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The United States harbors an uneasy relationship with Blackness that has facilitated the abuse of Black people through various individual, institutional and cultural practices (Coates, 2015; Dumas, 2016). Derman-Sparks, Edwards and Goins (2020), informed us that infants as early as 6 months begin to discriminate based on skin color cues. At the age of 1–2 years old, children begin to relate to other children based on the social and cultural norms modeled in their family culture. This includes attention to senses, which leads to children forming ideas about hair texture, skin color, and body appearance. Given this knowledge on childhood development, it is necessary to design physical education experiences that are not only developmentally appropriate but free of racial bias. A few weeks after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis by police, I participated in several forums dealing with the topic of eliminating structural and systemic racism targeted toward Black populations. Each of the forums was well intentioned. Still, I and others who attended these gatherings felt that the forums omitted conversation on the need to disrupt and dismantle practices that promote anti-Blackness in our society. When I was invited to contribute an editorial piece to *JOPERD* for this issue, I felt that the topic of anti-Blackness could no longer be ignored. The commentary to follow is not intended to be an all-inclusive "catch-all," but a starting point to inspire behavior change, cultural fluency, and an "ideological repositioning" of how we think about our professional work (Hodge, 2014; James-Hassan, 2016; Strong, 2015). In defining anti-Blackness, I will provide perspectives from educational literature, research, and my personal observations before providing a challenge to SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators and all professionals involved

in efforts related to the promotion of quality physical education.

What Is Anti-Blackness?

Anti-Blackness is the inability of society, including its laws, social practices, and institutions, to recognize the humanity of Black people (Ross, 2020). Anti-Black thought originated from the institution of slavery in the United States and categorizes Black people as "unacceptable, irrespective of their intelligence, character, competence, creativity or achievements" (Washington, 1981, p. 146). While formal slavery ended over a century and a half ago, the notion that the Black body is perceived as an expendable piece of property is essential to understanding anti-Black ideology (Dumas, 2016). Ross (2020) noted that the violence of anti-Blackness is not just physical but psychological and has been incorporated though suggestions to Black people on how to act in certain spaces so that discrimination is normalized. Indeed, despite the election of President Barack Obama, the continued existence of police

brutality, mass incarceration, segregated and substandard schools and housing, increased health disparities, and voter suppression are still heavy influences that impact Black life (Wilderson, 2010).

The Role of Whiteness

Understanding the role of whiteness is essential to the dismantling of anti-Blackness in physical education. Lynch (2018) has noted that the use of the term *whiteness* can at first glance appear bold and accusatory. However, whiteness is not synonymous with white people (Leonardo, 2009; Painter, 2010). Rather, it is a position of power and an identity created and supported by historical practices, laws, socially developed constructs on race, and falsehoods (Du Bois, 1920). Whiteness is not just a matter of biology, but includes interpretations of class, labor, gender, beauty, sexuality and how these intersect (Painter, 2010). Ignatiev (1995) held that whiteness is an ideological club, where the members go through accepting benefits of their induction with little reflection on the cost to others.

Whiteness provides white people a higher status in society, preferential treatment, and positions those who are nonwhite as the "other" (Lynch, 2018). Whiteness has erroneously been considered a default position that guides decision making and the development of models and standards for behavior. Given that whiteness is a construct, white people have the choice to participate in it and should disown and disidentify with whiteness to fight for racial justice and equality (Leonardo, 2002). Recent work in physical education has highlighted the problem of whiteness and its overwhelming presence and normalization in physical education (Flintoff, Dowling, & Fitzgerald, 2014; Flintoff & Dowling, 2018; Simon, 2020). Furthermore, the

problem of whiteness has influenced pedagogy, curriculum implementation, and assessment practices (Barker, 2017; Blackshear, 2020; Burden, Hodge, O'Bryant, & Harrison Jr., 2004) along with PE settings and related spaces (Culp, 2020; Harrison & Clark, 2016; Hylton, 2015). Further, physical bodies of Black people have long been critiqued through a "white gaze" that erases the real experience of Blacks in favor of a safe, prototypical conceptualization framed by whiteness (Yancy, 2016). Thus physical education needs dramatic revision, as its deficiencies in discounting the experiences of Black youth have significant social and health implications (Beale, 2016; Clark, 2020; Culp & James-Hassan, 2015).

