A Critical Race Perspective of Police Shooting of Unarmed Black Males in the United States: Implications for Social Work

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Recent high-profile killings of unarmed Black males underscore a stark reality in America: though Black men have the same constitutional rights as all other citizens of the United States, in practice their rights are often violated. The negative stereotype that all Black males are criminals has created an environment that perpetuates the killing of unarmed Black males by police officers as justifiable self-defense. In this article, critical race theory (CRT) provides a theoretical lens to examine and understand the persistent racism underlying the social inequities that have been thrust upon Black males in the United States of America. The authors conclude with implications and recommendations for social work education.

Keywords: Black killings; police brutality; excessive force; Black males; unarmed Black males; critical race theory

Although it has been over 50 years since the passage of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, American Blacks are still stereotyped, stigmatized, dehumanized, and blamed for many of the social ills with which the United States grapples (Alexander, 2010; Cooper, 2015; Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014). While in theory Black males are afforded the same constitutional and civil rights as all citizens, in practice they are pilloried, and their rights are often violated and denied

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(Alexander, 2010; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Croll, 2014; Dow, 2016). Black males are negatively stereotyped as menacing, criminals, inherently violent, and prone to deviant tendencies (Alexander, 2010; Lipman, 1998; Trawalter, Todd, Baird, & Richeson, 2008). These stereotypes create and perpetuate an environment that justifies the abuse and killing of Black males by the police, often in the name of self-defense (Park & Kim, 2015; Sim, Correll, & Sadler, 2013; Trawalter et al., 2008). As will be discussed later, the abuse and killing of unarmed Black males by police has been a consistent feature of a country rooted in White supremacy that has evolved through slavery, the Jim Crow era, and the civil rights movement (Aymer, 2016; Battalora, 2013; Robinson, 2017). However, with the advent of cell phones with camera capability and the rise of social media, there has been increased pubic visibility to the issue of police brutality toward Black males, leading to increased public outcry (Aymer, 2016; McLaughlin, 2015).

Social work is a profession with particular focus on the dignity and well-being of vulnerable populations (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). The negative stereotypes about Black males that justify their devaluation and killing by the police are therefore relevant for social work practice. Drawing on critical race theory (CRT), we examine the historical context of the oppression and killing of Black males by police, to highlight the patterns of injustice against Black males in the United States. By examining the historical context of the killing of Black males in the United States, we seek to underscore the need for a social justice profession, such as social work, to be intentional and to develop race-specific responses in the training of social workers in relation to the shootings of Black males. Although Black women are also victims of police violence, and their deaths are equally concerning, Black males have a higher rate of vulnerability to police shootings, hence the focus on Black males in this article (http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/unarmed/). Our experiences and perspectives are presented as Black faculty members who teach at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and who sometimes get resistance from students when teaching about racial inequality. We present approaches on how we teach, advocate, and address the social inequity that Black males face in contemporary American society. We conclude with recommendations for teaching race and oppression with implications for social work practice.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE POLICING OF BLACK MALES

As noted by some scholars, police brutality toward Black males is not a new phenomenon in the history of the United States (Alexander, 2010; Aymer, 2016; Cooper, 2015). In this section, critical race theory (CRT) is employed as an analytical tool to argue in support of the assertion that the dehumanization and killing of Black males are key features of a racialized America, a society that has institutionalized and thus normalized such patterns (Battalora, 2013; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Coates, 2015). CRT emerged from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and draws from a body of literature which seeks to study and transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, CRT considers the influence that White supremacy has had on the American psyche (Crenshaw et al., 1995) and can be further extended to shed more light on police brutality (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) by providing a foundation for understanding the historical racialized

experiences of Black men in the United States (Aymer, 2016). CRT thus provides an important premise of the historical context of how present-day racial inequality and oppression should be analyzed, and illustrates how killings and violence by police are a consistent and persistent inescapable truth for Black men. Additionally, CRT captures how racism is structurally embedded within U.S. institutions such as law enforcement, increasing the likelihood of disparate treatment of marginalized groups through the social construction of race to keep them subjugated (Bell, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

