The Multidimensional Turn

Revisiting Progressive Black Masculinities

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[−] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter revisits the theory of progressive masculinities included in the collection entitled *Progressive Black Masculinities* (2006), in particular the article "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities." It does so through the lens of multidimensional theory, suggesting that developing progressive black masculinities is consistent with black men's pursuit of racial justice. The chapter is organized as follows. The first part defines progressive black masculinities and briefly summarizes the arguments that support the concept and seek to encourage black men's engagement with it. The second part discusses the origins and tenets of the multidimensional turn in intersectionality theory. The third part turns to masculinities and hegemonic masculinity theory, situating the insights about the patriarchal gender system and the ranking of masculinities within a multidimensionality framework. The final section makes the argument for progressive masculinities, drawing on both multidimensionality and masculinities theory.

Keywords: progressive masculinities, black masculinities, racial justice, multidimensional theory, black men, intersectionality theory, gender system

Deepening the Multidimensional Analysis

This chapter revisits the theory of progressive masculinities as described in the collection entitled *Progressive Black Masculinities* published by Routledge in 2006 and in particular the article "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities." It does so through the lens of multidimensional theory, suggesting that developing progressive black masculinities is consistent with black men's pursuit of racial justice.

Multidimensional theory is and remains outsider jurisprudence (Matsuda 1989; Valdes 1997). That is, it is a theory, arising specifically in the study of law, that is situated in the experiences of and is predominately developed by those who are outside the intellectual mainstream of even those who do feminist and masculinity scholarship—themselves often outside the mainstream of

intellectual production. It consists of two central ideas that are both descriptive and methodological. The first idea is that every individual and group can be seen as not only raced (black, white, or Hispanic, etc.) or gendered (masculine, feminine, transgendered), for **(p.79)** example, but is simultaneously raced, gendered, classed, sexually oriented, etc.; and that these persistent social hierarchies of race, class, etc., are materially relevant and mutually interacting and reinforcing (Mutua 2006a). The second idea is that a particular context further informs and shapes the operation and interaction of individuals or groups within these hierarchies. So, for example, it is context that structures which aspects of an individual or hierarchies are foregrounded in a particular situation or analysis; and context almost always consists of influential spatial configurations and/or particular historical nuances. For instance, racial profiling of black men often engages the multidimensional interplay of race and gender in what John Calmore has called the patrol and monitoring of anonymous public space (2006).

The original progressive black masculinities project engaged multidimensional theory, or the multidimensional turn in intersectional theory to assess whether black men lacked access to patriarchal privileges as nationalist scholars asserted, or whether black men were privileged by gender and oppressed by race as certain interpretations of intersectionality theory maintained. Multidimensionality theory suggested that in some contexts black men were privileged by gender in relation to black women, and in other contexts they were oppressed by gendered racism as blackmen—one word—and one multidimensional entity. In this chapter I ground the project more deeply in multidimensionality theory. I do so because I believe the multidimensional turn in intersectionality theory better situates masculine identities and practices within the matrix of socially constructed hierarchies, better explains the synergistic interplay between categories such as gender and race, and better explains the role context plays in that interaction. As such, it is a useful tool in explaining and clarifying the gendered racial dynamics present in such phenomena as racial profiling, as well as in understanding the justifications for the project of progressive black masculinities.

The first part of this chapter defines progressive black masculinities. It also briefly summarizes the arguments that support the concept and which seek to encourage black men's engagement with it. Next the chapter discusses the origins and tenets of the multidimensional turn in intersectionality theory. The third part turns to masculinities and hegemonic masculinity theory, situating the insights about the patriarchal gender system and the ranking of masculinities within a multidimensionality framework. The final section then briefly makes the argument for progressive masculinities, drawing on both multidimensionality and masculinities theory.

(p.80) Progressive Black Masculinities: Definition and Summary of Arguments

Progressive black masculinities are the "unique and innovative practices of the masculine self actively engaged in struggles to transform social structures of domination" (Mutua 2006b, xi). The progressive black masculinities project understands domination (or maintaining dominance) as a central goal of the patriarchal order as well as the goal of a number of other oppressive social systems such as race, class, and enforced heterosexuality. It rejects arrangements that depend on the subordination and oppression of others. This is particularly important because, in the case of the patriarchal system, the very definition of a man [of masculinity] is, in part, dependent on the subordination of women.

