

Who's All Over There? Patriarchy, White Manning, and Deficit Framed Thinking Aimed at Spirit Murdering Black Children

Frederick V. Engram Jr.

*Department of Criminology/Criminal Justice and the Center for African American Studies
University of Texas-Arlington, Texas, USA*

[Abstract] Anti-Blackness in education is not a siloed issue. It is pervasive in every part of society and the world. As Black male educators we are often forced into disciplinary roles as a means of enforcing the social control of Black youth. Guided by the understanding of *patriarchy* and *white manning* as core concepts Black male educators must fight back in hopes of disrupting the status-quo. This article will examine how Black male educators express themselves via social media in ways that are not conducive to the positive uplift of Black youth. It will also explore how deficit-framed pedagogical practices which create the idea that Black children are unteachable--requires disruption. The article will conclude with encouraging Black male educators to provide an intersectional-feminist lens to understand how to disrupt anti-Blackness in education and uplift Black boy and girlhood.

[Keywords] white manning, school-to-prison pipeline, anti-blackness, anti-racism, spirit-murdering, misogyny

Introduction

In June of 2019, I served as a key planning member of the *Summer Institute for Education, Equity, and Justice* better known as *SIEEJ* at American University in Washington, D.C. We had a line-up that boasted some of the top higher education phenoms that ranged from Dr. Johnetta Betsch-Cole, and Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, to Dr. Bettina Love among others. The opportunity to be in company with and engage such monumental figures was beneficial for all who were in attendance. During Dr. Love's talk, she emphasized two things that have since stuck with me 1.) *spirit murdering* and 2. the importance of *co-conspirators* over performative allyship. Love (2017) states, race-centered violence kills Black children on a daily basis. This particular kind of violence either murders Black children in the streets by taking their bodies, or by murdering their spirits—taking their souls (Love, 2017). As both a practitioner and higher education scholar I have personally bore witness to the existence of spirit murdering and the need for co-conspirators over performative allyship. Co-conspirators for me place more skin in the game and are willing to use their privileged racialized identity as a tool to help liberate the oppressed. Allies simply nurse your wounds behind closed doors afraid of stepping out of the shadows for fear of being ostracized from their oppressive identity. In my nearly sixteen-year higher education career and even in the revisiting of my own educational experience, I can identify where deficit framed thinking combined with white supremacy could have changed the trajectory of my own life. *But for* my amazing support system, academic curiosity, and tenacity things would be different. White supremacy and the educational experience for Black children in America are relentless.

Who's All Over There?

There are tons of social media groups that are created to allow for the gathering of like-minded individuals based on similar identifying characteristics. I happen to belong to a few, *Phinished/FinishEdD (Drs/FutureDrs) #WhoGotNext, PhD Savage, and Black Male Educators United*, to name a few. I, like many of my fellow introverts prefer to know “*who’s all over there?*”, before choosing to engage not because I am socially inept but because I prefer to protect my peace. One of the things that I notice about educator groups whether they be mixed company (*multiple ethnicities present*) or all Black there seems to be a running theme. That theme seems to be the staunch existence of patriarchy. There are often discussions that are steeped in anti-Black rhetoric which appears as politics of respectability, misogynoir (Bailey & Trudy, 2018), or homophobia. For these reasons, I do my best to avoid having to engage in well-versed trigger finger e-battles aimed at setting the record straight. I am often befuddled by the number of Black educators who willingly do the work of white supremacy even when white persons are not present. The constant discussions of what is or is not acceptable can range from hairstyles, to clothing, and even personal mannerisms that are used to determine the masculinity or femininity of Black school-aged male children.

Many of the conversations are often centered around proving that Black males are important to education and the development of Black children (*an indisputable fact*) through the lens of patriarchy (*white supremacist work*). It would be easy to assume that a great majority of the Black male educators in these spaces have earned graduate degrees which should equate to having done the reading. If this is to be reasonably assumed, then it means that many are choosing to operate as educators through a white lens. The constant discussions about being proud to be labeled as disciplinarians, supervised by Black women whom they deem to be “haters”, and pushing the assumption that having a father in the home = automatic success. Whereas having a father absent from the home = the automatic inability to develop into a well-adjusted Black man.

