Guest editorial

Broadening the conversation: why Black Lives Matter

There was no good time to write this introductory paper to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) special issue. Naively, we sought to find a time of reflection in which we could consider how cases of anti-black police brutality, hate crimes, and ongoing systems of anti-black discrimination and disparities affect us all; black and non-black. However, honestly that time never came. We cannot recall a time during the production of this special issue when there was not a case of anti-black intimidation, violence, or harassment, nor a time in which we were not affected as individuals and as faculty.

The weekend we finally set aside time to write was the weekend of the Charlottesville assault on humanity and human sensibility. The Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and others from the alt-right movement converged on Charlottesville and the University of Virginia to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee while being protected by an armed militia. Diversity advocates came to wage a counter-protest but ultimately there was violence, and Heather Hyer was killed as a 20-year-old neo-Nazi drove directly into the crowd. So far, subsequent protests have not resulted in the same tragic outcome, but the growing visibility of the alt-right makes the relevance of BLM even more significant.

However, attention to the blatant hate of the Klan and neo-Nazis should not distract us from the persistent ongoing systemic and more insidious ways in which black lives seem not to matter. Reality dictates that we address both. In this commentary, we first provide a brief history of the BLM movement, then outline numerous domains in which we see its relevance, and finally give an overview of the scholarship presented in this special issue. Readers will see that social science researchers continue to reveal ways in which blacks encounter access and treatment discrimination (Goff *et al.*, 2014; Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990; Morris and Perry, 2016; Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009; Williams and Collins, 2001). These studies demonstrate that, in addition to anti-black bias guiding policing and the justice system, evidence of anti-black racism appears within educational contexts, workplaces, and healthcare settings; and such sentiments affect children as well as adults.

History of BLM

BLM is a chapter-based national organization founded on July 13, 2013, by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza ("A HerStory," 2017). The organization's name originated from a hashtag that was posted to social media shortly after the nation gathered to bear witness to the murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black teenage boy. Trayvon was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old white man, who was later arrested and acquitted of all charges. Three queer, black women took to social media to express their rage and intolerance of the taking of an innocent black life by using what was then just a popular Twitter handle. #BlackLivesMatter quickly spread among black people and allies as a statement of solidarity, and has now evolved to mean much more. The garnered attention from mainstream media, political figures, cultural workers, artists, and social activists has since transformed outcries for justice into a nationally recognized black liberation movement ("A HerStory," 2017).

The BLM organization raises awareness of the violations against the human rights of black persons in this country, whether they be adult or child, free or incarcerated; man, woman, or gender neutral, cis, queer, or trans; citizen or undocumented. And as incidents

of exclusion, mistreatment, violence, and other threats to black life rise, so do the visibility, support, and efforts of BLM. Through various strategies, BLM mobilizes large numbers of black people and allies around the country, and globally, who then take action to address social injustices. These actions take the form of rallies, town hall meetings, conferences with elected officials, calls for legislative reform, boycotts, and other methods of protest. The aim is to fight anti-black racism, encourage dialogue among black people, and encourage social action and engagement ("A HerStory," 2017). Tired of existing in a nation whose history and present practices carry strong evidence suggesting the insignificance of black bodies, the originators of #BlackLivesMatter created a movement that has now inspired millions to become agents of change. The social and behavioral sciences document the need for change throughout almost every societal domain including the policing and the justice system, education, workplaces, and even healthcare settings.

Policing and justice

Anti-black biases affect every aspect of the criminal justice system, from policing to sentencing. Social cognition research reveals that people automatically associate weapons more with blacks than with whites (Payne, 2006), and they are more inclined to "see" guns mistakenly when a black person holds an innocuous object (e.g. cell phone) than when a white person holds such objects (Correll *et al.*, 2002). Mock jurors (Levinson *et al.*, 2010) and defense attorneys (Eisenberg and Johnson, 2003) alike associate more negative words with blacks than with whites. Furthermore, the more implicitly biased they are against blacks, the more mock jurors interpret ambiguous evidence as indicative of guilt (Levinson *et al.*, 2010). Until we come to understand the pervasiveness of anti-black racism, we will continue to see black children like Tamir Rice perceived as older than they are and therefore less innocent (Goff *et al.*, 2014), have their actions perceived as more threatening and violent (Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015) which legitimizes violence toward them, even at the hands of the police.