The project rests on three distinct arguments. The first argument embodies an ethical position. Ethics suggests that if black men believe that racism constrains and limits their own and others' human potential and they oppose this, then to the extent that it can be shown that patriarchy and sexism also constrain and limit the human potential of others, particularly that of black

women and other women, then they should also oppose these. In other words, it involves a principled commitment to the well-being of not only men but also women and other people. This argument also rests on a certain amount of hopefulness. Given that black men have fought against racism and oppression (and some against other forms of oppression including gender oppression) on behalf of black communities and themselves, they are accustomed to swimming against the tide and taking others along with them. This suggests that they might be enlisted and successful in fighting against the hurtful practices of masculinity.

The second argument is based on the workings of systems of oppression. Specifically, systems of oppression shape and reinforce one another. The argument then is that to the extent black men are committed to undermining racism and racist structures, their success is hindered by gender domination and hierarchy, among other structures that mutually support and reinforce racism. To get rid of racism, it is likely necessary, at least, to disrupt or cripple other systems of oppression. In other words, black men's complicity with hegemonic and patriarchal systems of masculinities undermines black struggles against racism.

The third argument is that, in addition to racism, other systems of domination also hurt black men. Both masculinities theory and the multidimensional turn in intersectionality theory suggest that gender hierarchy also hurts black men. It does so in three interrelated ways. First, it subjects them to the domination of other men while undermining their efforts to combat **(p.81)** racism and transform structures of racial domination. Second, it potentially limits the contours of their own identities. And third, in certain contexts it compounds their vulnerability, in part because gender oppression sometimes compounds the oppression wrought by racial domination.

Given these arguments, the fuller definition of progressive black masculinities encourages action, in concert with others, to disrupt racist structures, but also to disrupt all structures of domination. It also embodies a call for edifying action on behalf of black communities, building on black people's and particularly black men's historical action against racism. Further, it encourages black men to personally eschew racist, sexist, classist, and hetero-sexist action, among others. And, it begins with the notion that men, themselves, will have to more fully define and construct progressive masculinities through the development of creative and innovative practices and ideas.

The project consequently links two distinct but overlapping *political* projects that have the goal of "eradicating relations of domination that constrain and reduce human potential" (Mutua 2006b, 5). The first project is one of progressive black practice or progressive blackness. This is an anti-racist project meant to intervene and disrupt "the normal functioning of a society built on white supremacist foundations" (ibid. 8) while also edifying and valuing black people and their communities, among others, as part of the global family and as a part of that family that has been historically denigrated. It is also part of a larger antidomination or antisubordination project. The second is a project of progressive masculine practice or performances of progressive masculinities. This project seeks to disrupt the workings and structures of what might be variously known as the patriarchal order, the hegemony of men, the gender hierarchy, and/or male domination. It does so through encouraging men to reorient their concepts and practices away from ideal or hegemonic masculinity, which by definition requires the subordination of women and the denigration and domination of men over women, children and, yes, other subordinate or marginal men. Consequently, these political projects are directed toward two overlapping groups, namely, black people generally on the one hand, and men—and particularly black men—on the other.

The Multidimensional Turn in Intersectionality Theory

Multidimensional theory, or the turn in intersectional theory, is and remains outsider jurisprudence. That is, it is a theory, arising specifically in the study of law (though not remaining there), that is situated in the experiences of groups such as black men. Specifically it arises as a theory within the context **(p.82)** and at the intersection of critical race and Latcrit theory on the one hand, and LGBT and queer scholarship produced by people of color on the other, all of which maintain strong feminist traditions within their intellectual communities; and all of which, by definition, have had to struggle with the multiplicity and intersection of persistent social hierarchies such as race, gender, and nation (Mutua 2006a).

