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Abstract
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Are They Not All the Same? Racial Heterogeneity Among Black Male Undergraduates

Shaun R. Harper Andrew H. Nichols

An erroneous assumption is often made that Black men, one of the most stereotyped groups on college and university campuses, all share common experiences and backgrounds. Using Celious and Oyserman's (2001) Heterogeneous Race Model as a conceptual framework, we explored within-group differences among Black male undergraduates at three private institutions. Data collected from 39 participants reveal insights into the origins and characterizations of diversity among Black men, as well as the stereotypes, competition, and social distance associated with racial heterogeneity. Implications for Black male solidarity on campuses where few are enrolled and expanding conceptualizations of interacting "across difference" are offered at the end of this article.

Over the past quarter century, numerous scholars have examined the experiences of Black students on college and university campuses (e.g., Allen, 1992; Fegin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Love, 1993; Nettles, 1987; Sedlacek, 1987; Thompson & Fretz, 1991), yet few of these studies do much to explain how within-group differences impact experiences, dynamics, relationships, and interactions. In fact, the vast majority of this research treats Black collegians as a monolithic or homogeneous group (Brown, 1994; Fries-Britt, 1998; White, 1998), and unique variations within the race are often overlooked at the expense of comparing these students to their White counterparts (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004). Within-group differences shaped by socioeconomic status, familial background, academic expectations and experiences, and geographic communities of origin (urban, suburban, and rural) have been, at best, trivially considered in the published higher education literature. Likewise, few researchers have disaggregated data collected from Black collegians by gender in previous studies (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper et al.; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

In addition to ignoring important within-group differences, limited effort has been devoted to exploring the complexities of interactions and peer engagement among Black student subpopulations. Instead, several scholars have offered valuable insights into trends, barriers, and outcomes associated with interactions between different groups of college students (Astin, 1993; Chang, 1999, 2001; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Milem, 2003; Nelson Laird, 2005; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Villalpando, 2002). Interacting across difference has been empirically linked to a range of productive outcomes among college students (Harper & antonio, 2008; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006), but "across difference" has almost universally pertained to diversity between students from various racial/ethnic backgrounds in these

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studies. Similar efforts to explore peer engagement patterns and corresponding consequences among various groups within the Black race (men and women, male students with varying characteristics, affluent and low-income students, etc.) have not been undertaken. It is plausible that there could be within-race diversity that also affords rich opportunities for learning and gains accrual.

Furthermore, Harper et al. (2004) argued that too few studies have focused exclusively on Black students within a specific institutional context like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) without comparing them to their same-race peers at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Although some researchers have studied Black male undergraduates at community colleges (Flowers, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001), at HBCUs (Harper et al.; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008), and at large public PWIs (Harper, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), those attending private universities have been overlooked in the published literature. Virtually nothing is known about their experiences and interactions with each other in those environments.

Given what has been characterized as the crisis concerning Black men in higher education (Harper, 2006a), gender-specific insights into their experiences are especially warranted. In 2002, Black men comprised 4.3% of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the exact same as in 1976 (Harper, 2006a). In addition, only 36.4% of all Black undergraduates in 2004 were men—their same-race female counterparts outnumbered them at a ratio of nearly 2:1. Nationally, more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Black men who start college do not graduate within 6 years, which is the worst college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006a).

With dismal representation and high attrition rates, it seems important to investigate trends and dynamics within Black male peer groups at institutions where the fewest are enrolled, private colleges and universities. Cuyjet (2006) maintained that these men must rely on each other in order to persist through degree completion. Because their numbers are so small, the diversity among Black men may complicate the likelihood of such peer support and solidarity. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore dynamics, relationships, and within-group peer engagement trends among Black male undergraduates at private universities, as well as the corresponding consequences of such interactions. Throughout this article, we use "heterogeneity" and "diversity" synonymously in reference to within-group differences.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In their article, "Race from the Inside: An Emerging Heterogeneous Race Model," Celious and Oyserman (2001) urged scholars to steer away from a homogenous examination of race and instead consider a heterogeneous group perspective. Their model stresses the importance of recognizing how within-group differences and distinctions among individuals of the same race influence daily interactions as well as experiences with and perceptions of each other. The authors discussed how differences in socioeconomic status, physical characteristics (i.e., skin tone), and gender influence how Black persons experience being racial minorities in various contexts. The racially homogenous viewpoint employed in most research studies fails to portray Blacks as diverse and assumes they share one common experience and can (or should) be able to comfortably interact with each other because

of it. When this perspective is adopted, within-group heterogeneity is often ignored and broad generalizations become accepted as normal by outsiders and sometimes by members of the racial group.