The tenets of CRT are as follows: (a) the primacy of racism and race in the United States; (b) a questioning of the notion of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy in laws and social interactions; (c) questioning of ahistorism of the racialized order; (d) a commitment to social justice; (e) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (f) a multidisciplinary perspective (Crenshaw, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000; Zuberi, 2011). In terms of the relationship with police in many marginalized communities, a central tenet of CRT is that racism is engrained in the fabric of American society and works to administer benefits and disadvantages to individuals through the construction of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Racial categories such as White and Black—where the former is ascribed with nearly everything that is good, and the latter deemed to be associated with nearly everything bad (Battalora, 2013; Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014)—make Blacks, males in particular, a greater target of police killings and abuse.

From the CRT perspective, Bonilla-Silva (2015) argues that while prejudice or implicit biases play a role in the racialized America, prejudice does not perpetuate racism. He supports his argument by explaining that if prejudice is the issue, then variation in individual-level prejudices should lead to randomness in the system of racial domination. However, given that racial domination seems consistent and highly rigid in the United States, racism needs to be understood beyond individual prejudices. From this contention, it is conceivable to suggest that the system of racial domination is structured in and through the social institutions that shape social relations. Racial domination continues unabated because the individuals who operate in social institutions (education, health, legal systems, politics, economics, and criminal justice) follow the path of least resistance to the racial protocol (procedures, rules, cultural norms, styles, and orientations) of those same social institutions whose foundations are rooted in racism (Battalora, 2013; Bonill-Silva, 2015; Erickson, 2016).

CRT thus reveals that historical antecedents provide the context for analyzing contemporary forms of oppression (Alexander, 2010; Aymer, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This proposition is consistent with the way social workers apply genogram at the microlevel practice to assess and understand the effect of intergenerational patterns on the here-and-now of clients' situations (Hartman, 1995). The application of CRT helps us to understand that the police killing and torture of Black males today is akin to the criminalization, torture, and killing of Blacks in the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States (Aymer, 2016; Battalora, 2013). Some scholars have argued from a critical perspective that the goal of these police killings and the dehumanization of Black males is to advance and perpetuate White supremacy (Aymer, 2016; Battalora, 2013; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Irby, 2014; Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014). In a more practical sense, it is about ensuring that a group of people socially categorized as Whites, men in particular, have the exclusive right

to power, wealth, material possessions, dominant status, and the right to women's sexuality (Battalora, 2013; Irby, 2014).

Although Black males are not lynched today, it may only suggest that racism is not static, it evolves and adapts to fit a given regime in time and space (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). In other words, police brutality and the killing of Black males are not new phenomena, rather they reflect the unabated continuation of racism (ideology stemming from White supremacy) in America (Aymer, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Racism thus works to provide actors with certain social and psychological orientations (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Given the centrality of the police in creating and maintaining the racialized order in the U.S (Cooper, 2015; Nelson, 2000), it could be inferred that police are socialized through the law to keep Black males under control to achieve the interests of White supremacists (Alexander, 2010; Battalora, 2013; Hooks, 1995).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young Black males are at a higher risk of being shot to death by police officers (Dow, 2016; Swaine & McCarthy, 2017). According to a report prepared by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the killing of Blacks by "law enforcement, security guards, and stand-your-ground vigilantes" has increased from one in every 36 hours in the first part of 2012 to one in every 28 hours by that year's end (Ragland, 2014). These estimates are to be taken with caution, however, because of potential underestimation; not all police departments report these types of deaths (Gabrielson, Jones, & Sagara, 2014). Estimates of recent yearly reports submitted to the FBI by local police departments from 2005 to 2012 suggest that police killings of Blacks occurred nearly two times a week (Johnson, Hoyer, & Heath, 2014). Similarly, research analysts at ProPublica (a nonpartisan think tank) have reported that African American males are 21 times more likely to be shot to death by police officers than their White counterparts (Gabrielson et al., 2014). They examined 1,217 deadly police shootings from 2010 to 2012 in the federal database and found that 15- to 19-year-old Blacks "were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million, while just 1.47 per million White males in that age range died at the hands of police" (Gabrielson et al., 2014, para. 2).

