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"The Discipline Stop": Black Male Teachers and the Politics of Urban School Discipline

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Abstract

Calls for the recruitment and retention of more Black male teachers have unfolded amid popular depictions of Black men as patriarchal disciplinarians. Against that backdrop, this article investigates how 11 Black male teachers were positioned as disciplinary agents in a predominantly Black urban school district on the east coast of the United States. As they described the discipline-related expectations they encountered in their jobs, study participants critiqued and complicated prevailing perceptions of Black male teachers as authoritarian disciplinarians for Black students. Through careful analyses of participants' narratives, this article offers new insights into how Black male teachers negotiate their roles as disciplinarians, and it raises several questions that could drive future efforts to understand and support Black male teachers' disciplinary practices in today's urban schools.

Keywords

urban education, teachers, multicultural education

> But when we did wrong/Papa beat the hell out of us . . . /Papa don't take no mess
>
> —J. Brown, Wesley, and Starks (1974)

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Of the many socially constructed and contested images of Black men that circulate the American cultural landscape, one that continues to resonate with multiple audiences is that of the Black male patriarch who exercises disciplinary authority over Black children. Social and political movements to reestablish Black men at the helm of Black families and communities (Neal, 2005; Reid-Pharr, 2001), widely viewed social media clips of Black fathers and father figures punishing their allegedly wayward Black children (Chandler, 2013; Healey, 2012; Nigel, 2011; Worley, 2011), and popular television shows from *Good Times* (Yorkin & Lear, 1974) to *The Bernie Mac Show* (Petok & Greener, 2001) featuring discipline-minded Black male heads-of-household all underscore the cultural currency of the authoritative Black male patriarch and disciplinarian. In addition, films like *Lean on Me* (Avildsen, 1989) and *187* (Davey, McEveety, & Reynolds, 1997), along with recent television reality series like TV One's *Save My Son* (R. Brown & Armstead, 2012) and OWN's *Blackboard Wars* (Barbini & Kuntz, 2013), reveal the appeal of enlisting Black male educators as disciplinarians for Black children. Amid a palpable angst over the paucity of adult male father figures in contemporary Black families (Dyson, 2008), the resonance of the Black male disciplinarian reflects an underlying belief in the stabilizing effects of patriarchal authority.

The valorization of the authoritative Black male patriarch in American society at large provides an important backdrop for understanding the experiences of Black male teachers. In scholarly literature (Bridges, 2011; Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Lynn, 2002, 2006) and popular media accounts (Haque, 2012; Jefferson, 2012; Matus, 2005; Milloy, 2004), Black male teachers have been cast as ideal role models and surrogate father figures for Black youth, especially Black boys, who may lack adult male figures in their homes and neighborhoods. Operating on this premise, universities and policy makers have initiated efforts to recruit more Black men into the teaching profession (Clemson University, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), single-sex educational initiatives have placed a premium on pairing Black male teachers with Black male students (King, 2011), and scholars have investigated strategies for supporting recruitment and retention initiatives targeting Black male teachers (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Lewis, 2006; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011). That these recruitment and retention efforts frequently envision Black male teachers as surrogate father figures and role models for Black youth raises important questions about approaches to discipline. In particular, how do widely circulating constructions of authoritative Black patriarchs shape what is expected of Black male teachers as disciplinarians, especially in urban classrooms with predominantly Black student bodies? Furthermore, how do Black male

teachers respond to what is expected of them as disciplinarians, especially if they struggle to meet or choose to resist those expectations? Given the preoccupation with establishing strict disciplinary cultures in many urban schools (E. Brown, 2003; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), high stakes may accompany Black male teachers' roles as disciplinarians. Thus, how they negotiate what is expected of them as disciplinarians warrants close and careful attention in urban educational research.

In an effort to explore Black male teachers' experiences as disciplinarians, this article presents a set of findings from a qualitative study on the identities and pedagogies of 11 Black male teachers in an urban, predominantly Black school district. Over the course of the study, engagement in the disciplinary cultures of urban schools emerged as a crucial and contested terrain for these teachers. Drawing conceptually upon Black masculinity studies and methodologically upon qualitative inquiry methods, this article offers new insights into how Black male teachers encounter and negotiate the patriarchal expectations that shape their roles as disciplinarians, and it raises several questions that could inform future efforts to prepare Black male teachers for the challenges they may face in today's urban schools.

Black Male Teachers as Disciplinarians

Scholarly literature on Blacks in the American teaching profession has credited Black educators with developing culturally relevant pedagogies that invoke racial bonds and emic understandings of Black culture to engage Black students (Foster, 1994; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In contrast to zero tolerance disciplinary policies that criminalize Black youth (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010), Black teachers' culturally relevant pedagogies have been associated with approaches to discipline that reflect insider insights into Black culture and culturally rooted modes of care for Black children. For example, Delpit (1995), Foster (1994), Howard (2001), and Irvine (2002) have described Black teachers' stern, no-nonsense approaches to discipline that mirror disciplinary styles frequently encountered by Black children in their familial contexts, and that reflect Black teachers' family-like concern for Black students' achievement. In two studies focusing specifically on discipline in predominantly Black urban middle schools, Monroe (2009) found that Black teachers, unlike their White counterparts, enacted disciplinary styles modeled by their own Black family members, and Monroe and Obidah (2004) found that Black teachers used culturally familiar forms of humor and displays of emotion to manage student behavior; both studies underscored the culturally mediated nature of Black teachers' disciplinary styles. In gendered analyses of culturally relevant pedagogy,