Education

In educational environments, there are lower expectations of black students regarding their academic potential (Boser *et al.*, 2014), and one study from the Netherlands found that lower expectations stemmed from teachers' implicit racial biases against students of color (in this case, Turkish and Moroccan students) and contributed to the racial achievement gap (Van den Bergh *et al.*, 2010). Such racial bias is evident in classroom discipline as well. Teachers deliver harsher evaluations of black students' behavior and perceive a greater need for their suspension from school (Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015).

These biases persist beyond the elementary school classroom; they also affect academic scholarship in higher education. For example, one study found that black applicants were 10 percentage points less likely than white applicants to be awarded funding from the National Institutes of Health (Ginther *et al.*, 2011). These findings were obtained after controlling for relevant factors such as educational background, previous research awards, and publication records. Given the importance of external funding for promotion and tenure in many institutions, these data suggest that blacks, and their scholarship, will continue to be underrepresented in higher education.

For black graduate students, there exist disparate experiences between them and their white peers, with minority students expressing feelings of isolation, tokenism, and perceived discrimination. Factors contributing to these feelings are the racial disparities in top graduate programs, such as lack of minority representation in the student body, few minority faculty and mentors, and the omission of diverse perspectives in the assigned curriculum (Gildersleeve *et al.*, 2011; Grapin *et al.*, 2015). When black graduate

students voice their concerns and discuss frameworks relevant to their identity as students of color to compensate for its absence in their coursework, they are often met with discouragement and opposition for deviating from materials that push the social narrative of the majority race (Dowdy *et al.*, 2000). This resistance signals lack of acceptance and disregard of one's racial narrative and reality, and perpetuates the exclusionary status quo in higher education.

Black faculty members are not exempt from negative race-based experiences in higher education. Making up roughly 6 percent of the professoriate, both males and females combined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), black faculty members are 2.5 times more likely than their white colleagues to report high levels of stress due to discrimination (Eagan and Garvey, 2015). Not only do they report little support and negative interracial interactions with colleagues, students contribute to negative experiences and outcomes for black faculty members as well. Students of the majority race often question their knowledge and level of expertise, contributing to feelings of isolation and oppression among black professors (Eagan and Garvey, 2015). For blacks who have attained the highest levels of education, the rewards for these faculties are inadequate given that they do not extinguish their exclusion and perceived inferiority in higher education institutions.

Workplace
The mistreatment of black lives in organizations is an old tale, with numerous studies showing discrimination at various stages of the talent management process. Organizations with low minority representation in their recruitment materials coupled with messages of colorblindness rather than multiculturalism create distrust and discomfort among black applicants (Purdie-Vaughns *et al.*, 2008). At the selection phase, job applicants with stereotypically black names receive call-backs from recruiters at substantially lower rates than applicants with traditionally white names (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004). With regard to performance appraisal, blacks are evaluated less favorably and are perceived to be less promotable than whites, but do not exhibit behaviors warranting stagnation (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990). In terms of organizational climate, black men are harassed for not being "man" enough, which is interpreted as not "white" enough (Berdahl and Moore, 2006). Just last year, an organization rescinded a job offer to a black woman because of her dreadlocks, and was backed by the ruling of a Circuit Court Judge (Greene, 2016).

Indeed, blacks and other minorities are all too often targets of overt discrimination and harassment. Like clockwork, the beginning of each calendar year welcomes enforcement and litigation data published by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Each report details the types of workplace discrimination charges filed nationwide and their percentage breakdowns. In 2014, of the 31,072 racial discrimination charges filed, 82 percent of the plaintiffs were African Americans (EEOC Releases Fiscal Year 2014, Enforcement and Litigation Data, 2015). Following the trends of previous years, in 2016 race discrimination was again the most common allegation under Title VII, totaling 35.3 percent of the 91,443 filings and outnumbering all other categories (e.g. disability, sex age, national origin, religion, etc.; EEOC Releases Fiscal Year 2016 Enforcement and Litigation Data, 2017). It can be assumed that an overwhelming majority of these complaints came from African Americans as well. In a nation where the workplace continues to welcome racial minorities at high rates and emphasizes a mantra of diversity and inclusion, the number of black employees claiming workplace injustice should raise speculations. Is the term "diversity" inclusive of black bodies?