Development

Multidimensionality theory is an expansion and development of two key insights about identity. These insights are antiessentialism and intersectionality. While the antiessentialist insight had engendered substantial prior debate in feminist, critical race theory, and other intellectual circles by the 1990s, intersectionality emerged as one of the most important theoretical contributions that critical race theorists and feminists have made in the last couple of decades and has become "the primary analytic tool that [they] deploy for theorizing identity and oppression" (Mutua 2010; Nash 2008, 1).

Antiessentialism stands for the proposition that no single experience or perspective reflects the common experience and interest of the people constituting the group called, for example, African Americans (Mutua 2006a). This is so because that group, like most social groups, consists of people that occupy different classes, are differently gendered and, for instance, differently colored, among other things. Instead, all social groups (be they gendered like women or raced like African Americans) contain internal differences; no groups are monolithic. Similarly, individuals are multifaceted and multidimensional. That is, every individual can be seen as raced, classed, and gendered, among other things, as well as a combination of diverse and contradictory selves (see, e.g., Mutua 2006a; Harris 1990). And finally, antiessentialism suggests that the development and imposition of categories that arise in any of these systems impose a limiting and essentialized identity on a complex and multidimensional person or group. In other words, the categories of white, black, Asian American in the racial system, or women, men or transgendered in the gender hierarchy, or bisexual, homosexual, or heterosexual in the sexuality hierarchy, impose constraints and essentialize identity (Cohen 2010, 517–21).

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, 1989) and drawing on black feminist scholarship, proffered and expanded a similar idea; namely, that in the context of black women's experiences, multiple systems of oppression affected them. In other words, black women were not simply oppressed by persistent social hierarchies of race-or-sex; rather, **(p.83)** both oppressed them (Crenshaw 1991). Feminists and other scholars almost immediately began to further expand this notion by suggesting that the systems of subordination were mutually relating and reinforcing but also that they interacted synergistically to form uniquely situated groups and situations (Ehrenreich 2002; Kwan 1997).

In the midst of these developments, gay men of color sought to expand intersectional theory both substantively and conceptually (Valdes 2002, 1998; Hutchinson 2001, 1999). Substantively they sought to demonstrate the ways in which heterosexual privilege and heterosexism also constituted a system of subordination that should be studied more closely as well as transformed. In addition, these scholars saw, as others had, that within the interactions of these complex multidimensional hierarchies racial groups were also privileged or stereotyped and

stigmatized through gendered, sexualized, and class attributes, or that classes often had gendered, sexualized, and racial attributes, and so forth. So, for example, historically to be black was also to be (seen as) sexually deviant (Collins 2004), or to be Asian was to be (seen as) gendered feminine (Yanagisako 1995).

Conceptually, they clarified, as had other studies (such as whiteness studies) that the systems of race, gender, sexuality, and so on, contained not only subordinate but also privileged locations (or categories). Intersectionality had focused on the way that two or more subordinating locations in different systems of oppression created unique experiences for the groups on which they operated, such that black (race) women (gender) for example appeared to have experiences distinct from black men or white women. However, Hutchinson in particular sought to demonstrate that when a *privileged* location or category (e.g., white) of one system intersected with a *subordinated* location in another system (e.g., women), it also created unique situations and could be either privileging or disadvantaging in particular contexts (white women) (Hutchinson 2001). As such, context mattered and the systems of oppression were complex.

Others also began to further develop multidimensionality theory through the analyses of the experiences of black men, seen not simply through a racial lens, but through a gendered one (Cooper 2006; Mutua 2006b). They were examining what appeared to be an intersection between positions of privilege and subordination; namely, men as a privileged gendered category and racialized humanity as a subordinate category. The interaction in certain contexts such as racial profiling demonstrated that the intersections could not be mechanistically applied. In that context black men were *more* prone to be the subject of racial profiling than were black women, even though black women occupied two subordinated categories whereas black men only **(p.84)** occupied one. The analysis turned in part on the interaction of context (often involving spatial configurations) and content of the category, such that what a "man" or "masculine" might mean in public space as opposed to what a "woman" or "feminine" (as vulnerable, non-threatening?) might mean in that same space may be more determinative of the outcome than a simple mechanistic compounding of multiple subordinating positions.

