THE ONTOLOGICAL MEMES, SOCIAL CURRICULUM, AND PERFORMANCE OF BLACK MASCULINITY

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Introduction

This article utilizes Foucault's (1965/1988, 1970/1994, 1972) archaeology method to explore how Black masculinity emerged as an episteme constructed at the intersection of race and gender curricula. It examines how North American slavery altered discourses on humanity and culture to such a degree that it created a new condition of possibility through creolization, and how the creolization of West African and European memes and meme complexes created the current episteme of Black masculinity. The archaeology method posits that the subject of history is a product of discourse (Hendry, 2011, p. 37, p. 361), and this emphasis on excavating the various discourses that produced a subject is integral to fostering a deeper understanding of African American social curricula as a whole but especially in regard to masculinity. Black masculinity has been the subject of interracial and intraracial discourses that have shaped its conceptualizations from the very first purchases of slaves by Europeans in West Africa to the present day. These discourses have produced multiple social curricula on what it is to be a Black man and how one performs Black masculinity. I have chosen to examine masculinity as its own social construct because while certain forces of creolization created all of what we think of today as African American culture, African American masculinity and African American femininity can also be seen as distinct epistemes with their own distinct archaeologies.

This article also utilizes memetics: Drawing on the work of Dawkins (1976/2016, 1982), Krippendorff (2012/2013) defines memes as, "A unitary idea, message, behavior, or style that spreads throughout a community of minds. Analogous to genes, which transmit biological information, memes transmit cultural information and are thought to affect the content and organization of human minds" (pp. 269-270, 399-400). Memes are not solely unitary according to Dawkins (1976/2016); he

writes "Perhaps we could regard an organized church, with its architecture, ritual, laws, music, art, and written traditions, as a co-adapted stable set of mutually assisting memes" (p. 217-218). Dawkins (1976/2016) asserts that individual memes combine with other related and complementary memes to form a "co-adaptable stable set of mutually assisting memes" or, more directly, "meme complexes" (p.217-218). Memes are analogous to social curricula in the sense that they are concepts that are transferred from person to person and affect how people act and think. This understanding of the meme and the meme complex is central to conceptualizing the historical creolization process that created what I am arguing to be a Black male episteme and for the continuing theorizing of how social curriculum manifests, in this case, at the intersection of race and gender.

Racial and Gendered Curricula

African American culture creates and disseminates its own knowledge and contains its own discourses; this includes the episteme of gender. The social and hidden curricula surrounding Black masculinity affect the practices of everyday life for everyone in America. Black boys are taught to be Black men according to these curricula, and this pedagogy has serious implication for all intersections of Blackness. Education, economics, politics, theology, criminal justice, and medicine all must contend with how to conceptualize Black men and the worlds they inhabit. A widespread lack of understanding of these worlds often leads to misunderstandings by the broader American society, such as with "the cool pose"— the African American expression of the Yoruba meme of mystic coolness or "Itutu" in the face of external macro and micro aggressions—which has contributed to fabrications such as Black male pathological criminality and is discussed in greater detail later (Thompson, 1983/1984, p. 33; Ferguson, 2001, p. 77-79; Majors and Billson, 1992, p. 5). American society tends to frame Black masculinity in a binary that Ferguson (2001) identifies as the criminal versus the endangered species (p. 77-79). This binary, which pervades the national discourse on all levels, has been forced into the public space, with full justification, with the rise of Black Lives Matter and its various factions, which have highlighted the extrajudicial killings of Black men and women by White vigilantes and the police.

This binary is problematic because it does not engage the ontological complexity of Black masculinity. Ferguson (2001) writes, "But they [the poles of the criminal-endangered special binary] are condensations, extrapolations, that emphasize certain elements and gloss over others. They represent a narrow selection from the

multiplicity, the heterogeneity of actual relations in society" (p. 78-79). This article seeks to address a vital set of glossed over elements: the ontological memes that comprise Black masculinity. As a people, African Americans are a recently coalesced ethnic group with a unique intellectual history that is reflected, for example, in how gender is conceptualized and enabled by certain ideas that have disparate origins.

