Why Are All the Black Scholars Going to NASSS? A Reflective Dialogue on the Under-Representation of Black Scholars at the NASSM Conference.

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According to NASSM’s strategic plan, the association strives to “understand and serve the perspectives of underrepresented and underserved stakeholders.” Organizational leaders believe that, “NASSM should be a diverse and inclusive academic society—one in which all persons can thrive, irrespective of their individual differences” (p. 5). To help accomplish said goals, the NASSM Diversity award recognizes and encourages members to make “exceptional contributions to promote diversity and inclusion within NASSM and related sport management disciplines.” The organization has also established a diversity committee to “promote diversity and inclusiveness through a variety of programs and initiatives.”

Results from the 2016 NASSM Climate Survey show that NASSM members believe organizational leaders are committed to diversity and inclusion, but “racial minority” members were significantly less likely than their White peers to agree that NASSM leaders value diversity. Moreover, a cursory look at attendees at the NASSM conference over the past several years reveals a noticeable lack of attendance by racial groups defined as “U.S. domestic minorities” compared to their presence at other sport-based academic conferences.

Hence, as suggested in the title of this abstract, the focus of this roundtable discussion will be specifically on one under-represented group in NASSM: Black scholars. In accordance with the strategic plan, the purpose of this discussion is to gather input from “people who can offer different perspectives about developing a diverse and inclusive Society” (p. 5). In this regard, the panel will consist of “persons who are not currently affiliated with NASSM but have been in the past” and “NASSM members from under-represented and under-served groups” (NASSM Strategic Plan, p. 5). Although the focus is on race, it is important to note that this under-representation of Black sport scholars not only impacts racial diversity, but it also impacts the inclusion of diverse voices, thought, theories and content in conference programming.

In framing our discussion, we draw inspiration and insight from psychologist, Beverly Tatum’s (1997) book, Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? In this work, she examined the nexus between racial identity development and racism in race-conscious societies such as the U.S., and the need to embrace cross-racial dialogue around these issues. As two Black scholars who have regularly attended both NASSM and NASSS over the years, our observations of the critical mass of Black scholars at NASSS and their glaring absence at NASSM led us to ponder why all the Black scholars are going to NASSS, but not NASSM. We have identified a group of Black scholars, including ourselves, who have attended both conferences to varying degrees, but in many cases have regularly chosen NASSS or other conferences over NASSM. We will discuss various macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors that have contributed to the dearth of Black scholars at NASSM over the years, and discuss strategies to increase their representation, participation, and engagement at NASSM.