Dixson (2003) and Irvine have described the "other mothering" pedagogical modes through which Black women teachers express care and establish discipline for Black students, and Lynn (2006) has characterized one Black male teacher's culturally relevant pedagogy as an "other fathering" mix of "tough love, discipline, and caring" (p. 2517) for Black students. A. L. Brown's (2009) research found a range of pedagogical performances employed by Black male teachers—from a discipline-intensive "enforcer style" to less rigid alternatives—all of which were rooted in the teachers' culturally mediated mission to serve the needs of Black male students. In all of these instances, Black teachers' disciplinary approaches were attributed to culturally relevant pedagogies that combined emic understandings of Black culture and a care for Black youth to create disciplined classroom environments for Black students.

Although scholarship on Blacks in the teaching profession has offered intriguing insights into the disciplinary practices of Black teachers, room still exists—as Monroe (2009) has noted—for more targeted empirical analyses of Black teachers' approaches to discipline. One specific area that warrants further analysis is Black male teachers' experiences as disciplinarians. An emergent strand of scholarship has started to trouble popular discourses on Black male teachers as role models and father figures. In doing so, this scholarship also raises questions about the presumption of Black male teachers as ideal disciplinarians for urban Black youth. A. L. Brown (2012), for instance, has critiqued the essentialist constructions of Black male teachers as pedagogues who can "govern the unruly Black boy in school" (p. 299), and the Black male teachers in his study also critiqued prevailing assumptions that they, as Black male teachers, should be positioned as aggressive disciplinary agents in urban Black schools. The Black male teacher in Rezai-Rashti and Martino's (2010) case study similarly troubled discourses that positioned him as a role model and disciplinarian for Black boys, thus informing the authors' critique of the overreliance on individual male teacher role models to ameliorate the effects of systemic inequities on the lives of urban youth of color.[1] Brockenbrough's research on Black male teachers has offered accounts of Black student resistance to Black male teachers as father figures (2012b) and Black students' antagonistic encounters with Black queer male teachers (2012a). Both cases not only troubled presumptions of Black male teachers' capacities to serve as role models and father figures, but they also revealed the discipline-related tensions that can confound Black male teachers' relationships with Black students. To be clear, none of these scholars oppose the recruitment and retention of Black men into the teaching profession. However, their works do point to the need for more critical considerations of how Black male teachers negotiate the pressures to serve as role models, father figures,

and disciplinarians for Black students. This article contributes to this important, emergent strand of scholarship by further examining Black male teachers' perspectives on their roles as disciplinarians.

To frame the analysis of Black male teachers as disciplinarians, this article draws conceptually upon Black masculinity studies, an interdisciplinary scholarly field that examines the unique amalgam of fears and fascinations that fuels the social construction of Black male subjectivity, and that makes Black maleness a highly visible and consequential marker of difference in the United States (Byrd & Guy-Sheftall, 2001; Carbado, 1999; Neal, 2005; Wallace, 2002).[2] From the hip-hop thug to the corporate professional, Black masculinity studies spotlights the socioeconomic, political, and ideological circumstances that push particular notions of Black manhood to the fore of the American imagination. Drawing upon that work, this article makes sense of popular discourses on the disciplinarian Black male teacher by situating those discourses against a backdrop of converging social and cultural concerns: most notably, the anxieties around the absence of father figures and adult male role models in Black families and communities (Dyson, 2008), and the pervasive perceptions of urban Black youth as violent, uncontrollable, and in need of discipline (Giroux, 2001). As noted in this article's introduction, a wide array of political discourses and mass media representations reveals the cultural currency of the Black male adult, and more specifically the Black male educator, as a patriarchal disciplinarian for Black children. In line with Black masculinity studies, this article recognizes widespread cultural discourses on Black male disciplinary authority as a crucial backdrop for understanding the discipline-oriented expectations encountered by Black male teachers in urban schools.

Study Design

To delve more deeply into the experiences of Black men in the teaching profession, the study described in this article employed qualitative research methods that were particularly suited for "understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences" (Maxwell, 1994, p. 17, emphasis in original). Drawing upon a regimen for in-depth interviewing developed by Seidman (1998), data collection for this study began with in-depth, one-on-one life history interviews in which each participant described the formation of his Black male identity over his life span. After generating rich, sociohistorically situated biographical overviews of participants' life experiences during the first round of interviews, a narrower focus on being a Black male teacher defined a second