Black masculinity incorporated European patriarchal conceptualizations into its social curricula and pedagogy between slavery and the Civil Rights movement that are still with us. Here I draw upon Ani's (1994) discussion of European and African culture in *Yurugu*. Ani (1994) asserts that in the Euro-American world view, reality is divided into the human and non-human phenomenal sphere where the self, affect, subject, ego, and self-consciousness are conceptualized and distinct from nature, invisible beings, concepts, and other men (p. 98). This worldview is necessary to exploit humans and the natural world. In the Africanized worldview, the gap between the human and non-human does not exist. Ani (1994) writes:

> It is appropriate, however, to make some obvious observations about what African, Amerindian, and Oceanic majority thought-systems have in common to the exclusion of European thought. All of the views mentioned are spiritual in their nature, that is, they have spiritual bases and thereby reject rationalism and objectification as valued epistemological modes. (p. 98-99)

These two worldviews provide the memes and meme complexes that inform and shape Black masculinity and, in turn, replicate themselves in the racial and gendered curricula. Collins (2004) writes:

> This Black gender ideology is not simply a benign set of ideas affecting individual African American women and men. Instead, it is used to justify patterns of opportunity and discrimination that African American women and men encounter in schools, jobs, government agencies, and other American social institutions. (p. 16)

The ramifications of the conceptualization of Black masculinity far exceed that of Black men; they permeate the political, economic, sexual, and social realities for millions of African Americans.

Race and gender are social constructs; they have no basis in the objective world. They are both performative identities and are products of the imagination. Anderson (2006) writes:

> In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion. (p. 24)

Race and gender function, both independently and intersectionally, in this manner. Yet, these imagined concepts have a very real impact on the lives of billions; this is especially true at the intersection of race and gender. Butler (1990/2010) writes, "My view is that no single account of construction will do, and that these categories always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another"(p. 19). The gender and the race curricula inform and shape one another while simultaneously endorsing and pushing back against the essentialism that race and gender inspire. The complexity inherent in the performance of Black masculinity is further complicated by Black masculinity having an agenda: It seeks to carve out its own space within a hegemonic White masculine space. From Garvey to Hip Hop, Black masculinity has been used as a site of resistance against these larger oppressive forces, which has created a pedagogy of both liberation and oppression that stretches across Black concepts of curriculum.

Ferguson (2001), Collins (2004), Ani (1994), McCune (2014), and hooks (2004) extend and complicate Watkins' (1993) notions of social education, the site where gender intersects with Blackness, that stretches across all six of Watkins' curriculum orientations. The Black curriculum, as described by Watkins (1993) consists of six orientations: Functionalism under slavery; Accommodationism, which was promoted by Booker T Washington in the early Jim Crow period; Liberalism, which saw the establishment of a number of historically Black colleges with White philanthropic contributions; Black Nationalism, which is rooted in the work of Garvey and Malcolm X; Afro-Centrism, which is rooted in the elevation of African culture within the Black curriculum; and Social Reconstructionism, which sought to challenge the historical and economic structures of the United States (p. 323-34). As Watkins (2001) writes, "Ideology is not left to chance" (p. 9). Each of these orientations have conceptualized Black masculinity according to their own ends by

perpetuating preexisting memes and meme complexes, creating new ones, and steering the ways in which memes are introduced, thereby ensuring their transmission in both emancipatory and oppressive ontological forms. Regarding oppressive ontological forms, hooks (2004) argues that by the time slavery had ended, patriarchal masculinity had become the standard for the majority of Black men, that this extended throughout the 20ᵗʰ century (p. 4), and that integration promoted a cultural situation in which Black men and women accepted broader White notions of gender roles (p. 9-10). Logically, this means that misogyny has been a part of the conceptualization of masculinity across the six orientations of Black curriculum. But, hooks (2004) asserts that there is a long continuum of complexity in Black gender roles. She writes,

