Black PlayCrit
Examining the Disruption of Play for Black Male Youth

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Drawing on such academic topics as the white racial frame, critical race theory, Black critical theory, and Black male studies, the authors offer Black PlayCrit, a tool focusing on the specificity of Blackness and anti-Black violence in play. Calling for the adoption of Black PlayCrit in future studies, they suggest researchers should consider practicing its tenets by developing questions that privilege the stories of Black male youths and consider racism a part of their everyday lived experience, including their participation in structured and unstructured play. Protecting young Black males, they argue, requires a shift in the way we view them and how they play in schools and communities. Doing so may make students of play uncomfortable, may push the boundaries of the scholarly understanding of play, and may force the scholarship around play to face harsh realities about the structure of communities and recreational agencies. However, such thoughtful consideration can help create a society in which playing while Black no longer becomes a death sentence. **Key words**: Black critical theory; Black PlayCrit theory; critical race theory; playground to prison pipeline; play of Black male youth; play-spatial exclusion; redlining and play

Introduction

Play has increasingly been recognized as vital for all children's learning and development. Through play children can master control over their environment; develop their cognitive, social, and emotional intelligence; and activate their imagination and creativity—all of which will assist in them in how they identify as adults. It is through play that children learn a breadth of skills for optimal development. Yet, the diminishment of both play time and spaces for play (e.g., the removal of recess and physical education programs in schools

and the increased investigations into so-called "free-range" parents) plus an ideological understanding of who has a right to play have reshaped play for millions of children. It follows that the construction of Black childhood play is marked by deficit discourses. These discourses exclude Black children from the developmental benefits of play while simultaneously denying their innocence and humanity. Our purpose in this article is to expand the understanding of the impact of systemic racism on Black play experiences. We do so by extending Bryan's (2021b) conception of Black PlayCrit theory as critical scholarship to disrupt these discourses and reimagine Black childhood play for the benefit of all. We do this by considering the importance of space—what we call play-spatial exclusion, which highlights the absence of resources, exclusionary practices, and potential dangers that Black male youth must navigate.

We introduce a normative understanding of the development of play and its history within the United States before we situate these discourses within the ongoing anti-Black experiences that have led to the exclusion of Black children from the notions of innocence through their dehumanization (i.e., the process of denying that Black children are fully human). We also introduce a historical overview of anti-Black exclusions and oppressions enacted through the dominant legal and social practices that have impacted the spaces and places in which Black children play, work, and reside (Pinckney, Outley et al. 2018). Each of these areas make visible the ways in which play—despite its praise as vital for development—has been denied to Black children, teens, and emerging adults, and especially to Black males.

Play Defined

In the United States, play has been introduced into legislation and public programs as a public good worthy of equitable distribution that benefits development. Play is often viewed as a natural activity for healthy development but deemed as wasteful when not accompanied by hard work or used productively for the purpose of creating better adult workers. In other words, play has been deemed an activity in which children practice the specific skills they need in adulthood. Though many believe that play is unimportant and unproductive (Edminston 2007), many scholars judge it essential during childhood for optimal growth (Gleave and Cole-Hamilton 2012; Goldstein 2012; Lester and Russell 2008; Navidi 2016). Play has been defined as an activity that is intrinsically

motivated, voluntary, enjoyable, and involves suspending reality (Docket 1999). Piaget (1972) indicates that play provides a range of developmental functions, including physical (i.e., small and gross motor skills), emotional (i.e., self-esteem and self-efficacy), and social (i.e., cooperation and team building), functions that assist in moving children through the stages of cognitive development. During the early infancy stage (one to twelve months of age), children participate in activities to master basic sensory motor skills. In early childhood (one to six years), children use pretend play to develop the ability to think abstractly and learn basic social rules. By late childhood (six to twelve years), children gain an understanding of equitable play through rules that allow them to develop empathy while simultaneously learning to control their environment, all of which relates to their emotional regulation. Play within each of these stages is grounded in the cultural context of their family, community, and society.