Celious and Oyserman's (2001) model does not include constructs, but instead is a conceptual lens introduced to explore within-group differences and intersectionalities that are often taken for granted. In acknowledging the ways in which gender intersects with race, Celious and Oyserman called attention to the stereotypes associated with Black males, especially young, economically disadvantaged, and darker-skinned Black men. Accordingly, the characteristics associated with these men have become synonymous with the larger Black population. "This system of homogenization mandates the use of stereotypes for in-group and out-group interactions, erasing the experiences of women, men, middle-class, and immigrant people of African origin from academic literature, popular culture, and, most importantly, daily interactions" (pp. 156-157). This makes it difficult to obtain a true insider's perspective that captures the individualistic experience of race. As recommended in Celious and Oyserman's model, a heterogeneous perspective was used in the present study to gain greater understanding of the diversity of Black men at private institutions.

Some perspectives regarding communalism complicate the Black individualism implicit in Celious and Oyserman's (2001) model. For example, Thompson and Fretz (1991) discussed the need for solidarity among Black students on campuses where they are grossly under-represented. "The more communal student may be more likely to draw from the support of Blacks on campus or in the surrounding community, thereby uniting with community members in the face of adversity" (p. 439). Inherent in this assumption is that Black students will find commonalities, comfortably communicate with, and get along with their same-race peers. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) noted that some students may liken participation in such communalism efforts to self-segregation and therefore decide against affiliating themselves with race-specific groups. Similarly, White (1998) determined that the extent to which students were either exclusively engaged in either predominantly Black or non-Black student organizations and campus activities or a combination of both was largely based on their racial identity and their definitions and understanding of the Black community. Whereas some students engaged in the Black community in order to explore and construct their racial identities, others used Black student groups to prove their Blackness to their same-race peers. In light of these findings, White suggested researchers must capture racial variations among Black students in order to understand more fully their experiences, development, and outcomes, hence our use of Celious and Osyerman's (2001) model as the guiding framework for the present study.

The Heterogeneous Race Model, when juxtaposed with the aforementioned gaps in the published literature on Black male undergraduates, led to the exploration of the following research questions: (a) What forms of diversity exist within Black male student populations; (b) how does this heterogeneity affect interactions, relationships, and same-race peer support among these students on private college and university campuses; and (c) in what ways do dominant misperceptions of racial homogeneity shape Black undergraduate men's views of and engagement with each other?

METHOD

Sites and Sample

This study was conducted at three racially diverse private institutions: (a) a small liberal

arts college that enrolled 1,866 undergraduates; (b) a midsize religiously affiliated university with 5,727 undergraduates; and (c) a large research university that 16,474 undergraduates attended at the time of data collection. We elected to study Black men at three different types of private institutions because, as previously mentioned, published research studies on this population were situated almost exclusively at public colleges and universities. Thus, we endeavored to explore the experiences of Black men at private institutions in general, as opposed to a case example from one particular size campus. All three institutions were located in an urban area. On each campus, fewer than half of the students were White; Black student enrollments ranged from 6.5% to 7.2%. Across the three institutions, 36.4% of the Black students were male, the exact same as the national average (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The mean six-year graduation rate for Black men at the three institutions was 69.2%, compared to 75.4% for White male undergraduates and 71.5% for their Black female counterparts. Consistent with national trends (Harper, 2006a), Black men were least retained among all racial/ethnic groups on the three campuses in this study.

The religiously affiliated university and the large research university both had offices specifically for Black student support, whereas the liberal arts college employed a high-ranking Black male student affairs administrator who advised a Black male student organization and provided mentoring to most Black male undergraduates on campus. Thirty-nine Black male undergraduates participated in this study: 6 from the liberal arts college, 14 from the midsize institution, and 19 from the research university. These size variations are reflective of differences in enrollments on the three campuses (e.g., 42 total Black males at the liberal arts college vs. 421 at the large university). The sample included 2 first-year students, 4 sophomores, 13 juniors, and 20 seniors, who represented a wide range of academic majors, attended high schools with variable racial demographics (predominantly Black, mostly White, and racially mixed), came from a variety of familial backgrounds (i.e., two-parent households and single-parent homes), and grew up in different geographic settings (urban, suburban, and rural).