> In every segregated Black community in the United States there are adult Black men married, unmarried, gay, straight, living in households where they do not assert patriarchal domination and yet live fulfilled lives, where they are not sitting around worried about castration. Again it must be emphasized that the black men who are most worried about castration and emasculation are those who have completely absorbed white supremacist patriarchal definitions of masculinity. (p. 10)

This means that alternative meme complexes of masculinity which are emancipatory have been a part of the conceptualization of masculinity across the six orientations of Black curriculum as well. This intersection between ontological meme complexes of oppression and emancipation is a prominent site of tension in the social curriculum of Black masculinity.

Gender and race performance must be taught which implies that a curriculum, albeit a hidden one sometimes, as well as pedagogical visions and methods are being employed to maintain these imagined communities. Blackness and masculinity can be taught through both formal and informal means. An analysis of Blackness or masculinity must occur at the intersection of Black masculinity and begin with the process that created the curriculum—the creolization of West African and European memes.

Creolization

From an archeological perspective, creolization is a new condition of possibility. The Black masculine social curriculum is not entirely a result of colonization but rather is one of creolization. Cohen (2007) has suggested that creolization or hybridization is a process by which two or more ethnic subjectivities exchange ideas, cultural symbols and artifacts, meanings, curricula, and genetics that results in a new subjectivity that is distinct from the previous subjectivities yet still bears some of its monikers. Cohen (2007) writes:

> By accepting the idea and reality that cultural boundaries are fuzzy and indeterminate and embracing the notion of travelling cultures, hybridization and creolization have become potentially subversive concepts. They are subversive of race and ethnicity because they point to the existence and growing numbers of people of mixed heritage. They are subversive of territorial and language-based notions of nationalism. They are subversive, thirdly, of religious fundamentalisms as they stress the syncretic nature of belief systems rather than their supposedly divine origins. Even as religious leaders stress purity, consistency and adherence to strict doctrine, hybridized and creolized practices present anomalies in social behaviour and belief systems. (p. 371)

Creolization can then be seen, in part, as an intertwining and exchange of the memes and meme complexes present in previous subjectivities and as a process of creating new ontological memes and meme complexes, ways of knowing, and methods of disseminating knowledge. I am not suggesting that African people entered into the creolization of the Atlantic world willingly, but African Americans are culturally, linguistically, religiously, and biologically the products of the mix of Africa, Europe, and the Americas; African Americans are a creole people. Slavery was its own episteme and creolization created a new condition of possibility in the most brutal sense; this has left us with an assortment of potentially conflicting memes and meme complexes that were introduced in horrible circumstances that have propagated over time within the social curriculum that socializes Black boys into Black men.

It is very difficult to ascribe "West African" memes and meme complexes to a specific state or cultural group in West Africa, but some are evident and traceable.

Traditionally, it has been assumed in the popular culture that most West African cultural memes did not survive once in the Americas because of the brutality of slavery, but this is a false assumption. Thornton (1998) argues:

> Slaves, although no longer surrounded by their familiar environment, village, and family, were nevertheless not in a cultural wilderness when they spoke their language and shared their norms in the new environment, especially if they were on a large estate or in an urban area. (p. 205)

There were once thriving and distinct West African slave communities in the Atlantic world, but this is no longer the case. Rather than vanishing, a creolization process happened among the enslaved West Africans and their descendants, which created a new Afro-Atlantic positionality. Many memes and meme complexes survived but they lost their specificity and became simply "African." For example, the meme complex of "Nommo," which can be defined as the creative power of the word embodied in the griot story tellers and poets of West Africa, has survived and manifests itself in African American blues and hip hop (Smitherman, 1997, p. 3-7; Ferris, 1974, p. 122-124; Howard, 2011, p. 738-740). This West African creolization process occurs simultaneously with the introduction of European memes and meme complexes. The Afro-Atlantic positionality, which includes African American culture, is the result of the creolization of West African memes and meme complexes which were dedicated to preserving identity and the creolization process of European memes and meme complexes which was dedicated to survival, both of which occurred concurrently. This creolization of the West African and the European by the Afro-Atlantic world can be observed in the religions and spiritual practices found in African American expressions of Catholicism in regard to the venernation of the saints and the Baptist denomination with its practice of immersion baptism and shouting which are all memes that were compatible with earlier West African meme complexes regarding the existence of spirits (Wilkie, 1997, p. 93-96). Out of this intersection of creolization processes, modern Black culture and its corresponding meme complex of masculinity emerged.