Finally, Valdes stressed that while individuals and groups could be situated in all kinds of ways and could possess a host of different traits and expressions, some traits or expressions were socially and systematically stigmatized or rewarded in a way that rendered them "materially relevant." That is, he stressed that he focused on hierarchal *systems* that materially stratified people based on group-held traits and expressions (Valdes 1997; Mutua 2006a).

Each of these analyses not only began to develop multidimensionality as an expansion of intersectional theory, but perhaps also suggests a significant turn.

Tenets of Multidimensionality

Multidimensional theory therefore has a number of precepts, as I have suggested elsewhere. It:

> 1. Recognizes that individuals have many dimensions, some of which are embodied human traits such as skin color, sex, ear-lobe length, and eye color; and others, which are expressed, such as being Methodist or Catholic, a cat owner or dog owner, etc.
> 2. Recognizes that groups also are multidimensional. They are internally diverse such that "African Americans" may be seen as a racial group but consists of people who occupy different classes, are gendered differently (men, women, and transgendered people), and are sexualized differently (heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals). Society has selected one trait or expression around which the group is organized, and the group

is essentialized based on that one trait or expression. In fact, groups are multidimensional, not monolithic.

3. Focuses on materially relevant systems that structure and rank groups in a hierarchy based on traits or expressions. These traits have been made materially relevant historically through the allocation and denial of resources (both expressive and material) and other patterned practices. Based on these practices, meanings are constructed about those who bear those traits or expressions. In other words: societies take some dimensions **(p.85)** such as color, sex, or a particular religious belief (but in the United States, not ear-lobe length or owning a cat or dog) and construct meanings (through practices) about the groups that possess them. Societies then allocate or deny both material and status-related resources through systems they develop (based on those traits or expressions) such as racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism, for example, which operate through multiple sites and institutions, including law, education, politics, access to health care, etc. (Mutua 2010, 295).

4. Acknowledges that these hierarchal systems form a matrix of privilege and oppression (Froc 2010; Collins 1990, 222–30) that interact, intersect, and are mutually reinforcing such that for example, in the United States, racism is patriarchal and patriarchy is racist (Mutua 2006a), or as bell hooks suggests, the American society is a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks 1995). At the same time, these categories are unstable and shift in different contexts, such that in the context of anonymous public space, as noted earlier, black men appear much more subject to racial profiling than black women have been, even though black men could be seen as inhabiting a privileged gender category (i.e., men) and a subordinated racial category (i.e., black) as opposed to black women who occupy two subordinated categories.

5. Posits that context matters. This idea has long been a central tenet of critical race theory but is also centrally important to multidimensional theory (Mutua 2006a, 2010; see also Froc 2010, 25–27). For instance, while the concept of "white supremacy" is infinitely clarifying about the nature of racism in the United States or South Africa, it perhaps tells us little about the nature of racism in the context of China.

In addition, context is not only important as an insight but is important methodologically because it directs attention to the specific hierarchy that is foregrounded in a given situation as well as the particular aspects of the system that may be in play. For example, in an essay that preceded the development of multidimensionality theory, Joan Williams once described an interaction with a colleague as they walked down a lunch line. It in some ways captures the shifting interplay of various social hierarchies, traits, and expressions through the changes in situation and context. She noted that when her colleague talked about his children, his reaction struck her as particularly "male." When the topic switched to birth control, his comments struck her as "shockingly Catholic." When he talked, and perhaps flirted, with the cashier, she noted both tension and camaraderie, which she recognized as a "complex dynamic that she had seen between privileged and **(p.86)** working-class blacks." Finally when she and her friend sat down to eat, they talked about scholarship and he reminded her of "just another upper-middle-class academic like herself" (Williams 1991, 306). In other words, though these were simply conversational shifts, determining whether race, gender, or some other trait or hierarchy is salient (by structuring an outlook or a particular outcome) will ultimately depend on analyzing the context.