Data Collection

We contacted administrators in student affairs and Black student support services offices on the three campuses and asked for assistance recruiting a sample of Black male undergraduates to participate in focus groups. We requested that they circulate widely the invitation to participate and not limit marketing efforts to one or two student organizations. Contact lists were furnished and all identified students (n = 48) were communicated with via telephone or e-mail. We explained to them the purposes and importance of the study and invited them to participate in a 90-minute focus group with other Black men on their respective campuses. As mentioned previously, 39 students ultimately agreed to participate in the study.

Focus groups were chosen over individual interviews for a variety of reasons. First, focus groups are effective ways of collecting large amounts of detail-rich information while allowing participants to build upon the reflections of others and gain previously unexplored insights into their own experiences (Krueger, 1998). Furthermore, focus groups were used because "the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view or great diversity of views can be quickly assessed" (M. Q. Patton, 2002, p. 386). A semi-structured interview technique was used in the focus group sessions, which simultaneously permitted authentic participant reflection

while maintaining focus and order (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Although specific questions and interview protocol were used, the discussions often became conversational as comments offered by some participants were confirmed, extended, and sometimes refuted by others.

Data Analysis

Several techniques prescribed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Moustakas (1994) were systematically employed to analyze the data collected in this study. The analysis process began with readings of the verbatim interview transcripts from each focus group. Reflective comments (or what Miles and Huberman refer to as "marginal remarks") regarding our own suppositions and emerging judgments about the data were written alongside the margins of printed copies of each transcript. After reading the transcripts, preliminary textual summaries of what each group reported about its experiences and tentative structural summaries of how each group reportedly experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas) were written for participants within the context of each individual campus. Next, the transcripts were uploaded and linearly arranged in the NVivo Qualitative Research Software program. Here, we engaged in pattern coding, whereby code words were assigned to passages of text that would eventually enable us to pull together common ideas, feelings, and experiences, while concurrently discarding cues that were largely unreflective of the participants' shared experiences.

The codes were then recorded and explained in the form of memos that brought together relevant concepts that related to within-group diversity as well as interactions among the participants and their same-race peers. At the end of the memoing phase, a set of five explanatory conclusions regarding the phenomenon under study were inductively generated. Two criteria were used to determine the strength of each conclusion: (a) the intensity and insightfulness of key quotes and contributing stories offered by the participants, and (b) the number of times each contributing code word was used in NVivo®. Each conclusion was solidified and categorically clustered into the major themes presented below.

Limitations

This research has some noteworthy limitations. First, the inclusion of three different-sized institutions enabled us to explore the breadth of racial heterogeneity among Black men at private universities, but not depth at any one particular campus or institutional type (e.g., small liberal arts colleges). Prolonged engagement and exclusive focus on private institutions that enrolled comparable numbers of Black male students may have yielded deeper, more context-specific insights. Nevertheless, we forfeited this richness in exchange for a wider view of how Black men interact at private colleges and universities. Another shortcoming is the unintended exclusion of students–athletes and Black fraternity members. Although they were mentioned frequently throughout the interviews, members of these subgroups were not there to confirm or deny claims being made about their behaviors. We did not purposely exclude these students; they too received invitation e-mail messages sent from administrators and staff, but none chose to participate. Although these groups included several Black males, they were not targeted any more or less aggressively than any other subgroup of Black men on the three campuses—meaning, they received the same invitation in the same ways as everyone who actually chose to participate. A third limitation is the reliance on a single qualitative approach for sensemaking around this topic. Having students write narrative summaries, reflecting more deeply in individual interviews, and conducting

ethnographic fieldwork in which interactions among Black males were observed on the three campuses would have enhanced this study.

FINDINGS

Three categories of findings emerged in this study. First, participants reflected on the origins and characterizations of heterogeneity among Black men on the three campuses. Second, they acknowledged the misconceptions and stereotypes they held about their Black male peers because of diversity within the population. Third, students described an ethos of competition and social reticence that existed between Black male subgroups. Below, these findings are discussed in relation to their influence on social interactions among Black men at the three private institutions.

Origins and Characterizations of Within-Group Heterogeneity

The complex nature of the diversity that existed within the Black male student populations on the three campuses is the first explanatory factor influencing their interpersonal relationships with each other. They recognized that members of other racial/ethnic groups might perceive the Black student population as a monolithic group. Notwithstanding, participants were quite cognizant of the characteristics and experiences that made them unique and distinctive from each other. For instance, some were from predominantly White neighborhoods that offered limited opportunities for engagement with other Black males prior to college. In contrast, several were from predominantly Black neighborhoods, where the majority of their interactions were with other racial/ethnic minority peers (namely Blacks and Latinos). One participant said:

> A lot of Black men at [the large research university] who come from very affluent neighborhoods may not have 'kicked it' [hung out] with a lot of Black men growing up, so I think there's a difference between those types of brothas' and brothas' who are from urban areas and Black neighborhoods.