It is easy to assume that having a father in the home automatically means that all is perfect in the world. However, any reasonable person knows that just because there are two parents in the home it does not mean that it is a balanced home. A home that provides a Black child all that he, she, or they might need to be their best self might not look “traditional”. We must rid ourselves of the misconception that marital and family stability are exact or that family stability is only found in a two-parent household (Pipes-McAdoo, 2007, p.175). It is a patriarchal concept to make the sweeping assertion that all masculine energy is good masculine energy. We all know that toxic masculinity exists and despite what the oppositional flag-bearers of “cancel culture” might will us all to believe, masculinity as a cishetero male only trait is false. Black men as mentors and *otherfathers* (uncles, older siblings, cousins, godfathers, and neighbors) have often been involved in the rearing of fatherless Black youth. This is not a new concept, and it is one of the traditions that we carried with us from Africa.

In many of our ancestral villages it was not uncommon for all of the children to be reared by all of the mothers and fathers within the village or compound. It is where our concept of it taking a village stems from. However, one of the lesser-known facts about our African roots is that there were also communal villages that were matriarchal in leadership. White supremacy makes us all believe that matriarchy is the nightmare to patriarchy where women rule ruthlessly in a petty world of feminine dictatorship (Farrar, 1997). It has long been easily dismissed that women could, in a non-western, pre “modern” cultural context wield and hold authority that equaled or surpassed

men (Farrar, 1997). Believing that Black women are incapable leaders, matriarchs, or key political figures is white supremacy—full stop.

Deficit Framed Pedagogy and *Spirit Murdering*

As Professor Christopher Emdin (2016) states, white teachers pre-determine which Black children are capable of learning and which Black children are not and respond accordingly. This same perspective also leads to deficit framed approaches to teaching Black children. White teachers who teach in the hood enter the educational space with a white savior complex, a white supremacist perspective, or in rare cases to do the good work. Those who intend to do the good work find no offense in the truth-telling regarding the role of white supremacy in education. Black teachers have also adopted this same mindset when it pertains to Black children (Emdin, 2016). The belief that only certain Black children will make it out of the hood because they are deserving is also a deficit perspective that many of us have adopted. Policing the day-to-day of Black children is also part of this deficit framed thinking and unfortunately it is not always white people in the driver's seat.

According to Love (2016), Black children are dehumanized and criminalized from the moment they enter the school doors. Whether it be the arrest of a four-year-old little girl for kicking over a trash can, an autistic eleven-year-old Black boy, or a teenage Black girl not moving out of her seat in a classroom fast enough for a police officer. An officer who absolutely did not belong in a school. Each of these instances only continue to allow the school-to-prison pipeline to exist. I recall a conversation recently where two Black male educators attempted to debate me on a Facebook status of mine that stated, "*Cops do not belong in schools.*" They attempted to convince me that their roles as disciplinarians were roles that they were proud of and roles that they looked forward to. As they doubled and even tripled down on their perspectives I could only think about the countless Black boys and girls who had their identities challenged and their spirits murdered because they did not show up or present in a way that would be deemed "respectable". I also wonder how much heavier the weight of their words felt because they look like the students.

We must be mindful to reject the role of white supremacy in all facets and how it tells us we should be. As I sat with the words of both of those Black male educators two things came to mind. The first being patriarchy and the second being white manning (Engram, 2020), both which are byproducts of white supremacy. According to Engram (2020), white manning is defined as any instance where white men occupy space even when they know that they lack the preparedness to engage on any given topic. Much like patriarchy, white manning does not require the participant to be white or a man to uphold its prowess. You simply have to be a purveyor of mediocre white male perspectives and refuse to yield the space. As Morris (2018) states, Black children are routinely told to speak only when spoken to. Which is only further exacerbated by the fragile male ego when it feels challenged—especially by Black girls and women.