The current concept of play emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when modernization decreased the need for working-class child labor. The Progressive movement—aimed at addressing, among other things, the societal problems caused by industrialization and its political corruption—centered on social activism and political reform. Led by middle-class white women and ministers, Progressivism sought to eradicate the ills of society, especially in urban settings. The movement led to child labor reforms that resulted in mandatory schooling. The rise of such schooling divided children's play between school and free time. However, for many children, especially low income and Black children, neighborhoods lacked areas in which to play. This led to many perceiving play as a privilege that could be enjoyed only by whites.

Although the United States adopted the practice of play as a privilege reserved for white people, the rest of the world established it as a fundamental right for citizens in the country where they resided (Lester and Russell 2008; Whitebread 2012). Play has not only been recognized as a basic right but has been deemed essential for the development of children and youth into adults. This right was affirmed in 1959 by the United Nations General Assembly in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. This was further cemented in 1989 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31 as a basic right for all children throughout the world. Article 31 states "the States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to play and to recreational activities appropriate for their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."

This resolution states that play is a right and not a privilege granted to a select few and has been adopted by international and national organizations such

as the International Play Association, the US Play Coalition, and the Alliance for Childhood. Yet we still lack adequate research focused on inequities in play and its consequences. Fundamentally, play is a powerful context for development. Through play children are able to explore their surroundings, engage with others, and enjoy agency in their lives. Play, when viewed as a privilege, leads to exclusion and oppression of those deemed the "other." These inequities lead to an underlining anti-Blackness discourse that extends in at least two key areas. The first is the racialized perception of childhood and privileged play spaces as the exclusive possession of white children. This is evident in the exclusion of Black childhood using portrayals of racial innocence and dehumanization. The second is the racialization of places and spaces where play exists.

Black Childhood and Privileged Play Spaces

Childhood has been demarcated as a period of innocence. Scholars have traced this ideal to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, when John Locke suggested children were the blank slates that distinguished them from adults (Bernstein 2011, 2017). As the United States was being established, African children were kidnapped or brought with their families for the sole purpose of elevating the lives of whites, both economically and personally. The white racial frame (the dominant perspective created by the white majority about how life should be lived) immediately reduced Black children to objects of servitude and ineptness. Later, during the Industrial Revolution, white immigrant children who worked in factories and sweatshops to support their families were labeled "delinquent" for their age-appropriate behavior, which did not align with the behaviors deemed legal by the law established by whites (Fradin and Fradin 2003). Services like those offered by Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago helped "troubled" white immigrant youth assimilate to the United States by providing opportunities for education, recreation, and leisure activities typically reserved for the elite. Such behavior by immigrant children was otherwise not considered productive enough to increase the wealth of factory owners. Under capitalism, such "play" was deemed problematic. Thus, Addams responded to the criminalization of youth by hosting youth programs in immigrant communities to help them develop socially acceptable behaviors that would improve assimilation into American culture (Addams 1999).

This is, in fact, a colonial approach to leisure. Rather than focusing on the

problematic system that penalized immigrant youth, Addams instead tried to bring immigrant youth into the white, Eurocentric patterns of leisure. Not until later in her work did Addams begin advocating for systemic change to address issues impacting the health and well-being of immigrant communities.

Despite the acclaim Addams received, the opportunities she provided were in many sites exclusively for white children and did not extend to Black children. During this time period, Black children were often subjected to extreme restriction of movement. Their play was limited by the requirements of labor. Black youth were widely viewed as illiterate, and the dominant ideology held that Black children were incapable of development beyond adolescence. This led to the belief shared by many that Black children were "savages" (Souto-Manning 2017; Bracken 1973). This belief ultimately manifested itself "in the form of dehumanization, surveillance, deficit perspectives, [and] punitive discipline . . ." (Nxumalo and Ross 2019, 505).

