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To cite this article: Lamar Johnson & Nathaniel Bryan (2016): Using our voices, losing our bodies: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and the spirit murders of Black male professors in the academy, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, DOI: [10.1080/13613324.2016.1248831](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248831)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248831>



Published online: 08 Nov 2016.



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## Using our voices, losing our bodies: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and the spirit murders of Black male professors in the academy

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### ABSTRACT

The recent deaths of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and other Black males have generated new civil rights urgencies in Black communities and spirited academic discourses in higher education regarding the educational and social plight of Black males in America. Connecting the deaths of Black males to our lived experiences in the academy, we use a text messaging performative writing style to demonstrate how Black males are not only gunned down in the streets of America by police but also are metaphorically gunned down in the academy. That is to say, white colleagues and students attempt to use what we call the *bullet of rejection*, the *bullet of silencing*, and the *bullet of disrespect* to destroy us and our academic agenda. We conclude with a call to action for teacher education programs as a way to deepen their understanding of the racialized experiences of Black males in the academy and Black males in America.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 March 2015  
Accepted 3 October 2016

### KEYWORDS

Race; critical race theory; Black males; teacher education; racial violence

### Prologue

I sit back in my office chair, close my eyes, and sigh. This is not my usual sigh of relief, but a single exhalation of frustration wrapped in a cloth of negative emotions, full of dismay and dissatisfaction – and anger. As a professor, I have several time-sensitive projects I need to complete, but it is approximately 15 minutes before the announcement of the grand jury's decision to indict Darren Wilson, the white police officer, who gunned down an unarmed, 18-year-old Black male, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri. Unfortunately, in this specific moment, being thoughtful and present requires me to have sentiments I would not rather embody and to acknowledge anguish and pain I would rather forget. Rev. George Lee, Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X – prominent Black men who were killed because they were vigilant about and adamant to fight against the physical and mental oppression of people of color. Flash-forward 60 years later – Oscar Grant, Jordan Davis, Kendrick Johnson, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and recently, Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old, who was recently killed in Cleveland, OH by another white police officer just a few weeks after the killing of Michael Brown. Suddenly, due to the ongoing killing of Black men in America and the turbulence of white supremacy in the world, a whirlwind of feelings form within me. I think to myself, 'Damn, I hear we have overcome, but it is not evident to me.' Abruptly, my concentration is distracted by a text message from Nate, a colleague and friend, who is a professor at a predominantly white institution in the southeast (I am in the Midwest). Slowly, I glance at my phone, which displays a text message

from Nate. I pause for a second. Then, I remove my glasses from my face, and place them on my desk. I gently lean back in my dark, charcoal office chair. Swiftly, I swipe my right thumb across the top of my phone to read Nate's message.

## Setting the stage: the assault on and spirit murder of Black males in the society and the academy

In the words of Ella Baker, we say 'until the killing of Black men (emphasis added) (both in the streets and the academy), Black mother's sons is as important as the killing of white men, white mother's sons ... we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes. (Bernice Johnson Reagon Website 2016)

The recent deaths of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and other Black males have generated new civil rights urgencies in Black communities and spirited academic discourses in higher educational spaces regarding the plight of Black males in America. Throughout the historical and contemporary accounts about Black males, there is ample existing literature that documents how Black men have consistently been the prime targets of white supremacy (DuBois 1903; Howard 2014; Ladson-Billings 2011; Love 2013; Woodson [1933] 2000). Building upon the scholarship of Brown and Johnson (2014) and Goldberg (1993), we suggest that the contexts of the physical and spiritual violence against Black males are learned by a socially instilled view of race. Moreover, this, 'confluence of racial knowledge,' portrays the hegemonic view of Black males (Brown and Johnson 2014). To this end, racial knowledge makes possible and normalizes the physical and spiritual racial deaths – as in the events of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner. In many ways, 'race is the silent killer because it is frequently masked' (Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015, 55). Society often takes its cue on how to treat Black males based upon the past and current stereotypes about Black males and the (mis)representation of them (Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). Further, viewing Black males from a deficit lens represents a (mis) reading of who they are as individuals. We posit the misreading of Black males transfers into how they are treated in classrooms and often leads to how Black males are ultimately treated in the academy and society-writ-large.

According to Brown and Johnson (2014), society has a priori knowledge about Black males; thus, the preconceived stereotypes about Black males lead to unforgettable incidents like Martin, Brown, Garner, and countless others. Clearly, the Black male and the Black male child are ready-made constructs formed by the repetitive narrative of Black males as problematic (Brown and Johnson 2014; Ladson-Billings 2011). The very sight of the Black male body categorizes Black males as criminals. Further, the disarmed Black males who were physically murdered (Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner) as well as Black males who are spiritually murdered are/were an already constructed text which vilifies Black boys and men because the Black body, even when unarmed is armed in the eyes of white people.

We are African-American male professors at predominately white universities. We are intentional about addressing social and equity issues in our work and pedagogical practices at universities, which both have adopted socially just and culturally responsive missions that reject deficit-oriented ideologies. In moving forward in our teaching, research, and service agendas, we understand the progression of unlearning a pervasive and persistent narrative seems almost impossible considering the negative narratives about Black males are deeply rooted in society. Nonetheless, we suggest along with others (Brown and Johnson 2014; Howard 2014; Love 2013) that society-writ-large and institutions such as P-20<sup>1</sup> settings need to re-center their focus from the criminalization of Black males' behaviors and beliefs to a focus on the historical antecedents that have and continue to create such conditions that intensify the love-hate relationship society has with Black males (Ladson-Billings 2011).