While members of the EEOC and other organizations continue the fight for employment rights afforded to black employees under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, black lives now

tackle the more subtle acts of discrimination at work known as racial microaggressions (Sue *et al.*, 2007). Such discrimination is harder to detect and regulate given the ambiguity of perpetrators' intent, yet its deleterious effects on turnover intentions and health outcomes are clear (Lim *et al.*, 2008).

Healthcare

Despite the well-documented health-related consequences of experiencing overt and subtle forms of discrimination, blacks continue to receive poorer healthcare than whites. Perhaps the last institution in which one might expect evidence of how BLM less is in healthcare given the oath of physicians and nurses to "do no harm." However, the literature on racial disparities in healthcare provides numerous examples of ways in which black lives seem not to matter. For example, a 2001 presentation at the meeting of Society for Investigative Dermatology suggested that 50 percent of dermatologists surveyed indicated that they were not trained to detect skin cancer, one of the fastest growing types of cancer, in black skin. Buster *et al.* (2012) have further called for a significant review of medical school curriculum to be more inclusive of black and brown skin in order to ultimately save more black and brown lives.

Hoffman *et al.*'s (2016) study of students in a prestigious medical school further illustrates this point. These medical students perpetuated numerous racial myths related to biological differences between blacks and whites that subsequently reinforce racial health disparities. These students believed that blacks had thicker skin, experiences less pain, and subsequently these students intended to provide less pain relief to blacks relative to whites who reported the same self-assessments of their pain levels. These unfortunate findings reflect the "superhuman" bias attributed to blacks by whites in a series of studies conducted by Waytz *et al.* (2015). The superhuman qualities blacks are expected to possess also make them more vulnerable to pain and lessen their opportunity to actually be treated for pain by health providers. The bias that blacks do not feel pain in the same way as whites has been documented in children as young as seven, and is reliably documented by age ten (Dore *et al.*, 2014).

These anti-black treatments occur across the lifespan until death. A recent ethnographic study found that racial biases in the treatment of blacks and whites extend to the very end of life (Elliott *et al.*, 2016). These researchers observed that physicians treated white patients who were elderly and dying with more care, more communication, and physical toughness than their treatment of black patients who were also near death.

Intersectionality

The BLM movement has called our attention to the realities of the diversity of anti-black bias and mistreatment. Black women's realities are now coming to be more fully understood by social scientists as unique to those of black men. For example, Katz *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that black women are particularly vulnerable when their lab study demonstrated that white female bystanders were unlikely to help an incapacitated black female victim as compared to a victim who was white and female. White participants appeared to simply not identify with black women as women and thus left them vulnerable. White participants also made attributions about black women that called into question their consent and experience of the attack as pleasurable. Indeed, black undergraduate women report more experiences with sexual objectification than white undergraduate women, and they are more fearful for their safety than white women (Watson *et al.*, 2015).

These findings also extend to black girls. Epstein *et al.* (2017) found that black girls as young as five are perceived as less innocent and less in need of protection from adults. It is no wonder then that even black female adolescents seem to suffer from the same type

of avoidance. Holland's (2012) study of racial integration demonstrates that black girls experience more social distancing than their male counterparts who appear to have more social capital afforded to them given their involvement in sports as well as their more physical embodiment of hip-hop culture. This pattern of unique discrimination toward black girls and women occurs over the lifespan as evidenced by fewer opportunities to lead despite leading every demographic in the pursuit of higher education, and they encounter persistent pay discrepancies relative to all men and white and Asian women (US Department of Education, 2017; Bibler, 2015; Daly *et al.*, 2017).