Dehumanization is a psychological process that entails individuals making some seem less than human or not worthy of humane treatment (Hairston 2008). It also serves to justify excluding individuals from the social norms that exist in society, and it is a precursor for cultural- and state-sanctioned violence against oppressed groups (Goff et al. 2014). Goff and his colleagues further argue that individuals will associate out-groups and their members with nonhuman animals more than with members of their own in-group. The dehumanization of Black people was necessary to support the institution of slavery, upon which institutional anti-Blackness was fabricated. In essence the establishment of the United States of America was based on the lie that Black individuals are less than human. Consequently, anti-Blackness is inherently and ineradicably systematic within all institutions in the United States. The conditions we observe in present-day Black communities are a direct result of the turbulent history Black Americans have experienced in this country due to its slavery and its inherent systemic anti-Blackness (Tolnay 2003). Furthermore, Friere (1970) asserts that when the interests of the oppressors are foremost, then the oppressor can maintain and embody oppressive acts through the dehumanization of the oppressed.

U.S. history is filled with examples of how dehumanization has led to the reduction of protections for Black children. Examples include, but are not limited to, the policies of chattel slavery that permitted owners to separate Black children from their parents and force them into labor at any age; the punitive practices and policies prevalent in welfare and justice institutions aimed at "correcting" and managing behaviors; the super predator theory about Black males;

the confinement of Black individuals to residential neighborhoods and environments that deny them access to social and cultural capital; the characterization of Black children by educational systems as disruptive, aggressive, illiterate, and antisocial (Stevenson 2016); the killing of Emmit Till in 1955 as he vacationed in Mississippi; and the shooting of Tamir Rice in 2014 while he played in the park (Bryan 2021a). In each of these, we see Black children racialized where whiteness dominated based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features to create hierarchical social standings. Here, Black children not only lost their innocence, they were also dehumanized.

Place and Space

When discussing the structure of communities and the amenities they provide, we must acknowledge that the presence or absence of resources, including spaces for play, do not occur at random. Strategic, informed decisions have contributed and continue to contribute to how neighborhoods are resourced, developed, and monitored. There is a well-documented history of the judicial, financial, and housing systems working collectively to restrict where Black families are allowed to live (Rothstein 2017). Citing concerns about the spread of communicable diseases, increases in criminal activity, and decreases in property values, policies have repeatedly been reinforced that limit the opportunities for Black homeowners to purchase homes in affluent neighborhoods primarily composed of white residents.

The first recognized example of an ordinance restricting housing opportunities can be found in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1910. George W. F. McMechen, a Black man, moved his family to "one of the most fashionable neighborhoods in Baltimore" (Power 1983, 298). Following violent acts by white neighbors, petitions submitted on behalf of white residents, and several public hearings, the city council passed an ordinance. This bill prohibited Black home buyers from moving onto a block where the majority of the residents were white, prohibited whites from moving onto a block that was primarily comprised of Black residents, and recommended fines and imprisonment for violators. The city-wide law was defended by J. Barry Mahool, the mayor of Baltimore who stated: "Blacks should be quarantined in isolated slums in order to reduce the incidence of civil disturbance, to prevent the spread of communicable disease into the nearby white neighborhoods, and to protect property values among the white majority" (Rothstein 2015, 205).

The city's ability to legitimize this ordinance established the narrative that the presence of Black residents was inextricably tied to lower-quality neighborhoods. It provided a blueprint for housing segregation and discrimination and set the stage for housing and banking practices that deny access to homes for Black people today. Over the next two decades, there was a noticeable increase in the number of cities (including Louisville, Kentucky; St. Louis, Missouri; and Atlanta, Georgia) across the country that implemented ordinances legalizing racial segregation of housing (Fischel 2004). These ordinances aimed primarily at prohibiting the movement of Black Americans into white neighborhoods.

In the 1930s, housing segregation based on race moved beyond local ordinances to the implementation of federal-level policies and practices. Introduced in 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established in part to provide access to affordable mortgages for low- and moderate-income and first-time home buyers. Home appraisers in local communities were charged with determining the value of properties.