Journalist Lauren Barbato wrote about the Bureau of Justice Statistics data on arrest-related deaths in the United States between 2003 and 2009. She found that 95.5% of those 4,813 arrest-related deaths were men (Barbato, 2015) and Gabrielson, Grochowski-Jones, and Sagara noted that they are sometimes Black boys; according to their study, 41 teens (14 years or younger) were reportedly killed by police from 1980 to 2012. Of these, 27 were Black, eight were White, four were Hispanic, and one was Asian (Gabrielson et al., 2014, para. 15). In recent times, with increasing public outcry due to the elevation of news coverage of police killings of Black males, the country is finally waking up to the problem (McLaughlin, 2015). *Time Magazine's* April 9, 2015 cover featured the headline "Black Lives Matter," and in an article in that issue, journalist David Von Drehle highlighted some of the high-profile cases where dozens of Black males have been killed by police or authority figures. In February 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed after an altercation in Sanford, Florida with a volunteer neighborhood watchman. On

July 17, 2014, Eric Garner, 43, died after being wrestled to the ground by police officers and placed in a chokehold in New York city. Later that summer on August 9, 2014, a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri fatally shot unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown. On April 4, 2015, Walter Scott, 53, was shot and killed as he was fleeing from a police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina; the shooting was captured on video. On April 12, 2015, 25-year-old Freddie Gray was arrested by police. He sustained life-threatening injuries and died several days later in Baltimore, Maryland (Von Drehle, 2015).

Research supports the accounts suggesting that Black males in the United States are seen as dangerous, criminal, menacing, and threatening, characteristics that are used to explain their killings at the hands of police (Aymer, 2016; Battalora, 2013; Cooper, 2015; Dow, 2016; Trawalter et al., 2008; Wacquant, 2002). Given the growing public outcry against the dehumanization of Black men by police officers, in addition to repeated calls from all corners of American society for criminal justice reform (Craven, 2016; Koring, 2016), the time to fully address this problem is now.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF POLICE RELATIONS WITH BLACK MALES

To better understand the current police relationship with Black males, a review of the origin and intent of policing in America, and how it has evolved into its current state, is crucial.

The fear of Black men by White society goes back to the earliest days of slavery in the early 1600s in this country. Along with this fear was the imposition of criminal sanctions upon Black slaves. Southern states created slave codes to control the behavior and movement of slaves and created a separate and more severe set of crimes and punishments for slaves (Bell, 2008). Slavery was a system of excessive brutality, and slaves reacted to the brutality in different ways, including the conspiracy to revolt (Franklin, 1998). The largest and deadliest slave uprising in U.S. history was Nat Turner's rebellion in Southampton, Virginia on August 21, 1831. During the rebellion, 60 Whites were killed (Franklin, 1998). Turner was captured several weeks later, tried, convicted of conspiracy to rebel and insurrection, and sentenced to be executed. He was hanged and his corpse was beheaded. That revolt set off a new wave of repressive legislation in the South toward slaves.

The history of the police force in America has also been linked to the institution of Slave Patrols and Night Watchers during the era of slavery (e.g., Dulaney, 1996; Gilbert & Ray, 2016; Kappeler, 2014; Robinson, 2017). These patrollers were usually White men who were authorized to control the movement and behaviors of slaves, to prevent escapes and uprisings (Cooper, 2015; Nelson, 2000). The slave patrollers were sanctioned to maintain the system of enslavement and the established racial order (Dulaney, 1996). The concept was so popular that in 1837, the 100 member slave patrol in Charleston, South Carolina was the largest police force in the United States (Gaines & Kappeler, 2005; Shelden, 2001). The patrollers could operate with virtually no accountability and thus adopted brutal tactics such as castration, maiming, and lynching to accomplish their goals (Anderson & Anderson, 2006; Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Lynching became widely used as an effective tool for policing Black communities (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2007)

and depicting Black males as a social problem (Muhammad, 2011). From 1881 to 1968, over 4,000 lynching cases were recorded, 70% were Black males (Gabrielson, Jones, & Sagara, 2014; Parks, Johnson, McDaniel, & Gladden, 2014). The majority of the Black males lynched in the report were accused of violating a racial norm such as breaking a curfew, trying to escape, and looking at a White woman (Cooper, 2015; Loewen, 2005). Ward (2012) approximated the rate of killing of Blacks (particularly those that resided in the South) through burning and hanging from 1890 to 1917 at about two to three times per week.

