

The Black Bromance Book:
A Convergence of Black Masculinity and Platonic Intimacy

A Series of Essays by

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Introduction: "Don't hug me, bro"

Black men should not be emotionally vulnerable with one another. We should never show our emotions to other black men or we will be seen as weak. We must never let anyone (especially black men) experience or witness our deeper emotions. We cannot—MUST not—cry, especially with other black men who are not our fathers, sons, uncles, cousins, etc. We cannot love other black men. If we do, we're homosexual and must desire sexual contact with them. We must not be too physically or verbally affectionate or we will be seen as promiscuous and less masculine. Onlookers will get the wrong idea of our relationships and emasculate us for being so "touchy-feely." Black men do not have emotions. Black men are strong and do not hug each other. Black men should not care deeply for one another. Black men must "man-up" and not be "soft." Black men should not be platonically and emotionally intimate.

A bromance is an intimate, non-sexual relationship between two or more men. It is a tight, affectionate, homosocial male bonding relationship exceeding that of usual friendship, and is distinguished by a particularly high level of emotional intimacy. ("Bromance")

The African American bromance is an urban myth that has barely begun to see the light of day. The prior mentioned claims go on and on as set guidelines for policing peer interactions between black males. The social constructs of the 21st century has led American society to internalize these as cold-hard facts of nature. I believe these policing guidelines are, in fact, the myth. The African American bromance can be falsely considered a myth because of its lack of acknowledgment and genuine discussion in our social climate as well as its overall rejection through the upholding of the stereotyped guidelines of black masculinity and white supremacy. A "myth" that is clouded by a brutal history, mass media projections, homophobia, and negatively developed coping mechanisms--a bromance in African American community is a rarely documented or understood occurrence. It is time that these "guidelines" be properly challenged with informative dialogue. The prior mentioned definition of bromance is a contemporary term that is gaining traction as a subject of Gender/Masculinity Studies. This term may be used in different contexts and cultures beyond American culture, but for the use of this work, the term bromance as defined by the citation prior will be inferred upon from the American cultural standpoint and is beneficial to providing terminology for the relationship referenced by this research.

The stigma of black bromance in American culture is distributed by a wide array of detrimental factors, but the primary cause is the lack of open dialogue around this subject matter. Before the discussion of black bromances can be delved into, there needs to be an introduction and acknowledgment of masculinity that is specific to black men. Black masculinity is a social construct that has been formed (and continues to form) through the rejections, perceptions, internalizations, and boundaries of white

supremacy. Kobena Mercer discusses this social construction of black masculinity in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. Mercer contests that the social definition of manliness is not a natural occurrence, but has been historically constructed throughout history to become a social definition of masculinity. He further states that in order to understand these social constructs, society cannot rely on ideologies of itself to make a determination of its origin and trajectory. Patriarchal culture is constantly being reconstructed to balance male power and privilege and adapt to the changing world by establishing itself through a system of gender roles, economy, and political class. Mercer unpacks the floating theories of black culture and arrives at new positions in black cultural studies in his text.

Race and ethnicity mediated the process at all levels, so it is not as if we could strip away the “negative images” of black masculinity created by Western patriarchy and discover some “natural” black male identity which is essentially good, pure and wholesome. The point is that black male gender identities have been historically and culturally constructed through complex dialects of power and subordination. (Mercer 136-7)

This subordination was easily traced to its source during times of slavery. White masters domination over black men and their families during this brutal era were clear and understood by society. When emancipation, segregation, civil rights, and racial integration made radical shifts (more than once) to societal roles and beliefs, the situation became more complex. As Mercer says, the construction of black masculinity became complicated and now, it has drifted so far culturally that it is internalized as reclaimed identity in black culture (Mercer 136). This construction is “culturally variable” because of the perceptions and assumptions of the groups involved (Mercer 137). White supremacy, being outwardly identified as racist and toxic, can also operate from the shadows of society (mostly) through oppressive discrimination, mass media projections, and microaggressions. Simultaneously, the black community is “reclaiming” racial slurs and stereotypes and adopting them as black culture. For instance, African American culture has reclaimed words like “nigger” and the creation of cuisine from leftover remnants (slop) of white master’s meals for sustenance. Now we champion the term “nigga” (dropping the aggressive “r”) and have claimed Soul Food as our cultural cuisine. This contemporary relationship is only further implicating black masculinity as a reclaimed construct of black culture when, actually, the roots stem from reactions and formation from white supremacy (i.e. Nigga and Soul Food). It could also be understood that there is no pure or natural way that black masculinity exists. Mercer is aware that even if society turns on itself and removes these “negative images” that it will only find that black masculinity (like all social roles and identities) can be socially constructed again based on the prevailing standards in culture of the time. The argument being made by inferring on Mercer is that black masculinity has been culturally shaped through white supremacy and is not a natural part of our existence. With these complex

overlays, even allies of racial equality can be coaxed into believing the internalized notion that black masculinity is purely defined and influenced by black culture for black culture when this is not the case.