Following the imposition of *Inter Caetera* in 1493 by the Spanish in the Americas the vast gold, silver, and cash crop industries that had been created faced a crisis of labor. The Native Americans who had once populated the region had become victims of genocide, were enslaved and later died off from disease, or fled into the interior beyond the reach of the Spanish. Faced with a shortage of labor in an

industry that had rapidly made Spain and Portugal economic powers, the Spanish along with the Portuguese would reach back to the Papal Bull *Romanus Pontifex*, which reiterated an earlier bull given by the same pope in 1452 titled *Dum Diversas*, given under Pope Nicholas V in 1455 which stated:

> We [therefore] weighing all and singular the premises with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly by other letters of ours granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso—to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit. (Davenport and Paullin, 2004, pp. 23)

This applied specifically to the inhabitants of West and Central Africa and would be the difference between the nature of slavery in Africa and the nature in the western hemisphere.

Perpetual slavery in order to guarantee the survival of an industry on which Spain's and Portugal's international power and standing depended created a situation in which the forced labor became an industry within itself. Slavery became the industry upon which all other industries would rest in the infancy of the capitalist colonial experiments. By the time of the American and Haitian revolutions, this trend had become ingrained as a de facto state of normalcy in the Western hemisphere. Before the Haitian revolt began in 1791, the French colony of St. Dominge was the most valuable territory in the French Empire, with New Orleans serving as a supply colony for the island's sugar cane industry, which demanded a constant supply of fresh slaves from Africa as most died due to the brutal nature of slavery on that island.

Within the United States, an economy that rested on Southern slave-based agricultural production and the maintenance of that labor force developed alongside Northern manufacturing. In the United States, only African Americans have had the

distinction of being seen as capital. Their bodies had economic value, and they or their children could be used as collateral for loans and payment of debts. The ownership of Blacks was the original American status symbol. Following the suspension of the international slave trade, there was a shift towards domestic production. In short, African Americans were created, culturally and biologically, by capitalism.

To survive a vicious life in America, Black people adopted European ontological memes and meme complexes. These meme complexes created social and hidden curricula and pedagogies that still shape the way that Black masculinity is conceptualized but this did not supplant the African memes. This relationship is a central frame of Black masculinity and Blackness in general. W.E.B. DuBois (1903/1994) describes the impact that the creolization of West African and European ontological meme complexes on Black American consciousness with his famous theory of double consciousness; he writes,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. (p. 2-3)

The duality in DuBois's double consciousness is the West African and European memes and meme complexes interacting with one another and the peculiar sensation he described is the tension that exists between them; to be able to perceive oneself from the perspective of the oppressor and as the oppressed in order to survive in a hostile society. For these ontological memes to be reconciled and a new curriculum and pedagogy of Black masculinity to exist, they must be acknowledged and explored.

Memes

Within African American culture, Black masculinity is its own episteme. The conceptualization of the proper self is central to any worldview. The Eurocentric worldview has traditionally positioned the individual as separate from the universe and the immediate environment; in this sense, "other men" or community is separate from the individual (Ani, 1994, p.98). It should be noted that this worldview is not without its critics in both Europe and White America. The Africanized worldview views the universe and the immediate environment as extensions of the self; the individual does not exist without the community (Ani, 1994, p.98). These memes and meme complexes provide a spectrum of how Black men view themselves, women, LGBT persons, and their responsibilities to their communities. It must be noted that all six orientations of Black Curriculum (Watkins, 1993, p. 323-34) are concerned with the emancipation of Black men and women from White domination. Yet, the meme complexes within the orientations of Black curriculum generate curriculum, pedagogy, and performance that has often proved hypocritical to that expressed aim because some of the ontological memes adopted by Black masculinity were conceptualized to subjugate African masculinity.