The FHA's federally insured home loan program was intended to increase home ownership in the United States. However, it assisted only some families because white people seeking home ownership were offered multiple avenues to reach this goal while Black people were overwhelmingly denied access to home ownership. Over the span of three decades from 1934 to 1968 only 2 percent of federally insured home loans were issued to Black home buyers (Hanchett 2000). The underwriting manual issued in 1935 by FHA provided the following to appraisers: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction of values" (4). Appraisers were then told to give higher property and zoning ratings where "protection against some adverse influences is obtained," and the manual defined adverse influences as "infiltration by inharmonious racial or nationality groups." Because the FHA's appraisal standards included a whites-only requirement, racial segregation became an official requirement of the federal mortgage insurance program, as the FHA frequently judged any properties in racially mixed neighborhoods or in close proximity to Black neighborhoods as being high-risk. Although this practice is no longer official policy, its practices are still widely implemented in measures of de facto segregation.

This policy moved the segregation of communities from isolated local practices to a national occurrence. In doing so, the federal government incidentally (if not intentionally) created white and Black neighborhoods. This determined

who should be absent from certain neighborhoods and who should be present in certain neighborhoods. In essence, if Black individuals cannot live in a particular neighborhood, there is no reason for them to drive, jog, or walk along their streets. Other systems and institutions further contributed to this "redlining" process. For example, Levittown, New York, set up to be a planned community and explicitly prohibited non-Caucasian residents in its lease agreements (Lambert 1997). This is especially worth noting because Black people were not only unable to access the homes but also the town's amenities, such as swimming pools and community centers. The model for the planned community, including the legitimate exclusion of nonwhites, was replicated in other parts of the country. Practices such as these, coupled with the FHA policies, led to decades of an inability by Black families to purchase homes or move into segregated neighborhoods.

The impact of redlining extended far beyond the question of who was allowed to live where. Banks and realtors also ensured that homes in communities with all-white residents were assessed at a higher value than homes in communities where residents of multiple races resided or communities with Black residents only (Gibson 2007). Without evidence, banks and realtors often told white residents that Black neighbors would lower the property values of the entire neighborhood because of increased crime rates, racial unrest, and other negative effects. This led white residents to discourage Black families from moving into neighborhoods through intimidation or simply by refusing to sell them homes. When Black home owners did move into all-white neighborhoods, a clear pattern developed of white residents quickly selling their homes, some at a lower price than they initially paid. This phenomenon became known as "white flight" (Frey 1979). These property values had and continue to have a direct impact on taxes and, thus, the availability of resources such as school funding, green spaces, and recreational facilities. As banks and realtors fabricated higher property values in white communities, they help ensure that the development of play spaces, such as pools, golf courses, and tennis courts, were never realized in Black communities.

Play Consequences

The consequences of establishing racially segregated neighborhoods extended beyond the provision of recreation and play resources. The location of play ser-

vices and facilities, along with the concentrated residential pockets of Black people, contributed to the increased monitoring of Black individuals who engaged in play. As a clear demarcation between Black neighborhoods and white neighborhoods became established, distinctly different play spaces also appeared in the two neighborhoods. Because some of these spaces were public, Black residents in the surrounding community could still access these spaces even if they did not live in the immediate neighborhood. However, if they visited white neighborhoods to use public play spaces, Black individuals fell prey to the possibility of harassment by members of the community and to monitoring by members of local law enforcement. This was especially true for young Black males who were perceived as sexual threats to white women and girls (Curry 2017). Simultaneously, the belief that young Black male males should inherently be associated with crime (e.g., rape; sexual threat) became a justification for policing Black communities—and especially the young men in them—at a higher rate than white communities, regardless of median incomes or property values. In short, even at play, Black people—particularly young men—were (and remain) monitored when visiting predominantly white communities and even in their own communities. The ultimate consequence of this continuous surveillance is the disruption of play for Black male youth. Black male youth and their care givers must remain aware of their play surroundings and modify their play behavior to remain safe in the presence of the white majority.

