The Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture (ISPRC) was founded in 2000 at Boston College, under the direction of Dr. Janet E. Helms, to promote the assets and address the societal conflicts associated with race or culture in theory and research, mental health practice, education, business, and society at large. The Institute offers pragmatic information about teaching, conducting research, and applying interventions intended to promote the benefits of racial and ethnic cultural diversity and resolve related social problems. The Institute is unique in its emphasis on addressing psychological issues related to race and ethnic culture from an interdisciplinary perspective.

9th Annual Diversity Challenge: Racial Identity and Cultural Factors in Treatment, Research, and Policy

More than 300 scholars, psychologists, mental health counselors, educators, and students convened at Boston College (Chestnut Hill, MA) for the 9th Annual Diversity Challenge, a two-day conference sponsored by the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture (ISPRC). Under the direction of Dr. Janet E. Helms, this multidisciplinary conference includes panel discussions, symposia, workshops, structured discussions, poster sessions, and individual presentations. Each year, the ISPRC addresses a racial or cultural issue that could benefit from a pragmatic, scholarly, or grassroots focus through the Diversity Challenge. The theme of Diversity Challenge 2009 was the integration of racial identity and cultural theories in treatment, research, and policy.

For the past three years, a National Institute of Mental Health grant has allowed us to invite nationally recognized experts in mental health research and practice to participate in the Diversity Challenge. This year, eight panelists from across the country shared their perspectives on culturally-responsive treatment and interventions, as well as statistical and research methods for exploring complex racial and cultural identity development.

Invited speakers were well-known experts in the field of racial identity. Featured presenters included Robert T. Carter, Ph.D., Teachers College, Columbia University; Martin LaRoche, Ph.D., Harvard Medical School; Belle Liang, Ph.D., Boston College; Thomas Parham, Ph.D., University of California, Irvine; Gina Samuels, Ph.D., University of Chicago; Lewis Schlosser, Ph.D., Seton Hall University; Karen Suyemoto, Ph.D., U. Mass-Boston; and Melba Vasquez, Ph.D., President Elect, American Psychological Association. Videos of the invited panels along with the conference proceedings are available on our website (http://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/isprc/dc/dc2009.html).

(continued on next page)
On this 10th anniversary year of the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture, we welcome our supporters and those who have shown a special interest in ISPRC in the course of its development as well as new readers. As was true of much of the country, this was a challenging year in terms of financial and personnel resources, which forced us to discover new ways to provide the kinds of interventions, outreach activities, and research that have become the hallmark of ISPRC.

We share some of our efforts in this newsletter. As you will see, the remaining ISPRC staff and volunteers stepped up to make this an eventful year nevertheless.

~ Dr. Janet E. Helms

Diversity Challenge (continued)

Over 80 other interesting, provoking, and stimulating presentations addressed the conference theme integrating racial and cultural factors with treatment, research, and policy at this year’s conference. Comments from Challenge participants included:

- “Excellent conference, full of information, individuals, and ideas that will surely be of benefit in my future work!”
- “It's a gem!”
- “I found myself rejuvenated after long strings of stimulating conversation!”
- “This was an extremely well-done and thought provoking conference.”

ISPRC looks forward to hosting the 10th Annual Diversity Challenge in 2010 on October 15-16, for which the theme is: Race and Culture in Teaching, Training, and Supervision.

ISPRC Summer Program 2010: Webinar Summer Series

Responding to the economic realities of tightened training and travel budgets, ISPRC has reworked this year’s summer program format. By teaming with experts in the area of race and culture, ISPRC will provide a series of continuing education-credited Webinars (i.e., training seminars presented over the internet), allowing our participants to take part in live, interactive learning from the comfort of their own locations. This June, ISPRC will present topics that include:

- Understanding Racial Identity Theory
- Cultural Competence and Working with Survivors of Trauma
- A Multidimensional Culturally Competent Psychotherapeutic Model
- Assessing School Climate: Identifying and Treating Racial Trauma in Schools

Detailed information is available on our website: www.bc.edu/isprc.
Project Success is a mentoring program for Black and Latino high school students attending predominantly White public schools in the Boston Metropolitan area. It is a generational mentoring program in which Black and Latino graduate students at Boston College mentor undergraduate Black and Latino students at Boston College who, in turn, mentor high school students. Parents serve as support systems by meeting as a group with mentored students, high school support staff, and ISPRC program staff at orientation and end of the year connection building meetings; school support staff work from inside the schools to identify students and parents who will benefit from the program, schedule meetings in the high schools between mentors and mentored students, contact parents, and obtain parental consent for educational activities that occur on the Boston College campus.