Masculinities Theory and Hegemonic Masculinity

In the context of multidimensional theory, masculinities are a category or location within the patriarchal gender system and order or hierarchy that privileges and provides "men as a group power over women as a group" (Dowd, Levit, and McGinley, this volume). In this patriarchal gender structure many of the society's structures, institutions, and cultural sites of power are gendered male or privilege men and qualities largely associated with men and dominant normative forms of masculinity. Men to varying degrees often engage a set of practices considered "masculine" in order, in part, to access these places and positions which are both designed to and have the effect of maintaining group power vis-à-vis women, to render men, as a group, dominant. Group domination yields privileges from which all men in general benefit.

At the same time, however, men are not a monolithic group, as antiessentialism theory provides and empirical evidence suggests. Rather, they are differentiated in a multitude of ways and these ways are also ranked such that a hierarchy of men and masculinities exists. Although this ranking occurs in multiple ways and changes over time, two significant strands, particularly in the United States in this historical moment, are evident. To be a real man, to demonstrate manliness, is to not be like women or feminine nor to be gay. To be like women is stereotypically to be weak, passive, and subordinate in relation to masculinity, which is often performed and associated with strength, assertiveness, and domination. To be a real man, to be masculine, thus requires the domination of or at least the denigration of women (and other contrast figures) and feminine practices that reinforce the subordination of women (Cooper 2009; Collins 2006; Kimmel 2004). The admonishment not to be gay is linked to the concept that to be gay is to be like a woman. "In particular, gay men submit to the sexual advances of other men and are penetrated like women; sexual practices that lead heterosexual men to stereotype gay men as sissies, faggots or effeminate men. ... To many people, homosexuality is the negation of masculinity" (Collins 2006, 83). And, the intersection of masculinity in the gendered system with homosexuality **(p.87)** in the sexual system constructs the ranking of men, such that straight men are ranked higher than gay men.

Further, other categories that intersect with masculine identities also function to rank men in a hierarchy. That is, race, class, age, etc., also rank men. For example, Patricia Hill Collins in describing the American order notes that "real men" are not like women, they are not gay, not poor, not boys, and may not be black (Collins 2006). Thus, there exists a hierarchy of men and masculinities in which men are ranked in relation to and at the intersection of a multiplicity of other identity categories that they inhabit and against which they must construct their identities. These intersectional identity categories (white men, black men, poor men) and the performances of the masculine self (not like women or gay, but rather, strong, aggressive, and dominant) interact with a host of social structures and institutions that are gendered male, often rewarding with position and prestige those who come close to the ideal norm in identity and/or action. At the same time this interaction of culture and structure penalizes through limited opportunity, limited freedom, censure, bullying, and violence those who are furthest from that norm, limiting the privileges these men can access as a result of their membership in a group that dominates women. In short, a hierarchy of men suggests that men also dominate over "lesser," subordinate, and other marginal men.

Hegemonic masculinities give clues as to what is valued in society. In any given society, the ways in which social hierarchies are established and exist provide some insight into the ideal types or models of masculinity that become dominant or hegemonic. That is, in society different ideal masculine models fight for hegemony at both the local and society-wide levels. These models

signal who is considered a "real man" and the way men should act, behave, or perform manliness. These models are hegemonic because both those who disproportionately benefit from them as well as those who are largely oppressed by the models often sign onto them. In the United States, many scholars have noted that the society-wide hegemonic ideal is not only defined by what he or she is not (not women or feminine, not gay, etc.), but it is also a combined identity of elite, white, Anglo, heterosexual, and male/men status and relations, among others (e.g., Collins 2006; Mutua 2006b). In other words, hegemonic masculinity in the United States, in this moment, is a multidimensional idea that is situated in the highest position of power at the intersection and interplay of persistent social hierarchies, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, as well as perhaps religion, age, etc. Thus, the U.S. hegemonic ideal (rather than an actual person) of a real man in the current historical moment is an elite Anglo white heterosexual male.