The very process of remaining vigilant interferes with the freedom inherent in play. Historical and contemporary examples of these two phenomena can be found throughout the country. For the purposes of our discussion, we offer case studies in which Black male youth were policed (without cause) while inhabiting play spaces. Together, these case studies support the notion that a history exists of policing Black male youth at play. This policing takes place in spaces shared with members of the white majority and within Black communities. Although the policing of them may begin in childhood, it continues into adolescence, young adulthood, and beyond. And the activity of policing is not limited to members of law enforcement but is also undertaken by members of the white majority.

Monroe, North Carolina
In 1958, a group of children were playing together in Monroe, North Carolina. Among them were two Black boys, nine-year-old James Hanover Thompson and seven-year-old David Simpson. Sissy Marcus, a young white girl in the play group, kissed these two boys on their cheeks. Upon returning home, Sissy told

her mother of the incident when she described her play that day. Sissy's mother responded by disciplining her daughter and calling the police to accuse James and David of raping Sissy (Hill 2016). The boys were picked up by local authorities, held for six days without access to legal counsel or their parents, and charged with molestation. While in custody, they were repeatedly handcuffed and beaten. Following a short trial, the boys were found guilty and given an indefinite term in reform school with the possibility of release when they turned twenty-one years old. This entire process took place without the boys having access to legal representation. After the two boys spent three months in a detention center, the governor of North Carolina—under much pressure from the NAACP— pardoned them. Years later, in an interview, James's sister Brenda described the impact of the event on her brother: "It was like seeing somebody different, that you didn't even know. He never talked about what he went through there. But ever since then, his mind just hadn't been the same" (NPR Staff 2011).

James also reflected on how that moment of play forever changed his life: "I always sit around and I wonder, if this hadn't happened to me, you know, what could I have turned out to be? Could I have been a doctor? Could I have went off to some college, or some great school? It just destroyed our life" (NPR Staff 2011).

Called "The Kissing Case," this example establishes that the interruption of the play of Black male youths is rooted in the history of the United States. Furthermore, this incident highlights the fact that, even in spaces of play, there exists a commitment among members of the white majority to protect their perceptions of whiteness and racial order. Finally, we can see through the example of this case that the disruption of play for Black boys may have life-long affects.

Grand Rapids, Michigan

In 2017 five Black boys between the ages of twelve and fourteen walked home from playing at the local Kroc Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Responding to the report of an altercation at the center, a police officer stopped the five boys at gunpoint and required them to lie face down on the ground. As captured on a police officer's body camera, the boys can be heard sobbing and making statements such as "what did we do wrong" and "I don't want to die" (*MLive* 2017, n.p.). Neighbors can also be heard questioning the police officers and being ordered to return to their homes. Although the boys did not fit the description of those involved in the altercation provided to the police, they were placed in patrol cars. Following the incident, another video from the body camera of a

police officer captured the parents of the five boys questioning the actions of the officers. While one officer acknowledges the boys were innocent and did not commit any crimes, he was unable to explain why he chose to point his gun at the children. Interestingly, the officer attempts to tell the parents that this was simply a case of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Note that the children were walking home from a designated community site for play in the middle of the day and that their parents were aware of their location, leaving us to ponder why this is the wrong place or wrong time.

Although the children where never taken into official police custody, the impact of the interaction proved long lasting. A year after the incident, a local reporter interviewed some of the boys and their families (Agar 2018). During the interview, the parents explained the boys rarely visited the Kroc Center. The boys had been careful to avoid all public spaces where lots of people gathered. According to the parents, the boys primarily limited their play to the front yard. Not only is the play of these five young men forever changed, but so are their perceptions of their community and of public spaces.

Brunswick, Georgia

While the kissing case of 1958 and the story of the Grand Rapids teenagers focus on interactions between members of law enforcement and young Black males, we must acknowledge that the disruption of play extends beyond interactions involving these two parties. First, law enforcement agencies are not the only perpetuators of violence and harm toward Black male youth. There are examples in which the play of young Black men gets interrupted by white adults physically asserting their authority without cause (e.g., Haley Zager, Stephanie Sebby-Strempel, and Miya Ponsetto). At the same time, play does not cease when one reaches twelve or even eighteen. As such, Black males experience disruption to their play as teens, young adults, and men.