We developed Project Success in response to high school support staff’s perceptions that previously successful students of Color quickly become underachievers once they enter high school. Whereas the tendency is to presume that the students have not received adequate academic skills necessary to achieve, another explanation is that they do not see themselves reflected in their teachers, peers, or the academic materials to which they are exposed. Thus, they disengage, often rebel, and find self-fulfillment in other life domains. Although in our work with the students, we have found that once they are helped to critically think about the situations in which they find themselves, they become more engaged in being academically successful. Exposing them to college students of Color and a college campus allows high school students to visualize higher education as an option for themselves early on. College students’ motivating high school students to achieve gives the undergraduates a sense of fulfillment as well as enhanced skills in coping with similar concerns in the college environment. Developing and trying out culturally-responsive interventions allows graduate students to increase their own educational and research skills and to discover which types of interventions are most effective in enhancing students’ academic success at all levels.

Haiti Initiative
In response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the ISPRC proposed a one-day conference, Haiti Initiative, which will be embedded within ISPRC’s annual Diversity Challenge. The Haiti Initiative primarily focuses on enhancing disaster relief efforts from a culturally-informed framework. The purpose of this initiative is to highlight the cultural needs of the Haitian community so that individuals (e.g., students, mental health and health professionals, humanitarians, educators), groups, and organizations can provide services that strengthen individuals and communities through a comprehensive understanding of the Haitian people, their needs, history, language, traditions, and values.

The celebration continued with dance and music performances from the Boston College New Fisk Jubilee Singers and Females Incorporating Sisterhood Through Step (F.I.S.T.S.) dance troupe and displays featuring the work of two local artists, Caleb Weinreb and Uma Chandrika Millner. We thank all of you who helped us share in this very special occasion.

25th Anniversary of Helms’s Racial Identity Theory

A special addition to this year’s conference was a tribute to honor Dr. Janet E. Helms and a celebration in recognition of the 25th anniversary of Helms’s Racial Identity Theory. Over the last 25 years, racial identity theory has gained considerable attention with scholars, practitioners, and society at large. The continued increase in racial and ethnic diversity around the world and the study of racial identity theory has important implications for mental health agencies, organizations, and educational settings worldwide. The evening was capped off with words of gratitude and appreciation from many of Dr. Helms’s students and colleagues.

Grant Activities: Under Review

Project Success Stair-Step Mentoring Program for K-12 Students of Color

Project Success is a mentoring program for Black and Latino high school students attending predominantly White public schools in the Boston Metropolitan area. It is a generational mentoring program in which Black and Latino graduate students at Boston College mentor undergraduate Black and Latino students at Boston College who, in turn, mentor high school students. Parents serve as support systems by meeting as a group with mentored students, high school support staff, and ISPRC program staff at orientation and end of the year connection building meetings; school support staff work from inside the schools to identify students and parents who will benefit from the program, schedule meetings in the high schools between mentors and mentored students, contact parents, and obtain parental consent for educational activities that occur on the Boston College campus.

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Current Projects: Research Initiatives

Examining Race-Related Stress Experiences among Elderly African American Women
According to health statistics, approximately 2.5 million members of the general population are elderly African Americans age 65 years and older. This group has a disproportionate number of chronic health and health-related problems relative to the White elderly population. Additionally, elderly African Americans have been found to suffer disproportionately from mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety.

To address these types of mental health disparities, ISPRC conducted a study using archival data from the Collaborative Psychiatric Epidemiology Surveys: National Study of American Life to examine the relationship between racial discrimination experiences, psychological distress, and racial identity statuses in a sample of elderly African American women. Findings will help mental health counselors and policy makers better understand the mental health disparities facing this population so that they can develop and use more effective culturally-responsive mental health services and policies for elderly African American women.

The Impact of Native American Images on Researchers
Images of Native Americans in the media are often blatantly racist and stereotypical. In this mixed methods study, research teams from three sites examined their own reactions to a variety of Native American images. Directed content analysis was used to explore and understand how each research team viewed and responded to the images. We sought to understand how the authors’ own biases, sociopolitical contexts, and values influenced their reactions to the images. In addition, the discussions about potential researcher biases indicated the need for researchers to engage in self-examination, regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, because researchers may hold attitudes and beliefs that directly or indirectly impact their choice of research design, interpretations of their results, and the recommendations made for future research.