 (p.88) Few men can live up to the American ideal of masculinity, a seemingly central feature of masculinity in general whereby men must constantly prove their manhood. But the few who do get close, or appear to represent the ideal, have a tremendous stake in maintaining their dominance generally, and dominance over women, other men, themselves, and their own emotions, in particular. Though most men cannot live up to ideal masculinity, many men can live up to some aspects of it. So, for instance, elite class status provides men with money and thus the power to influence, if not control, institutions and apparatuses of violence so that they appear "strong" even if they are physically "weak." Poor men may emphasize their physical strength as a way of presenting themselves as manly, even as they might be powerless in the workforce and have trouble acting as the "breadwinner" or "provider," another apparent requirement of ideal masculinity. In any case, there exist tremendous incentives (privileges, positions) and pressures (group monitoring, bullying, violence), both culturally and materially, to live up to at least some aspects of ideal-hegemonic-masculinity, even as individual men or subgroups resist other aspects. Such actions contribute both to change and consistency of the ideal and contribute to hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) while maintaining the construction of masculinities as dominant and dominating.

Progressive Black Masculinities: The Argument, Embodying the Theories

Black men occupy an intersectional identity in which race shapes their masculine gendered identities and vice versa. While white racial oppression of black identity, as a subordinated racial category, severely limits black men's human potential, their identities as men, the dominant gender category seems a source of privilege that might compensate them for the liability of being black. In other words, meeting the demands of or performing masculinity appears to allow black men to compensate for the penalties that the white racial oppression of blackness levies on them. To the extent that all men face incentives and penalties that encourage them to live up to hegemonic ideals of masculinity, black men appear to have even greater incentives, including compensatory ones.

However, the social construction of race places severe limitations on the ways that black men's assertion of masculinity may aid them. Further, the intersection of racial subordination with masculinities renders black masculinity a secondary status (within the hierarchy of masculinities) reinforcing that subordination. At the same time, the imperatives of masculinities **(p.89)** hurt men generally, because, as masculinities scholars suggest, they limit the contours of their personalities and exact a range of costs (Dowd, Levit, and McGinley, this volume). For black men the limitations may be greater and the costs higher. For instance, the intersection of masculinities with racial subordination may make black men more vulnerable to surveillance and violence. These harms in many ways demonstrate the manner in which social hierarchies are

mutually reinforcing. At the same time, adhering to masculine imperatives of domination and denigration exacts an additional cost. It undermines the anti-racist struggle of black men in part because it fractures black communities by alienating some of black men's closest allies, namely, black women and sexual minorities. This imperative also harms black women and black sexual minorities in ways not all that dissimilar from the way that black men claim racism hurts them. It limits women and sexual minorities' human potential; and black men's participation in that harm undermines their own claims for justice and human dignity. Progressive black masculinities thus start here—with an ethical challenge to men to struggle against all the systems of domination that harm black people and others.

The political project of progressive black masculinities therefore grounds the project in part in black men's racial justice sentiments and in their historical engagement in anti-racist and other struggles against domination on behalf of black communities. In this sense, the justification for progressive masculinities is not simply that hegemonic masculinity and the persistent social hierarchy of men and masculinities harms black men, but that black men have a historical practice in fighting for justice on behalf of others, and the cause of justice provides additional incentives for creating, pursuing, and practicing alternative and progressive ways of being men.

I now turn briefly to the arguments in support of the progressive black masculinities project.

Anti-Racist Struggle: Progressive Blackness

Of the two projects that make up the project of progressive masculinities, the anti-racism struggle is central to the project of progressive blackness. Said differently, in the United States, race is a hierarchal system of domination socially constructed on the basis of different types (phenotype) of human bodies (Omi and Winant 1994), and with resources both expressive and material distributed and withheld to mark and exaggerate the difference between groups in both perception and fact (MacKinnon 1987). In other words, as the social construction insight suggests, race is not a biological feature but rather a set of practices and social processes that over time construct **(p.90)** a hierarchy based on certain features of different phenotyped human bodies. This was the project of white supremacy, with those seen and categorized as white on top and those seen as black on the bottom with other groups ordered in a hierarchy between the two. While whiteness has been a project of supremacy and domination, blackness historically has been a project and struggle for self-determination and self-definition in the face of oppression and denigration.

