

Defining Black Masculinity as Cultural Property: Toward an Identity Negotiation Paradigm

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Black masculinist scholarship cannot afford to accept, approve, and adopt the same cultural, social, and political agendas as traditional White masculinist scholarship. The two areas of gender theory share some commonalities, however there is a distinction that emerges at the intersection where gender meets culture.

JACKSON, 1997, P. 731

Theory, by its very nature, is something that can be proven wrong. It has voids because no one theory can possibly characterize all aspects of a given phenomenon. Communicologist Stanley Deetz (1992) explains: "A theory is a way of seeing and thinking about the world. As such, it is better seen as the 'lens' one uses in observation rather than as the 'mirror' of nature" (p. 66). The existing lenses used to explore Black masculinity, as a communicative aspect of gendered lives, require correction. Any time a body of theory, set of discoveries, or range of conceptualizations are no longer effective in explaining the phenomena or behaviors they purport to describe, a paradigm shift is needed.

After having reviewed the existing interdisciplinary literature and conceptualizations of Black masculinity, we feel we have read a set of foreign autobiographies, few of which pertain to the first author of this essay, a Black male. Married, middle-class, educated spiritual Black men, who are goal-

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driven, employed, competent, and non-criminal are missing from both the vast amount of literature and the constellation of media representations of Black males. The indisputable and tragic reality is that Black males have been pathologized and labeled as violent/criminal, sexual, and incompetent/uneducated individuals. This prevalent set of stereotypical depictions of Black masculinity as a stigmatized condition or of Black males as an "endangered species" makes it extremely difficult to theorize Black masculinities in the same ways as White or other marginalized group masculinities. Black masculinities are first and foremost cultural property communicated in everyday interaction as manifestations of Black identities.¹

Traditionally, the impulse among gender theorists in many disciplines including communication has been to interpret the incendiary nature of masculinity studies in the specter of the European American experience. The assumption made is that all masculine persons function in homogeneous ways.² However, a growing contingent of Black writers, including bell hooks, Clyde Franklin III, Patricia Hill Collins, Richard Majors, Michelle Wallace, Philip Brian Harper, Naim Akbar, Haki Madhubuti, Earl Ofari Hutchinson, and others, have proposed that Black masculinities are cultural property, and that they are ritualistically, explicitly, and implicitly validated by communities within everyday interactions. We agree with bell hooks' (1992) assertion about scholarship pertaining to Black masculinities. She writes:

[The literature on black masculinity] does not interrogate the conventional construction of patriarchal masculinity or question the extent to which Black men have internalized this norm. It never assumes the existence of black men whose creative agency has enabled them to subvert norms and develop ways of thinking about masculinity that challenge patriarchy. (p. 89)

Essentially, the literature presupposes complicity with hegemony and never questions whether Black men have been affected by their own exclusion from the mainstream to the extent that they have constructed their masculinities differently. In assuming that all masculinities are the same, one presupposes that all men should completely share the burden of U.S. White male patriarchal allegations without

sharing the licenses to White male privilege, Black men to be the "endangered species" and still function in a position of privilege, hence with the same sensibilities as White men. So, we are persuaded by hooks' argument that social depictions of Black masculinities as dominate are "fantastical" and "narrow" (p. 89). While introducing a Black masculine paradigm, this article issues a challenge to rethink how cultural particularity influences the existing range of Black masculinities, which significantly diverge from culture-generic characterizations of what it means to be masculine.

Feminist thinkers, who encapsulate and hold liable negative masculine tendencies for the American fixation on power, competition, greed, control, and institutionalized exclusion, have inspired a large segment of critical masculinity scholarship. Consequently, the versions of masculinity that are described are often culturally generic, fragmented, and aloof. Very few gender studies depict masculinities as positive, healthy, mature, productive, and balanced identities, but these masculinities do exist. The gender descriptors "masculinity" or "masculinist" usually refer to antagonistic, puerile, insecure, very unaware, and chaotic male identities. It is true that masculine, like feminine, persons enact a wide range of behaviors on a daily basis, from dysfunctional to quite functional. So, theorizing masculinities, in terms of a gendered continuum ranging from healthy to unhealthy and positive to negative self-definitions, is both necessary and revolutionary.

As mentioned previously, the everyday existence of healthy and productive human beings is not so new, which means that some gender theories have slipped with respect to how they account for healthy masculinities. This near absence of critical gender commentary on cultural masculinities only accents the inseparable link between power, ideology, and the politics of representation. It is the intent of this essay to address this void in gender thinking and offer a paradigm that may serve as some basis for explaining productive and counter-productive masculine behaviors, while accenting culture as a means of understanding masculine realities.