Multicultural Competency in Counseling: Implementing a Training Program within a Social Justice Orientation
As the counseling client population continues to grow progressively more diverse, multicultural competency training has become a vital aspect of graduate counseling programs. Research indicates that an understanding of how perceptions of race affect clients helps counselors to implement interventions to combat race-related structures of social oppression, and, thereby, bring about social change. Considering the salience of race and culture in the training goals of both the field of counseling psychology and the Boston College (BC) Lynch School of Education, the research team evaluated the quality of inclusion of race and culture in the training experiences of first-year students in the Masters program in Counseling Psychology and their doctoral supervisors. Data collection consisted of qualitative and quantitative measures, which were administered during the first and second semesters of the academic year. Data analysis is in progress.

Helms’s PRIAS with Adolescents: A Reliability Analysis
As psychological research continues expanding its focus on positive youth development, psychological measures that were normed on adult and college samples should be evaluated to determine their generalizability to adolescents. The People of Color Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (PRIAS) was created to assess individuals’ preferred racial identity schemas, or strategies for understanding racial issues. Both Cronbach’s alpha, a type of group-level reliability statistic, and Helms’s iota, an individual reliability statistic, are being used to examine psychometric properties of the PRIAS in an adolescent sample from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds. Explicitly investigating the reliability of an adolescent sample’s responses to the PRIAS can have implications for the use of this measure with future adolescent research samples, clinicians’ assessment of their adolescent clients’ racial identity, and the development of related interventions and prevention programs.

Intersections of Discrimination, Depression, and Somatic Symptoms for Asian Americans
The impact of discrimination on Asian American/Pacific Islanders (AAPI) has only recently been investigated. Of this research, few studies have examined the outcomes of discrimination for immigrant and non-immigrant AAPI, while also considering interethnic differences. Moreover, few studies have compared depressive and somatic outcomes of anti-AAPI discrimination. Using the 2003 National Latino and Asian Americans Study (NLAAS) dataset, this study examines the predictive role of discrimination for depressive and somatic symptoms for Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino American immigrant and non-immigrant participants. Implications for interethnic differences, immigrant discrimination experiences, and diagnoses of depressive and somatic conditions are proposed.

Asian Americans’ Experiences of Racism
The category of “Asian Americans” consists of several ethnic groups that are usually grouped together despite vast differences in cultural and historical experiences in the U.S. Whereas these individuals may share the same racial categorization, their ethnic differences definitively foster unique perceptions and lived experiences. At present, Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans comprise the two largest ethnic groups of Asian Americans. To better understand the differing experiences of racism within these two groups, the purpose of this study was to compare both daily life experiences and generalized experiences of racism between groups of Chinese American and Filipino American college students based on racial identity profiles. Analyses depict differences in experiences based on group membership, which supports the importance of exploring cultural and ethnic differences among socially constructed racial groups.
Race-Related Stress, Protective Factors, and Mental Health for African Americans and Afro-Caribbean Americans

Black Americans, which include African Americans and Afro Caribbeans, have long endured a unique level of exposure to racism and race-related life stressors including perceived slights in the workplace, discriminatory treatment by service providers, race-related violence and other manifestations of racial bias. Experiences of race-related discrimination have been linked to a wide range of negative psychological outcomes including increased levels of generalized anxiety and major depression among Black American adolescents and adults. Investigations of the effects of race-related stressors upon Black Americans’ mental health has led to an increase in research on psychological resilience, resistance, and factors that promote positive psychological health. Psychological resources, such as self-esteem and a sense of mastery, and religiosity have been identified as factors that contribute to positive mental health outcomes among Black Americans. A question that exists within the literature, however, is how resilience may manifest differently within disparate groups of Black Americans. This question warrants an investigation of the relationship between race-related stressors, mental health outcomes, and protective factors among African Americans and Afro-Caribbean Americans. Using data from a nationally representative sample of African Americans and Afro-Caribbean Americans, we investigated the degree to which self esteem and a sense of mastery influenced the relationship between race-related stress and depression. Additionally, we explored how the relationship between religiosity and depression was affected by self-esteem and a sense of mastery. Preliminary results suggest that African Americans and Afro Caribbeans report different experiences of race-related stress, and that protective factors manifest differently among the ethnic groups. This research further supports the argument that there are within-group differences among the Black American population. Researchers and practitioners are admonished to consider such differences in order to work competently and ethically with Black populations.

