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Editorial: Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research](#)

How do Black youth claim their humanity and dignity within educational settings? How do we nurture and promote Black youths' capacity for joy, love, and creativity in educational settings? How have Black youth, Black families, and Black educators found ways to matter within educational settings that threaten to devalue and demean us?

In Dr. Love's (2019) call for educational freedom, she states,

“[t]he practice of abolitionist teaching is rooted in the internal desire we all have for freedom, joy, restorative justice (restoring humanity, not just rules), and to matter to ourselves, our community, our family, and our country with the profound understanding that we must ‘demand the impossible’ by refusing injustice and the disposability of dark children.” (p. 7)

In the current Research Topic, “*Freedom Dreaming Futures for Black Youth: Exploring Meanings of Liberation in Education and Psychology Research*,” we join broader scholarly conversations on racial justice and radical healing (Kelley, 2002) by actively uplifting the complex lives and stories of Black children and youth in educational settings. We received an array of conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative articles, which collectively, offer a CREED around freedom dreaming for Black youth's educational futures:

- 1) Cultivating safe and brave spaces for in education,
- 2) (RE)envisioning education to center Black joy, creativity, and imagination
- 3) Embracing Black youth's ideas about their education, and
- 4) Disrupting normative research practices.

(1) Cultivating Safe and Brave Spaces for Black Youth in Education: Four articles in this topic address how Black youth and their communities resist anti-Black educational violence and disempowering experiences in school settings (Kubi et al.; Luney; Mathews et al.; Mayes et al.). For instance, Kubi et al. drew upon a Black life-making framework

(Mustaffa, 2017) to examine ethnic-racial socialization, critical consciousness, and critical action as key features of Black adolescents' sociopolitical development. Their results highlight the importance of examining Black youths' resistance to socialization experiences amidst school policies that center whiteness in day-to-day school practices. Relatedly, Mayes et al. provide a comprehensive overview of how school counselors can merge healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018) with freedom dreaming to address the lack of culturally responsive and anti-racist practices in school counseling programming. They discuss healing-centered and Indigenous educational practices (Gee et al., 2014), critical hip-hop approaches (Levy and Adjapong, 2020), and Youth Participatory Action Research (Langhout and Thomas, 2010) as tools that can support Black youths' ability to experience joy, embrace creativity, resist systems of oppression, and lean into their power.

(2) (Re)Envisioning Education to Center Black Joy, Creativity, and Imagination: How do we transform the field of education in ways that honor Black youths' joy, imagination, and creativity? Five studies (Fearon; Kaler-Jones; LeBlanc and Loyd; Mathews et al.; Scott et al.) aim to respond to this question by identifying the ways that scholars and educators can build on the legacy of abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019) and Afrofuturistic pedagogy (Dando et al., 2019; Boyd Acuff, 2020) to remap Black youths' educational experiences in ways that support their sociopolitical voices, visions, and agency. Scott et al. offer a conceptual piece contextualizing Black youths' imagination in relation to their sociopolitical development and transformative political action. They discuss how we can offer Black youth the necessary fugitive spaces and opportunities to envision and help create a just society, while also preserving/promoting/providing the childness of their childhood. Mathews et al. highlight curricula and pedagogical practices that normalize and celebrate Black students' success in STEM by exploring how teacher-student relationships can foster learning spaces that allow joy, creativity, and youth's personal interests to drive STEM development. They discuss how educators can cultivate Black liberatory STEM spaces by creating opportunities to link Black youth's identities to STEM success, helping youth recognize the scientific inquiry embedded in their daily lives, and embedding the legacy of Black excellence within school programming.

(3) Embracing Black Students' Ideas about their Education: Five articles in this topic used qualitative or participatory action approaches to foreground Black youths' experiences and freedom dreams within education (Burnett et al.; Duane and Mims; Kaler-Jones; Luney; Stewart). Kaler-Jones integrated theoretical perspectives on abolitionist teaching and critical race feminism (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010) to explore how Black adolescent girls leveraged creative expression to reclaim personal and historical narratives, dream new worlds, and use art as activism within a virtual summer arts program. Her study demonstrates how educators and researchers can employ creative, participatory, and arts-based practices and methodologies to explore how Black girls write themselves and their existence into the future. While most studies focused on Black adolescents or children, Luney explored the resistance strategies that Black womxn and femme college students practiced in response to gendered racism and misogynoir

(i.e., anti-Black misogyny; Bailey and Trudy, 2018). Luney found that self-education, direct confrontation with aggressors, and communal humor with other Black students helped them cope with racism on campus, and Luney discusses how we can be accountable in sustaining transformative changes in educational settings.

(4) Disrupting Dominant Research Practices: Across studies, scholars in the current Research Topic demonstrate the importance of disrupting dominant research practices that misrepresent and marginalize Black youths' experiences. This includes reflecting on our positionality in relation to our work, integrating research with creative practice, and valuing Black youth as co-creators during the research process. For instance, Fearon used endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000) to highlight how Black mothers living in Toronto came together to reimagine their children's learning experiences and establish alternative sites of learning and community. Fearon challenges traditional methodological approaches that valorize objectivity in the research process and separate the researcher and researched (Toliver, 2021) through a short story and arts-informed approach (Cole and Knowles, 2008). Kaler-Jones worked alongside eight Black adolescent girls to create a performance ethnography. Throughout data collection, Kaler-Jones disrupted normative power dynamics by recognizing the girls' contributions as co-researchers who were involved in the training, data collection, analysis, and artmaking. Black girls' voices were front and center throughout the research process, including displaying their artwork. Collectively, these scholars point to promising avenues for future interdisciplinary research, wherein we work alongside Black youth, families, and broader communities about what it means to dream, imagine, and work toward socially just, responsive, and loving educational contexts.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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