In this article, we provide a glimpse of our lives by connecting such unjust killing of Black males to our lived experiences in the academy. First, we begin this discussion with a disclaimer – this is not to minimize the physical death of the aforementioned young Black men, but to demonstrate the level of racial scrutiny Black males face on a day-to-day basis that lead to their physical deaths. In other words, it is to demonstrate the racialized continuum of white supremacy from the streets to the

academy and the academy to the streets. By this we mean, it is this larger system of white supremacy and racism that renders the Black male body unsafe in both the streets and the academy. Our intent is to illuminate the ongoing spiritual murders of the spirit of many Black male academics. Second, we do not negate, discount, or ignore the fact that many of the issues and examples that will be discussed or outlined in this article transpire to many other marginalized groups including young girls, women, and other men of color (Baldrige, Lamont Hill, and Davis 2011; Conchas and Vigil 2012; De la Luz Reyes and Halcon 1988; Noguera 2008; Robinson and Clardy 2010).

We argue that Black men are metaphorically murdered in the academy. These are spirit murders (Williams 1991) committed by the hands of white students, faculty, and racist institutional policies and practices that perpetuate such murders. We approach this topic from a critical race theoretical lens to examine the raced experiences of Black male academicians. In addition to using critical race theory as an analytic tool, we use critical race methodology along with a performative writing style in the form of a text messaging conversation between us. We engage as such to speak back to racial oppression and to demonstrate how Black males are not only gunned down in the streets of America but also are metaphorically (emphasis added) gunned down in the academy. That is to say, white colleagues and students attempt to use what we call the *bullet of rejection*, the *bullet of silencing*, and the *bullet of disrespect* to destroy Black males' academic agenda. Finally, we conclude with a call to action and recommendations for teacher education programs as a way to deepen their understanding of the racialized experiences of Black males in the academy and Black males in America.

### Critical race theory

Many people view America as a post-racial society; however, critical race scholars (Bell 1992; Cook 2013; Howard 2014; Lynn and Dixon 2013) argue this is far from the truth. The days of lynching and Black bodies hanging from trees have been supplanted with a contemporary form of racism that is covertly etched within the American fabric. Race-centered violence, deeply entrenched and often arduous to unravel, leads to the killing of innocent Black people, particularly Black males. Critical race theory (CRT) calls for a critical analysis of *race* in the American society (Milner 2007). Advancing the proposition that racism is normal, permanent, and interwoven throughout the American landscape, leading CRT theorist, Bell (1992) postulated that race should be situated within its social and historical contexts, social structures and institutions such as the educational system. Nearly two decades ago, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced critical race theory to the field of education. Ladson-Billings and Tate contended that although there were studies and theoretical dialogs examining race in education, the investigation, analysis, and persistence of racism are understudied in P-20 settings. Thus, we employ CRT as an illuminating theory to assist in empirical and conceptual arguments related to race and Black males. This serves to better shed light on the actual and metaphorical bullets that are being shot at Black males in society and in the academy on a day-to-day basis.

As evidenced by the racial violent incidents we have encountered, we know that all too often racially marginalized individuals experience racial micro/macro aggressions (Solórzano and Huber 2012). Racial aggressions propel systemic and everyday racism which is utilized to keep those who are racially marginalized 'in their place.' Further, microaggressions are structured in a way that *silence*, *disrespect*, and *reject* Black people's experiences:

Racial microaggressions are (a) subtle verbal and nonverbal assaults directed toward people of color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously; (b) layered assaults, based on a person of color's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and (c) cumulative assaults that take a psychological and physiological toll on people of color. (Solórzano and Huber 2012, 1489)

Microaggressions illustrate the implicit yet explicit ways in which racism and racial oppression have manifested as, 'systemic and endemic condition within U.S. educational institutions' (Solórzano and Huber 2012, 1489). Due to the historical legacy of the enslavement of African people, Black people were viewed as white property. As a result, Black people continue to be viewed in such a light within institutional contexts including the academy, which we also term like Matias (2015) 'the neoplantation.'

We contend unapologetically and unashamedly that the academy is the neoplantation for scholars of color. Matias (2015) exerts, 'Sometimes the academy life is nothing more than a neoplantation; faces and bodies of faculty of color are sold to college websites for statistical proof of diversity in higher education' (61). The author suggests that the institutional costs of Black faculty are being purchased in groups as means to meet a diversity quota while their scholarship, teaching, and service are devalued.