Racism and Ethnoviolence as Trauma: Enhancing Professional and Research Training

Trauma is generally defined in terms of survivors’ common reactions to objectively defined and easily recognizable cataclysmic events (e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes). However, missing from current conceptualizations of trauma and related symptoms, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and stress-induced depression, is consideration of the extent to which microaggressions and violence against a person because of the person’s ascribed race (i.e., racism) or presumed cultural origins (i.e., ethnoviolence) may serve as either aggravating correlates of commonly recognized traumatic events or sole catalysts for traumatic symptoms. Yet some epidemiological literature suggests that traditionally defined traumatic events potentially have a disparate impact on African Americans, Latina/Latino Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander Americans, and Native Americans (ALANAs) and members of non-dominant cultures relative to their White American or majority-culture counterparts. Sometimes the disparity is reflected in higher levels of PTSD symptoms and sometimes as different types of trauma-related symptoms. Very little conceptual or empirical literature addresses racial and cultural traumas as potential explanations for existing racial and ethnic cultural mental health disparities. To address this gap in the literature, we have defined racism and ethnoviolence as traumatic events and discuss their respective roles in traumatic experiences and the manifestation of related symptoms. We recommend that researchers and practitioners conduct culturally responsive and racially informed assessment and interventions with ALANAs when they present with symptoms of trauma, particularly when their trauma responses are atypical or the precipitating stressor is ambiguous. Furthermore, we use the Helms’s social interaction model to assist researchers and practitioners with understanding how racial dynamics may manifest in the midst of research, assessment, and treatment relationships where racism or ethnoviolence might be understood as initial or aggravating traumatic stressors.
The SANKOFA Project
The Jernigan Sankofa Program, under the direction of Dr. Maryam Jernigan, continued in its sixth year to provide Black and Latino K-12 students in the Boston area with a setting that empowers them to remain resistant in the face of the racial and ethnic cultural discrimination that they encounter. Empowerment through the Jernigan Sankofa Program embodies an awareness of one’s personal cultural history and the sociopolitical history of race and gender. The research-based group intervention allows participants to reclaim their sense of self through an awareness of history that promotes self-definition rather than acceptance of definitions proposed and often imposed by society. Participation in the group enables students to enhance their personal resources, thus allowing them to resist barriers to achievement and persevere to attain academic success and positive relationships with teachers and peers. To date, Sankofa groups have been implemented at the elementary schools and high school level. The Jernigan Sankofa Program has received funding for program development and research from the American Psychological Association Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention, and Training and the Ford Foundation.

Adolescent Advisory Board
The Adolescent Advisory Board (AAB) consists of teenagers from various schools in the Boston Metro area. Board members have the opportunity to enhance leadership skills, interact with other diverse students, and investigate issues that are important to them. The AAB is currently working on a new qualitative research project that seeks to understand adolescents’ experiences of race and culture in communities and schools. Board members are learning how to conduct evaluations and use qualitative research methods to code and interpret data.

Circle of Success: College Prep
Circle of Success: College Prep (COS) is a one-day workshop geared toward promoting higher academic performance for students of Color and helping them gain admission into their college of choice. COS was built on the premise that students of Color often face unique challenges (e.g. stereotypes, lack of role models, and unequal opportunities for academic resources) when moving through the educational pipeline. Recognizing the academic and social disadvantages youths of Color face, this workshop provided 15 students from eight high schools in the Boston Metro area with information about the college application process, college life, and strategies for accessing academic resources. Students learned about the process of goal setting, navigating environmental and personal expectations that influence achievement, and how racial and cultural dynamics and norms can affect choices, academic pursuits, and opportunities for academic success. In addition, students interacted with ten Boston College undergraduate students of Color through a panel and small group discussion. Undergraduates addressed students’ fears, expectations, and questions regarding college admission and college life. Following the workshop participants stated that they felt more competent in their ability to apply to and be successful in college.

Lesson Plans for Teaching Counseling Skills
While there have been many calls for the inclusion of social justice perspectives in the field of counseling psychology, few training materials are available which integrate counseling skills with social justice practice. Social justice oriented programs for training mental health counselors actively struggle with this issue. To respond to this need, the student-led Diversity Committee of the Counseling Psychology Program proposed the development of a curriculum for (a) improving the self-awareness of mental health trainees and (b) teaching counseling skills with a sensitivity to social justice issues. ISPRC collaborated with other members of the Boston College counseling psychology program in generating ideas and activities for the experienced-based set of lesson plans. The implementation of the curriculum has begun and is currently used by doctoral students teaching masters students in a counseling skills lab.