Focus group discussions often amplified differences between the two groups, including their styles of dress, speech, and cultural interests. Participants indicated that students from predominantly Black neighborhoods often preferred baggier clothes or urban apparel (e.g., Sean Jean, Phat Farm, G-Unit, or Rocawear), whereas men from predominantly White neighborhoods tended to buy Polo Ralph Lauren, Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle, and other more mainstream brands worn by White students. They also highlighted differences in speech patterns and commented on dissimilar greeting approaches (e.g., handshaking styles). For instance, participants from urban areas deemed it cool to say, "What's up," and offer other slang greetings in casual encounters. However, they considered saying, "Hello," "Hi," or "Hey," to be associated with White student communication styles. "You can tell where a brotha' is from if he says 'Hey' to you."

In addition, they also noted the diverse cultural interests of their peers. One particular student from a predominantly Black home community made a comment about another Black male's musical preferences:

> We were listening to music and he put in a Counting Crows CD or like, you know like Coldplay or something. I almost felt like "this is blasphemy" as far as like a Black man listening to Coldplay. But it's just like he had a background difference.

Although non-group members might mistakenly assume that all Black students share common cultural interests, such as a preference for rap or hip hop music, men in our focus groups clearly understood and reinforced that

skin color did not necessarily guarantee they would share common interests and codes of communication. "After a while you tend to realize that skin color doesn't mean that you guys are close or anything. You just realize what really bounds Black people together is culture more than skin color." Another participant endorsed this same perspective:

> I definitely agree. Culture, where you were raised is going to override, a lot of times, skin color. If you don't have things in common, you can't really form a close relationship with each other, even if the other person is Black.

Ultimately, dissimilar behavioral norms and cultural interests influenced the extent to and manner in which these students interacted with each other on campus.

The markedly diverse experiences, preferences, and interests they brought to college were not the only distinguishing characteristics among Black male collegians at the private institutions we studied. The activities in which the students choose to engage once enrolled also constituted a significant source of difference. Participants indicated some Black male students were athletes in various intercollegiate sports or members of historically Black and predominantly White Greek-letter organizations, whereas a few others were campus leaders and activists. Moreover, some students were socially active, whereas others focused more on academic endeavors and decided against being engaged outside the classroom. Essentially, the manner in which students spent their out-of-class time colored their college experiences in noticeably different ways. One participant from the midsize university commented:

> Some people just go to school and go home. They just keep it simple and plain. Others want to be at every event. Some guys like to be everywhere at once and others just like to go back to their caves.

Some suggested this difference in out-of-class engagement might have been partially attributable to the demands of various academic majors. For instance, many participants felt the engineering curriculum at the large university was more rigorous and time-consuming than some liberal arts majors.

In every focus group, participants talked about the social divide between student–athletes and nonathletes. Conversations about this topic were especially lengthy at the large university, which had the most pervasive sports culture. One student from the liberal arts college described some of the differences between him and his roommate who played on a sports team. He explained how their class and workout schedules made it difficult to interact and form an authentic relationship. "We just lived together, that's it," he added. Because student–athletes attended most of their classes in the morning, worked out and trained in the afternoon, and spent much of their free time in the evenings studying, there were limited opportunities for them to participate in campus activities and student organizations with others outside of athletics. Subsequently, their ability to socialize with other Black male peers was constrained. Not only did these differential experiences limit opportunities for these two groups to interact, but this diversity also influenced their ability to relate to and understand each other. Consequently, participants developed widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about their same-race male peers with different backgrounds and collegiate experiences.

Within-Group Stereotypes

The second e:major finding that influenced social interactions and relationship building among Black men on the three campuses was the trivial misconceptions and stereotypes participants held about their same-race male peers. These stereotypes seemed to be the

byproducts of the vast diversity in precollege and collegiate experiences among Black men. One source of these stereotypes stemmed from preconceived notions about their peers' communities of origin, visual appearances, and communication styles. Opinions about the activities, lifestyles, and affiliations of their peers comprised the second source of these stereotypes.

Men from both predominantly Black and predominantly White neighborhoods held stereotypes about each other. Participants agreed these stereotypes often influenced their interactions. A student from an urban home community elaborated on the following:

> I think there is a level of stereotyping in both groups. The urban Black males and then the suburban Black males, they both have these ideas of how the other one is, which kind of prevents them from clicking more. I know, like I used to have stereotypes against Black males who didn't grow up around the city or around other Black people.