Congruent with CRT, we agree that racism is normal and not aberrant in teacher education preparation programs and higher education (Evans-Winters and Hoff 2011). Within the academy, racism impacts relationships, decisions, and practices; and, it is mirrored and reflected in P-20 school practices and beliefs, re-formulating, 'a new generation of raced subjects' (Evans-Winters and Hoff 2011, 466). The fact that many teacher education programs are not addressing the issues of race and racism reifies the weaponry of white supremacy (Lynn 1999). In fact, many pre-service teachers leave teacher education preparation programs with deficit ideologies and views about students of color, in particular Black males (Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). Prospective and practicing teachers re-share and re-construct the stock stories and narratives that position the Black male body as violent animals, the hyper-sexual other, and the strong athlete (Brown 2011; Howard 2014; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). In return, pre-/in-service teachers carry these fragmented depictions of Black men into their classrooms; and, how the voices and words of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown were ignored by their white enforcers is analogous to how white teachers and academicians ignore the voices and everyday outcries of Black boys in classrooms and men in academic spaces, regarding their oppression. To illuminate the issues and assaults on Black men in academic spaces, we employ counterstorytelling as a way to *hear* their outcries. Counterstorytelling is used to counter distorted, majoritarian stories about people of color, Black male professors in this case. We will further explore counterstorytelling as a methodology in a later section of this paper.

## Review of related literature

In order to better understand the metaphorical/physical killing of Black males, the affixed discourses concerning them need to be problematized and unpacked. However, we do not overemphasize the cold sterility of negative school statistics relative to Black males in this paper. Throughout the past decades, there has been a surmountable amount of dialog pertaining to the social and educational concern and status of Black males (Brown 2011; Harper 2012; Howard 2014; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). To illustrate, Brown (2011) examined the historical and contemporary assumptions about Black males. The author documented that as early as 1830 and continuing to the current-day, researchers, advocates, and educators have written about Black males in school and society (DuBois 1903; Garibaldi 1992; Howard 2008; Kunjufu 1985; Walker [1830] 1997; Woodson [1933] 2000). As a result, many comments about the historical and contemporary accounts about the schooling and education of Black boys and men have led to the allegation that Black males are 'in crisis' (Brown 2011; Hopkins 1997; Jackson, Boutte, and Wilson 2013; Howard 2014). In fact, there is this well-received image that Black males are stereotypically 'violent,' 'unruly,' and 'uneducable.'

Although such promulgations signal national attention to the social and educational needs of African-American males, such discourses have manifested and systematized a changeless, distorted, and revised *narrative* for discussing or addressing the standings of Black males (Bryan and Browder 2013). Pejorative stories about Black males as deficient, criminally minded, and sensual individuals were first used to validate the enslavement of Black people (Johns 2007). These distorted narratives about African-American males are constantly being replayed in the American backdrop. Furthermore, educators have to take into consideration the infrastructure of the educational system to fully understand how it is not set up for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and in this case, Black males.

The past and current literature abounds with theoretical and empirical research that illustrates the cultural-blindness/mismatch that obfuscates many K-12 classrooms. This is particularly true in a profession that is comprised of 85% white, middle-class, and monolingual-speaking females who are teaching a diverse group of students whose racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities may

or may not resemble theirs (Bryan and Ford 2014). This particular issue concerns us because white teachers often do not fully understand the marginality and pain of Black male students – and, often, they minimize the distress and the ‘true totality of the students’ humanity’ [emphasis added] (Matias 2015, 2). Leonardo and Boas (2013) charge the field of education to explore the relationship between white female teachers and their students of color. The K-12 classroom is monopolized by whiteness and its structures; hence, educators need to understand the multiple layers of whiteness and how it is a conduit that propels these old narratives of oppressive discourses, which have discounted Black males’ experiences, language, culture, race, ethnicity, humanity, triumphs, and struggles (Kirkland 2013). Therefore, many white female teachers are devoted members of what Leonardo and Boas call the ‘white racial army’:

Just as every army is composed of different tactical positions in order to secure or conquer a territory, so does whiteness consist of its own foot soliders, officers, and generals who perform different functions but whose allegiance to whiteness is not the question. With respect to white women, although they may not call the shots, they often pull the trigger. (Leonardo and Boas 2013, 315)

Understanding white people’s roles in the maintenance of whiteness better helps us to understand how the educational arena is an ongoing racial battleground that tacitly kills the human soul of the Black male child while simultaneously teaching violence from the curriculum we teach. With a focus on the nature of the curriculum, Cridland-Hughes and King (2015) state, ‘schools condition a *curriculum of violence* in classrooms and if teachers’ instructional practices adhere strictly to the traditional curriculum, they enact a *pedagogy of violence*’ (99). When educators offer their blood of oath to only adhere to a white Eurocentric patriarchal curriculum, it illustrates their agreement to continue to march in the white racial army, uphold the racial legacy of white supremacy, and perpetuate the attack on the psychological and spiritual deaths of Black and Brown learners.

However, such psychological and spiritual deaths are not new. Black males, like Black children, have always been mistreated as such. During segregated Black schooling, Black males were among those who were victims of the white racial army. That is, white men and women, who fought against Black education, violently attacked them in and on their way to and from schools (Butchart 2010). Presently, the violent attacks continue in that Black males, and other students of color attend schools that fail to meet their academic and social needs, which would enable them to contribute positively to this ‘democratic’ society (Boutte 2015). The violence also extends to whose culture is valued in schools.