This article is organized into four parts. First, the article begins by defining the terms *masculinity* and *femininity* and then discussing male and female sex and gender role stereotypes. Second, we pro-

vide a brief overview of three prominent social and racial stereotypes of Black masculinities. Third, a theoretic paradigm of Black masculine identities is introduced. Finally, the essay concludes with implications of the Black masculinity studies and suggestions for future research.

DEFINING MASCULINITY AND FEMINITY

Clearly, masculine and feminine mystiques socially dominate how we see the world. It only takes a quick survey of child-rearing practices among parents and mass-mediated reinforcements of sex and gender role stereotypes to see that these images are sharply divided. When writers speak of masculinities and femininities, we often assume we know what the terms mean, and we also presume that these universal categories are reasonable ways to conceptualize lived realities. Rather than totally discard the terms, we recommend that the terms be re-defined as perceptual categories in flux. In order to discuss definitions of masculinity and femininity, it is appropriate to return to the distinctions between sex and gender. The contemporary conversation concerning sex and gender is similar to that of race and ethnicity. The first term in each pair refers to biologically conceived characteristics of an individual, whereas the latter pertains to social ascriptions and prescriptions.

Sex Roles

Just as one may be able to determine another's sex and/or race by observing optic markers, such as the hair, skin, lips, eyes, musculature, and so on, he or she may also be able to determine one's sex by the same means. This is what we call "preverbal communication," the communication that occurs via physiognomic markers before the talk begins. When we speak of sex roles rather than sex, expectations emerge. Sex roles are the biological prescriptions about what males and females should do with their bodies. For example, one female role is to procreate. Males are expected to talk with a deep voice. Although it is generally easier to visually identify a male or a female, gender identities are more intricate.

Gender Roles

Gender roles refer to ways women and men are socially and culturally assigned feminine and masculine behaviors. For instance, men are socially expected to actively pursue women for a dating and mating relationship. Women are socially expected to be more nurturing and affectionate than men. These gender roles are socializations that begin at birth. Family and friends purchase products that are blue for newborn boys. Purchased newborn gifts are typically pink if for girls, and if you don't know the sex of the baby, green is appropriate. A family would probably find it insulting to receive a baby boy's gift that is pink. Another gender role is seen with boys, who are normally socialized to play with trucks, whereas girls are typically encouraged to play with Barbies. This supposedly keeps the presumptions of what constitutes masculinity and femininity intact.

This social logic inspired both Toys 'R Us and FAO Schwarz to come up with Boys' World and Girls' World in 1999. It must have sounded like a great idea at the time, until Toys 'R Us received negative feedback about their discriminatory and sexist toy lines in the Girls' World section. Toys like Barbies, cookware, cleaning supplies, phones, and so on were placed in Girls' World, and trucks, cars, tools, monsters, race tracks, and video games were placed in Boys' World. This arrangement lasted for all of about two days as consumers complained that Toys 'R Us was promoting stereotypes by suggesting that boys should have all of the fun while girls stay in the house, cook, clean, and talk on the phone. This short-lived fiasco with Toys 'R Us escaped much of the national media's attention.

FAO Schwarz was a bit more strategic in its placement of toys. They divided toys by color. So, both sections had almost the same exact toys, except that the Ggirls' section had pink, orange, yellow, and green toys and the boys' section had blue, black, purple, and green toys. They have somehow managed to reduce the negative feedback level significantly. The description of "FAO Girl," however, is still stereotypical. It reads:

Introducing FAO Girl. Because girls just wanna have fun. And fun stuff. This great new line will take your FAO Girl from homeroom to her room in style with a huge selection of hair accessories and jewelry, plush

toys and pillows and cool gadgets—everything every girl can't do without. FAO Girls are filled with glamour, giggles and guts! (www.fao.com)

Body politics theorist Moira Gatens (1996) provides a valuable commentary concerning this problem of social stereotyping. She states:

Masculinity and femininity as forms of sex-appropriate behaviors are manifestations of a historically based, culturally shared phantasy [sic] about male and female biologies, and as such sex and gender are not arbitrarily connected. The connection between the female body and femininity is not arbitrary in the same way that the symptom is not arbitrarily related to its etiology. Hence, to treat gender, the symptom, as the problem is to misread its genesis (p. 13)

Gatens conceptualization is insightful with regards to the dual functions of gender—body and role. Majors & Billson (1992) contend that gendered beings are not merely socially characterized however, but in the case of males, are also forced to "attain masculinity" by "being responsible and being a good provider for the self and family" (p. 30). In other words, masculinity is earned and achieved, rather than socially prescribed. We concur with Majors & Billson that masculinity is not necessarily natural or innate as is implied by Gatens' references to biologies; rather, it is learned.