round of one-on-one study interviews, during which participants were asked to describe the particular role of Black maleness in shaping various elements of their pedagogies and professional experiences. A third and final round of one-on-one interviews provided participants with the chance to reflect on themes that had emerged throughout the study, and to share ideas for how study findings might ultimately be put to use. All one-on-one data collection sessions were conducted as semistructured interviews, and Lichtman's (2006) "strategies for questioning" during in-depth interviews were employed to make sure that key issues were addressed while still enabling enough flexibility for participants to narrate their life experiences on their own terms.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, two one-time focus group sessions were conducted to enable study participants to collectively explore the significance of their experiences as Black male teachers. Major themes from one-on-one interviews were intentionally revisited during both focus groups to generate more opportunities for triangulation across data sources. In addition to supplying more data, the focus groups allowed participants to meet and bond with other Black male teachers working in similar environments, and to collectively act as coproducers of scholarly knowledge on their experiences as Black men in the teaching profession. In all, data collection extended from January to October 2007 for nine study participants, and from October 2007 to February 2008 for two participants who were enrolled later in the study and consequently were not included in focus group sessions. One-on-one interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hr, at an average of 90 min, and both focus group sessions lasted for 2 hr. All data collection sessions were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed for coding.

Data analysis for this study consisted of three phases. In the first phase, interview transcripts were reviewed to develop an overarching sense of the range of themes across data sources. Based on this review, an initial list of coding schemes was generated with a particular attention to two broader categories—Black male identity politics and pedagogical perspectives. In the second phase of analysis, data on each participant were revisited to construct an analytical participant profile, refine emergent coding schemes, and look for triangulation of codes across multiple data sources on each participant. These individual participant profiles proved crucial in illuminating the connections between participants' identities and politics as Black men and their pedagogical stances as Black male teachers. In the third phase of analysis, participant profiles were used to look for triangulation of codes across participant narratives, and to group codes into broad, overarching categories. Overall, the three phases of data analysis afforded examinations of common challenges and triumphs across participants' narratives as Black male teachers, as well as in-depth portraits of each participant's negotiations of those

challenges and triumphs. Feedback from members of the author's writing group also helped to refine the analysis of data.

Research Context and Participants

Pseudonyms for the research context and study participants are used throughout this article to protect participants' anonymity. All of the participants in this study were employed at the time of data collection in the public school system in Brewerton, a large urban center on the east coast. Like many urban districts, the Brewerton School District struggled with scarce financial resources, student underperformance on high-stakes testing, high student drop-out rates, and high teacher turnover. School violence was also a recurring issue, especially in Brewerton's high schools, providing fuel for the District's zero tolerance policy toward violence and misconduct. Metal detectors, security guards, disciplinary deans, and suspension policies were commonplace throughout Brewerton high schools, and data on suspension rates and the incidence of violence weighed heavily in annual assessments of Brewerton school improvement.

Participation in this study was limited to Black male educators with middle and high school teaching experiences to draw upon and speak to the greater presence of male teachers at those levels. Participants were identified and recruited through personal contacts and professional networks to which the author had access, including alumni networks of local teacher education programs and teacher-led peer support and professional development organizations. Prospective participants received descriptions of the study and were given opportunities to ask questions of the researcher prior to joining the study. Purposeful sampling was used to achieve some diversity of background experiences and teaching subjects. Table 1 provides a demographic summary of the participants.

Researcher Perspectives and Study Limitations

As with any qualitative inquiry, the interpretive lens of the researcher played an important role in this study. The author's status as a Black male researcher, teacher educator, and former K-12 instructor afforded a familiarity and rapport with study participants that proved crucial in earning their trust and eliciting detailed accounts of their personal and professional experiences. Yet despite his insider status, the author intentionally resisted presumptions that his identities, experiences, and perspectives as a Black male educator necessarily mirrored those of his study participants. The data collection and analysis procedures described above helped the author to carefully and respectfully

Table 1. Demographic Summary of Study Participants.

Participant	Age	Grade level	Subject area	Years of teaching
Bill Drexler	<30	High school	Humanities	<5
Damon Hubert	<30	Middle school	Humanities	<5
Felix Jones	<30	High school	Math/science	<5
Greg Poland	30-39	Middle school[a]	Humanities	≥10
Ira Walker	30-39	High school	Humanities	5-9
Karl Reardon	<30	Middle school	Humanities	<5
Mitch Abrams	<30	Middle school	Math/science	<5
Oliver Currington	≥40	High school	Humanities	≥10
Quincy Stinson	<30	Middle school	Humanities	<5
Solomon Yardley	<30	High school	Math/science	<5
Victor Rollins	≥40	Middle school	Humanities	5-9

[a]Grade level prior to study, comprising half of overall teaching experience.

note moments of overlap and divergence between his assumptions and the perspectives of the men who so generously contributed to this study.

While the study described in this article was carefully designed to unearth participants' unique perspectives on their experiences as Black male teachers in an urban, predominantly Black school district, it is not without its limitations. The self-reported nature of the data, along with the locally bound study sample, works against the generalizability of study findings. Nevertheless, the recurrent themes presented below point to several issues that beg for closer consideration in future efforts to prepare Black male teachers, and these issues will be discussed toward the end of this article.

Findings

Given pervasive anxieties about student misconduct in the Brewerton School District, it was not surprising that school discipline surfaced as a recurrent theme in the narratives of the men in this study. However, in contrast to popular discourses on Black male disciplinary authority, the men in this study offered insights that critiqued and complicated prevailing perceptions of their roles in the disciplinary cultures of urban schools. Two themes from eight of the study participants' narratives were particularly noteworthy: their struggles to adopt the authoritarian disciplinary personas that others expected of them as Black male teachers, and their critiques of the disproportionate assignment of disciplinary responsibilities to Black male teachers. These themes are described in further detail below.

