

Chapter 18

The Influence of Hegemonic (Toxic) Masculinity on Leadership Behaviors of Black Men

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ABSTRACT

Black male leaders represent a small percentage of Fortune 500 companies. Images of Black men have mostly portrayed aggression, hypermasculinity, and patriarchal thoughts about gender dominance. Hegemonic (toxic) masculinity is a symptom of cultural impressions that teach men what masculine ideologies to embrace and how to become a “real man.” Nuances across race are evident as Black males learn messages of masculinity through the history of Black people and community influences that abhor vulnerability. With so few Black leaders across organizations, they could become susceptible to enacting hegemonic behaviors in their leadership and mentorship roles. Further research could buttress leadership studies, Black studies, and men’s psychology by examining the lived experiences of Black male leaders acting as mentors within professional associations. These investigations might illustrate the profound contributions of early conceptualizations of masculinity to leadership behavior and the proliferation of masculine thoughts taught in mentorship programs to young Black people.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2018, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued a report that called attention to specific guidelines for psychological practice with boys and men. The APA (2018) acknowledged the multiple intersecting identities of boys and men and how they shape masculine experience and performance. Connell described hegemonic masculinity as the standard upon which the “real man” exists in an amalgamation of patriarchy and intermale dominance (as cited by Kupers, 2005). Modern research

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assigned the term toxic masculinity to the socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination. Studies on masculinity have examined how social processes thought to be endemic of maleness established both the blueprint for manhood and how individuals see themselves as men (Berdahl et al., 2018).

There is a racial and cultural dimension that the APA (2018) proclaims stereotypes Black men and boys into categories of aggression and hypermasculinity despite their normative behaviors. According to a 2017 survey, roughly 53% of Americans admire men who are manly or masculine (Pew Research Center, 2017). The Pew Research Center (2017) also delineated thoughts concerning masculinity by racial categories, and found that Black men report having others look to them as masculine in higher percentages (23%) than both whites (7%) and Hispanics (8%). Moreover, 49% of Black men identified themselves as being very masculine when asked to rate themselves on a scale from not at all masculine to very masculine (Pew Research Center, 2017). Given the salience of these ideologies, Black men enact this mental model in the varying domains of their lives, including relationships, religion, and work. Utilizing the theoretical foundation of hegemonic masculinity and the intersections of this phenomenon with race and class, this chapter explores how the formation and the understanding of masculinity influence how Black men perform in leadership roles. A conceptual approach offers an opportunity to make interconnections and highlights the nuances of empirical investigations to develop a more robust understanding of toxic masculinity in Black communities. Exploring the intersections of race, class, and masculinity is a pathway to understanding the ecological influence of environment and culture on thoughts around leadership capacity and, ultimately, the impact on leader behavior. These ideas also explore the generational social conditioning of masculinity in Black communities and the narratives that shape leadership context.

BACKGROUND

Indeed, Black people continue to face significant barriers to workplace advancement (Morgan Roberts & Mayo, 2019). According to a CNN article, only four Black CEOs are leading Fortune 500 companies (Yurkevich, 2020). Many of these leaders share familiarity and closeness to the oppression and tenor of racial injustice that continues to proliferate in the United States (Yurkevich, 2020). There is limited research in both the leadership and psychology of men that explores the connections between Black masculine identities and leadership behaviors. However, empirical evidence appears to confirm the notion that white leaders are more positively associated with appropriately acceptable leadership than racial minorities (Rosette et al., 2008).

As images of racial trauma against Black male bodies pervade, the suspicion and self-protection that might be inherent in the identity development of Black males can show up in the workplace. Moreover, feelings of inferiority can force Black men to assert their dominant masculine traits in highly racialized organizations where implicit racial bias affects Black men's psycho-political well-being in three domains: personal, relational, and collective (Mosley et al., 2017). These reactions to negative racial stereotypes can instigate behavioral responses grounded in hypermasculine ideologies: misogyny, overachieving, and rebellion. An intentional and targeted attempt at understanding the experiences of Black men within the context of leadership can add to both the leadership literature and organizational practices that make space for Black men to rise through the ranks of leadership in environments that are sensitive and inclusive.

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