Clearly, the intellectual analysis of the link between sex roles and gender stereotypes is non-unique. Sigmund Freud explored this issue in the early 1900s, and countless gender theoreticians comment on this phenomenon on a daily basis. But, are these academic assessments parochial? Have we redefined masculinities in such a way that they are no longer recognizable to the general population? It seems that socially understood conventions about masculinity include the medieval image of the "man as protector of his woman and family" to the more commonplace "man as the head of the household" and "primary breadwinner" motifs. Gender scholars' discussions of sex role orientations and gender stereotypes are often antiquated conceptualizations that have outlived their epistemological utility. This is not to say that social discourse has completely discarded these notions, but that we must move forward because the analyses are stale. In an effort to do

so, we recommend analyses of gendered relationships as behavioral institutions confined by context-based realities. With this in mind, masculinities are not to be understood as a singular or unitary reality, but as multiple masculinities, pluralized to accent an anti-essentialist perspective, which accounts for variegations resulting from culture, class, sexual preference, religion, and other axes of difference.

For the purposes of this chapter, *masculinity* is defined as a perceptual and cosmological category in flux. It is composed and validated by culturally particular behavioral tendencies that are consonant with personal, social, and communal expectations. Although women may have masculine tendencies, we will discuss masculinity as a perceptual category that is male-centered.

Thus far, we have discussed the voids and inconsistencies in masculinity research and provided some insights about sex and gender role stereotyping. Stereotypes are important information as indicators of problems within a given social context. Moreover, stereotypes inhibit social relationships and often offer inaccurate and damaging perspectives about others. Because stereotypes of all kinds are dangerous yet instructive, we would be remiss in discussing Black masculine identities without some discussion of the social stereotypes that make them problematic and inhibit them.

Stereotyping Black Masculine Bodies

Ribeau, Baldwin & Hecht (1997), in their studies of satisfying Black-White communication, indicated that the primary issue of concern to the Black participants they studied was *negative* stereotyping. They defined *negative* stereotyping as "the use of rigid racial categories that distort an African American's individuality" (p. 149). Negative stereotypes can be both racial and social. Racial stereotypes coupled with sex role stereotypes produce a rather interesting pastiche because discussions of the dual function of role and body are elicited. The public narratives pertaining to Black men's lives comply with several racialized social projections about the Black masculine body as (1) violent, (2) sexual, and (3) incompetent. These descriptors have been used to degrade and stigmatize black males and are considered projections be-

cause of what they imply about the insecurities, fears, and anxieties *society* has about Black males.

Black Masculine Body as Violent/Criminal. The media have helped to portray the black man as a violent person who often becomes ensconced in a life of crime. Nightly newscasts parade criminal offenders, the likes of which appear to represent a disproportionate number of non-white offenders. According to Entman and Rojecki (2000):

The FBI estimated that 41% of those arrested for violent crimes in 1997 were Black (and 57% were White); 32% of those arrested for property crimes were Black. . . . Public [mass-mediated] perceptions exaggerate the actual racial disproportion. . . . By a 1.5:1 (241 to 160) ratio, White victims outnumber Blacks in news reports. . . . The average story featuring Black victims was 106 seconds long; those featuring white victims, 185 seconds long. (pp. 79-81)

These authors have illustrated that the public portrayals of Blacks as violent are often misguided and unjustly framed. Several recent studies have confirmed that the media tend to reinforce racial stereotypes, social deviancy, and delinquency of black males (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Entman, 1992; Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Gray, 1997; Heider, 2000). For example, Dixon & Linz (2000) analyzed local television news programming in Los Angeles to uncover whether Blacks, Latinos, and Whites were equally represented as lawbreakers. Their results indicated that televised crime stories presented on Los Angeles news stations were biased in their coverage. Blacks were found to be almost 2.5 times more likely to be portrayed as felons than Whites. Also, with an actual arrest rate of 21% in Orange County, California, the televised coverage showed Blacks as perpetrators of crime 37% of the time. Dixon & Linz argue that biased coverage of this sort solidifies the perception that Black males are habitual lawbreakers, much more so than Whites or any other cultural group. The reality, in Los Angeles and Orange County, was that Blacks were arrested less frequently than Whites and Latinos. This stereotypical portrayal of Blacks as criminals is political. The politics of race and black masculine identity have produced a peculiar anxiety in the United States. This is also evidenced in the perception of the black masculine body as a sexual object.