"Control" as a concept is important to understanding the differences between the European and African worldviews regarding the self, which have been blended by the process of creolization. The European concept of control is situated in a detachment from the world. The world is something to be controlled as he himself is something that he can control. Ani (1994) writes:

> The "rational man," in European terms, is above all the person who
> is in control of his passions. He makes decisions—choices based on
> reason—the proper and invulnerable guide. Being in control of
> himself puts himself in control of others—those who are irrational
> or at least less rational. (p. 239)

Emotionally suppressed rationality, which is not a solely European capacity but is prominent in the Eurocentric meme complex, has provided the bedrock for the various oppressions associated with White patriarchal culture because of the separation between the self and the world. This meme complex has been co-adapted within Black masculinity meme complexes.

The "control" meme is evidenced by the manifestation of a Black patriarchy that parallels White patriarchy. Before the slave trade and later imperial repression, African masculinity did not resemble European masculinity. As a matter of emphasis, African men did not understand why European men insisted on dominating women. Hooks (2004) writes:

> When we read the annals of history, the autobiographical writings of free and enslaved Black men, it is revealed that initially Black men did not see themselves as sharing the same standpoint as White men about the nature of masculinity. Transplanted African men, even those coming from communities where sex roles shaped the division of labor, where the status of men was different and most times higher than that of women, had to be taught to equate their status as men with the right to dominate women, they had to be taught patriarchal masculinity. (p. 2-3)

Slavery can be described as its own form of education and training. In time, the European patriarchal masculinity would become a part of the social curriculum of African American masculinity with the rise of Jim Crow. Hooks (2004) writes:

> Throughout the 1900s Black men and women debated the issues of gender equality. White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy's refusal to allow Black males to full access to employment while offering Black females a place in the service economy created a context where Black males and females could not conform to standard sexist roles in regard to work even if they wanted to. (p. 8)

But rather than outright reject this binary, many Black men desired to fit into those roles in order to validate their own masculinity in the same manner that White men validated theirs. The adoption of the White memes of patriarchal masculinity has been one of the most problematic memes in the creolization process.

While some have cited the current problematic reality of Black men producing children whom they in turn ignore as a measure of manhood as a recent phenomenon, from a creolized perspective it is very old, as slave masters had the right to have sex with whom they wished whenever they wished. The masculine ideal of the American south was a wealthy White man who had many illegitimate children who he acknowledged at his own whim while his wife was faithful only to

him and did not complain; he was a patriarch in the Biblical sense. We see this older ideal of White patriarchal masculinity manifested in some current hip-hop pop culture memes of Black masculinity. With capital comes power and the rights to do what the original master did. Calling women "Bitches" and "Hos" might seem garish to some, but in a creolization sense, these Black men emulate the same White hegemonic masculinity that dominated them and their ancestors.

Collins (2004) writes:

> Because enslaved African men were denied the patriarchal power that came with family and property, they claimed other markers of masculinity, namely, sexual prowess and brute strength. Foreshadowing contemporary images of Black masculinity that celebrate hyper sexuality and athletic ability, Black men were permitted dimensions of masculinity that most benefited Whites. (p. 78)

In regard to women, in order to validate Black masculinity along Eurocentric standards, Black men would largely do what White men had done to Black women. Black masculinity is not exempt from the same toxicity that characterizes Eurocentric hegemonic masculinity. The adoption and incorporation of these memes of White patriarchal masculinity has made Black masculinity an intellectual enabler of the same hegemonic masculinity that dehumanized Africans and continues to dehumanize their descendants of all genders and sexual orientations. Hooks (2004) writes:

