who expressed that they experienced racism indicated that it was the systems of actions and inactions that allowed people from the dominant subculture to disadvantage and marginalize Black male professionals. These aversive racist systems perpetuated race-based communications and behaviors that, when spoken or enacted, reinforced negative perceptions of Blacks in general and slowed the development and promotion of Black males in postsecondary educational institutions in particular. It allowed well-intentioned White people to unconsciously act or speak in discriminatory ways that innocuously reinforced an ethnocentric bias against Blacks (i.e. sprinkling Ebonics or 'Black English' in conversations or in meetings) and created an environment conducive to the other themes study participants described (Gaertner and Dovidio 2005; Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn 1993).

Tokenism, cultural taxation, and microaggressions are some of the ways in which aversive racism manifests itself (Flores Niemann 1999; Harvey Wingfield 2011; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn 1993; Padilla 1994). Rosabeth Kanter (1977) introduces the concept of tokenism as an explanation of how and why women's workplace experiences differ from those of their male counterparts. Flores Niemann (1999) enlarges Kanter's

work by adding the multiplicative factor of ethnicity to the theory in her analysis of her experiences with tokenism as a Latina faculty member. She discusses the expectation that tokens will perform their stated job functions and ad hoc tasks that other male and other non-ethnic professionals are not asked to do. She asserts that the challenge of being a token lies in the perception that you are not a team player if you decline the additional responsibilities or that you are incompetent because you accept the additional responsibilities but cannot satisfactorily execute your stated job functions. Harvey Wingfield (2013), in her analysis of Black professionals and Black men in work spaces, explains that the differential treatment that tokens experience hinders the token's opportunities for professional growth and advancement.

Participants in the current study describe the isolation of being one of very few Blacks, and even fewer Black men, in their profession and feeling the need to go the extra mile to prove that they are not reflective of the racial stereotyping and do, in fact, belong in their professional space. They 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. This treatment and their acceptance of it challenges their perception of their individual authenticity and agency, but they recognize that failure to accept the treatment suggests that they may not be a good fit for the organizational culture, thus hindering their opportunities for professional growth and advancement. These experiences of isolation, additional expectations, and potential marginalization are consistent with tokenism.

Cultural taxation seems to be a component of tokenism. Padilla (1994:26) defines cultural taxation as “the obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by serving its needs for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which may even bring accolades to the institution but which is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed.” Examples of cultural taxation include: (1) being subject matter expert on all facets of diversity, regardless of personal knowledge or experience with specific facets; (2) serving on committees with a specific diversity agenda; and (3) acting as liaison, educator, problem-solver, negotiator, or general unpaid consultant to external agencies regarding cultural crises (Padilla 1994).

The Black male professionals in this study explain that they are often asked to serve as the diversity representative on committees and in race-based crises. Often, this donation of time and effort was undertaken in addition to stated job functions and was not considered during performance evaluations, but the participants understood these efforts to be for the good of the team and for the good of the students. These efforts were the added cost of being the token minority in the unit. It is interesting to note that the legal protections 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 on search committees. As one of the few Blacks in their offices and possibly their sub-division 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 make sure that the organization is in compliance with federal laws and regulations.

Participants' explanations indicated that they knew others viewed them differently than how they viewed themselves to be and that they knew others viewed them as subpar or deficient in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Facing questions about their qualifications, their abilities, and their commitment to the stated purpose of the unit or the University caused internal stress because the participants increasingly began to question themselves. As young professionals, their response was to do more as a means of proving they were just as good. Older professionals and seasoned professionals were angered and resigned, respectively, by the exchanges that they understood nothing would change. Each participant, though, questioned his own abilities, sometimes reminding himself that he was all the things he believed himself to be, regardless of what White colleagues believed.

We see a clear example of symbolic interactionism as participants defined themselves and act as the system in which they work defined them, whether for good or for bad, in agreement or in protest. Participants acted in ways they hoped, vainly, would change the others' perception of them. The hope that they could act as White people act and receive the same recognition, praise, respect, and acceptance that Whites receive constituted a violation of the White racial frame. Consequently, they experienced moments of acute disrespect that reminded them of their place in the social order. The emancipating act of participating in this study provided the participants an opportunity to freely speak their truth and bring their internal conversations about meanings into a

public space, openly challenging the symbolism, the interactions, and the social order.