Given this brief review of all of the ways in which black lives seem to matter less across every major institution, we find it challenging that the #BLM hashtag and the mere label itself continues to attract so much resistance and denigration. Perhaps resistance to #BLM is a function of ignorance of its principles which include, diversity, globalism, engagement, restorative justice, collective value, empathy, queer affirming, trans affirming, intergenerational, and a commitment to black women, black families, and black villages (http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/). It is difficult to understand how the All Lives Matter campaigns and its various spin-offs could truly be against these value systems, yet our research in anti-black racism suggests that it may be the promotion of these values by and for blacks (and black women in particular) that might be at the root of the resistance.

The current issue

Therefore, this special issue seeks to elevate these values and demonstrate how our peers across the academy are incorporating #BLM into their classrooms, scholarship, and practice. We open this special issue with a paper by Opie and Roberts that provides a brief history of employment discrimination faced by African Americans. These authors adapt a restorative justice framework from the criminal justice literature to describe ways organizations can repair the relationships damaged by this history. Opie and Roberts first outline the harmful effects racism has on black employees, suggesting that black lives do not matter in organizations historically or currently. They then identify various challenges individuals must overcome to embrace diversity truly (rather than provide it lip service), and they offer some concrete suggestions for change. Specifically, they advocate for more perspective-taking and thoughtful leadership, and they provide specific strategies for organizational change at multiple levels such that black lives will indeed one day matter at work.

This special issue then ventures into specific organizational settings that, traditionally, receive limited attention in the organizational science literature. First, Leopold and Bell provide a critical analysis of media coverage of BLM, highlighting the media as an understudied organization in the management literature. With examples from news coverage of BLM, the authors' analysis demonstrates how the media's framing of protest movements serves to undermine the protest's goals, delegitimize the movement, and perpetuate outgroup stereotypes and also an "us vs them" or "good guys vs bad guys" mentality. They then apply best practices from the human resources management literature to offer suggestions for decreasing bias in the media.

Next, Cole examines the field of education by conducting a critical analysis of educational practices with a focus on culturally sustaining pedagogy that embraces pluralistic ideology and rejects colorblindness – a message that is supported empirically in the organizational science literature as well (e.g. Plaut *et al.*, 2009). Culturally sustaining pedagogy involves not only checking one's own biases but also challenging others' biases, consistent with the literature on allyship (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017). Indeed, Cole calls on non-black people to accept responsibility for changing education and being true allies to

people of color by challenging social injustices. She offers specific examples of pedagogical practices that use BLM to change normative discourse and highlight groups that are typically portrayed as "other." These examples promise to be of benefit not only for educators in college classrooms, but also for practitioners more broadly, including human resources personnel and diversity trainers and educators.

Gibson *et al.* likewise focus on a seldom-studied organization in the management literature: public libraries. As public institutions, libraries must be all-inclusive, representing both dominant and disadvantaged social groups. Their paper discusses the important role that libraries can have in educating the public about the BLM movement and in providing a safe, democratic space for public discourse. Through these functions, public libraries can be an instrument of voice for people with less power in society. Like Cole (2017), Gibson *et al.* explicitly reject colorblind ideology. Libraries historically have strived for neutrality with regard to political issues, but given their role as social change agents, Gibson *et al.* argue that remaining neutral and colorblind is no longer an option for public libraries. Importantly, the authors stress the necessity of self-care for those of us doing diversity work. They remind readers that the battle against institutional racism (and other "isms") is cognitively taxing and emotionally draining, and that people cannot be effective allies, advocates, or activists on behalf of others if they fail to take care of themselves first.

The special issue concludes with a contribution by McCluney, Bryant, King, and Ali, who use BLM and the example of "calling in black" – much like "calling in sick" – to underscore the points about racial battle fatigue raised by Gibson *et al.* (2017). McCluney *et al.* provide a multilevel framework for understanding how traumatic events external to organizations (e.g. biased news coverage revealed by Leopold and Bell, 2017) can serve as signals of identity threat for employees of color. Such events communicate meaning about the value of black employees' social identity (Steele *et al.*, 2002), suggesting perhaps that black lives do not really matter. Their model then describes the responses that individuals and organizations take to restore feelings of identity safety and psychological safety within the workplace, thereby establishing a research agenda for organizational scientists for years to come.

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