When slavery ended in 1865, there was a brief period known as Reconstruction, where Black males gained full rights of citizenship. However, Reconstruction ended in 1877 when President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal troops from the South. Following the end of Reconstruction, the South began to deny Blacks the social and political rights they had recently gained. This was the beginning of a sweeping era of intimidation and violence directed at Blacks by White terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, determined to regain White supremacy and to gain total control over Blacks in the South. There were very limited efforts by law enforcement and local governments to protect the rights and liberty of Blacks (Nelson, 2000). The ex-confederate government at that time did not provide protection for Blacks, and in some situations they created a nonprotective environment by passing a series of "Black Codes" that economically and socially disenfranchised Blacks (Cooper, 2015; Nelson, 2000). The acts of violence continued into the late 19th century, a period that marked the emergence of formal police forces in various cities and counties in America (Sidney, 1983).

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the doctrine of "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and Black Americans were reduced once again to second-class citizens in all facets of American life. This era of Jim Crow would last into the second half of the 20th century. In 1955, a 14-year-old Black boy, Emmett Till, traveled South from Chicago to stay with relatives for the summer in Money, Mississippi. He did not know the customs and unwritten laws of the Jim Crow South and whistled at a White woman when leaving a country store (Williams, 2013). Three days later, the woman's husband and brother-in-law dragged Till from his uncle's home, beat him savagely, shot him in the head, and tied a cotton gin fan around his neck and threw him in the Tallahatchie River.

More recent times saw rioting break out in Los Angeles in 1992, after the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department officers charged with assault and the use of excessive force in the beating of Rodney King after a high speed police chase through Los Angeles County. In the two decades following the Los Angeles riots, the issues of police misconduct, racial bias, and the mass incarceration of African American males have grabbed the public spotlight and led to calls for criminal justice reform. There was a renewed "call to action" in the academy after the publication of legal scholar Michelle Alexander's seminal work, *The New Jim Crow* (2010).

Many argue that the current institution of policing or law enforcement is the closest approximation of such socio-historic tenets rooted in the earlier days of racialized social control (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Gilbert & Ray, 2016). Chambliss (1994) argued that police departments are reflections of the socio-culture structural make-up of the larger White supremacist society. Thus, police brutality toward Black males is a consistent feature of the racialized system of the United States.

According to Cooper (2015), policing and race in America are mutually constitutive. A central but implicit function of the police is to enforce the racial hierarchy of the country. Cooper (2015) therefore argued "one dimension of Blackness was living with the persistent and pernicious threat of police intervention, while freedom from this threat helped to define "Whiteness," particularly for affluent Whites" (p. 3).

The last few decades have witnessed mass expansion and militarization of police forces across the nation, especially in urban communities. Research has shown that police in disadvantaged neighborhoods, neighborhoods with minority populations, and neighborhoods with high crime rates use more force (Smith, 1986; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). In such neighborhoods, the disadvantaged conditions—often a product of patterns of segregation—are viewed by police as an inherent pathology of the inhabitants that warrants force (Erickson, 2016). The result has been the intended or unintended perpetuation of the historic trend of the systemic culture of oppression and marginalization of Black males (Cornileus, 2013). Consequently, Black males are profiled as criminals, deviant, unapproachable, and to be greatly feared (Cornileus, 2013). This profile often influences how the police treat Black males (Hutchison, 1996; Bell, Hopson, Craig, & Robinson, 2014).