> When Black males began in the name of Black power to completely embrace patriarchal masculinity, the historical movement for racial uplift rooted in nonviolence and gender equality was ruthlessly undermined. Whereas an unconventional perspective on masculinity had given Black males an alternative ground on which to build healthy self-esteem, the embrace of patriarchal masculinity meant that most black men measuring against the norm would also be less than a man, failures, unable to realize the ideal. Such thinking led to grave psychological unrest and disease. (p. 14)

In a radical departure from their West African ancestors and their conceptualizations of gender, the Black masculine quest for validation against historically systemic

European emasculation has come at the grotesque expense of Black women and men who deviate from the hegemonic norm. Hooks (2004) writes:

> Taught to believe the world is against them, that they are doomed to be victims; they assume the posture of victimizer. First embracing the ideals of patriarchal masculinity that make dominations acceptable, they then draw upon misogyny and sexism to experience their first use of violence, psychological or physical, to control another human being. (p. 57)

Ontologically speaking, Black masculinity is trapped in a cycle of emulating a masculinity that will never accept them.

Black women are not the only target for the toxic meme complex undermining the Black masculine pursuit for internal validation. Ontologically, Black masculinity can be conceptualized in very rigid performative terms. The obsession with strength in the face of the oppressor, or replicating the oppressors' masculinity, violently excludes those who do not perform as is dictated; this performance is derided as feminine or homosexual. McCune (2014) writes:

> There is no room for femininity in the domain of the masculine. A man is considered either masculine/feminine; the different styles of masculinity often remain unaccounted for or unrecognized. Of course, femininity is the less ideal performance of gender, marking the distinction between who is properly masculine and who is not. Much of these understandings of gender are residual hegemonic perspectives that almost always uses the effete or feminine to describe the "gay," setting straight men apart from those who are identified as "gay." (p. 100)

The misogynistic/LGBT-phobic meme complex expresses itself violently; it has no other manner in which to function. European meme complexes likely co-adapted with pre-existing West African meme complexes in the form of taboos regarding homosexuality. Eurocentric masculinity is premised on a meme complex regarding the use of violence to protect one's status, which was not a meme complex in West Africa, and it has functioned with devastating effect in Black communities since its introduction and adoption by Black men in their pursuit of a Eurocentric standard of validation (hooks, 2004, p. 2-3).

Yet, Black masculinity is rooted in a resistance to the brutality of White patriarchal masculinity, and this conflicts with the hegemonic masculinity often performed by Black men. For example, while there is a phenomenon of Black men ignoring the children they have fathered, this is by far the minority occurrence. According to the 2013 report *Fathers' involvement with their children: United States, 2006-2010*, published by the Centers for Disease Control, Black fathers bathed, dressed, and spent recreational time with their children more often than White fathers (p.13-15). The presence of West African memes provides alternate ontological curriculums, pedagogies, possibilities, and manifestations of Black masculinity.

The West African concept of "control", as expressed by the Yoruba meme complex of "Ashe" or the power to make things happen and spiritual command, simultaneously demands that the individual be connected to themselves and all aspects of this reality (Thompson, 1983/1984, p.17, 25). This meme complex has survived along with "Itutu" in the African American concept of "cool." About the Yoruba origin of this African American concept, Thompson (1983/1984) writes,

> The notion of coolness in Yoruba art extends beyond representations of the act of sacrifice and acts or gestures of propitiation. So heavily charged is this concept with ideas of beauty and correctness that a fine carnelian bead or a passage of exciting drumming may be praised as "cool". (p. 36)

This concept extended into practice is evident in the "cool pose", which retains that Yoruba sense of mystic coolness. Majors and Billson (1992) write:

> By acting calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough, the African American male strives to offset an externally imposed "zero" image. Being cool shows both the dominant culture and the Black male himself that he is strong and proud. He is somebody. He is a survivor, in spite of the systematic harm done by the legacy of slavery and the realities of racial oppression, in spite of centuries of mistrust. (p. 5)