Black Masculine Body as Sexual. Notwithstanding the myths of Black sexual prowess and phallus size, there is historical significance to the "Black Masculine Body as Sexual" stereotype. Historically, when white slave owners wanted to penalize the black male for acts of aggression or disobedience, they would perform one of two activities: emasculation or a picnic. Emasculation refers to cutting off the penis. This removal of the phallus symbolized the denial of black masculinity. Essentially, this would prevent the black male's body from performing its normal sexual reproductive function and eliminate the threat of miscegenation. This was only one form of lynching. Another form was the picnic. The social etymology of the term *picnic* is "pick a nigger." Picnics were festivals and family gatherings in which white slave owners would bring their children, wives, and friends to witness the hanging of a black slave who was deemed disobedient. For example, Cunningham (1996) recounts that Emmett Till, a 14-year old black boy, was lynched in Mississippi for whistling at a white girl. This was done at a picnic. Till's death became the signpost of Black racial misery throughout the South.

These acts of aggression against blacks signified prohibition and assimilation. The slave master's narrative suggested that Black male bodies were lynched when they did not comply. The truth is that the slave's body was at once an object of disgust and admiration; hence, his body was seen as a threat (Best, 1996). His body was used as an object of labor, and in the process, his body became very muscular. This was especially threatening because it attracted white women, who were forbidden from contact with Blacks.

Black Masculine Body as Incompetent/Uneducated. Several deficit/deficiency models of black masculinity have proposed a pathologized version of these identities. Oliver (1989) contends that: "Blacks are disproportionately represented among Americans experiencing academic failure, teenage pregnancy, female-headed families, chronic unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, and criminal victimization" (p. 15). These social problems, presumably caused primarily by Black males, have led to perceptions of black masculine incompetence as a

result of a process of inferiorization. It is not that some black males intrinsically sense they cannot achieve, but rather that the social conditions and mass media reinforcement of stereotypes remind and convince the Black male population that they will experience struggle. It is inevitable. For example, Entman & Rojecki (2000) assert:

More generally, television's visuals construct poverty as nearly synonymous with "Black," and surveys show Whites typically accept this picture, even though poverty is not the lot of most Black people and more Whites are poor than Black. . . . In this sense news images encourage the sense of the prototypical Black as poor and the prototypical poor person as Black. (p. 102)

The media links Black poverty with Black crime, incompetence, and poor education. These false media images seem almost insurmountable. Eventually, images of this sort will affect anyone's worldview. This is not to suggest that black male delinquency or deviancy is excusable, but that not all Blacks or Black males are delinquent. Sociologist Manning Marable (2001) asks:

What is a Black man in an institutionally racist society, in the social system of modern capitalist America? The essential tragedy of being Black and male is our inability, as men and as people of African descent, to define ourselves without the stereotypes the larger society imposes upon us, and through various institutional means perpetuates and permeates within our entire culture. (p. 17)

These social conditions and stereotypes coupled with cultural expectations for black males can be overwhelming. Besides the social idea of black macho rigidity (or the tough guy image), cultural mandates on Black masculinity have historically been centered on being a good provider. As a result, a Black male who cannot take care of his family almost immediately loses his "rights to manhood" or is viewed as not being a man. If the stereotypes of Black male incompetency and/or uneducability were true, Black manhood would be easily surrendered. Adaptive and protective behaviors are often employed to counter these stereotypes and have created a dual sensibility with respect to how Black masculinity is defined in Black versus White communities.

The three stereotypes just discussed are powerful statements that tremendously influence how Blacks define this perceptual category of masculinity and negotiate their masculinities in light of how they are socially and communicatively perceived. That negotiation of identity within varying contexts produces the "in flux" nature of Black masculine identities. This vacillated or dual consciousness is characteristic of the communicative process of negotiating identities. Identity negotiation refers to the win, loss, or exchange of one's ability to maintain one's own cultural worldview. It is, by nature, an act of resilience to outside pressures to constrict self-definitions and consequently self-efficacy. As Marable (2001) suggests, Black masculine identity development is impossible without acknowledging and countering the stereotypes that threaten the survival of Black masculinity.