Often time schools value and privilege Western European ways of knowing while devaluing the cultural nuances and ways of knowing of people of color (King 2005; Ladson-Billings 1997). To illustrate, Cridland-Hughes and King (2015) contend, ‘The curriculum of violence also confirms to majority of youth that there is something to fear about Black and Brown persons. So, while violence on unarmed Black bodies occur on the streets, the idea of violence against nonwhite bodies begins in the classroom’ (101). This same violence trains white children to hate, disown, and disrespect Black and Brown persons – it reiterates what their ancestors have done to sustain power. Therefore, these counterproductive views bleed into all aspects of their lives. The police officer who sees an 18-year-old as a ‘monster,’ the politicians who create laws and policies that propel the mass incarceration of Black and Brown bodies, and the teachers who refuse to see the strengths and possibilities of Black children are all members of this white apprenticeship. From early on, they see how the white dominated media, their white families, and their white teachers perceive Black people. In short, educators need to stop debating the perennial question of ‘What is wrong with Black males and their tensions with the educational system?’ And, instead, ask, ‘What is wrong with the educational system and its tensions with Black males?’ (Coates 2015; Howard 2014). Further, we should not ask Black males, ‘How does it feel to be a problem?’ (DuBois 1903). However, we should ask, ‘How is the educational system a problem for Black bodies?’ (Ladson-Billings 2011).

The insidious and spiritual murder of innocent Black men is not only present in K-12 spaces and society-writ-large but also concomitant and pervasive in the ‘ivory towers,’ where less than one percent of professors is Black and male (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). The underrepresentation of



Black male professors is also an act of spirit murder. Such underrepresentation is particularly true for Black men in the academy who engage in critical race work by challenging systemic racism therein (Juarez and Hayes 2015; Ture and Hamilton 1967). While the lack of Black male representation in the academy is seemingly becoming a growing concern, of particular concern is the underrepresentation of Black male (and women) professors who become tenure; thus, adversely impacting the pipeline of Black males who become full professors. Less than four percent of full professors are Black and even fewer are Black and male (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). Leading CRT scholar, Bell (1994), evoked a similar image in his influential book, *Confronting Authority*, in which he documents his experiences being the only pre-tenured and then tenured Black male faculty at Harvard University. In the novel, Bell highlights his personal and professional racially related experiences and the racial affliction he encountered beyond and within the classroom. For example, Bell's white colleagues and students disregarded his knowledge about race and racism, refused to refer to him as Dr, and doubted his intellect and ability to teach. Furthermore, Bell contends, 'I soon discovered that, whatever my willingness to conform, my tenured status did not entitle me to admission to the Law School's inner circles. My nontraditional teaching and writing seemed to confirm the faculty's doubts that a person without the usual credentials could be an able Harvard law professor' (38). Even when Black male faculty obtain tenure, many white colleagues still doubt our presence in the academy. During Bell's time at Harvard, the law school failed to hire a Black woman law scholar, which ignited Bell to challenge authority through an ongoing two-year protest. In the end, Harvard refused to hear the voice of Bell, and he was terminated.

Amid such claims, Dantley's (2010) speech, *The Critical Nature of Black Men in the Academy*, not only captures his journey as a Black male tenured professor at a predominately white institution in the Midwest but also provides a caricature of the shared experiences of Black males' professoriates. Dantley's conception of the Black male experience in the academy highlights how Black male intellectuals are plagued with a racist, classist, homophobic, and xenophobic system that second-guesses the position and scholarship of Black males. In return, Black males can inadvertently play into our own oppression by employing feelings of self-doubt. To enumerate, the author explained that in order for Black intellectuals to be tenured and promoted, we have to make choices and decisions that are filled with 'what if' angst—

what if my research is too radical (emphasis added) and too Afrocentric; will that hurt me? What if my pedagogical style is not only intellectually rigorous but also indeed exceptionally challenging? Am I over-compensating for the inbred racist stereotypes that are alive and well in the academy especially as they relate to the brothers? (11)

Even if we sit in a privilege position, being promoted to a tenured professor or full professor does not exempt Black male academics from encountering micro/macro racial assaults, which impede on our struggle to remain human.

Extending some of Bell and Dantley's initial thoughts, Griffin, Ward, and Phillips (2014) employed critical race theory to capture the presence of Black misandric ideology. In conjunction with CRT, the authors used composite counterstorytelling to narrate the lived realities of Black male faculty on predominately white institutions. The composite counterstory draws upon 11 interviews with Black male faculty on traditionally white campuses. To create the composite counterstory, the authors gleaned for narrative themes across the interviews and pivotal scholarly publications. In addition, the authors used direct quotes from participants and the scholarly literature to make sure they remained close to the data and to illustrate the experiences of Black male faculty as a collective. Through the creation of the authors' protagonist, Dr. Timesnow, a Black male assistant professor, the authors shed light on the Black misandry that exists to validate, confirm, and reproduce the oppression and exploitation of Black men at PWIs. That is, 'Black misandric ideology manifests individually, institutionally, and societally, and its omnipresence suggests that Black men are perceived as an illegitimate part of the formal academic campus community' (Griffin, Ward, and Phillips 2014, 1366). At times, Black male faculty are silenced and excluded from certain events with other colleagues, which hurts physically, mentally, and emotionally. It is important to note that the feeling of being marginalized moves beyond

this idea of 'feeling welcomed' (Bell 1992, 1994; Coates 2015; Dantley 2010; Griffin, Ward, and Phillips 2014) but it is also about maneuvering a space that is plagued with insensitive, intentional, and unintentional racial aggressions and explicit oppression.