African Cradle
Drs. Helms and Jernigan collaborated with the African Cradle Ethiopian Heritage Camp in the summer of 2009. Both traveled to California to work with adoptive parents of Ethiopian children and their families. A total of four workshops in two days were dedicated to discussions of race and White and People of Color racial identity development. Parents and children attended separate workshops that focused on issues of race and parenting and race and adoption in an effort to allow participants to process individual and collective experiences of race and racism. In doing so, families were better able to understand how racial identity development can facilitate meaningful and necessary dialogue about race.

Providing Consultation on Racial and Cultural Identities to Educators and Professional Staff
Two ISPRC staff members and another counseling psychology doctoral student at Boston College consulted with the Walker Home and School and implemented trainings for almost 200 staff members, including teachers, administrators, and support staff from all departments at Walker. After consulting with the executive staff, the consulting team agreed that advancing Walker’s mission to provide culturally competent services to clients would be better facilitated by engaging Walker staff in dialogue regarding identity, race, culture, and diversity. An Identity Wheel activity from the recently created social justice curriculum, Social Justice as Practice: Lesson Plans for Teaching Counseling Skills, was adapted to encourage participants to reflect about how different aspects of their identity influence them at the personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. Evaluative feedback suggested that the staff at Walker enjoyed getting to know each other better while engaging in these personal conversations. The consulting team has committed to ongoing conversations to determine the next steps in helping Walker to pursue its mission of providing culturally-responsive care and services.
ISPRC Staff Presentations


Helms, J. E., Jernigan, M. M., Chen, C. C., Green, C. E., Harris, A., Perez-Gualdron, L., & Williams, S. D. (2009, October). ISPRC in the schools: Preparing students for higher education by promoting racial and cultural awareness. Poster session presented at the meeting of the 10th Annual Lynch School of Education Series. Chestnut Hill, MA.


Jernigan, M. M. (2009, August). Developing and maintaining the pipeline for black women in psychology. In C. Le Ondra (Chair), Mentoring the next generation of black psychologists. Symposium conducted at the 117th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association Convention, Toronto, ON, Canada.


Mereish, E. H., Green, C. E., Sundaram, S., Skehan, D., & Helms, J. E. Emotional aftermath: Gender identity and affect post social justice dialogues. Poster to be presented in August, 2010 at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Diego, CA.


Mereish, E. H., & Poteat, V. P. Friendships with gay men as predictors of sexual prejudice attitudes and behaviors. Poster to be presented in May, 2010 at the Association for Psychological Science Annual Convention, Boston, MA.


ISPRC Staff: Awards & Honors

Dr. Janet E. Helms
Past President of the Society of Counseling Psychology (Division 17, the second largest Division of the American Psychological Association)

Carlton E. Green
2010 Ever to Excel Award - The Ever to Excel Award is given to the Boston College graduate student who has demonstrated rigorous intellectual development as well as ethical and personal formation, in preparation for service and leadership in a global society.

Theresa L. Sass
2009-2010 Donald J. White Teaching Excellence Award which recognizes graduate teaching fellows who distinguish themselves in classroom instruction.

Ethan Mereish
2010-2012 Elected Member-at-Large, Membership Recruitment and Retention Focus, The American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) to recruit and advocate for graduate students.

Kisha Bazelais will be joining the University of Miami Counseling Center to complete her pre-doctoral internship beginning in August, 2010. As part of the Dr. Jess Spirer Predoctoral Internship program at the University of Miami, Kisha will be involved in a number of clinical and professional activities including individual/group psychotherapy, psychological assessment, career counseling, crisis intervention, and consultation.

Maryam Jernigan will begin research fellowship training at the Yale University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry in the fall of 2010. The multidisciplinary fellowship, sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health, focuses on training providers in interventions research. Participation in the training program will allow Dr. Jernigan to continue to collaborate with ISRPC to develop and implement culturally-appropriate research-based community interventions that include race and culture as fundamental concepts.

Leyla Pérez-Gualdrón will begin as an Assistant Professor of School Counseling in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco in the fall of 2010. Her teaching and research program emphasizes integrating issues of culture and race among children and adolescents in education, with a focus on social justice orientation and resistance to oppression in Latinas/os.