BLACK MASCULINE IDENTITIES PARADIGM

Precepts to the Paradigm: Negotiating Black Masculine Identities

We choose to theorize Black masculinities rather than culturally generic or universal masculinities because the latter are foreign to me. One's behaviors are potent enactments of one's worldview coupled with cultural sensibilities. Additionally, the cosmological trivium of communication, history, and identity is culturally inscribed on the canvas we call the Self. Human beings are informed and transformed by the intricate *labyrinth* of agony, desire, pleasure, power, and difference. This labyrinth is literally the means by which we gauge self-efficacy and attachment to our personal and relational histories. As masculine persons, however, we establish positions that grant agency to the self and limit access to "Others." Agency is a power-laden term that presupposes that people are defensive about how they will control their lives. It is about authority, permission, boundaries, and rules, and by establishing these things, it enables the Self to make choices and explore the world without inhibitions. But, because identities are co-defined in everyday interactions with others, agency is sometimes negotiated and

ends up resting externally with the "Other." This is the juncture at which the *labyrinth* becomes heightened, and therefore most visible. As Audre Lorde (1984) cautions: "For Black women as well as Black men, it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment" (p. 45). The frustration of a displaced agency causes the "I" (i.e., masculine person) to struggle to reacquire stability and control over his choices, worldview, and life possibilities. The "Other," in the previously described scenario, can be anyone from another Black masculine person to another Cultural feminine person. Incidentally, both may be males.

Can Manhood Be Revoked?

The entire process of removing the agency of masculine persons is often referred to as *emasculation* or "revoking one's manhood." Three obvious assumptions are being made with this reference. The first is that men are the only ones who qualify as masculine, which of course is false. The second is that all men are masculine and all masculine persons are *men*; yet, some may be males or boys.³ Masculinity is a perceptual category that attends each stage of self-development—boyhood, maleness, and manhood. Third, another assumption is that manhood can be revoked. Manhood is a category of being. Rationally, it does not seem possible to revoke a person's sense of being, but because being a man is highly significant among masculine persons, boys and males must define it so that it is achievable. Boys and males define *manhood* as a subconscious extension of the self that is externally presented and licensed. Being on the exterior, manhood is more likely to be seized.

When it is defined this way, it is worn like paraphernalia; consequently it can be undressed relatively easily. Manhood, in its purest manifestation as defined by men, cannot be revoked, partly because it is internalized. It is not a standpoint or position that is defined solely or even primarily by a "way of knowing," but rather a way of being. It is a life-force that is achieved after reaching a level of spiritual, emotional, mental, and ontological maturity, consciousness, and balance and having one's manhood coextensively and relationally validated by one's

community. One who has achieved manhood is aware of the ontological spatial boundaries and functions along the borders between himself and others to achieve desired ends, but is conscious of not "losing himself" in the identity negotiation process. "Losing himself" is always a threat because of the exhaustive code switching mandate as he attempts to coordinate his actions with others, as well as the possibility that his masculine identity may become anonymous, silenced, suppressed, and accessorized. So, he must always be cognizant of the effects of identity negotiation; this is accomplished through policing and maintaining surveillance over his identity. Keeping oneself in balance is the goal of masculine behaviors. It also defines struggle, the centerpiece of Black masculine identities (see Figure 1).

Explaining the Black Masculine Identities Paradigm

Masculinities in general are perceptual categories in flux; therefore, defining black masculine identities requires that black masculine perceptions are taken into account. Stuart Hall (1997) asserts that identities are the labels given to the different ways interactants are positioned by and position themselves in

past and present social narratives. Essentially, all definitions of *masculinity* are a matter of positionality.

Black masculine social positionings are primarily communication phenomena. Positioning is the axis of ontological difference among separate, but often overlapping, masculine identities. That is, positions facilitate how masculinity is understood and enacted at any given moment. If any of the following factors is threatened, the perceptual position can shift from positive to negative as an instinctive protective response; hence masculinities are not stable, predictable forces. They are as fluid as one's perceptions.

Five factors affect Black masculine positionality: *struggle*, *community*, *achievement*, *independence*, and *recognition*. These factors offer some explanation for how masculinities are selected and enacted. It is important to remember that masculinities vary with respect to conditions, maturity, and positionality. Masculinity, as with all behavioral manifestations, can be conceptualized along the twin registers of self-efficacy and symbiosis. *Self-efficacy* refers to the degree to which an individual feels he or she has control over his or her life. *Symbiosis* refers to the attachment one has to a certain life-space and/or relational history that is partly defined by a different, foreign, or asymmetrical cultural experience, such as the case with *African Americans*. So, a person who has a strong Black cultural identification and is militant may hate Whites because of what he has learned about slavery, yet he is forced to interact with Whites if he wants to be employed. He becomes unavoidably attached to an American culture that has become synonymous with whiteness, while attempting to maintain a commitment to an African ancestral heritage.