"I'm Not the Belt Dad": Struggling to Adopt Authoritarian Disciplinary Personas

Popular perceptions of Black male teachers as well-suited disciplinarians for predominantly Black urban schools emerged across multiple participant narratives. These perceptions reflected patriarchal constructions of Black masculinity that presumed Black male teachers' capacity to enforce stern, father-like forms of authority in the classroom. For 5 of the 11 men in this study, the patriarchal authoritarianism expected of Black male teachers was a notable source of stress, anxiety, or frustration in their professional experiences, as revealed in the participant accounts provided below.

For some study participants, the patriarchal authoritarianism that was expected of them clashed with their preferred classroom demeanors. One of those participants was Victor. When discussing his pedagogy, Victor used "laissez faire" and "organized chaos" to characterize both his laid-back demeanor and his constructivist leaning toward project-based learning that involved minimal-to-moderate interjections from the instructor.[3] Because of his deviation from rigid styles of instruction and discipline, Victor reported in a one-on-one interview that colleagues would critique him for falling short of their expectations of a Black man in the classroom:

> For some Black men, that stern, real hard-core approach works, but you can't force it. You can't force something that's not there. That rigid structure, drill sergeant approach is not me. The approach of organized chaos is more my style. But then the question becomes now, particularly as a Black man, people say, "Oh, you're a Black man and these are Black kids." So now my colleagues and peers are like, "Oh, by his room is a mess, he's out of order. What's going on in there?" Their perception is like, the kids are running things!

Victor added that critiques of his laid-back styles of instruction and discipline came under particular fire from Black colleagues. In his words, "The Black teachers are like, 'You got to get with these kids, you got to be hard on them. Life ain't going to be easy for these Black kids. They need to be prepared by you. That's our agenda.'" As Victor was a Black male teacher who did not run his classroom in a rigid manner, his approach to teaching and discipline became fodder for collegial criticisms.

As Victor continued to discuss his more laid-back manner of running his classroom, he also noted the pressures he felt from students to enact a more rigid disciplinary approach. In Victor's words, his students mistook his "softness for being weak." In addition, Victor noted how students' perceptions of him seemed to be influenced by the attitudes and strict disciplinary styles of his Black female colleagues, as captured in this following exchange with the author during a one-on-one interview:

Victor: So kids were getting those strong [Black] female teacher classrooms and then they would come in my class and then they would use, they'd kind of try to play the teachers against . . . "Oh, when we go to Ms. Yarborough's class we don't do this, but you don't got no control in your class." So that's what they'll start saying, "You don't have any control in your class." These are the kids. I'm like, "Are you guys prisoners? Am I supposed to control you? Don't you control yourself?" I put it back on them, but again that's the questioning, you know.

Author: Is that coming from them, or do you think they're picking up on stuff from other adults?

Victor: I think it's two parts. It's part them and part . . . because they will go into other classrooms and, "Oh, you're not in Mr. Rollins' class. You might be doing crazy stuff, but don't bring that hot mess in here." They use hot mess. "You're with Mr. Rollins with that hot mess, don't bring that hot mess in here!" And again, Mr. Rollins' hot mess, is this organized? People don't understand the organized, even the students, they don't understand organized chaos. If the principal is struggling to understand it, my [Black female partner teachers] are struggling to understand it.

In this exchange, Victor revealed that students' reactions to his more relaxed pedagogical style repeated the critiques of the "hot mess," or the perceived lack of control in his classroom, articulated by Black female colleagues. Such moments appeared to simultaneously normalize authoritarian classroom management strategies and discredit less rigid approaches like the one pursued by Victor.

Unfavorable reactions to Victor's instructional and classroom management strategies were not limited to Black teachers and students. At several points in his narrative, Victor reported that his less rigid teaching style prompted some White colleagues to suggest that he consider teaching in the suburbs, at an urban magnet school, or at a university. While not dismissing Victor's pedagogy as a "hot mess," these White colleagues, in Victor's eyes, nonetheless conveyed their perception of his ill-fit with the teaching culture of their school. These comments, along with the narrative excerpts above, revealed the sense of marginality that Victor felt as a Black male teacher who enacted a nonauthoritarian disciplinary style in a Brewerton school.

Bill was another participant whose approach to teaching and discipline clashed with others' expectations of him as a Black male teacher. Like Victor, Bill reported receiving dual messages that Black male teachers needed to be

stern patriarchs in the classroom, and that he was falling woefully short of that expectation. In the following passage, Bill recalled how a Black female teacher coach at his school had stressed the need for him to adopt a firmer disciplinary style as a Black male teacher:

> So we were talking. I was just telling her some of the problems I was having in the classroom. She basically was like, "You're a Black male, and a lot of these kids don't have a Black male presence in their life. So when you're in the classroom, they expect for you to be firm. They expect for you to lay down the law. They expect for you to do all of this stuff." She specifically said because you're a Black male, they expect you to be firmer with them than they would expect from these other teachers.