In reference to teacher education programs and colleges of education, Ture and Hamilton (1967) stated that, 'Jobs will have to be sacrificed, positions of prestige and status given up, favors forfeited ... When one forcefully challenges the racist system, one cannot, at the same time, expect that system to reward [him] or even treat [him] comfortably' (15). The same tune that is sung about Black men in society is the same song that is hummed and at times vociferously expressed in the academy. Black men who engage in critical<sup>2</sup> work experience being fired from their jobs, denied job promotions, and required to leave people and places whom they love and call home (Juarez and Hayes 2015). And, this is not to exclude the everyday burden of racism that Black male professors spend time unraveling the subliminal racial undertones and microaggressions from white colleagues and students while strategically trying to figure out how to react and to respond to each disparaging remark (Boutte and Jackson 2013; King 1991; Sue and Constantine 2007). According to Juarez and Hayes (2015), white racial domination within teacher education programs has structured critical educators' professional identities and opportunities, especially critical scholars of color. Because of the historical and current issues pertaining to race and the intersection between the historical privileging of whites, many critical race scholars address the many nuances of racism and <sup>3</sup>whiteness in their teacher education courses. It has been our experience, pointedly, that there are white faculty and students who attempt to kill our human spirit because of our paradigmatic and epistemic orientations.

### **CRT as a methodological analytic tool: performing the dialog**

What makes critical race theory intriguing is its simplistic, yet complex components that blur the boundaries of theory and methodology (Cook 2013). The theory of CRT documents and explores how the systems and structures of inequalities operate regarding race and racism. Furthermore, the methodological component of CRT centers the lived experiences and realities of oppressed individuals while simultaneously rejecting positivistic epistemologies and historical ways of knowing and truth (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Critical race methodology is a component of critical race theory that unveils the ways in which race and racism impact the lives of targeted groups. One methodological CRT strategy is the use of counterstorytelling, which strives to work against the continuation of oppressing those who are usually 'silent and invisible as subjects of the research' (Cook 2013, 184). Bell (1992) explained counterstorytelling as a mode of telling the stories and narratives of those whose realities are often not told and silenced.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) assert that counterstorytelling challenges the dominant ideology and the traditional claims educational institutions construct about colorblindness, objectivity, meritocracy, and racial and social justice. More specifically, critical race scholars purport a critical race methodology in education confronts white privilege, counters notions of neutral or objective research, and reveals deficit research that silences epistemologies of people of color (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). The authors proclaim that the ideology of racism supports, creates, and validates the implementation of the 'master narrative' in storytelling. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posit that monovocal, majoritarian, master and dominant narratives, are stories that perpetuate white privilege, middle/upper class, heterosexuals, and white men by identifying these social situations as static and normative; therefore, CRT scholars utilize counterstorytelling as a way to challenge 'master narratives' and to dismantle the presumptions of the dominant discourse (Boutte and Johnson 2013).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) and Cook (2013) discuss three types of counterstories: personal narratives, other people's narratives, and composite narratives that (a) build community between those who are marginalized (b) resists and challenge the epistemology of those at the center (c) helps individuals and groups to develop our understanding of reality and possibility. In this article, we created a personal counternarrative that captures the confluence and complexities of our voices within the contexts that also provokes readers to think about the implications for Black males in the academy.



Counternarrative allows us to amplify the numerous ways Black male scholars are metaphorically gunned down in the academy and to interrupt pervasive deficit perspectives about Black men. Specifically, we utilized a counternarrative featuring our experiences in the academy and the killing of our spirits by these metaphorical bullets, while connecting the physical killing of Black men in society to the spiritual killing of the Black male humanity in the academy. The counternarrative contains a performance script in the form of a text messaging conversation between us.

### Data sources and analysis

Sources of data include both recorded and informal text message conversation with each other, journal entries, notes, classroom conversations, and extemporaneous dialog from meetings. This script was created by excerpting direct quotes from an actual text message conversation between us during the night of Darren Wilson's indictment verdict. The actual text message conversation was over the course of an hour. We analyzed the text messages and three interconnected themes emerged: (1) Bullet of rejection; (2) Bullet of silencing; and (3) Bullet of disrespect. We provide a full transcript of the texts. Moreover, we used our exact words and experiences to illustrate instances where the bullets of rejection, silencing, and disrespect were shot at us. The rawness and pain of our reactions are captured in the original texts so we have not altered them. We decided that our original and private texts were more powerful than a translation of our words to sanitized versions of our thoughts.

Below we weave a narrative depicting the overt and covert forms of racism that we encounter in the academy. Our intent is to illuminate the ubiquity of racism and the subordination of other forms of oppression threaded throughout our lives. Therefore, we draw from historical reminders such as the tragedies of Emmett Till, Medger Evans, Oscar Grant, and Kevin Johnson. These tragedies (and nameless others) have reminded us that race still matters and that Black males continue to be 'convicted in the womb' (Upchurch 1997). We now turn to the counternarrative. The italics in the counternarrative include some of our internal thoughts that occurred while the event is happening.