The difficult conversations these participants had revealed that they embraced and lived 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 continued 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.

While this study adds to the research on the work experiences of professional Black men and to the research on the experiences of professionals from historically un- or under-represented populations working in postsecondary education, more research is needed in both of these areas. This study was conducted at one predominantly White institution and prompts questions about whether the experiences of other Black male professionals across the United States share the same experiences. It begs the question, also, about the experiences of Black male professionals and of White male professionals working at historically Black colleges and universities. Future research may also investigate workplace satisfaction of minority men at predominantly White institutions and at historically Black colleges and universities, as well as measuring the impact of aversive racism in the postsecondary educational workplace.

## EPILOGUE

Let me tell you a story about an emerging Black female sociologist, part closet militant and part closet feminist, who worked on the administrative side of postsecondary education for thirteen years. She was speaking, one day, with a young graduate student about the subcultures that interact on a college campus, student engagements, conscious and unconscious individual and corporate disrespect, and the internalization of stereotypes. The graduate student spoke about her supervisor, a young Black man who was intellectually brilliant and a consummate professional. She told of how this man lived far away from campus specifically so he could use the drive home to decompress from his day and how he waits to play his music – the music that speaks to and soothes his soul – until he is at least two miles away from campus. Why? Because he knows that his professional trajectory would be derailed if any of his colleagues heard him listening to the KRS-1, BDP, Public Enemy, Tupac, or Biggie that revives him after the professional and personal interactions of the workday has drained the life out of him. They would consider him as an angry Black man, a label that has effectively been the kiss of death for Black people since they were brought to these United States. So was born the idea for this paper.

I am that emerging sociologist. I have always wanted to do scholarship that made a positive impact on my society. I've always been fascinated with humanity's inhumanity and how groups malign and oppress each other in systematic and systemic ways. I remember thinking that I did not want to begin with Black women (that would seem too self-serving), but I could investigate the experiences of Black men – American society's

most maligned constituent group. I could give them a voice. Looking back, I think I succumbed to the idea of being their ‘great hope’. Yes, the experience of Black men working in American colleges and universities would be a good place to start. Two days later, I had the encounter I outlined in the Introduction of this paper. While I was excited when I stumbled across idea and made my decision, I became committed to the project in the aftermath of that encounter. In my righteous indignation on behalf of all Black and particularly Black men, I saw this as a strong way to combat the sincere ignorance or conscientious stupidity that allowed a White man to believe he had ever experienced the same thing that Black man experiences. What I did not realize is that I needed just as much of an education as he because there was no way I could ever be a Black man’s ‘great hope’.

As I indicated in the Discussion section, I knew this research would evoke emotions in the participants and it did. I thought I could maintain a scholarly level of professionalism. I could not. While I hurt and I cried over the experiences told to me, I could never experience the pain that these men experienced in their personal and professional lives as Black men. All I could do was listen to the experiences and tell others their stories. And is that not what I purposed to do with this research?

As I researched and wrote this piece, I went through the grief cycle of shock and denial, anger, depression and detachment, dialog and bargaining, acceptance, and empowerment. I was shocked at some of the experiences that these men endured and endure still, particularly the lack of support by professionals who trained them. Then I grew angry: why was this still happening and how could people of good conscience not

fight harder on behalf of the Black men who were marginalized? For a time, I was depressed and, particularly in the writing part of the project, I detached my emotions from the project because it was too physically draining to deal with my emotions. Recognizing that I could not handle the emotional drain of their experiences, I wondered where they found the strength to “keep on ‘keepin’ on” in their everyday lives as Black (professional) men in America.

The experience of these Black male professionals working in postsecondary education reminded me that change requires action. These men valiantly face the same racist system and sincerely ignorant or conscienciously stupid colleagues every day in an effort to improve their lives and the lives of other marginalized people. That is action. They answer the internal and external challenges to their knowledge, skill, and attitudes in an effort to remind themselves that they are contributing members of the University society and the broader society. That is action. They widen the road so that future generations will know that progress is possible through perseverance and that we have a responsibility to make the path easier for those who come after us. That is action.