Are We Aware of Anti-Black Habits and Practices?

As a physical education teacher, professor, and administrator, I have seen firsthand countless anti-Black behaviors imposed on Black youth. Some examples have included (1) adults in positions of influence in schools having low expectations of students' cognitive ability, (2) being unaware of the socio-emotional needs of students, (3) lacking knowledge of the communities their students live in, (4) using punitive classroom management techniques, and (5) reinforcing cultural stereotypes. Anti-Black practices are often intertwined and can occur in any school setting, irrespective of the opportunities that are provided. Thomas, Johnson, Clark and Harrison Jr. (2020) analyzed the experiences of Black boys encountering anti-Blackness in a predominately white Catholic school. They found that participants in the study encountered forms of anti-Blackness that left them feeling invisible, isolated, and devalued intellectually. Additionally, participants felt that their identities were acknowledged only because of their ability to play sports. While the description of the study presented here is brief and describes the experience of Black boys, similar themes have been reported in studies of schooling involving Black girls (Carter Andrews, Brown, Castro, & Id-Deen, 2019; Chepyator-Thomson, Russell, & Culp, 2007), Black students with a disability (Tabron & Ramlackhan, ;2019),

and racially and ethnically diverse LGBT student groups (Craig, McInroy, & Austin, 2018).

Unexamined actions, habits, and practices have consequences that could substantially shape the way that Black youth perceive physical education. The following is an abbreviated list of offenses that contribute to an anti-Black climate for learning (Boutte & Bryan, 2019; Watson, Hagopian, & Au, 2018; Wright, 2019). How many times have you heard, witnessed, facilitated or contributed to the following?

- Asking a Black student to calm down because they are loud or animated
- Teachers who have mispronounced or nicknamed students because of their inability to pronounce or remember Black-sounding names
- Denial of the racial experiences of Black students by telling them that they can all succeed if they work hard enough or suggesting to students that you don't see color
- Comparing difficult Black students to other students who are more behaved and responsible
- Expecting Black youth to act much older than they are, thus denying them opportunities to express the joy of youth
- Administrators being indifferent to large class sizes for PE in predominately Black schools
- Harboring and communicating ideologies that suggest that Black students have a biological and cultural destiny to excel in sports and can be successful only in roles related to sports and entertainment
- Promoting school policies that are biased toward the way Black students wear their hair or dress
- Allowing students to use racial slurs associated with Black people (and not addressing it)
- Constructing curriculum and teaching lessons in which Eurocentric perspectives are the dominant or only perspective demonstrated
- Using punishment and corrective behaviors that lack empathy and a critical understanding of race and power, which could result in the hyperdisciplining of Black students

The Way Forward

Anti-Blackness and the biases embedded in it is a multifaceted

problem that has implications for the promotion of quality physical education. Howard (2020) provided several aspects for us to consider in rooting out anti-Black racism from our schools. First, he suggested that we name anti-Black racism for what it is, including examples of what it looks like and the ways that it manifests in all aspects of society. Second, he implores us to believe Black students, as their stories provide an authentic portrait of their experiences, which are routinely ignored by adults accustomed to having all the answers and power in the classroom. Third, Howard suggested that we cease using statements such as "All Lives Matter," which irrespective of intent, only serves to minimize, dismiss and ignore the pain and suffering of Black people. Finally, as anti-Blackness is centered on the belief that Black people and their accomplishments are inferior, it is critical that Black excellence is identified and spoken of frequently, so that Black students feel valued and accepted.

Conclusion

To end, my commentary would be incomplete without challenging SHAPE America and similar organizations to be more intentional about addressing the topic of anti-Blackness and its impact on teaching and learning. Attempts to reduce the biases of individual teachers through trainings, forums, and invited editorials will not be enough to overcome the "cultural distance" (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) that exists between our discipline and Black students. Rather, what is needed is a coalition of progressive educators, researchers, policymakers and stakeholders who fully understand that anti-Blackness is a disease that currently has no cure (Pearman, 2020). Therefore, anti-racism must be institutionalized in the educational policies and practices and the standards of SHAPE America and the partners we collaborate with (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2020). In this, we can move toward building better communities where equity is not just a stated aspiration, but a recognizable and defining outcome of involvement in physical education.

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