### Counternarrative: using our voices, losing our bodies: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and the metaphorical murdering of Black male professors in the academy

- Nate: I'm on edge about this verdict. I can't even focus on my work.
- Lamar: (*Shaking my head with a look of despair while replying to Nate's text*). I'm so scared! My heart is racing.
- Nate: We know already ... white people will win again. Hell, Doc! This is America ... America the so-called Beautiful ... the same America that has been so ugly to our Black sons.
- Lamar: (*Disappointed*) I know, Doc. When we look into the mirror, we see brothas who are misunderstood. We see the reflection of other brothas who are labeled day-to-day with the specious claims about our humanity and existence.
- Nate: Deep brotha! white folks don't care anything about us. An insurrection is needed! How many more Black males will it take?
- Lamar: (*With affirmation*). To no fault of our own, we were born into a perplexed world. A world that promised us *life, liberty, equality, and freedom*; but, instead, we come into this world plagued with the inequities and stark realities that deny us this very promise. (*Angrily*). The moment we took our first breath while crying to let our loved ones know we arrived; consequently, this became the same moment we were raped of our dignity and humanity while mentally, emotionally, and physically held captive to the plight of racism.
- Nate: Preach brotha! ... The recent travesties and killing of Black men are clear. Black men are using their voices and losing their bodies. In those moments, these young Black men activated their voices to speak against racial stereotypes, biases, and oppression that cost them their physical bodies. Remember Rachel Jeantel's conversation with Trayvon Martin. She said she heard the interaction between Trayvon and Zimmerman. Trayvon confronted Zimmerman about following him. In the case

of Michael Brown, Darren Wilson approached him and his friend while walking in the middle of the street. They responded back to him, and then, things escalated from there. Doesn't this remind you of the academy? Especially, how white colleagues and students treat Black male academicians, when they use their voices to speak against social injustices in the academy and their pedagogical practices? Although we are not losing our physical bodies, notwithstanding our physiological responses to racism, we are being murdered!

Lamar: (*Shaking my head as I read the message. I begin to reflect on my experiences in the academy. Slowly, I begin to respond to Nate's message.*) I'm following you, brotha. You are right! The same actions occur in the academy. There is a pervasive demand for the Black male body dead or alive. You are right! This is not to minimize the death of these young Black men, but to demonstrate the level of racial inspection Black males face on a consistent basis. Black men are metaphorically murdered in the academy. These are spirit murders committed by the hands of our white students and colleagues.

Nate: Right. I like how you described that. We educated ourselves, we took trajectories people expected us not to take, and our experiences in the academy are similar to what all Black males are experiencing in America. We are not exempted! The blatant disrespect and resistance from our white colleagues and students have become what you describe as spirit deaths that have negatively impacted us physiologically and psychologically as Black male scholars. Thinking about the bullets that ended the lives of so many young Black males, we, too, are victims of the bullet. These bullets are released from metaphorical weapons used by white colleagues and students to *kill* us in the academy. All of this comes largely in response to the work we do that challenges white supremacy and racism. Sadly, our white colleagues cannot see their own propensity for violence used to protect their white comfort, yet in their minds, we are the violent ones. And, since Black males are stereotypically violent in their minds, we have to unapologetically use our scholarship as an epistemic violent tool to dismantle and ward off race, racism, and white supremacy in the academy.

Lamar: So deep, so deep! I think you may be on to something about those bullets. You make me think about what I call the *bullet of rejection*. Being the only Black male body in my department, I am often trying to negotiate this white space. My white male colleagues reject my scholarship and positionality by asking questions such as, 'Is race the only thing you write and research about?' Furthermore, my white female colleagues take pride on meeting one-on-one with white male colleagues to cajole them to view my scholarship and teaching as invaluable to the department. But, I tell my white female colleagues how I do not need anyone to speak for me. I can activate my own voice.

Nate: (*Anxiously waiting to respond*) Yea, I know what you mean. I have had similar experiences. Viewed as the 'academic other' because I do critical race work, I am also hyper-visible, invisible, shunned, and disregarded. My work brings about such marginalization that I am oftentimes not spoken to unless I speak to my white colleagues who see me before I see them in the hallway. When I make suggestions on how I could collaborate with them, I am looked at with much suspicion as if I lack the essential skills to do so. And, these are just a few examples of my bullets of rejection. I could text for days about this!

Lamar: Yeah! I think most Black academicians can text for days about this. SMH! (read: shaking my head). With all that being written, what about the *bullet of silence*?

Nate: (*Thinking about ways of being silenced in the academy*) Hmm... Oh my brotha! Another one I can write about for days. One semester, I received a lot of complaints about 'talking too much about race' from my white female students in a culturally relevant pedagogy course that met weekly on campus. And you know what? The following semester, I was assigned to teach all of my courses online as a way to silence me from talking about issues of race and racism, to say the least.

Lamar: Nate, you must be kidding! (Though I know he was not.)

Nate: No, not at all. This silencing strategy is used to keep the status quo in place... to keep white pre-service teachers thinking about children of color in deficits ways ... to enable them to carry out horrendous acts towards them in classrooms that lead to them wanting to check out of school. It is all by design. Symbolic of the uniforms of members of the KKK, they do not understand that they are wearing white sheets without wearing white sheets.