This historical symbiosis may cause him to behave negatively toward anyone who looks White. On the other hand, a Black person who has a strong Black identification may feel self-efficacious, and therefore have little problem initiating and maintaining relationships with Whites despite what he knows about slavery. Both persons function this way for a variety of reasons. The factors of positionality offer some explanation for how masculinities are selected and enacted. As stated previously, it is important to remember that masculinities vary with respect to ontological condition, maturity, and positionality.

Figure 1 Black Masculine Identity Model



Struggle and the Mandala

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung contended that the self, as an archetype, is naturally motivated to move toward growth, perfection, and completion. The ultimate symbol of the self, he argues, is the mandala, a diagram that contains a circle inside of a square or vice versa. The dialectic between the shapes is consistent with the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious elements of the self; hence, the combination of the three represents the total self, which is in constant pursuit of balance and wholeness. It is particularly interesting that Jung applies the second law of thermodynamics, the principle of entropy, to explain his interpretations of dreams. This law is also an important component of chaos theory. The actual principle states that when hot and cold objects merge, the hotter flows into the colder to create a sense of equilibrium. No matter what conceptual label is used to describe entropic behavior, it refers to the degree to which disorder in a human or object-centered system may be managed. Because we, as human beings, are naturally incomplete, we often strive toward perfection and balance, and sometimes this is done on a most subconscious level.

So, it may appear on the surface that one may be stagnated or polarized in a certain life-stage; we often behave in ways that are meant to evoke recognition, approval, and validation. Black masculine persons do this by taking agency in defining the "spaces" where they live. Place, space, home, and territory are metaphors often used in postmodern research to describe positions of the self in society. Home is a particularly useful metaphor because of its implicit property of privacy, self-protection, shelter, and comfort. Place, space, and territory are much more public terms that fuse the constitutive features of adjacency, interconnectedness, isolation, possession, yet fragmentation. In both cases, something clearly accents a void that needs to be filled. The motivation to do so characterizes struggle, but the behavioral quest is about human possibility and growth. This is why struggle is at the center of the mandala. To speak of achievement and independence, for instance, one must at some point address the issue of potentiality and ask: "What are the possibilities of my achievement, or of my being independent?"

On a psychic level, struggle can be understood as the effort to seek out portions to fulfill our (self-observed) conscious needs and desires. The peculiar operation of conscious behavior in the social domain is that it nourishes and reproduces subconscious motivations, but the social domain initially constitutes these self-understandings. Consciousness, by nature, is fragmentary and an enactment of self-recognition. The fascinating dimension of consciousness is how it gets perpetuated on a daily basis via communicated identities.

Recognition. Human beings clearly coexist, and consequently we coordinate our behaviors so that human activity is somewhat synthesized and rule-governed. Michael Walzer (1997) offers an interesting approach to managing social diversity by rethinking coordination as toleration. His central thesis is that difference can be tolerated if humans can recognize how we are basically alike and dissolve commitments to group localities. He supports this thesis by expounding on what he names "regimes of toleration," which are multinational instances of submerged difference for the sake of human totality. Although intriguing, Walzer's analysis oversimplifies human difference and proposes an alternative that mimics "the melting pot" concept; however, Walzer is correct in suggesting that human difference makes social coordination problematic for those who find the activity of recognition to be a hassle. The discourse humans use to capture the thoughts we have about the Other is significant.

As Chandra Mohanty (1994) points out: "The central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged" (p. 146). Personhood is founded on what the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor coins the "politics of recognition." The entire concept of masculinity is predicated on recognition. Therefore, the natural progression of gender relationships depends on this social process. Taylor asserts that a politics of recognition requires that "Others" recognize and identify the authentic "I," and offer it permission to proceed with a given behavior.

So, self-authenticity is discovered within the dynamics of human interaction; meanwhile the "Other" serves the function of recognizing and validating that

construction. In cases where the "Other" fails to recognize or refuses to validate masculine behavior, then either the masculine person discontinues the behavior or suffers social penalty, which is sometimes more punitive than any other kind. Certainly, people can and often do present themselves differently to different people. This is but another facet of recognition politics. This perceptual factor, which affects positionality, is explained by Ribeau, Baldwin & Hecht (1997) as understanding "the feeling that there was a genuine exchange of thinking, feeling and caring" (p. 150).