White supremacy, therefore, is not just a belief or an ideology but a structural system, much like male supremacy, with white supremacy deeply written into the very systems, institutions, and structures of American society. It was initially constructed through the patterned practices and historical social process of whites colonizing and conquering others, complemented in the United States by whites exterminating the Native American population, enslaving and exploiting the labor and expertise of black people, appropriating Latino land and subordinating them, and initially excluding Asians. This was followed by segregation, legal dictatorship, and the near monopolization and hoarding of the country's resources. Over several hundred years and in the process, the cultural value of whiteness and white supremacy has become so institutionalized that it remains present throughout most of the country's systems, structures, and institutions, including schools, government agencies, neighborhoods, businesses, the health care system, etc., despite the elimination of many of its legal supports but evident in continuing racial disparities and inequities.

The cultural value also has been deeply written into the conscious and unconscious patterns of white people's behavior. It remains so pervasive, as Faegin explains, that a mental frame complete with emotional reactions, readily available negative stereotypes about nonwhites, and rationalizing stories have become a structure in most white people's characters while also impacting people of color (Faegin 2009, 11). Thus, this cultural and institutional value became and remains the hidden norm against which most people are measured such that it operates even in the absence of racist intent as a part of the normal functioning of the economy, the schools, and other institutional structures. So, for example, "good schools" code as "white schools" not because black schools are inherently inferior but because a history of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, government housing policies, and white flight have left "good" schools as "white" schools (Mutua 2006a). Active intervention is required to change and disrupt the normal functioning of a society organized around and on the basis of white power and supremacy. Progressive blackness (while having other cultural meanings and content) becomes one of those interventions.

(p.91) Black men's commitment to anti-racism and their anti-racist struggle on behalf of black communities engenders hope that black men will engage a politics of progressive black masculine performance and activism.

Progressive Masculinities

The Ethical Extensions of Anti-Racist Struggle

The progressive black masculinities project attempts to connect black men's commitments to fight against racial domination on behalf of themselves and black communities to a commitment to the communities' constituent parts, to the diversity of justice projects that these constituent groups and others must pursue, and to coalition-building with others similarly affected and committed. In other words, the progressive black masculinities project is an ethical project. It is concerned with the existential well-being of black people and black communities. It thus poses an ethical challenge: If black men believe that racial domination is wrong because it limits the human flourishing of black people, then a principled position requires (1) concern for black people, in all their diversity, or the communities' constituent parts; (2) a concern for other groups subjected to racial domination as well as a stand against other systems of domination that limit the humanity of others within the black community; and (3) coalition-building against domination not only with those within the black community but also those outside of it. These are the ethical extensions of progressive black practice and anti-racist struggle.

The constituent parts or subgroups of the black community include women, men, sexual minorities of color, and children, as well as others. The insight suggests that if the anti-racist struggle is in part about black people, then the anti-racist struggle should also be about the structures of domination that affect black people. And this can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, this insight recognizes in part that racial domination itself is gendered, sexed, classed, etc.; it is multidimensional. For example, racial discrimination acts on black men and black women as differently gendered beings, differently, and it poses different obstacles to poor blacks than it does to middle-class black people. On the other hand, the idea could be understood from the perspective that racism is not the only system of domination that limits the human potential of black people and those within black communities; so do, for example, sexism, classism, heterosexism. This is the intersectional and multidimensional insight.

A commitment to human flourishing and against subordination suggests that people committed to fighting against racism and other systems of **(p.92)** subordination should be willing to

partner and build coalitions with others who are also similarly committed. So, for example, black men and women fighting against gendered oppression should partner with white, Latino, and Asian American women to work to overcome gender and racial domination.

Adherence to Dominant Masculinity Undermines Racial Justice

Black men should reorient their masculine practices toward progressive masculinities not only because it is ethical but also because white supremacy and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing systems that undermine the project of racial justice. They do so, for example, by reinforcing black men's subordinate status in the hierarchy of masculinities and by goading them into actions that alienate potential allies in the racial struggle.