The negative relations between police and Black males continue to take a toll on Black communities—the loss of the lives of many Black fathers and husbands, as well as leaders of their community, and the nation. Any attempt to have a meaningful discussion aimed at addressing the issue should address the foundational ideologies that have shaped the current culture of policing. Through this process, a new form of policing that respects and upholds the civil rights of all citizens, including Black males, should be constructed. The social justice implications of the killing of Black males and their dehumanization by the police in the U.S. situate social work with a responsibility for a new form of policing that is fair and equitable for all, including Black males. For social workers to be change agents in responding to these heinous acts, the social work profession needs to be explicit in talking and teaching about racism and racial oppression in the United States. In the section that follows, we offer some skills and tools for teaching racism in social work.

TEACHING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS ABOUT POLICE BRUTALITY AND THE KILLING OF BLACK MALES

In the following section, we present four approaches that enhance how we teach to address the social injustice of racism and oppression that sustain the dehumanization of Black males.

Creating a Safe Classroom Atmosphere by Acknowledging and Validating Feelings

Our experiences have shown that to successfully teach about racism and police brutality toward Black males, instructors must acknowledge and validate students' feelings regarding tension, conflict, guilt, and despair, and discussions about race may evoke among Whites and Blacks or other minorities (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014). The racialized system in the U.S is organized in such a way that it allocates

privileges to Whites collectively. Therefore, when talking about racism and race, Whites are more likely to feel uncomfortable because it can immediately situate them as racist, or they may be concerned about the possibility of saying the wrong things (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014; Tatum, 1992). Such feelings can evoke resistance and avoidance on the part of Whites as a defense strategy. To defuse such conflicts and tensions, instructors should point them out and normalize the fact that talking about race can be difficult. However, the instructor must demonstrate to students that teaching about racism and race is meant to help eliminate these tensions and provide them with competencies for resolving such tensions (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014).

As Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits, police brutality as a form of racism is rooted in the foundation of the United States. Therefore, students should understand that while they may not be inherently racist or did not invent racism, they could become a tool to perpetuate racism. Teaching about racism and race is not meant to make anybody uncomfortable, but to help discover the underlying mechanisms by which it operates, in order to refuse participation in it, and to disrupt it. For Blacks and other minorities, who may have experienced the impact of police brutality, whether directly or indirectly, discussions of racism and police abuse of Black males may produce overwhelming feelings of resentment or ridicule. The instructor needs to acknowledge and talk about these issues and communicate expectations that assure students that their feelings and perspectives will be recognized and respected. Creating a safe classroom setting allows students to be open to talk and share their own experiences, while respecting others' experiences (Croll, 2014; Tatum, 1992). While the first day of class is usually used to communicate classroom safety and set expectations for the class, these need to be reiterated in subsequent sessions.

Context for the Development of Critical Consciousness About Institutional Racism

In the discourse around racism, acknowledging the structural aspects of race is effective in the classroom. Instructors therefore should help students to understand that racism in America is institutionally structured (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Croll, 2014; Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014) and uses socially constructed categories, as well as racial protocols and procedures, in institutions to shape social interactions with the goal of advancing and maintaining White supremacy (Battalora, 2013; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Croll, 2014). The participants in the racialized order in the United States and its institutions can be compared to actors playing different roles in a play, where the script calls for reproducing and reinforcing White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014). Many educators describe that they do not see color in the classroom (Milner IV, 2012). However, by claiming to not see race, and therefore not talking about it, we consciously or unconsciously act out the exact script that the racialized stage designs for us (Milner IV, 2012; Tatum, 1992).

Talking and teaching about racism and race in classrooms in a social justice-oriented profession such as social work then becomes about helping students learn how one can refuse to act out the ascribed role on this racialized stage. By utilizing CRT, instructors should help students, Whites in particular, know that while they may not have played a role in implementing institutionalized racism, the system is intended to preserve whiteness as the status quo (Battalora, 2013; Crenshaw et al.,

1995). Providing opportunities for students to explore how racism and race impacts them, and the extent to which racism and its atrocities persist in our society, has shown to be successful in engaging students. Students develop a critical under-standing of racism and the mechanisms by which racism works (e.g., the norms, values, cultural processes, organizational, and policy procedures). This can be accomplished through journaling, role-play, watching documentaries, debating, and small group discussions related to racism and oppression. These activities provide opportunities for students to develop a critical self-reflection about White privilege, and subsequently, engage in transformative actions that are social justice-oriented (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2014; Tatum, 1992).