I learned that Black men do not need a ‘great hope’: future generations are their great hope. Black men act in manners that communicate their stories every day, to each other and to the people who matter, as a means of encouragement. Their shared experience and their perseverance in the face of injustice is the well from which they draw their strength to continue on.

More significantly, I learned that my purpose – as an emerging sociologist who is part closet militant and part closet feminist – is to make their stories public so that others

will know what they persevere through. As Bonilla-Silva (2012) explains, racism persists because the dominant culture does not have to see it in its fullness. Our nation and all of the social institutions that support it is sick with the plague of racism. The only way to heal our land is to shine as many lights on it as possible to expose it. The more it is exposed, the greater the opportunities to eradicate it. As a sociologist, my purpose is to expose it. I hope this work serves as my light and will become the foundation for more works that tell the story of humanity's inhumanity.

## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH SCHEDULE

Thesis Proposal Defense	14 September, 2015
IRB Approval	23 November, 2015
Data Collection & Analysis	November 2015 – April 2016
Graduate Master's Thesis Format Review	24 June 2016
Graduate Thesis Defense Deadline	8 July 2016
Graduate Thesis Final Submission Deadline	22 July 2016

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello.

My name is Claudine Turner and I am a graduate student completing my thesis for the Master of Arts in Applied Sociology under the guidance of Dr. Elizabeth Grauerholz, a professor in UCF's Department of Sociology. I am investigating the experiences around race that Black male professionals in postsecondary education encounter and I invite your participation in a 60 minute interview.

You are being asked to participate in this research because you have been identified by the UCF Human Resources office as a Black, male postsecondary education professional over the age of 18. The purpose of the interview is to learn about the attitudes and behaviors interview participants believe they have encountered from peers, supervisors, subordinates, and students and the attitudes and behaviors the interviewee models for their mentees. The interview is semi-structured to encourage study participants to tell their stories on their own terms and 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.

Should you choose to participate in this research, you can determine how much information you share: you do not have to answer every question. Interview will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.

- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

I appreciate your willingness to learn about this study. Please feel free to contact me at [claudine.turner@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:claudine.turner@knights.ucf.edu) should you have questions about this research.

Should you elect to participate in this research, please reply to

[claudine.turner@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:claudine.turner@knights.ucf.edu) no later than November 30, 2015 at 5:00 PM.

Thank you for your consideration,

Claudine Turner

## APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL OF EXEMPT HUMAN RESEARCH



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Claudine D. Turner**

Date: **November 23, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 11/23/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Making the Invisible Visible: The Lived Experiences of Black Male Professionals in Postsecondary Education  
Investigator: Claudine D. Turner  
IRB Number: SBE-15-11691  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kanille Chay" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT



**Making the Invisible Visible:  
The Lived Experiences of Black Male Professionals  
in Postsecondary Education**

**Informed Consent**

Principal Investigator: Claudine Turner  
Faculty Advisor: Elizabeth Grauerholz, PhD  
Investigational Site(s): University of Central Florida

**Introduction:** Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which will include about 20 people associated with UCF. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you are a black, male professional. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

The person doing this research is Claudine Turner, a Master's level student in the University of Central Florida Department of Sociology. Because the researcher is a graduate student, she is being guided Dr. Elizabeth Grauerholz, a UCF faculty advisor in the Department of Sociology.

**What you should know about a research study:**

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of black male professionals in postsecondary education. This research provides a voice for this little investigated subculture within postsecondary educational institutions, augmenting the current body of knowledge through written work (Master's thesis) and conference presentations. I invite you to participate in this research as an interviewee. As such, you would participate in a 60 minute interview about the attitudes and behaviors you believe you encounter from your peers, supervisors, subordinates, and students and the attitudes and behaviors you model for your mentees.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** You will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions during the 60 minute interview. The questions are designed to facilitate and guide a one-sided conversation about the experiences or interactions that made you feel insignificant, inferior, or invisible; how these interactions defined your power in your professional positions; and how you redefined your power within those experiences.. The semi-structured nature of the interview is meant to encourage you to tell your story on your own terms and make meaning of those stories from your perspective as an individual, a member of a larger group, and a member of a much larger society. You do not have to answer every question.