On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, a twenty-five-year-old African American male, set out on one of his frequent jogs around the neighborhood. Ahmaud's jogging route took him through Satilla Shores, a neighborhood near Brunswick, Georgia. Several residents of Satilla Shores spotted Arbery and made 911 calls about a Black man in a white t-shirt running down the street (McLaughlin, Morris, and Barajas 2020). Two residents who saw Ahmaud that day were sixty-four-year-old Gregory McMichael and his thirty-four-year-old son Travis McMichael. Gregory alerted Travis that a Black male suspect was running down the street. Armed with a .357 Magnum revolver and a shotgun,

the two men solicited help from a local resident named William "Roddie" Bryan to pursue the jogger in pickup trucks. During a four-minute pursuit, Travis and William made several attempts to cut Ahmaud off. On the final attempt, Gregory demanded that Ahmaud stop while Travis exited the truck with his shotgun. According to Gregory McMichael, Ahmaud attacked his son, and Travis fired two shots in response. Relying on the testimony of the McMichaels and Bryan, the police made no arrests, nor did they file any charges. Ahmaud Arbery collapsed and died at the scene. On May 5, 2020, a local radio station uploaded a video of Ahmaud's murder (reportedly provided by McMichaels' attorney) to its website. The release of this video eventually led to the arrest of all three men, and the case went to trial (McLaughlin, Morris, and Barajas 2020). [The three white men were found guilty of Ahmand's murder on November 24, 2021—eds.]Upon being arrested, Gregory McMichael indicated that he and his son were attempting to conduct a citizen's arrest because they thought Arbery looked like a suspect. However alarming the loss of Ahmaud Arbery's life, our attention is drawn to this case because it entails white citizens usurping the role of the police. This incident suggests that Black male youth are not only at risk of their play being disrupted by members of law enforcement but also by white citizens who believe it is their right, if not their duty, to monitor the movement and behavior of Blacks individuals.

Contemporary Themes in Black Play

Reflecting on these three cases, the key question becomes: "Why are Black male youth monitored by others in their spaces of play?" If play is a right guaranteed to all and a space for children and youth to explore the world around them, why are Black children routinely denied this opportunity? Finally, why do we see not just a simple exclusion from play, but an assault on the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of Black male youth at play? We submit that Black PlayCrit can expand our understanding of these interactions and provide insight for navigating play spaces for Black male youth.

Black PlayCrit is guided by three important critical race theories (Bryan 2021b). They include critical race theory (CRT), Black critical theory (Black-Crit), and Black male studies (BMS). We address these theories prior to exploring Black PlayCrit. Because BlackCrit is born out of CRT, we first discuss briefly CRT to honor the genealogy of BlackCrit.

CRT, BlackCrit, and BMS

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate introduced critical race theory (CRT) to the field of education (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Drawn from critical legal studies, CRT theorizes race, racism, and white supremacy to explain the educational disenfranchisement of children of color in public K–12 schools and replaces trite multicultural frameworks that did little to explain institutional and systemic inequities in education (Dumas and Ross 2016). Building on CRT and its tenets, Dumas and Ross (2016) introduced Black critical theory. These scholars argued that, while CRT addresses race broadly and draws on Black examples of racism, it is not specific enough to describe how schools and other American institutions are anti-Black and thus uphold a particular disdain for Black people. As such, Dumas and Ross have proposed that it is anti-Blackness and not racism that is endemic to American society.

Furthering CRT and BlackCrit, Curry (2017) introduced BMS, which underscores the idea that anti-Black misandry—a particular disdain for Black men and boys—is endemic to American society. As we mentioned, Curry argues that most scholarship imposes an undeserved perpetuator status on Black men and boys. That is, instead of Black men and boys being viewed as victims of institutionally and systemically embedded narratives that frame them as "white race's antipodal monstrosity" (Curry 2017, 4), Black males are far too often perceived as those who victimize others. As such, they are surveilled, policed, and restricted, which necessitates their exclusion from institutional spaces including play and recreational areas (Curry 2017; Davis 2017). For these reasons and more, Black male youth are and have been discouraged from play interactions with young white females who often misperceive their play styles and behaviors (Bryan 2020). Curry (2017) argues that mainstream and Black feminist scholarship often reinforces deficit views of Black men and boys. He proposes instead a Black public philosophy that encourages the reframing of the ways we see Black men and boys.

