How does it feel to be a problem?

The Souls of Black Folk (1903). The question he asks in the opening sentence is this: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (p. 7). The question is asked of blacks, but this same question should be asked of white males, yet it is so often avoided. Jensen (2005) writes through his own lens (as a white male) in the last line of his book The Heart of Whiteness, “The world does not need white people to civilize others. The real White People’s Burden is to civilize ourselves” (Jensen, 2005, pp. 96). If white male students on campus are a problem, how are we, as white male administrators, inform and educate them?

The problem this research will address is that systems of white supremacy (political, social, and economic) and white privilege perpetuate inequality. Changing systems of power and privilege require understanding how white males serve as both perpetuators of privilege and as change agents. While white males have the ability to ignore systems of inequality, their roles in challenging and dismantling racial privilege is critical if we expect change to occur. In leadership roles and as mentors, the importance of white male involvement in diverse experiences, as well as to challenge and support other white males in the community of higher education becomes exponentially important if we expect these men to become change agents and actors within the fabric of a multicultural society.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to examine how white male graduate students in student affairs preparation programs make meaning of their whiteness, white privilege, and multiculturalism, and apply the meaning to practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. How do white males in student affairs preparation programs make meaning of their own whiteness?
2. How do they understand white privilege, and how did they gain that experience?
3. How do they view and utilize diverse interactions (programmatic and interpersonal), both formally and informally?
4. How have they incorporated their white awareness into their professional preparation?

PROBLEM

How white male graduate students in student affairs preparation programs make meaning of their whiteness, white privilege, and multiculturalism

Barry Olson, North Carolina State University

W. E. B. DuBois writes about racial burden, or rather, baggage, in The Souls of Black Folk (1903). The question he asks in the opening sentence is this: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (p. 7). The question is asked of blacks, but this same question should be asked of white males, yet it is so often avoided. Jensen (2005) writes through his own lens (as a white male) in the last line of his book The Heart of Whiteness, “The world does not need white people to civilize others. The real White People’s Burden is to civilize ourselves” (Jensen, 2005, pp. 96). If white male students on campus are a problem, how are we, as white male administrators, inform and educate them?

LITERATURE REVIEW

   • CRT is historically anchored in our legal system. It was designed to give voice to marginalized populations. In this study, CRT will serve to give a voice to white males who have, by their own omission, not become a part of the dialogue on race, diversity, and multiculturalism. CRT supports change through the stories of those who have traditionally been on the margins. In this case, white male graduate students are empowered to tell their story about how they have made meaning of whiteness and privilege.
   • What new information will white male graduate students provide about their own meaning-making?

2. Student Development Theory
   • Student development theory provides a basis for understanding how college students have been defined and redefined since the earlier days of the practice of student affairs. This literature provides a template for how the cumulative and continual process of student development has shifted from a discussion of student’s psychosocial, moral and ethical growth to one of how students understand their racial and cultural identity.
   • Development is a process. How does your development situate you to understand your identity? Your role in higher education?

3. Identity
   • Our gender and racial identities are learned and experienced, both through positive support and through negative reinforcement. The social mores that follow are also learned and reinforced through daily interactions. White male graduate students in student affairs preparation programs learn early on that a college student’s identity is quite often challenged from their early experiences on campus. Their actions lead to deep and meaningful conversations about what is socially acceptable behavior, what is considered taboo, and most importantly, how their identity in the collegiate environment can be maladaptive.
   • Identity is a lifelong process. How can white male student affairs practitioners use identity theory (mainly, social and ethnic identity, as well as gendered) to assist their own students?

4. Multicultural Competency
   • Multiculturalism and multicultural competency among student affairs practitioners has become commonplace and expected in the development of a well-rounded professional. The core elements of student affairs focus on inclusivity and a respect for individual and group differences. These differences lead to spirited discussions, debates, and dialogues on our campuses, yet most student affairs professionals are woefully trained to face and address multiculturalism through an authentic voice.
   • How are student affairs professionals using their own experiences as a culturally being to articulate and navigate being white on a college campus? How are they owning the struggle?

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Qualitative Research
• Seeking cultural description, analyzing in-depth and complex processes (identity), researching little-known phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall, 1985a, 1987). Articulating the lived experience.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry
• Narrative allows the researcher to use the words of the participant to construct the meaning-making involved in whiteness, white privilege, and multiculturalism.

Data Collection
• The men will be contacted initially through electronic mail, and by telephone. Once the individuals confirm their willingness to participate, we will select a date and time to meet. Two interviews will be conducted in the student’s environment, so as to provide the greatest amount of comfort to the participant. Interview two will occur electronically. Notes and journals will also be included.

Data Analysis
• The data will be arranged through the use of four of Lofland’s (1971) codes: activities that shape who we are; meanings that we apply to those activities in life; our participation in the activities, or rather, how we have been embedded in the individual activities; and our relationships with multiple people or events based on those activities.

Data Display
• Data will be displayed in narrative format, with the participant’s stories as centrally focused.

Limitations
• First, a sample size of ten to twelve is simply not large enough to draw extensive conclusions nationwide. Second, study is limited to the students in one region of the United States, may not prove replicable in other parts of the country. Third, all participants come from student affairs preparation programs may expose a special type of individual who is atypical in a college environment.

Researcher and Subjectivity Statement
• The use of external auditors and conceptual notes to process observations and preliminary data will assist in the subjectivity of my study.

Veracity and Trustworthiness
• Triangulation (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, in Maxwell, 2005). Creswell’s (1998) eight standards for qualitative research. (publication standards for social researchers, honesty and authenticity in how the information is shared, serving the needs of the community the researcher serves, using the voice of the participants whenever possible, critical subjectivity, reciprocity and mutual sharing of information with the participants, respect for the sacred relationships between the researcher and participant, and the sharing of the final product with the participants) (pp. 195-196).