In addition to recalling this feedback from his Black female teacher coach, Bill noted that during his preservice teaching experience, another Black female colleague—in this case, a mentor teacher—had urged him to assume a more stern disciplinary approach as well. Bill went on to explain that while he could understand the cultural context behind the image of the Black male as a patriarchal disciplinarian, that image simply did not match his natural demeanor:

> Part of me understands what [my teacher coach] means because I think there's this kind of push for the Black male . . . he's almost viewed as a disciplinarian, you know what I mean. In [Elijah Anderson's] *Code of the Streets* (1999), it talks about the male as the head of the household, and what he says, you know, blah-blah-blah. He lays down the law and all this kind of stuff. But my issue, and I was telling her, it's hard for me to get into that mentality because I don't naturally . . . I get the impression that I'm supposed be an asshole of some type. I can be that when I feel pushed to it, but it's not my natural inclination to come into the classroom and be like a hard-ass. But it seems like I have to be like that from the beginning, I have to be this kind of lay-down-the-law, don't-ever-let-up, be-mean-all-the-time . . . At least that's kind of the impression that I get from a lot of my coworkers, and even from this particular teacher.

That Bill characterized this patriarchal approach to discipline as being an "asshole of some type" plainly marked his disconnect with this style. It also underscored his frustration with the expectations he was encountering, as captured in this exchange with the author:

> Bill: It's not that I can't be a father or a father figure, but maybe I'm just not the lay-down-the-law type of father [*chuckle*], you know what I mean. Maybe the type of father figure that I envision being effective is

not the one who goes to work, brings home the bacon, and disciplines the kids when they need it, but a different type of father. And the type of father that they need is not the type of father that I can be. Does that make sense?

Author: Yeah. It sounds like you're saying you can be . . . like the talk-it-out type of dad versus let-me-get-my-belt.

Bill: Yes, yes. But it seems like they're saying, "No, you can't talk it out with these kids. You have to get the belt out. That's what they need, they need the belt." Well, you know, I'm not the belt dad [*chuckle*]. And if that's what you're expecting, I'm gonna disappoint you.

In this passage, Bill envisioned himself as an alternative to images of Black male teachers entrenched in patriarchal narratives of dominance. This alternative, however, was at odds with the "lay-down-the-law" persona, or "the belt dad," that his colleagues seemed to repeatedly demand of him. Hints of the potential impact of his dissonance and exasperation emerged during a focus group session when Bill stated, "I'm not a disciplinarian to the extent that I would need to be if I were to continue to teach in the Brewerton public school system." Despite entering urban teaching specifically to work with Black youth, Bill's deviation from a patriarchal, authoritarian norm for Black male teachers led him to question his fit with the teaching environment that surrounded him.

Like Bill and Victor, Quincy was another study participant who spoke about the challenges of adopting a stern disciplinary style. His deviation from authoritarian disciplinary norms was ominously marked by a student on his first day as a full-time classroom teacher, as he recounted during a one-on-one interview:

> The first day last year, a kid was kind of like, "You know, you kinda sweet, Mr. Stinson, you kinda soft. You not gonna be able to teach us. You're gonna be gone soon." Just like that, the very first day I came in, that was what one of the kids, who was pretty decent all along, but that's what he said to me. I'm like, if they've already pegged me for somebody who's gonna quit the first day, I gotta start acting tougher.

Quincy went on to explain to the author that other students had developed similar first impressions of him as "kinda soft" because of his departure from the confrontational disciplinary styles enacted by other Black male teachers at his school, who would

> punch kids and shove kids into lockers all the time, or smack them over the head with rulers, or whatever the case may be. It was not a surprise to see a kid get pulled aside, punched in the stomach a couple times, saying "sit down."

Situated in a school where some Black male teachers resorted to moderate forms of violence to establish discipline, Quincy's mild demeanor marked him as an aberration in the eyes of some students and hindered his ability to establish himself as a credible authority figure in the classroom.

Realizing his initial failure to conform to his school's occasionally rogue disciplinary culture, Quincy spent much of his first year as a Brewerton teacher trying to reinvent himself as an authoritarian Black male disciplinarian. In one-on-one interviews, Quincy recounted recurrent bouts for authority in his classroom that led to volatile exchanges with his students, particularly his Black male students. With the passage of time, Quincy had developed a critical and insightful perspective on why he used to fall so readily into verbal and near-physical skirmishes with his students as a disciplinarian, which he shared with the author in this exchange:

> Qunicy: When a student would challenge me, I'd say, "Alright, let's go. You wanna fight, let's go. Let's take it outside, do it right here." And I had no desire to fight the kid, but I had no desire to back down either. And I would always get into power struggles with kids immediately. Sometimes I'd jump on top of my desk and start shouting, weird things to try and act like no matter what, I'm still in charge here, you're not going to beat me. So when I look back on it, I'm like wow, I did some crazy things. And even sometimes kids would call me on it, and I'm like, my kids are calling me on it, saying, "Mr. Stinson, why are you doing that?" And it did take me until after Christmas that I started realizing that I got to figure out some other way of doing it.
>
> Author: But the answer to why you were doing that is . . .?
>
> Quincy: Because I wanted to make sure that they understood that I'm not soft, you know what I'm saying. No matter what you say, no matter what you're dealing with, you can hit me, you can do whatever, it doesn't matter. I'm going to show up every day, I'm not going to back down, I'm not going to change the way I do things just because you try to make my life a living hell.

