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Issue Editor Reflection

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EDITOR REFLECTION

The recent tragic and untimely deaths of Black men and women, notably that of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor, has resulted in pushing issues of race to the forefront of our national consciousness. The more we endeavor to shy away from issues of race in America, the more the issue continues to *rear its historical head* with consequences permeating our major institutions in society, most notably our education system. Furthermore, we know that "the same racist brutality toward Black citizens that we see happening on the streets across the United States mirrors the violence toward Black students that is happening in our nation's academic streets" (Baker-Bell, Jones Stanbrough, & Everett, 2017, p. 131).

Within the P-20 education system, the consequences of persistent racism (e.g. implicit bias, negative stereotypes, and discrimination) disproportionately affect Black and Latino males as early as kindergarten. Academic tracking, disciplinary suspension, and expulsion practices continue to expand the gap of equity among different racial and ethnic groups. Black and Latino students as well as their parents are frequently silenced in both education and society. Counter-narrative can serve as a vehicle to empower their voices in constructing their lived realities while simultaneously providing a cultural insight to understanding their schooling experiences.

There is a growing body of literature that demonstrates that school-based racial discrimination experiences undermine academic success, lower academic self-concept, and engagement, and reduce academic curiosity and persistence for racial/ethnic minority students (Levy, Heissel, Richeson & Adam, 2016; Banerjee, Byrd, & Rowley, 2018; Merolla & Jackson, 2019). For many Black and Latino youth, racial discrimination exposures at school are not uncommon, including reported experiences of negative treatment from teachers and peers.

When we started this project almost two years ago we were in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. We had no idea the effect that the pandemic would have on the world in general and specifically on education for students across the P-20 educational pipeline. From pre-kindergarten to doctoral studies, students, faculty, teachers, staff, administrators and support workers have all been impacted by the pandemic; however, the impact on underrepresented communities particularly African American and Latino males has been magnified due to the systemic challenges they also experience at the local, state, and national levels. It is clear that our African American and Latino males are in peril (Bonner, 2000, 2014; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Ford, 1994, 1995; Gay, 2013; Grantham, 2004; Griffin, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Whiting, 2006, 2010).

In educational, as well as societal contexts, a number of stubbornly persistent themes tend to frame the conversations related to African American and Latino males related to achievement gaps; disciplinary patterns; special education; gifted and talented and masculinity. Perhaps the most pervasive problem is rooted in *deficit-based* mindsets that schools and society have assumed in addressing these issues. There is no more

critical time to continue to discuss the disparities for African American and Latino male youth in education. We have a unique opportunity to develop and institutionalize interventions to begin to rectify these disparities.

This special issue of the *Journal of Family Strengths* enhances the conversation related to interventions that will be most helpful to assist our African American and Latino males be successful in the classroom. Unique to this issue is a series of *Prospectus from the Field* op-ed pieces from emerging scholars and seasoned administrators. As we consider the impact of low academic achievement on African American and Latino males throughout the P-20 educational continuum, we are delighted to feature new perspectives on this critical issue in this special issue.

It is imperative that we capitalize on the assets our young men bring to the table and provide them with support to be successful academically. This issue seeks to support this goal. We hope that this special issue inspires you to make a conscious effort and pledge to make a difference in your current role today to support and advocate for African American and Latino males.

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