Others in the study from predominantly Black environments held stereotypes about those who had not adopted speaking and dress styles stereotypically associated with young Black urban males. They thought peers from predominantly White communities had weak Black identities and thus frequently made comments about their clothes, hairstyles, and speech. One participant from a predominantly Black neighborhood indicated he oftentimes viewed other Black men from White environments as "just another White male."

Conversely, Black males from predominantly White neighborhoods were less likely to voice specific stereotypes about their counterparts from Black neighborhoods. However, they did express discomfort interacting with same-race male peers from predominantly Black environments. For instance, one student recalled situations in which he was ridiculed for being "an Oreo or a White-Black person." Experiences such as these compelled him to avoid social encounters with peers from predominantly Black home environments. Essentially, the student allowed prior bad experiences to influence his interactions with others in his same racial and gender group. In a different interview, another participant explained how negative interactions might influence the behaviors of Black men from predominantly White communities:

> You may try to introduce them to other Black males; they might not have good experiences with Black males; they've probably been talked about, probably called Oreo and stuff like that. So they stay away from Black males because they have probably been talked about by them, and they are like "Dude forget it . . . they are probably all going to treat me the same."

Although participants from predominantly White environments disclosed fewer specific stereotypes about their counterparts from Black neighborhoods, it was apparent throughout the focus group interviews that these men were fearful about interacting with their same-race male peers who had not come from similar neighborhoods. Essentially, stereotypes held by both groups stifled their ability to effectively interact and engage in a meaningful manner.

In addition to the previously mentioned stereotypes, participants also held misconceptions about their peers based on affiliations and activities. For example, they perceived members of Black Greek-letter organizations to be elitist and arrogant. "The fraternity dudes think they are better than everyone else," a student at the midsize university felt. Furthermore, Black men who routinely neglected out-of-class social and cultural activities were described as atypical and strange. Participants often referred to these peers as "random brothas" or "incognegroes" because they were hardly ever seen on campus.

Perhaps the most stereotyped group of Black men on these campuses was the student–athletes. Many participants believed student–athletes, particularly at the large research university, were privileged, arrogant, and intellectually inferior. One person shared, "They don't go to class and could care less about their education." Another endorsed this perspective: "He is the running back and he was in my class freshman year and that dude had the attitude that you don't have to come to class if you're an athlete and you can pretty much pass. They don't have to go to class and they got it made."It was apparent that some participants harbored negative feelings toward their peers who played intercollegiate sports because Black male student–athletes presumably were not taking seriously the privilege of a free education at the three elite private institutions. Though their interactions had been limited, such assumptions were based largely on observation, not through meaningful engagement and conversations with student–athletes regarding their educational values.

Stereotypes held about student–athletes created tension, as many focus group participants described the relationships as disjointed and suggested administrators on their campuses should facilitate more interaction between the two groups. One student deemed this divisiveness extremely problematic because student–athletes on his campus comprised a sizeable portion of the Black male enrollment. Overall, it was evident that the stereotypes these men held about their same-race male peers inhibited their interactions and engagement with each other, which engendered a range of behavioral responses.

An Ethos of Competition and Social Reticence

In addition to holding widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about their same-race male peers, the students at each institution described an environment where competition for recognition and status was divisive. Many thought the average Black man was competing to be a "big fish in a small pond." This competition eventually led to destructive behaviors that affected relationships among Black men, which is further explained in the next section. In addition, engagement was also stifled by socially reticence and distrust of other men in the race.

Competition. According to the focus group participants, many of the Black men on their campuses were in constant competition for popularity. Essentially, they were looking to distinguish themselves or "stand out" from their same-race male peers. A student from the large research university indicated, "You just naturally feel inclined to feel like there is a competition going on between you versus somebody who may want to appear more popular." In each interview session, students agreed that affiliation with a group was associated with increased popularity among Black men. Popularity, according to one student, was viewed as "knowing a lot of people," "having a big reputation," and "being in a group." The students agreed that members of historically Black Greek-letter fraternities and varsity sports teams enjoyed greater popularity on campus. In addition, the participants viewed Black men who were actively involved or held leadership positions in prominent campus organizations as socially privileged. "Leaders and guys who are involved, they get more attention, which everyone is pretty much desiring."