Lamar: You are so right man! I, too, recall a bullet of silencing that impacted me. A few days ago, after I presented a research presentation to my department, I provided everyone with a handout pertaining to my research presentation. As one of my white male colleagues quickly read my handout, I watched him roll his eyes and rumple his face.

- Nate: Oh man! It seems like bullets are being shot all around us. There seems to be neither a place of refuge in the streets nor in the academy for Black males. Remember when you came to my culturally relevant pedagogy class to present and you witnessed how I was inflicted with what I call the *bullet of disrespect*?
- Lamar: Yes, man! I remember it like it was yesterday! It was awful to see how disrespectful that white female reacted toward you when you returned her failing assignment. I remember the barrage of profane words she used outside of your classroom door. If you were a white male professor, she would have never reacted in the same manner.
- Nate: I know right! But, you experienced similar disrespect I recall.
- Lamar: (*Looking up and shaking his head repeatedly*). One day, during the end of class, I asked the students to choose a word or a phrase that described their thoughts and feelings about the course and immediately, a white female blurted, 'BORED!' (*He pauses. Shakes his head in despair and relive that moment*).
- Nate: Man, we are inflicted with all of these bullets in the academy. We also have to cry out, *Hands up, don't shoot!*

### 'Hands up, Don't Shoot!': call to action for teacher education

What are you following me for? (Trayvon Martin)

I can't breathe (Eric Garner)

I don't have a gun. Stop shooting (Michael Brown)

The quotes above depict some of the last words uttered by three innocent Black men who activated their voices to speak back and against racial oppression. When these young Black men attempted to disrupt racial subjugation and the specious claims society had constructed about them, they lost their bodies. The narrative presented in the aforementioned text messages reveal the spiritual murdering and racially related experiences encountered by Black male professors by white students (e.g. comments such as 'I'm bored' or 'We talk about race too much') and white colleagues (e.g. non-verbal reactions such as rolling their eyes when someone mentions the words social justice or race and using silence as a tool of resistance). In essence, these bullets are heavily intertwined into the backdrop of Black male academicians and Black men's lives that at times they are easily indistinguishable. Therefore, we are concerned with the numerous teacher education programs that have a social justice agenda in mind but do not acknowledge the veneers of white supremacy (Milner 2007). Table 1 illustrates examples of the metaphorical bullets of rejection, silencing, and disrespect.

As a result, this is a call to action for teacher education programs to examine themselves and their own pedagogical practices as well as to investigate how their students construct race in teacher

**Table 1.** Examples of metaphorical bullets.

Bullet 1: Rejection	Bullet 2: Silencing	Bullet 3: Disrespect
'We talk about race too much' (Lamar's white student comment)	Non-verbal reactions from white students and colleagues such as rolling their eyes or rumpling their face when issues of social justice or race is mentioned (Lamar's experience)	Profane words from a student who received a failing grade on her assignment (Nate's experience)
This course also needs to be more supportive of the white race. I can't help that I'm white' (Lamar's white student comment).	White colleagues feel as though they cannot speak up against societal and institutional issues until after tenure; for example, during a panel discussion about social justice, a white panelist explained his trepidations about speaking up about social justice until he is awarded tenure promotion. (Lamar's experience)	During a whole-group discussion, a student openly explained how bored she was of learning about critical literacy (Lamar's white student comment)

education programs and more largely in teacher educators' lived experiences. In this section, we raise one broad question for white faculty and students to consider: 'What can white faculty and students do to avoid propagating the racial assault on Black males in society and within the academy?' In the next section, we address this question by suggesting the urgency of equity-based paradigms threaded throughout teacher education programs and classes. We also recommend better support for Black males who engage in critical work.

### **The need for equity-based paradigms and critical perspectives in teacher education**

We are doing severe disservice to future and practicing teachers if we provide little to no attention to social/racial justice, sociopolitical consciousness, and sociocultural issues that lay heavily in teaching and learning in a progressively diverse world (Boutte 2015). We are troubled by the fact that numerous teacher educators are not well versed on social and equity issues, especially race and racism. The negative reactions to equity-based methodologies and critical perspectives allude to the lack of critical theoretical framing in teacher education is, to some stance, an epistemological dilemma as much as conceptual or theoretical one. Thus, further research efforts aimed at understanding the experiences of Black males in society and within the academy could offer teacher educators and practicing and prospective teachers to focus more openly on how we construct knowledge, how we conceptualize it, and whose knowledge is often valued and devalued. Further, scholarship that deepens our knowledge of teacher education programs and colleges of education which have exhibited success in building Black males' multiple identities as well as their academic achievement may offer models for teacher education programs committed to uplifting and soliciting the voices of Black males. White academics must not remain silent on issues of race and racism (Boutte and Jackson 2013). In seeking solutions, we suggest the importance of having dialog around issues of race and racism because it provides pre-/in-service educators with the discourse and knowledge on the pervasiveness of racism, its manifestation, and the role it plays in the lives of their current and future students.