Black masculinity as coolness has historically provided an ontological and performative space outside of the reach of White supremacy to exist and create. Hooks (2004) writes:

> Once upon a time Black male "cool" was defined by the ways in which Black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged. They took the pain of it and used it alchemically to turn pain into gold…It was defined by Black male willingness to confront reality, to face the truth, and bear it not by adopting a false pose of cool while feeding on fantasy; not by Black male denial or by assuming a poor me victim identity. It was defined by individual Black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others. (p. 138)

Coolness is the alternative, or "Africanized," meme complex to White masculinity and toxic Black hegemonic masculinity.

Coolness is a fluid ontological meme complex that allows for a self-expressive and defined masculinity that creates spaces for reflection about ones' relationship with their environment and community. It is a total resistance to hegemonic White norms and an intellectual space where Black masculinity can exist in concert with the world rather than in an effort of seeking dominance over it. In a society where large portions of Black males' lives are not under their control, coolness is control that cannot be taken away; it can only be given away.

Other memes that shape how Black masculinity is conceptualized and taught relate to matters of productivity and wealth. Ontologically, the social curriculum of African American masculinity is firmly attached to capitalist ethics and values and this intersection is central to understanding current conceptualizations. Simultaneously, African American masculinity is rooted in West African concepts of responsibility for the family and the community; this tension has been evident from the beginning. African American history begins with a sale. African Americans were, in an ethnic sense, created in an economic exchange between West African states and European plantation owners.

How wealth is framed in relationship to the individual and the community contrasts greatly between the Euro-American and Africanized worldview to the point where they are incompatible. This is not to say that West Africa had no concept of wealth, but rather that this notion was attached to the commitments of community. In Europe, however, capitalism provided the intellectual and practical means by which individuals broke free from the rigid class structure. Wealth was individual in this instance and meant freedom. Ani (1994) writes:

> One of the most important ways that missionary education prepared Africans for capitalism and the European techno-social order was by destroying the integrity of lineage organization that formed the basis of the traditional communal structure. Christianity stressed individual salvation and the "Judeo-Christian material culture," as Awoonor phrases it, and it denounces all communal forms such as polygyny, the traditional education system, and especially, economic communalism; i.e., the communal ownership and distribution of resources. (p. 186-87)

Ani is specifically referring to Africans in Africa; for those in the diaspora, the ethics of capitalism was the conceptual default. This concept was easily transmuted and was nowhere more apparent than with slaves who bought their freedom. The existence of a class of Blacks in cities such as Charleston and New Orleans who were not slaves gave the enslaved a glimmer of hope that they might be free someday and served to reinforce the connection between wealth, freedom, and power. It is here that we see the emergence of the accumulation of capital by the people who were once capital as the main undercurrent of the Black narrative in America, especially in stories of men such as Solomon Northup. Capital could free a man and it could, in the case of Northup, enslave a man as he was kidnapped and sold (Northup, 1853/2013). With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the issue of the economics of slavery was brought into full and violent view. Is it any wonder that the South fought to preserve slavery? Why would the South side against what was morally right— as the debate about the morality of slavery was not new, and side with a brutal institution? Because it was a foundational economic reality of the New World dating back to 1492: to preserve slavery was in their best pragmatic interests.

Bearing this in mind, the economic aspects of Jim Crow become a pragmatic attempt to preserve the order by which most Southern wealth had been accumulated. While Blacks were no longer literally the property of other individuals, their labor was now to be owned by those same individuals who once owned them in the literal sense. The newly freed man was still capital, often working off a debt imposed upon him; essentially Blacks occupied the same economic status they had while enslaved for a century after emancipation. The West African notion of communal wealth had not died out. It would emerge as a form of radicalism that has been a constant in the African American discourse as a whole and in regards to masculinity in particular. Economic independence being the ultimate freedom and an instrument of power has been espoused by many Black leaders, such as Marcus Garvey, throughout Black

history and was a point that, notably, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. agreed on.