In a school setting where his calm demeanor departed from the belligerent disciplinary norms perpetuated by other Black male adults, and where he was consequently marked at first glance as "soft," Quincy felt pressured to resort to more confrontational strategies to assert his leadership in his classroom, even as those strategies brought him closer and closer to the threat of altercations. Unlike Victor and Bill, who reported an ongoing disconnect with stern disciplinary personas, Quincy wholeheartedly attempted to adopt such a persona in his classroom. And yet despite his efforts, Quincy still found himself

in a stressful and precarious position as a Black male teacher because of his initially unsuccessful efforts to manage an authoritarian approach to discipline.

As noted above, Quincy reported a school culture where Black male teachers routinely engaged in austere modes of disciplinary enforcement. Similarly, Bill, Solomon, and Mitch made references to older and more experienced Black male educators who exhibited stern disciplinary styles that contrasted with their own departures from or inexperience with such styles. For instance, Bill described an older and more experienced Black male colleague who frequently used profanity and stern lectures to maintain control of his classroom, and Solomon contrasted himself to an older, veteran Black male colleague who was "the über authoritarian henchman." Mitch, who ultimately developed his own strict approach to discipline, recalled how an early and clumsy attempt to mimic the stern disciplinary techniques of an older, more experienced Black male colleague had inadvertently instigated a fight between two students in his classroom. In all of these cases, the presence of Black male colleagues who convincingly performed authoritarian teacher identities increased participants' awareness of their own divergence from or initial struggles with such identities, and ultimately underscored the pressures to master these identities as Black men in urban teaching.

In sum, the participants mentioned above attested in various ways to prevailing perceptions in Brewerton schools of Black male teachers as authoritarian classroom managers. In the midst of a discipline-intensive urban school culture, five of the Black men in this study felt pressured to control student conduct by performing a very particular construction of Black masculinity in the classroom. As captured in the preceding narrative accounts, the dominant image of the stern Black male teacher delimited a narrow approach to classroom discipline that not only clashed with some participants' definitions of themselves as teachers but also threatened their very legitimacy as Black male teachers in the eyes of colleagues and students in Brewerton schools.

"The Discipline Stop": Disproportionate Responsibilities for Disciplinary Matters

All five of the study participants referenced thus far reported the anxieties associated with initial or ongoing struggles to adopt authoritarian approaches to discipline as Black male teachers. For other study participants, it was their successful performance of stern disciplinary personas that became the source of contention in their narratives. More specifically, three men in this study critiqued the disproportionate responsibility that they seemed to carry as Black male teachers who could successfully handle student misconduct.

Their critical perspectives, which often problematized collegial perceptions of the hypermasculinity of Black male teachers, are described below.

One of the study participants who troubled the disproportionate assignment of disciplinary responsibilities to Black male teachers was Karl. During an exchange in a focus group session that included comments from another participant, Greg, and the author, Karl was critical of fellow teachers who repeatedly relied on his capacity to manage student behavior:

> Karl: I'm in a small school, and I'm just thinking, I thought back to the time where I had a sixth-grade teacher who literally called me. Like this was on the day when I had like nine kids from other classes coming in and out of my room because I'm the discipline stop. [*All: laughter*] And she was like . . .
>
> Author: The discipline stop!
>
> Karl: Yeah, that's how I feel sometimes. Like, y'all think I'm not teaching at this point? So she calls me and she's like, "Mr. Reardon, I'm gonna send Peter up to you." I'm like, "Why?" She's like, "Well, I want you to scare him." And I'm like, "Scare him?" But I'm like, Peter and I . . . he's a [younger] student and I'm like, "Peter's like my buddy, so if you want me to scare him it's not going to work because he'll just laugh at me." So she was just like, "Well, we really just need to do something to really just get something in." And I'm just like, is that the role that you see me as, when I'm probably the most effective teacher in the building? But, that's another thing . . . [*chuckle*].
>
> Greg: The big, Black, scary guy.
>
> Karl: Yeah. I feel like that's the role, if any, that people will want me as. I mean my size and physical stature doesn't help either, but I feel like that's a role that I frequently do get lumped into.

Karl's reference to his classroom as "the discipline stop" spoke to the disproportionate burden for discipline that he seemed to carry at his school. In Karl's view, his colleagues' overreliance on his disciplinary talents revealed a disregard for his own workload and failed to recognize his strengths in other aspects of teaching. Contrary to his view of himself as "probably the most effective teacher in the building," Karl sensed a narrow peer perception of him as an enforcer who could frighten ill-behaved students into submission. It was this perception that sometimes turned Karl's classroom into, in his words, "the discipline stop."