Although the assertion of hegemonic masculinity may appear to compensate for the injustices that whites inflict on black people, the socio-historical construction of race and white supremacy in particular, places limitations on the ways the assertion may aid black men. That is, the content of the category called black as developed over time places limitations on compensatory moves. For instance, to the extent that black men and people in general have been constructed as disproportionately poor vis-à-vis white people, only a few black men will be able to attain the status of "provider" that has historically been a part of the masculine ideal. Said differently, race, gender, and class reinforce black men's secondary and subordinate status in the American hierarchy of masculinities. Rethinking the ideal of a sole provider in the current economic and historical moment might render a whole host of men less stressed and committed to finding ways to be partners (Collins 2006).

Further, these kinds of structural limitations may encourage men to behave in ways that over-emphasize certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity, such as violence and sexual potency, that they can access. That is, they may encourage hypermasculinities. In this sense, men who do not have access to money and position may use their physical bodies extremely aggressively as sources of power over and against women, sexual minorities, and other men and children. This move is likely to have multiple negative effects. First, because the patriarchy is racist and white domination is also patriarchal, this action may simply reinforce the stereotype of black men as brutes, again reinforcing their secondary status both in the hierarchy of men and in the racial hierarchy. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it potentially and destructively alienates some of black men's traditional allies, such as black women and black sexual minorities, who also have **(p.93)** struggled against racism. The aspiration and attempt at hegemonic masculinity disrupts and fractures black communities undermining solidarity and the anti-racist struggle that depends on these other groups' participation (Kimmel 2006).

Black Men: Masculinities and Gendered Racism

Black men should eschew hegemonic masculinity in their personal lives and define anew progressive masculinities because both the imperatives of masculinities and its intersection with racial subordination or gendered racism hurt black men.

As others have suggested, the imperatives of normative masculinity potentially limit the contours of black men's identities. For example, they are told to be tough, strong, and in control of themselves, their emotions, and those around them. Further, they are counseled to be breadwinners, presidents, warriors, playboys, etc. These instructions belie the full range of human expressions that exist. But, in addition, their performances of masculinity—how they choose to be and act—are heavily monitored and evaluated by other men as well as women to see if they comport to the imperatives of ideal and hegemonic masculinity. These norms and

imperatives limit who men are and who they can become. Most men suffer from these limitations in some form or another.

However, these limitations may pose additional costs for black men. For instance, working-class or poor black men may lack the institutional resources that make control of one's environment possible. They have fewer social networks or access to jobs than even poor white men in general. Thus, they may be more easily forced into positions where they act as warriors (soldiers in war), the potential costs of which are extremely high, potentially involving death.

But in addition, the intersection of racial subordination with masculinities may impose other costs, costs which not even black women face. This is so even though black men reap some part of the male dividend, in that those who work tend to make more money than black women (when they can find work), they tend to occupy places of status within black communities, and their issues all too oftenz are given priority vis-à-vis black women both within and without the communities (Carbado 1999). Nevertheless, black men face gendered racism which imposes additional cost on them. For instance, in public space where strangers pass or interact, men are considered dangerous. In that same space, black strangers are also seen as dangerous. But in what Calmore calls anonymous public space, unknown black men, the synergy between racial oppression and gender suspicion is lethal and they are seen as the most dangerous people in this context, in this space. So much so that Calmore refers to **(p.94)** them as unwanted traffic (2006). And he argues that these men, particularly if they are young, engender heightened surveillance by the police, who see them as dangerous and criminal and are inclined not only to subject them to heightened surveillance but also to stop, interrogate, and possibly injure them. At the same time, they engender heightened surveillance from other men both like and unlike themselves. All of this attention appears to subject them, even though most are law-abiding, to increased violence by other men.

Progressive black masculinities might bring more trust among black men. More trust may lead to more solidarity for the struggle against racism.

Conclusion: Racial Justice Requires Gender Justice

Multidimensionality is embedded in the justifications and call for progressive masculinities. It suggests that black men, who sit at the intersection of racial subordination and gender privilege, would be aided in their struggle for racial justice, if they also pursued gender justice. It further suggests that black men themselves would also benefit significantly from gender justice.

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