Independence. Independence is about self-authorization, autonomy, and freedom of self-expression. All human beings seek it at some point in their lives, often as teenagers. As one matures, the manner and mode of self-expression often becomes more sophisticated. It is then more about transformation of the self. When scholars merge Black masculinities and independence in their conversations, they often evoke notions of resistance to dependence, control of situations, and ultimately deviancy. Independence does begin with self-assertion but does not need to end with abnormality or delinquency. Perhaps the best method of pursuing this phenomenon is to theorize *male* masculinities as spaces that are attached to behavioral modes of existence, so that a male's (based on Akbar's distinctions) masculinity will be perceived differently than a boy's or a man's. For example, a male's masculine quest for independence may be read as an unwillingness to commit himself to a relational partner, whereas a man's masculine assertion of independence may be related to self-development. That is, he may find it necessary to separate himself in order to understand himself better, as a separate entity rather than a dependent pair. The healthiest relationships are interdependent; in these exchanges, there is some balance between autonomy and dependence.

Achievement. At first glance, achievement may appear to reflect only acquisition, but its real concern is with accomplishment of personal and collective goals. Personal goals may range from materialistic items such as owning a BMW to the spiritual goal of being at peace and one with God. The personal impinges directly on the collective. The content of and progress toward one's aspirations of achievement au-

tomatically affect the success and survival of the collective. This is reflected in the African-American affirmation "I am because we are, and because we are; therefore I am." This is much different than the quote representing the individualist, competitive, survival-of-the-fittest nature of Cartesian thought—"I think therefore I am." Masculine behavior cannot be substantiated as an intricate identity matrix if the only achievement concerns are with an individual's materialistic bread-winning capabilities. The cultural community to which he belongs is also critical. The commitment to the immediate and extended family, the church, and to the preservation of African-American culture is critical.

The discussion of achievement cannot ignore the reality of cultural identity *negotiation* among Black males. Roberts (1994) maintains:

African American men must negotiate two cultural models of human relationships. . . . The Euro-American model emphasizes values such as competition, individualism, and domination as central to the human condition. The African model for human relationships, conversely, stresses the importance of group and community needs over individual aspirations, cooperation over competitive relationships, as well as interconnectivity among people. (p. 384)

In seeking to achieve one's goals, both cultural modes of behavior may be enacted in rapid succession such that they appear to be simultaneously engaged. The real danger is when Black masculine persons cease from embracing indigenous African-centered values, hence negotiating African cultural aspects of their identities. Staying grounded in one's cultural worldview, while functioning within a "Euro-American model," is difficult when switching back and forth between two modes of consciousness; however, this activity is important. This is what is meant by the popular phrases in the Black community—"stay Black" and "keep it real." They are admonitions to remain aligned with one's culture as one pursues his aspirations rather than relinquishing or negotiating aspects of the cultural self in the process.

Community. It is impossible to define one's self alone while living in a community of persons who must validate one's presence. Here, Black manhood is achieved ritualistically and behaviorally, while

Black masculinity is perceptually reaffirmed. So, Black manhood is the behavioral category and Black masculinity is the perceptual category. Essentially, by this definition, *manhood* is relationally discovered via one's actions. The community not only affirms but also contractualizes the behaviors of Black men via interaction. The value of Black manhood is what it gives to the rest of the community. If one is unproductive, then the community must question his value. Manhood is both an agreement and social, political, and/or cultural assignment contractually arranged. As a result of the contract, Black men are figuratively bound to the community, which is the co-author of normative masculine behavior.

Black manhood is a behavioral category in flux developing with age, experience, stability, cultural consciousness, self-comfort, and spiritual awareness, and affirmed by the community. The "community" can be defined broadly as in a global or diasporic "family" and/or locally as in the neighborhood in which one lives. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to agree on universal criteria for Black manhood because communities change and are often diverse. Nonetheless, the community affirms one's masculinity, no matter whether one is homosexual or heterosexual, fatherless or not, employed or unemployed, male or female. The composite cultural community may not be the adjudicates of masculinity or manhood; sometimes, those that affirm are persons who function similarly to the adjudicated individual. Nonetheless, the community plays a viable role in how masculinities are constituted and positioned.

These five factors that affect Black masculine positionality—struggle, community, achievement, independence, and recognition—are important aspects of repositioning Black masculinities to counter pathological depictions of Black masculinity. These factors offer some explanation for how masculinities are selected and enacted but also facilitate the redefinition of Black masculinity as cultural property.