Provide Opportunity for Self-Generated Knowledge

As part of the assignments in teaching racism and race, students are asked to look on a weekly basis for news items or social media blogs about police killings of Black males, describe the incident, provide self-reflection about the encounter, and sug-gest ways to improve police relations with Black males. Students may challenge or resist examples of racism item brought up by the instructor, particularly instructors of color (Tatum, 1992). However, when students can discover information on their own about the impact of racism, and think through it themselves, they are more likely to engage in actions and behaviors that can dismantle racism and the oppres-sion of others.

Connecting Students With Data-Driven Racial Identity Exploration

In a course about working with African American families, students were asked to read articles related to racial identity (e.g., "Black and White Racial Identity" by (Helms Janet, 1990) and discuss their own process of racial exploration as part of the assignment. This process is helpful in exposing students to research and pro-vides the opportunity for a personal connection that can lead to meaningful impact on students' ability to undo racism. Students were able to discuss identity, forming a distinction between individual self-concept and racial self-concept, described as *socially imposed self-concept by the broader society*. In providing their reflections about this assignment, it was interesting to see how White students engaged in the discussion about the need for racial literacy to expose racism and its intent. The lesson learned from this assignment was that in teaching racism and oppression in PWIs, data-driven assignments help students to make a personal connection to research on racism. Moreover, the assignments give students the opportunity to pro-cess their reflections in more practical terms of neutralizing resistance about racism and encouraging students toward transformative actions.

In another exercise, students were asked to examine how, as social workers, they can have a positive impact on the life outcomes of marginalized populations through an analysis of texts designed to highlight salient issues for African American males. At the end of these book reviews, students were asked to include an additional sec-tion titled "My Thoughts" and support their personal reflections with sources from social work peer-reviewed journals. They were told to discuss the following: (a) In light of the social unrest in Ferguson, MO and the police killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, what are three of the most salient issues facing Black men and men

of color today? (b) Is this text relevant for addressing the issues currently faced by Black men and if so, how? (c) What three intervention strategies you would propose to address the issues that you identified in item (a) above? Finally, pursuant to their book review, students participated in a roundtable discussion of the text. All students were given equal opportunities to participate in the discussion, and all critical points of view were considered. This assignment has been well-received; Black students have made the connection between past and present oppressive treatment of Black males by society and police, and many White students also made the connection, although some do not, in light of data that support oppressive practices against Black males.

Understanding One's Own Positionality and Bringing in Different Views

Viewing racism and race from a systems' perspective, the instructor's ability to acknowledge who he or she is, his or her positionality, and the issue of concern is simultaneously a whole and a part of a more complex issue significantly influencing the instructor's perspective (Anderson, Carter, & Lowe, 1999). Such recognition allows the instructor to appreciate his or her own limitations and biases that can potentially undermine effective teaching on racism and police brutality of Black males (Croll, 2014; Weiner, 2014). In our own experiences teaching in PWIs, we employ different modes of teaching course materials, including guest lectures, films, books, and articles from different voices to provide students the opportunity to hear diverse perspectives that constitute the American experience. For example, in one of the classes, a guest lecturer was invited to talk about the concept of cultural tolerance as it relates to understanding and empathizing with the historic oppression of African Americans. In our teaching experiences, guest lectures of this nature were effective and beneficial to both Black and White students in understanding the reality of race as a social construction. This is very critical, particularly for faculty of color who teach about race. In PWIs, using a White ally to provide a perspective on whiteness and White privilege, and the impact on non-Whites (Black males in particular), is a powerful way to help students develop the critical reflection needed for transformative action to dismantle racism (Croll, 2014).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

We conclude this article by discussing implications for social work education from three dimensions. First, there is the need for a racial literacy project in the United States to help expunge and replace the negative image of Black males and to engage in actions that support and promote the dignity and worth of Black males. There is a false claim that the ascension of the first African American president, and the upward mobility of some Black professionals, have erased the past history of the dehumanization of Black males (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). However, with the advances in technology and social media that now aid the coverage of police brutality and killings of Black males, and this contradict that notion, America must grapple with the reality of this postracial claim. To this end, we propose the introduction and

application of explicit conversation and teaching about racism and race in a wide range of curricula in schools.