Though Curry neither draws on childhood studies nor boyhood studies theories, he speaks explicitly about the tragic disadvantages of Black childhoods and boyhoods in his work as he provides a continuum of Black male dehumanization from childhood to manhood. In other words, Curry's work locates the conditions of anti-Blackness and misandry as major historical and contemporary sites of Black childhood and boyhoods in ways that other childhood and boyhood studies do not. Therefore, because of such careful attention to the conditions of Black boys, Curry provides an adequate framework in which to ground

the childhood, boyhood, and the play experiences of Black boys as reflected in what Bryan (2021b) terms Black PlayCrit.

Black PlayCrit

Building on CRT, BlackCrit, and Black Male Studies, Black PlayCrit addresses the specificity of Blackness, anti-Blackness, and anti-Black misandry in Black boys' childhood play. According to Bryan (2021b), Black PlayCrit consists of three ideas: the idea of "play-not" is endemic to American society; the ideas of "play past," "play present" and "future nexus"; and the idea that the Black public philosophy of boyhood play is essential to reframing the perception of boyhood play. Below, we briefly summarize Bryan's (2021 a, b) key ideas of Black PlayCrit.

Given the endemic nature of anti-Blackness, Black people have been, are, and will be victims of it in the past, present, and future. Therefore, BlackCrit requires an intentional connection between Black people's past, present, and futures. While BlackCrit is intentional in terms of addressing anti-Blackness, it centers Black futures through Black liberatory fantasy—the joy and hope of imagining a future world without the consequences of anti-Blackness (Dumas and Ross 2016).

Play-Not

The concept of play-not recognizes the pervasive belief that the Black body and the social constructions of Black boyhood deems Black boys nonhuman and unchildlike (Bryan 2021a, b). As such, Black boys are socially constructed as undeserving of play rights under the white gaze. Such ideas explain the deficit construction of Black boys' play styles and the misreading and misperceptions of Black boys' play styles as violent. This leads to many types of anti-Black misandric violence (i.e., suspension and subjection to criminal charges, for example) in schools and communities during play.

Play Past and Play Present and Future Nexus

The idea of the play past and play present and future nexus connects Black boys'

play pasts to their play presents and futures to help us understand the perpetual consequences of race, racism, white supremacy and the anti-Black misandric violence Black boys face during play in schools and communities (Bryan 2021a, b). In other words, to better understand the anti-Black misandry Black boys face during play, we must take a historical gaze. During the enslavement of African people, Black boys (and girls) were often denied opportunities to play because they were forced to work alongside their enslaved parents (Williams 2005). When they had opportunities to play, Black boys (and girls) often used them as educational opportunities: they played with white children to learn English so that they could teach their enslaved parents how to read and write (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003; Williams 2005). Thus, while white children played freely, Black children were playing for freedom (Bryan 2021b; Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003; Pinckney, Mowatt, et al. 2018).

Public Pedagogy of Black Boyhood Play

Public pedagogy of Black boyhood play serves as both a conceptual and pedagogical tool to confront anti-Black misandric violence during play (Bryan 2021a, b). It also challenges deficit perceptions of Black boys' play styles and white-dominant curricular constructions of play by focusing on what Bryan (2021a) terms Black PlayCrit literacies—the literacy practices that celebrate the rich histories, strength, and beauty of Black boys' play styles. We use the term "public pedagogy" to suggest that this idea of Black PlayCrit is not solely conceptual, but instead requires critical praxis (Stovall 2013) or action-oriented steps to dismantle anti-Black misandry in Black boys' play experiences and, by extension, the school playground-to-prison pipeline.