IMPLICATIONS OF BLACK MASCULINIST RESEARCH

Black masculine identities are deployed and negotiated with struggle at the center of the exchange. Recognition, independence, achievement, and com-

munity are four factors that affect masculine positioning. So, you might ask: What are the implications for females or homosexuals? In conceptualizing masculinities, it is my attempt to be critical, yet inclusive. Based on the definition of *masculinity* given in this essay, both sets of persons can be masculine, although we have diverged at times from a unitary gender framework to a male conception of masculinity in order to accent unique concerns of that group of masculine persons. We are aware that class is a dominant and interceding factor of masculine realities as well. It is not discussed here because of the scope and nature of this essay. Clearly, many scholars have combined race, class, and gender, rationalizing that these terms are inseparable, especially as we write about the intersection of power and social formations. Likewise, it could be argued that sexual preference, physical ability, and a host of other ontological facets cannot be disjoined. Difference as a pillar of identity must be constituted, grounded in critical examinations of everyday experiences. These experiences and personal histories are numerous and must be deconstructed in order to better understand the formation and maturation of self-definitions.

The study of Black masculinities is an effort to recombine the African-American gender community. That should remain the goal. Theorizing masculinity as cultural, ontological, historical, communicative, and gendered is one progressive formula to achieve this goal. Extant gender research purviews the communicative, sociological, and psychological dimensions of male behavior. That should continue, and it should be culturally specific. If Black masculine theory is described as a set of explanations that stipulates a defining relationship between Black males and their environment, then certainly communication scholars should continue to create, develop, and sustain this circuit of inquiry. Empirical studies should explore this barren terrain. If Black masculine theory's primary function is to illustrate its opposition to feminine ways of knowing, however, then the venture is counterproductive. There are truly unique concerns that Black men share about their masculinities. This article begins that dialogue in the discipline of communication.

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Endnotes

1. We purposefully use the term "Black" instead of African American for two reasons: (1) to accent the body politic inherent in seeing the color black during interracial interaction and (2) to make the point that "Black" refers to peoples throughout the Diaspora who are Black, from Brazil to Trinidad to the United States and beyond. These Black masculinities share the common positionalities and overall struggle discussed in the Black masculine identity theory.
2. Incidentally, these are often the same people who believe that all humans share the same desires, interests, needs, and motivations.
3. According to Nakim Akbar (1991): "A male is a biological entity. . . . One need not look beyond the observable anatomical characteristics to determine that he is a male. Maleness is also a mentality that operates with the same principles as biology. It is a mentality dictated by appetite and physical determinants. This mentality is one guided by instincts, urges, desires, and feelings. He is in this mentality a whining, crying, hungry, and dependent little leech. The next stage in the transformation from the biologically bound definition of 'male' is the development of the 'boy.' The movement is determined by the development of discipline. Once the mind has become disciplined, the boy is in a position to grow into reasoning. . . . When the primary use of your reason is for the purpose of scheming or lying then you are fixated in the boyish mentality. . . . The thing that transforms a boy into becoming a man is knowledge." (pp. 3-12).

Questions and Concepts

1. What do Jackson and Dangerfield imply when they assert that masculinity is negotiated?
2. How do media stereotypes of Black males affect Black masculine identity?
3. Discuss the link between sex roles and gender stereotypes.
4. How do Jackson and Dangerfield define masculinity?
5. What are the stereotypes of Black masculine bodies described by Jackson and Dangerfield? How do these stereotypes correspond to actual social reality?
6. How does the Jackson and Dangerfield identity paradigm lead to the development of Black masculine identity?
7. What are Jackson and Dangerfield inferring when they ask the question "Can manhood be revoked?"
8. What factors affect Black male positionality?
9. How does the notion of struggle influence Black male identity?
10. What roles do recognition, independence, achievement, and community play in establishing Black male identity?

Does the Worm Live in the Ground? Reflections on Native American Spirituality

MICHAEL TLANUSTA GARRETT

MICHAEL P. WILBUR

Everyone knows that grandparents and grandchildren often have a very special bond that goes beyond words. Still, from time to time, the way grandchildren act can get on the nerves of grandparents (and, of course, the way grandparents act can get on children's nerves, too). Tsayoga was a good little boy—sensitive, quiet, inquisitive, but also very stubborn. He was a good boy, but he had to do things his own way, and he couldn't always understand why things weren't the way he thought they should be. "But why?" he might ask his grandfather—over and over and over. Sometimes, Grandfather would get a little frustrated with the boy who might be busy listening but not hearing. "Tsayoga," the old man would say abruptly sometimes, "does the worm live in the ground, or does the worm fly in the sky?" "Grandfather," the little boy would answer, "the worm lives in the ground." "Well, OK then," Grandfather would reply.

OVERVIEW

There seems to be a great deal of misunderstanding these days about what Native American spirituality actually means and what it involves (Matheson, 1996). This misunderstanding in mainstream American culture has developed for several reasons, in-

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