Centering Grace and Disrupting Anti-Blackness in Schooling

Watson and Baxley (2021) state, as educators and researchers they are troubled by the anti-Blackness that is present in schools and society. Their work provides a masterclass for us to understand the overrepresentation of Black girls in school discipline as well as the school-to-prison pipeline even during the pandemic (Watson & Baxley, 2021). Society which is guided by the status-quo disallows for the innocence of Black boyhood and girlhood to exist. This is further encapsulated by the insistence on the infantilization of white boys and men. The outrage over the

possibility of truth being taught in schools is a contemporary example of this weird flex. Black children need an intersectional feminist lens to be applied by both Black men and women educators alike in order to be culturally responsive and to battle anti-Blackness. Black children do not need Black educators upholding white supremacy under the guise of discipline and political correctness. Schooling itself is already deleterious and anti-Black to Black people (Watson & Baxley, 2021). The last thing we as educators should be doing is participating in a system aimed at destroying our Blackness from the inside out. This paper is intended to call-in Black male (K-12) educators as well as any other educator who finds themselves searching for reasons to criminalize the existence of Black children in educational spaces and in general.

Acknowledging the very real trauma that Black children experience at the hands of adults charged with their care is the least we can do. What we are responsible for is disrupting the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness and in order to do this we must first acknowledge how we also uphold white supremacy. Particularly Black male educators who reinforce patriarchal concepts of manhood and what is considered respectable womanhood. Our focus should be on reinforcing the beauty and triumphant history of our Blackness not waging gender wars through pedagogy and practice. As a Black educator it is important for us to provide grace and understanding for the natural occurrence of Black rebellion due to the need for social change (Watson & Baxley, 2021). Black youth are living through the same racial reckoning that adults are living through as well as engaging in liberation movements in-person and via social media (Watson & Baxley, 2021). As educators it is our job to honor their growth even if it looks different than ours or one that we would prefer.

Conclusion

This article focuses on the role and responsibility of Black male educators as positive resources and not problematic reinforcements. As a Black male and as an educator I feel a great sense of responsibility to make my fellow Black men aware of the power and authority that we give white supremacy via *patriarchy* and *white manning*. It is intended to highlight errors in the way that we as Black men approach femininity whether it be in leadership or the way that it shows up in Black male identified youth. As a Black male educator being hired to police Blackness and operate as an agent of white supremacy should absolutely be something that you reject. Children deserve to remain children and we should not be forcing the worst part of society and our own oppression upon them. Black children as a historically known fact do not get to maintain their innocence for very long as a result of enslavement and white supremacy. At the very bare minimum when Black children enter educational spaces they should not encounter violence at the hands of adults—especially Black adults. Anti-Blackness as a theoretical framework allows us to understand how society disallows itself to recognize the beauty and humanity of Black people (Watson & Baxley, 2021). Understanding anti-Blackness as a concept and system allows for Black people to reject it and disrupt the pervasiveness of it. Black men are needed in education but we must force ourselves to understand how our insistence on patriarchal ideologies hurts our youth.

References

- Bailey, M., & Trudy. (2018). On misogynoir: Citation, erasure, and plagiarism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-7.

- Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood...and the rest of y'all too reality: reality pedagogy and urban education*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Engram, F. (2020). White manning and lacking institutional preparedness amid tragedy. *About Campus*, 20-24.
- Farrar, T. (1997). The queenmother, matriarchy, and the question of female political authority in Precolonial West African monarchy. *Journal of Black Studies* , 579-597.
- Love, B. (2017). Anti-Black state violence, classroom edition: The spirit murdering of Black children. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 1-3.
- McAdoo, H. P. (2007). Black Families. In H. P. McAdoo, *Black Families* (p. 175). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Morris, M. (2018). Push-Out: The criminalization of Black girls in schools. In M. Morris, *Push-Out: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (p. 19). New York: New Press.
- Watson, T., & Baxley, G. (2021). Centering "Grace": Challenging Anti-Blackness in schooling through motherwork. *Journal of School Leadership*, 1-16.