Extending Black PlayCrit: Play-Spatial Exclusion

Although Bryan's (2021a, b) conceptualization of Black PlayCrit has given us an adequate framework to explain the conditions and play experiences of Black male youth, it does not account for the ways in which place and space further exacerbate the play experiences of Black male youth. Given our understanding of the play experiences of Black male youth, place, and space, we want to extend Bryan's (2021b) conception of Black PlayCrit by introducing a new idea or tenet

we term "play-spatial exclusion." Play-spatial exclusion brings attention to the absence of resources in urban communities (including play spaces), exclusion through redlining, and the potential dangers of Black youth participating in play activities in public spaces. These force and have forced young Black men to navigate the realities that have led to increased policing, loss of innocence, decreased universal childhood experiences, and even death. While play-spatial exclusion acknowledges the exclusionary conditions of urban communities and its deleterious effects on Black boyhood play, play-spatial exclusion also foregrounds the strengths of these communities by positioning urban recreation centers and other play spaces in what Pryor and Outley (2014) referred to as "just spaces," islands or spaces of hope and safe havens for Black males and other marginalized youth. By islands of hope and safe havens, Pryor and Outley envision urban recreation centers as counter play spaces that minimize the loss of innocence, the loss of freedom, and the loss of life.

We want to be clear: These counter-play spaces do not merely necessitate "just spaces," because no space in a white supremacist, imperialistic, and anti-Black misandric society will ever be "just" for Black male bodies (Curry 2017; Howard 2014). That being said, building on Pryor, Kelly, and Outley (2014), play-spatial exclusion requires Black radical imaginative spaces in which Black male youth create spaces where they feel safe enough to dream freely about play and recreation or to create play spaces of "love, solidarity, and resiliency, as [they] demand what seems impossible" (Love 2019, 12). This impossibility will require us not only to shift our views of Black male youth and their play to protect them, but will also call for us to collaborate with them to "break from the realism [of play-not] and to [position] imagination" as a means to "liberate unconscious" (Tolliver 2021, 87). By that we mean that if Black male youth are to survive and thrive as they engage in play and recreation, we must invoke what Tolliver (2021) terms Afrosurrealism—"an explicit way for Black [male youth who play and those who support them] to depart from realistic methods of seeing, thinking, [and playing] and move toward the constructions of new realities based on Black cultural memory (i.e., play past and present and future nexus) and Black futuristic imagination" (87) (i.e., the public pedagogy of Black boyhood play). Therefore, scholars who consider play spatial-exclusion in their work are encouraged to think about the ways in which Afrosurrealism can inform not only the play experiences of Black male youth but also Black PlayCrit in general to interrupt the disruption of play for Black male youth.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Studies

In conclusion, examining the disruption of play for Black male youth is critical, because it allows those who care about the well-being and play experiences of Black males to protect them from the anti-Black misandric violence that is pervasive in communities and schools. That being said, we draw on Black Play-Crit and its key ideas, including play-not, play past and play present and future nexus, and the public pedagogy of black boyhood play to address such historical and contemporary violence in the play lives of Black male youth. Understanding the limitation of Black PlayCrit, we extend it by introducing what we term play-spatial exclusion to explicate how Black male youth are excluded spatially from play. Yet, we understand that if we truly want to interrupt anti-Black misandry in the play lives of Black male youth, we must be not only relentless in our struggle to do so but must engage in ongoing critical praxis to imagine a play world that does not yet exist for Black male youths. We offer several recommendations to the fields of education and play studies to dismantle the oppressive systems that disrupt play for Black male youth.

We recommend that more studies drawing on the developing ideas of Black PlayCrit be conducted to examine the disruption of play for Black male youth. We highly recommend that scholars and practitioners alike use the framework to prioritize social identities and locations, including class and sexuality, to explore further the conditions of Black male youth play.

Although we focused on the disruption of play for Black male youth, we highly recommend that scholars and practitioners draw on Black PlayCrit to examine the play lives and experiences of Black girls. Because of Curry's critique of intersectionality, we encourage the exploration of how the characterization of Black girls as aggressive (Angry Black woman) and hypersexual, for example, contribute to the disruption of their play experiences.

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