Additionally, we propose education on racial literacy through the lens of different media (especially print, radio, television, and social media) to educate the public and highlight instances of discrimination against Black males. We propose that social workers be trained to take the lead in this media advocacy effort. One way this type of social work education can help social work students develop skills for this kind of advocacy is through course assignments like the ones listed above. As described in our approaches to engaging students in talking about racism, course assignments that enable students to generate self-knowledge and critical reflections about racism and its impact on marginalized groups can be a powerful tool for advocacy initiatives to advance the worth and dignity of Black males. While social workers can provide advocacy through many different outlets (e.g., professional development activities, training at work places, social actions, and research), we believe that the media is a significant outlet to reach a larger audience. For instance, if the public became aware and conscious of a weekly media report that spotlights discriminatory and racist practices against Black males in different sectors of the society, it is hypothesized that stereotypical and discriminatory tendencies could be significantly reduced. While this suggestion may be considered by some as utopian and unrealistic, it could be argued that true healing, reconciliation, and "re-dignification" of Black males starts with the same media outlets that have been used over the years to depersonalize, dehumanize, and demonize them (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014a, Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014b).

Second, we recommend a new paradigm of teaching social inequity that begins in elementary education instead of higher education, as currently done. At the elementary to high school level, we propose that the six tenets of CRT discussed above be taught to students at a digestible level. Children are more likely to develop their perception of Black males early in elementary school (Young, 2011). The innocence, color-blindness, and empathy of children should be positively harnessed in educating 21st century students to respect the dignity and worth of Black males. Furthermore, it is recommended that content about social inequity be taught across disciplines and curricula in the educational system using a hybrid of the teaching and narrative experiences. For instance, inviting a White male who is an advocate for eliminating police brutality against Black males might be better received than a Black teacher or advocate on the same issue.

In addition, social work educators, irrespective of racial identification, should be more intentional in integrating racism and race content in both undergraduate and graduate level courses instead of having mostly only electives, or minor content within more general courses, focus on social inequity. Social work educators should be strategic, intentional, and take the lead in addressing the dehumanization of Black males in the U.S., thereby preparing social work professionals in private and public agencies to stand up for the fair treatment of minority clients. Race conscious education may be the starting point. Teaching about the history of the race construct allows students to step back, move out of the personal, and begin to see that they (and we) are part of this historical composition and how we see the world stems from our cultural conditioning. This approach also provides a sense of possibility that which we have constructed can surely be deconstructed and reconstructed (Okun, 2014, p.58)

Third, social work students, professors, and practitioners should take a more activist role in ameliorating the dehumanization of the Black males. For instance, this social work activism could take the form of identifying specific neighborhoods, companies, or agencies that are involved in discriminatory practices, then mobilizing community resources to address such social inequity. Often, social workers are reactive, rather than proactive, in advocating and advancing the well-being of minorities, especially Black males. Further, social work activism can also include influencing policy and legislative outcomes and empowering or collaborating with Black institutions such as the Black church to address this malaise.

The social work profession is uniquely positioned and driven by principles and values that can have a substantial impact on educating society on the worth and dignity of Black males. Social work activism, focused on restoring the humanity and respect for Black males by using a multidisciplinary approach in concert with institutions such as the Black church and the news media, can help to usher in a new era of cordial race relations in this country.

CONCLUSION

The recent reports of police shootings of Black males have gained national attention and have caused renewed social activism for justice within society. Many Black males throughout the nation feel threatened and are apprehensive about any situation that results in an encounter with law enforcement officials. Social scientists and others are diligently seeking ways to stop the unnecessary deaths of Black males at the hands of police. Further research should explore what creates and perpetuates an environment where the police, who are charged with protecting all citizens, perpetrate lethal violence against those whom they should safeguard. The authors hope to add to the important discussion of this issue by proposing ideas and teaching strategies for social work educators for ameliorating this problem.

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