As students became affiliated with their respective groups, the competition evolved into small rivalries that were detrimental to the larger community of Black students, especially men. Specifically, participants shared accounts of rumor spreading, defamation, and noticeable tension or hostility between subgroups within the race. This was most reflective in

the relationships among Black Greek-letter fraternities. A participant suggested:

> There is heavy sectionalism among the fraternities, like Alphas, Kappas, and then like a couple Sigmas. It's like they're divided, they're real divided. There's no unity. It's like if you talk to the Alphas, they're going to disrespect the Kappas, disrespect the Sigmas. And if you talk to any of the other groups, they're going to disrespect the other ones. It's very sectionalized among the Greeks.

Someone else added, "One fraternity won't go to another fraternity's events. You know, that kind of petty high school thing going on. Talking behind each others' backs happens a lot around here." Although these dynamics may have been most prevalent among the Black fraternities, participants reported that similar tumultuous relationships existed between student–athletes and Black males who were not involved in intercollegiate athletics.

Because many believed Black student-athletes were afforded special perks and privileged access to resources, a level of resentment seemed to exist. "If you are a Black athlete, then people treat you better," one participant observed. In addition to preferential treatment, participants thought Black student–athletes were considered high status and popular among their peers, especially female students. Subsequently, they suggested that Black men who did not play intercollegiate athletics often felt as if they were competing for recognition with Black male student–athletes. These feelings seemed to be exacerbated by the participants' perceptions that the student–athletes separated themselves from the other Black men on campus and failed to support communal endeavors. Overall, this competitive ethos cultivated unhealthy relationships among the Black men on these campuses.

Social Reticence. All participants in the study agreed that the Black men on their campuses were socially reticent. Throughout the focus group interviews, students described their peers as being "standoffish" or "always walking around with their guards up." They believed this such interactional norms inhibited daily exchanges between Black men on campus. One student recalled encounters where Black men might pass each other on campus and purposely refuse to speak to or acknowledge each other.

> I think for me coming from the south and being a minority there is a certain recognition that we as Black people should acknowledge each other in passing, at least a simple nod or just any kind of acknowledgement. I find it is kind of lacking here, like when I walk around campus and I see other Black males I don't get, "Hey how are you? I'm glad to see you, my brother." I just don't get that type of greeting that I would normally get if like I was back down south.

In all the focus groups, similar remarks repeatedly emerged about the lack of friendliness among Black male students on three campuses. Many participants came to campus expecting to have a general level of camaraderie or solidarity with their same-race male peers. They believed the common experience of being Black men would compel them to unite and support each other; however, they found that such a bond was lacking. To make their point, participants frequently described instances when their peers might have completely ignored friendly advances altogether. One student indicated, "You walk around campus and you can already tell, this guy is not going to speak to you, but then you try anyway. And then you do, and he doesn't speak. It's just like the worst feeling ever." These types of negative encounters eventually led many participants to stop reaching out to their peers. "Eventually you realize they might not even say, 'What's up,' so I'm not even going to waste my time," another participant added.

Identifying the undercurrents of this social reticence was difficult for these students; however, probing revealed that snobbery, a genuine lack of trust, or cultural issues might be explanatory factors. A student offered, "But, with some [Black guys], you say, 'What's up to them,' and they just walk right by you. I'm like, 'What is this?' Half are cool, and half think that they're too good to talk to regular 'ole Joes." As the quote suggests, some believed their peers' unwillingness to recognize their greetings or presence was largely attributable to a sense of superiority. Others, however, offered alternative explanations for such behaviors. Some thought social reticence among their peers might also be due to a lack of trust. One participant admitted he had become skeptical of other Black men's motives for befriending him: "Nobody really took an interest in me until like, you know, they found out I could play a musical instrument." This student believed his peers' feelings and actions toward him changed once they discovered he played the piano and they could use him to perform at their student organization events. Subsequently, he was inclined to distrust the intentions of other Black male students who arbitrarily approached him. Because they may not have been accustomed to other Black men being open and outgoing, specifically on their campuses, such friendly advances seemed somewhat bizarre and atypical, thus leading them to question their peers' motives.

Another student offered a different explanation for distrust and social distance among Black men on his campus:

> I think that because of hip-hop culture, Black males are just standoffish. By standoffish, I mean a "too cool" mentality . . . because of the machismo nature of hip hop culture, it's just not a friendly vibe. How many rap songs are about being friendly? None. I can't think of one. There are 800 about being violent and standoffish.