Malcolm X stated this tradition plainly when he said in his famous 1964 "Bullet or Ballot" speech that:

> The economic philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that we should own and operate and control the economy of our community. You would never—You can't open up a black store in a white community. White men won't even patronize you. And he's not wrong. He's got sense enough to look out for himself. You the one who don't have sense enough to look out for yourself. The white man—The white man is too intelligent to let someone else come and gain control of the economy of his community. But you will let anybody come in and take control of the economy of your community, control the housing, control the education, control the jobs, control the businesses, under the pretext that you want to integrate. No, you're ought of your mind. (1964)

Martin Luther King said as much in his final speech delivered before his assassination. He said:

> And so as a result of this we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coco-Cola in Memphis…We've got to strengthen Black institutions. I call upon you to take your money out of the banks downtown and deposit your money in Tristate bank. We want a "bank-in" movement in Memphis…. you have six or seven Black insurance companies here in the city of Memphis. Take out your insurance there. We want to have an "insurance-in." Now these are some practical things we can do. We begin the process of building a greater economic base and at the same time we are putting pressure where it really hurts. (1968)

As much as the Civil Rights movement was about moral rightness and rights guaranteed under the law, it was also a movement for Black participation in the market, and its leaders were always aware and used Black economic power to force communal change. Hooks (2004) points out, however, that Black people did not heed the message of these radical reformers, who were rooted in the West African

communal wealth aspect, and they flocked to the dominant markets of the White world once most of the Jim Crow barriers collapsed.

Conclusion

The Black masculine episteme along with its social curricula and pedagogy is rooted in tension because of its origins in the creolization process that created African American culture. The memes that inform how Black masculinity is conceptualized originate in disparate culture circumstances, which were brought into dialogue with each other in the most violent and demeaning of circumstances. Black masculinity contains extremes, ranging from the inclusive and fluid to the oppressively rigid, with all points in between. Some Eurocentric memes have been combined with West African ones to create new meme complexes that function in the community. Others are incorporated from West Africa and serve as sites of resistance, whereas others are incorporated from Europe and perpetuate horrors once inflicted on our ancestors.

It must be reiterated that Black masculinity has centered on emancipation for centuries, but that this emancipation has been compromised by enduring Eurocentric conceptualizations. To the extent that it has replicated White patriarchal masculinity, Black masculinity has operated as an enabler of the repression of Black women and LGBT bodies. This misogyny has been evident across all Black curriculum orientations and political efforts. Alternative conceptualizations of Black masculinity that serve as sites of resistance to the repression of Black women and LGBT bodies have been evident across all Black curriculum orientations as well. But it must also be reiterated that the tension within Black masculinity comes from the continuing presence of West African ontological memes that create social curriculum, pedagogy, and performance that contradicts the European memes.

American society simultaneously celebrates Black men in certain avenues, like athletics and art, while also demonizing them, which is manifested in grotesque incarceration rates and extrajudicial killings of men and boys like Phillando Castile and Tamir Rice. The social curriculum being taught to Black males suggests that their very being is dangerous to the dominant Eurocentric conceptualization of masculinity, unless they are serving in some form of entertainment. Black men are attempting to find space in a conceptualization that rejects their very being.

Memes such as "coolness" are interpreted as disinterest or disrespect by the American public and school officials; these have contributed to the conceptualization of Black males as hostile, uncontrollable, and problematic. In the current formal and hidden curricula found in many schools and in the broader American society, Black males are being taught an ontology that does not acknowledge their own cultural memes or the historical creolization process that created them. Until the West African memes that undergird Black masculinity are enumerated in such a way that Black males', writ large, begin to re-conceptualize Black masculinity away from Eurocentric masculinity through a transformative social curriculum and pedagogy, Black masculinity will continue to serve as an accomplice to the patriarchy, albeit under the guise of emancipation, and will therefore remain in conflict with itself.

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