Another study participant who reported bearing a heavier load for disciplinary matters than his non-Black male colleagues was Greg. During a focus group session, Greg noted that a White female colleague consistently asked

for his help with disciplining Black and Latino boys in her classroom. While Greg stated several times in his narrative that he did not mind assisting his colleagues with their classroom management issues, he did note during his final one-on-one interview that helping other teachers with disciplinary matters in their classrooms required him to "go into a zone" that he did not want to enter at times, particularly as his own students were usually well behaved. This "zone" consisted of raising his voice and summoning facial expressions that would scare students and that did not reflect who he truly was as a teacher and a person. As Greg noted of those moments, "I don't know what I look like, but I don't look like Mr. Poland because I don't feel like Mr. Poland." Thus, while Greg was willing to help colleagues with their discipline matters, he was also aware that doing so forced him to assume a persona that did not reflect his true demeanor as a teacher.

Like other study participants, Greg expressed his awareness of particular constructions of Black maleness that seemed to inform peer reliance on his disciplinary talents. During a one-on-one interview, Greg attributed his White colleagues' perceptions of him to common stereotypes of Black men:

> Well, I don't know if it's a positive stereotype, but it's a stereotype that all Black men can handle kids. You know, we're aggressive. We're the big, bad, Black, scary teacher. So I do get that, where a lot of the White teachers, if there's a problem going on in the classroom, they'll want me to handle it.

Greg also noted assumptions about Black male teachers among his former Black female teacher colleagues, as captured in this excerpt from a focus group session:

> I think they look at us as, in my own situation, as disciplinarians first. Like, you should be able to handle these kids. When I was teaching in a middle school, the female teachers would say—the Black ones would say—"Oh, we need some more Black men in here to handle these kids." And I would say, "Well, y'all not doing too bad a job right now," you know. [*Others: laughter*] But they just felt as though if there were more Black men, then we could handle more of the discipline. Other than the fact that, you know, we would be good role models, but I think that they look at me and other Black men as disciplinarians first, and then all the other things.

Greg later recalled that Black parents at that same middle school, assuming the disciplinary prowess of Black men, used to vie for spots for their children in Black male teachers' classrooms. Although Greg challenged the notion that Black male teachers were the only ones who could "handle these kids," he still was aware of the enduring perception of Black men in teaching as "disciplinarians first."

While Greg and Karl problematized their status as schoolwide, disciplinary go-to men, some of the men in this study also seemed to understand the discipline-related expectations facing Black male teachers as par for the course. As noted earlier, Solomon, Mitch, and Quincy acknowledged and adapted to the prevalence of stern disciplinary approaches among Black male colleagues despite initial missteps. A sense of resignation with the status quo emerged in the following remark made by Damon during a focus group session:

> I think as much as I don't wanna be the disciplinarian, I know that the kids will listen to me, even the ones that I don't teach. I kind of take on the role because there are some people who don't have management, that I need to kind of step up for. If my strength is the fact that I happen to be a Black male who has control over students, then I have to play that role, even if I don't want to. I have to be on my A-game because some kids, they will cause our whole little area to go amuck if I'm not there. It's unfortunate because there shouldn't be so much responsibility put on a Black male in the classroom just simply because we're Black males in the environments we teach in.

Although Damon ultimately complied with the discipline-related pressures he encountered as a Black male teacher, he still underscored a significant critique voiced by Greg and Karl as well. Despite seeing themselves as talented and caring instructors, these three men sensed a narrow peer reliance on them as enforcers of school disciplinary regimes, reflecting prevailing presumptions of Black male educators as naturally inclined disciplinarians. This limited view generated frustration for each of these men as his classroom became "the discipline stop."

Overall, eight participants were referenced across both portions of the "Findings" section, offering critical perspectives on their struggles and frustrations with prevailing perceptions of Black male teachers as authoritarian disciplinarians. In the midst of a discipline-intensive urban school culture, the men cited above felt pressured to control student conduct by performing a very particular construction of Black masculinity in the classroom. For some, the dominant image of the stern Black male teacher clashed with their self-defined identities as teachers, and their struggles to conform to this image threatened their legitimacy in the eyes of colleagues and students. For others, this image demarked an essentialist lens among colleagues that over-emphasized the disciplinary roles of Black male teachers. In both cases, these popular perceptions failed to fully recognize and accept study participants on their own terms as Black male teachers in an urban school district.

Supporting Black Male Teachers as Disciplinarians

As noted earlier in this article, scholarship in Black masculinity studies has emphasized the need to examine the roots and effects of popular discourses on Black male subjectivity. Through a conceptual engagement with that scholarship, this article uncovered unique insights into study participants' daily encounters with the prevailing construction of Black male teachers as authoritarian disciplinarians. Multiple narrative passages acknowledged the struggle and/or reluctance of eight men in this study to perform the authoritarian disciplinary personas that were expected of them as Black male teachers in Brewerton schools. As the desire for more Black male teachers cuts across numerous urban districts where strict disciplinary cultures reign supreme, future research could tap into potentially rich and relatively unexplored terrains by further unpacking the constructions of Black masculinity that inform perceptions of Black male teachers as stern disciplinarians for Black youth. This research could draw upon Black masculinity studies to help multiple stakeholders explicitly articulate and collectively problematize popular assumptions about Black male teachers' roles as enforcers of urban school discipline. As Black male teachers do not determine their position and purpose in urban schools on their own, future research that brings together the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups—for example, Black women educators, White teacher colleagues, Black parents, and Black students—could create new and illuminating opportunities for educational scholars, teacher education programs, and urban school communities to clarify, question, and possibly re-envision the role of Black male teachers in the disciplinary cultures of city schools.