Several other participants echoed this perspective. Although not all Black men listen to hip hop music or subscribe to its cultural norms, its impact seemed to be partly responsible for this culture of reticence among Black men on the campuses we studied. Although verbal acknowledgement, or the lack of it, may seem somewhat trivial to outsiders, the participants considered it essential for interpersonal relationships. Rendering each other invisible negatively affected the cultivation of authentic relationships, adequate support channels, and social networks. For relationships to improve, the participants felt this social reticence should have been addressed through dialogue, something that was missing among Black men on the three campuses.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our findings confirm and add new dimensions to existing research on racial heterogeneity among Black collegians (Brown, 1994; Fries-Britt, 1998; White, 1998). Clearly, Black male students are not all the same. Participants came from a range of home backgrounds, made different choices regarding affiliations and the expenditure of their out-of-class time, communicated in culturally dissimilar ways, and had varying levels of interaction with their same-race peers prior to college. Consequently, they noted there were at least six distinct subgroups of Black men on the campuses we studied: (a) student-athletes, (b) members of predominantly Black Greek-letter organizations, (c) socially disengaged men, (d) campus leaders and activists, (e) urban males, and (f) men from suburban and predominantly White neighborhoods. This diversity signifies the inappropriateness of treating Black students as a monolithic group in higher education research and practice.

Celious and Oyserman's (2001) Heterogeneous Race Model suggests that within-

group differences and distinctions among individuals of the same race influence their daily interactions and relationships, which we also found in the present study. Whereas Celious and Oyserman mainly considered the effects of socioeconomic status, skin tone/complexion, and gender on interactions between Black Americans, our findings show how different home communities of origin and subgroup affiliation influence social engagement trends among Black men within the college environment. Simply because Black male students share the same racial categorization, it would be wrong to assume they all perceive or experience Blackness the same way.

Ultimately, participants suggested that common social interests, not the race they shared, were the foundation of their relationships with each other. This is consistent with findings from antonio's (2004) study of how a racially diverse group of college men chose their friends. Communication norms, musical interests, and other factors superseded race, which is important for understanding how and why Black undergraduates choose certain friends and make various social decisions. It also helps explain why some find predominantly Black student organizations attractive (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007), whereas others decide against participating in race-based campus activities (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; White, 1998).

Recognition of subgrouping among Black male collegians seems both noteworthy and problematic. On one hand, within-group diversity presents unique opportunities for learning, which we discuss later in greater detail. But on the other, dismal Black male student enrollments at PWIs, especially highly selective private colleges and universities, complicates the existence of so much fragmentation within the group. As mentioned, there were only 42 total Black males at the small liberal arts college in our study. This seems hardly enough to support so many subgroups, especially given Cuyjet's (2006) assertion that Black men must rely on each other to persist through degree completion.

Because there are so few Black men at private institutions, it is necessary and appropriate to find ways to unify them for the purposes of collective resilience against racism. Considering the hostile racial climates that exist at many predominantly White colleges and universities (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Loo & Rolinson, 1986; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), it should not be assumed that Black men will pursue solidarity with others within the race. Thompson and Fretz (1991) suggested that communalism is necessary for Black students to craft productive responses to racial toxins on predominantly White campuses. If within-group heterogeneity stifles communication and inhibits racial collectivism (as participants in the present study reported), upon whom will these students rely for support in racially oppressive campus environments? Until institutional transformation ensues and necessary campus racial climate adjustments are made, there may be tremendous value in helping Black male students (no matter how few or how different they are) engage each other in more supportive ways on campuses where others outside the race treat them the same.

The stereotypes revealed in this study in some ways parallel those reported in previous studies of Black students at PWIs (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2005; Smith et al, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The difference here, however, is that Black male students held these stereotypes about each other. Although Harper (2006b) found no evidence of internalized racism—the acceptance

of racist misperceptions about one's own group that are presented in the media and perpetuated by White persons—participants in the present study admitted to holding racist stereotypes about their same-race male peers. Given this, it is essential to provide structured venues for Black male students to discuss their differences, challenge inaccurate race-based assumptions about each other, and learn that variation among them is not necessarily bad.

In addition, efforts to unite diverse subgroups of Black men could result in previously unexplored opportunities to learn about others who are similarly categorized by race, but come from different backgrounds and have dissimilar cultural perspectives. A vast body of literature reveals gains in student learning and development that are associated with engagement with diverse peers. Specifically, interactions with diverse peers have been positively linked to benefits and outcomes in the following domains: self-concept (intellectual and social), cultural awareness and appreciation, racial understanding, leadership, engagement in citizenship activities, satisfaction with college, high post-baccalaureate degree aspirations, and readiness for participation in a diverse workforce (Chang, 1999, 2001; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang et al., 2006; Gurin et al., 2002; Harper & antonio, 2008; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Pascarella et al., 1996; Villalpando, 2002).