Similarly, we need to have professional development for faculty to come to an understanding about these issues. Over the past few decades, the focus has been on pre-service teacher education and there is a scant body of knowledge that focuses on faculty in the academy. Many universities have numerous programs in place for faculty and staff to begin having such contested conversations; however, we need to make sure we are doing a better job of having scholars understand the issues around Black male professors and our particular needs as we are socialized in the academy. Furthermore, if we want students to come to these understandings, we have to possess the same expectations for faculty and staff members. How can we expect pre-service/in-service teachers to respect and honor the humanity of the Black and Brown males whom they are going to serve, if the teacher educators who are preparing them do not understand, respect, and honor the humanity of Black and Brown bodies? Therefore, we must create spaces within higher educational contexts for the ongoing professional development of faculty and staff. For example, my (Lamar) former institution, Miami University, has Faculty Learning Communities (FLC). Faculty Learning Communities usher together faculty members, staff, and students across disciplines to engage in critical conversations and collaborative year-long projects centered on the curriculum pertaining to the improvement of teaching and learning, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and communal enhancement (Miami University 2016). Furthermore, there needs to be an intentional call to recruit more Black male faculty to the academy. This will expose white pre-service teacher candidates to Black male professors. Again, presently less than one percent of Black males are professors. Like Black male P-12 teacher recruitment programs including Call Me Mister, which is designed to recruit a more diverse population of teachers to K-12 classrooms, there needs to be a 'Call Me Doctor' Black male professor recruitment program to increase the percentage of Black male professors in the academy. We will develop the idea relative to 'Call Me Doctor' in a future academic paper.

## The support of critical Black male scholars through critical listening

The violent projectile of bullets physically and metaphorically directed at Black males is an epistemological dilemma as we examine, probe, and muse diverse views that may converge or diverge with our own. We contend that listening impacts our epistemological and ideological views by what we hear, do not hear, and understand about our own and other's thinking as we engage in listening (Kinloch and San Pedro 2014). The (un)intentional refusal to listen to our inner most voice leads to a maze of thoughts, opinions, and notations of the Black man as aberrant. Therefore, Black males must critically engage their very thoughts, opinions, and ideals to master the maze of their minds and to dismantle the perplexing images society has constructed about them.

We propose that it is imperative that teachers listen to the complexities of Black males' stories. Conscientious, intentional, and critical listening can assist white faculty and students to understand the stories and voices of the Black male and the Black male child. Further, engaging in mindful listening could help society receive the voices of the Black child/teen who has been robbed of his childhood or the Black male who has been deprived of his adulthood. We recognize the need for teacher educators and pre-/in-service teachers to listen without bias and prejudice as a way to learn *from*, collaborate *with*, and *center* Black males' voices and narratives in their scholarship. Such actions will allow teacher educators as well as practicing and prospective teachers to observe and understand firsthand who Black men are, what Black men represent, and the Black male lived experience(s). Further, while many white colleagues protest the physical killing of Black men, at the same time, they seem oblivious to the spiritual killing of Black men in the academy. Finally, as we listen to Black males, we need to re-shape our pedagogies, practices, and beliefs and continuously challenge ourselves by listening to what we are saying, how we are saying it, and why we are saying it (Kinloch and San Pedro 2014).

## Epilogue

It has been 15 min since the prosecutor began his statement, and he has yet to deliver the grand jury's decision. I (Lamar) think to myself, 'I know where this is headed.' Suddenly, at the bottom of my television screen, I see, 'No Indictment for Darren Wilson.' I close my computer – 'Breathe,' I tell myself, 'just breathe.' Instead of taking a tranquil breath, I make the same coarse, weary sigh that I made 15 min before the indictment verdict was read. It remained a single exhalation of frustration wrapped in a cloth of negative emotions, full of dismay and dissatisfaction – anger and rage.

I think to myself – as a nation, we are morally bankrupted, and our moral compass has gone in a direction that has cost us a price we cannot afford and a <sup>4</sup>check we cannot cash. Sadly, such bankruptcy and dysfunction have been most reflected in the resurgence of what we call new age lynching of Black men in America. The recent deaths of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and other Black males have generated new civil rights urgencies in Black communities, but not enough in the academy. Unfortunately, when Black males work to disclose, expose, and overcome systems of oppression to achieve academic success, they are still vulnerable to deadly attacks, even in professional spaces as the academy.

## Notes

1. P-20 refers to the organization of US public schools by grade level beginning with (P)re-school and continuing through higher education.
2. The term critical refers to the unveiling of beliefs and practices that demarcates equity and justice. Critical theory is an act of explanation – defining and acknowledging the voices that are silenced. Therefore, critical social theory critiques and challenges the various structures of power (Lynn, Jennings, and Hughes 2013). Critical theory brings privilege and non-privilege conditions to the forefront unveiling how the privilege has been racist, Eurocentric, masculine, heterosexual, and abled-bodied, etc. (Freire 1973).
3. Whiteness is not a biological category but a social/psychological construction (Harris 1995). It is a system (or ideology) where people are perceived to *fit* or *pass* as white. Thus, to be white is analogous with having collateral since it translates into accompanying privileges.

4. 'But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice' Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963).

## Acknowledgments

A big thanks to our Academic Mother, Dr. Gloria Boutte, for providing her intellect and mentorship to help bring this piece to fruition. Your unwavering devotion to Black education propels us to carry on the torch for racial and social justice.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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