In addition to revealing the need for dialogue among multiple stakeholder groups, this article points to the urgency for Black male teachers' own collective reckonings with their participation in the disciplinary cultures of urban schools. That the focus groups conducted for this study became generative spaces for dialogue on classroom discipline underscored participants' desire to examine this topic with other Black male teachers. Moving forward, future efforts by researchers, teacher education programs, and school districts to understand and support Black male teachers should consider the creation of spaces where these men can collectively wrestle with their participation in the disciplinary cultures of urban schools.[4] Such spaces could provide opportunities for Black male teachers to engage in deeper considerations of the pedagogical rationales for, and the affordances and constraints of, their approaches to discipline and classroom management. For instance, how might one's investment in culturally relevant pedagogy (Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994), critical pedagogy (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007), or

another pedagogical camp shape the theory behind and execution of his disciplinary practices? What affordances and constraints accompany different approaches to classroom discipline rooted in different pedagogies? How might strategies like incentives (Kohn, 1993) or positive behavioral supports (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013) inform one's overall approach to discipline? And how might one's positionality as a Black man mediate whatever disciplinary strategies he engages in the classroom? These questions point to the types of deliberation that could enable Black male teachers to intentionally craft their own strategies for classroom discipline instead of merely responding to external pressures to perform a certain type of disciplinary persona.

Finally, looking beyond the implications for individual teachers' practices, the findings presented in this article set the stage for future considerations of Black male teachers' roles in sustaining or troubling the broader discipline-intensive educational milieu within which they are currently situated. Numerous scholars have decried the reign of zero tolerance policies in urban schools that have intensified the surveillance and criminalization of youth of color (E. Brown, 2003; Giroux, 2001: Lewis et al., 2010; Lipman, 2004; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Verdugo, 2002). As suggested in works by A. L. Brown (2012) and Ferguson (2001), and as echoed by several of the study participants quoted in this article, the Black male educator can easily be pegged in such spaces as an enforcer for racially punitive school disciplinary regimes. He is, in study participant Greg's words, "the big, bad, Black, scary teacher" whose Black masculine prowess can intimidate and subdue unruly Black children. As noted earlier in the description of this study's research context, Greg and the other participants in this study were working in an urban school district where metal detectors, security guards, disciplinary deans, and suspension policies were commonplace in high schools, and where data on suspension rates and the incidence of violence weighed heavily in annual assessments of school improvement. In this discipline-intensive milieu, is the authoritarian Black male teacher an agent of a racially punitive disciplinary culture? How might the disciplinary practices of study participants and other Black male teachers in a school district like Brewerton's exacerbate and/or disrupt the criminalization of students of color? Although the data collected for this study did not address these questions directly, the high stakes associated with the implementation of zero tolerance policies in Brewerton and other urban school districts across the United States suggests that future research should look critically at the relationship between Black male teachers' disciplinary practices and the broader politics of race and discipline in urban education.

Conclusion

This article explored the perspectives of 11 Black male teachers working in a predominantly Black urban school district with a discipline-intensive institutional culture. As noted across the "Findings" section, eight of the men in this study struggled with or became frustrated by the authoritarian disciplinary personas that were expected of them as Black male teachers. By bringing Black masculinity politics to the fore, this article contributes to the emergent scholarship on Black male teachers by situating study participants' discipline-related experiences against broader social and cultural discourses that have shaped prevailing perceptions of Black male disciplinary authority. This article also raises critical questions that should be considered by researchers, teacher education programs, and school districts that want to support Black male teachers' strategic and transformative participation in the disciplinary cultures of contemporary urban schools.

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Notes

1. Although the authors' analysis is set in Toronto, Ontario, the discourses in that local context on racial minority male teachers as role models for racial minority students bear a striking resemblance to those within the United States. See their article for a further description.
2. This strand of scholarship marks a departure from other threads of scholarship on Black masculinity (Hare & Hare, 1984; Kunjufu, 1986; Madhubuti, 1990) that tend to valorize hypermasculine and patriarchal forms of Black manhood. Through its Black-feminist informed critique of patriarchy, the strand of Black masculinity studies upon which this article draws enables a critical perspective on patriarchal constructions of Black male teachers as authoritarian disciplinarians.
3. While Victor described his instructional approach as constructivist, he did not situate his approach to classroom management in any specific pedagogical or theoretical camp. I use "laid-back" in the "Findings" section to convey Victor's repeated characterization of his disciplinary style as divergent from the more

rigid and authoritarian approaches of his colleagues and critics. Toward the end of this article, I discuss the need for further research that pushes Black male teachers to interrogate the affordances and constraints of different schools of thought on classroom discipline.

4. Of course these are not the only potential spaces where Black male teachers might consider their approaches to discipline more rigorously. However, given the particular enthusiasm demonstrated by study participants during the focus groups for this study, spaces designed specifically for Black male teachers may possess a unique capacity for the type of generative dialogue for which this article is calling.

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