Although interacting across difference is typically conceptualized in an interracial context, it is entirely possible that some of the aforementioned gains and outcomes can be accrued through within-group interactions. Put another way, our data suggest that learning "across difference" can be achieved through interactions among different subgroups of students within the same race. Because Black male students are not the same, there are powerful and often overlooked opportunities for them to learn about those who come from different cultures, challenge stereotypes they have about others within the race, and develop communication skills that will enable them to comfortably interact with Black men in settings after college (e.g., the workforce, churches and other worship venues, and community organizations). Participants in our study reported their engagement with same-race peers outside their respective subgroups was often rare, conflict-laden, and competitive. These sorts of interactional norms will likely persist during and after college if educators and administrators continue to view Black men as the same and assume they will automatically interact in productive ways because of racial similarity.

Several implications for practice can be derived from this study. First, Black male student organizations such as those profiled in Cuyjet's (2006) edited book would be useful in bringing together men from diverse backgrounds to learn from each other's experiences and cultural perspectives. These groups could also enable Black men to work together on programs and service initiatives, discuss topics related to masculinities and the status of Black men in America, and share information about resources and navigational insights into persistence on predominantly White campuses. Similarly, Black culture centers can offer interactional spaces for students who identify and experience their Blackness in different ways. According to L. D. Patton (2006), these centers also enable Black students to foster the sort of collective responses to campus racism that Thompson and Fretz (1991) advocated.

Collaborative programming between culture centers, student activities offices, Black fraternities, and other student organizations would likely attract students who may not feel entirely comfortable going to an event where there may not be other Black students with whom they share much in common. This recommendation is important given that many

participants from predominantly White neighborhoods expressed uneasiness about interacting with other Black males. Events that attract Black men and women from a range of subgroups and organizations could help neutralize the negative effects of past experiences.

Learning communities and theme floors in residence halls that focus on Black culture could also bring together diverse groups of Black students (and interested others) to explore the spectrum of Blackness that exists in America. Moreover, faculty should ensure that monolithic representations of Black people are not advanced in curricula and class discussions, as doing so only perpetuates stereotypes. An annual forum, discussion series, or coordinated set of programming regarding the state of Blackness on campus would present opportunities for learning that may otherwise be missed due to avoidance of subgroups that are different from one's own. Many of these efforts would also enable Black students to openly acknowledge and confront erroneous stereotypes they have about each other; better understand and address the sources of their interactional discomfort; and discuss common experiences with racism on campus, which could lead to collective action.

Four implications for future research are readily apparent. First, disaggregating data and exploring within-group differences are essential in future investigations of Black student experiences. Second, researchers should pursue deeper insights into the competition that exists between various Black male subgroups. Specifically, knowing more about ways in which within-race rivalries differ from the competition characteristic of men in general (Kimmel, 1996) and male undergraduates in particular (Harris, 2006) could be useful to those who endeavor to foster more comfortable, less conflict-laden interactions among Black male collegians.

Third, gay and bisexual Black men did not emerge as a subgroup in the interviews, which we found surprising in the analysis. A follow-up study should be conducted to explore how these students interact with their same-race heterosexual male peers, as well as how Black LGBT subgroups are treated by other Black students. Lastly, researchers should explore with greater intensity the experiences of Black men across different institutional contexts. Subgrouping and interactional norms are likely to differ at HBCUs, two-year and community colleges, and public PWIs. As mentioned, this is the first known published study on this population that is situated exclusively within private colleges and universities; surely much more remains to be known about Black males on these types of campuses than what has been reported here.

CONCLUSION

Many educators and administrators erroneously assume the mere presence of diverse student populations will compel them to interact with and learn from each others' differences—Chang, Chang, and Ledesma (2005) referred to this as "magical thinking." Equally flawed are views of exact sameness among Black students and narrowly conceived conceptualizations of what it means to interact across difference. Findings that emerged in this study make clear that Black male students are not the same and there are several within-group differences from which they can learn. However, consistent with perspectives offered by Harper and antonio (2008), educators must be thoughtful and intentional about fostering the conditions that will enable such learning to occur. Expecting Black males to put aside their cultural differences, dispel stereotypes about each other, and foster collective responses to toxic campus racial climates are all unlikely to occur in the absence of strategic institutional

effort to bring together diverse subgroups such as those identified in this study.

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