**Location:** Interviews will be conducted and voice recorded in the home of the investigator.

**Time required:** We expect that you will be in this research study for one 60-minute session.

**Audio or video taping:** You will be voice recorded during this study. If you do not want to be voice recorded, you may still participate in the study. Discuss this with the researcher or a research team member. If you are voice recorded, the recording will be kept in a locked, safe place until transcription, at which time the recording will be destroyed. The transcription of the audio recording will be securely maintained for a period of five (5) years, after which time, it will be destroyed.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks to participants. However, the interview contains questions about past events that may cause emotional distress. If answering these questions causes you any kind of distress or makes you feel uncomfortable in any way, please contact the UCF Counseling and Psychological Services at (407) 823-2811.

**Compensation or payment:** There is no compensation or other payment to you for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality:** We will limit your personal data collected in this study to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of UCF.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, please contact Claudine Turner, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, (407) 823-2717 or or by email at [claudine.turner@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:claudine.turner@knights.ucf.edu),

or Dr. Elizabeth Grauerholz, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Sociology at (407) 823-4241 or by email at [elizabeth.grauerholz@ucf.edu](mailto:elizabeth.grauerholz@ucf.edu).

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

**Withdrawing from the study:** If you decide to leave the study prior to the interview, please email the investigator indicating your withdrawal of consent so that the investigator can document your request on the recruitment and participation lists. If you decide to leave the study after the interview, please email the investigator indicating your withdrawal of consent so that the investigator can document your request on the recruitment and participation lists and delete interview and all transcripts thereof. The person in charge of the research study or the sponsor can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include early termination of research study and unforeseen risk to the participant. We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare or choice to stay in the research.

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Part 1: Introduction questions (2-3 minutes)
  - a. Are you considered an administrator, professional staff, faculty with administrative duties, or graduate assistant?
  - b. How long have you worked in the field?
  - c. What kind of universities have you experienced (HBCUs, PWIs, HSAs, etc.)?
- 2) Part 2: Experiences with racism and marginalization in postsecondary education
  - a. What has been your experience as a black male at a university (can include student or professional experience)?
    - i. If experience was as a student, was it during undergraduate years? Graduate school? Did it change when you transitioned to a professional or semi-professional role?
    - ii. If experience was as a professional or semi-professional, did it change when you transitioned to more responsible professional roles?
  - b. Can you detail an experience in which your effectiveness as a professional was called into question because you are a black male? What was your response? How did you react?
  - c. Can you detail an experience in which your professional knowledge and experience was called into question because you are a black male? What was your response? How did you react?
  - d. Were you able to discuss either situation with your colleagues? If so, what was their response?

- e. Can you detail an experience in which your authenticity as a black male was called into question? What was your response? How did you react?
- f. What behaviors, comments, looks, comments, or gestures do you notice from your colleagues?
- g. During your professional experience, do you think your colleagues have used language or behavior to encourage or diminish confidence in your professional ability? Please explain.
- h. Is this similar or different to the experiences of other colleagues? How?
- i. Would you classify your experiences as those of marginalization?
  - i. Do you believe your colleagues were being intentionally dismissive, subversive, or otherwise minimizing you as a professional?
  - ii. What impact do these kinds of language or behavior have on your authority as a higher education professional?
- j. How do you respond to these kinds of language or behavior?
  - i. How does your response impact your authority as a higher education professional?
  - ii. How do you feel about the manner in which you respond?
- k. Do you believe that racism exists in postsecondary education? In the professional fields of postsecondary education?
  - i. Would you consider it to be the same kind of racism experienced by blacks working in postsecondary education during the mid-twentieth century?

- ii. Do you believe the experience is different for women in the field?
  - l. Do you believe you've experienced racism in your professional life?
  - m. Do you mentor undergraduates, graduate students, junior faculty or professionals, or transitioning professionals?
  - n. Do they ever discuss their experiences with marginalization or racism with you?
    - i. Are you able to empathize with their experience?
    - ii. How do you coach them through handling the experience?
  - o. What practices or techniques do you model for them or encourage them to embrace as they attempt to stay the course?
- 3) Part 4: Ending the interview
  - a. Thank you for answering my questions.
    - i. Do you have anything you would like to add about your experiences as a black male professional in postsecondary education?
    - ii. Is there anything related to this discussion that I forgot to ask but that you want to talk about?
- 4) Stop recording

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