Black cultural educator and writer bell hooks goes into detailed accounts of black masculinity in her book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. In this text, hooks gives a well-fleshed out synopsis on the history behind the patriarchal standards performed by black men of our current time. Black masculinity has been formed through white supremacy and has lead black men to have a skewed standard of patriarchy and masculinity in American culture. hooks goes on to explain the disparities black men faced during slavery: watching their mothers, wives, and children being beaten, raped, and destroyed before their eyes, and the men were powerless to stop it. These currently skewed standards of violence and domination are attributed to internalized behaviors of white slave masters and current racism within American culture and black communities. hooks states that “racist sexist iconography in Western culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depicted black males as uncivilized brutes without the capacity to feel complex emotions or the ability to experience remorse” (hooks 48). Black men have been demonized as violent beasts, psychopaths, monsters, uncivilized, and natural-born predators. This has been a long standing social construct dating back to colonial times (and further), but the difference between then and now is the acceptance of this dehumanizing stereotype by black males, re-claiming it to be an upper hand over white males. This can account for the stigmas around black bromance due to the internalized perceptions of this group and by this group (and others). hooks continues by deconstructing this social belief and explaining the reasoning behind it. “Black males,” she claims are “socialized in patriarchal culture to make manhood synonymous with domination and control of others, with the use of violence . . .” (hooks 54). During times of slavery, black males witnessed this patriarchal masculinity being established from white masters and have internalized this as a means to achieve manliness (i.e., power, status, and domination). Black masculinity is a social construct that has never been properly reclaimed by black culture and is one of the many social remnants of the American colonial era. Mercer and hooks show how this social construct has not matured, but has taken on new capacities to produce the same results of subordination of black men. This mindset has only further clouded the context of platonic intimacy between black men, as it could be said here that African American men see each other as violent people incapable of affection towards anyone or anything (unless it is sexual), and, with this internalized context, bromances would never be seriously considered or accepted by this group.

What makes the African American male experience unique is the attention and praise given to them when acting violently. Black men are living in a society that pays attention to them the most when they are aggressive and violent. The most tragic result of all these falsehoods within black masculinity is that most black males are being held hostage by the past in a constant state of rage from unaddressed

internalization of racism and stereotypes. Relying on stereotypes and without a known (or socially acceptable) alternative, black males are forced to accept patriarchal manhood as the only claim to masculinity that further harbors violence and emotional repression. hooks makes a declaration that a “love ethic” must be reinstated amongst black males in order to undo the damage of the multiple layers of internalization. This internalization that black men who were stronger could have protected their families with brute strength and violence is empowering black men to reclaim their strength in the name of protecting their family, but on the darker end of the spectrum, this enforces toxic patriarchal behaviors towards others using that same malevolent force once used by slave masters. This ominous thinking continued to morph as civil rights battles flurried following emancipation of slave-bound African Americans. Black men were never fully allowed (in the eyes of white supremacy) to assume masculine roles in society. This created a purposeful rift between black men and women which drove black men to believe that their true manhood came from enforcing their dominance over women through sexuality. To assume the role of “player” or female dominator has become the standard for black masculinity and its expression. Black men have been coaxed into believing that they can never be equal to a white man, but could best him (and reestablish their masculinity) through enforcing their sexuality.

The sexualized mindset and representation of black men is only further enforced through the desire for black male bodies by white Americans, the envy of their beauty, and lusting for them while simultaneously barring black men from the workforce and the commonplace patriarch roles established (and maintained) by white supremacy. This has convinced black men, along with American society, that black men are hypersexual beings, establishing themselves through sexual expression and violent dominance. Kobena Mercer continues to discuss this extortion and lust for black male bodies and explains that through a gathered experience, historically “. . . black men have adopted certain patriarchal values such as physical strength, sexual prowess and being in control as a means of survival against the repressive and violent system of subordination to which they were subjected” (133). Mercer’s account can further be understood as the way in which black masculinity is rooted in white supremacy. Sexual dominance and violence became the cultural norm for this group and only further perpetuated stereotypes of aggressive sexuality. Black men being overly represented in pornography is a phenomenon that has greatly affected the sexualization and lust of black male bodies. There is a large representation of black men in this realm and black representation is good (according to white supremacy’s meager attempt at racial equality). On the other hand, this only further sexualized black men due to under representation in other areas of society, but an overpopulation of erotic images were (and still are) available. As Mercer describes it, “we want to look, but do not always find the images we want to see” (Mercer 133). Black male bodies were being objectified not only in imagery and physicality, but mentally as well. Mercer accounts for this

when it is inferred that there is an implimentation of a “rigid set of racial roles and identities which rehearse scenarios of desire in a way which traces the cultural legacies of slavery, empire and imperialism” (Mercer 133-4). This “colonial fantasy” was only further projected with white society's interest in the phallus of black men and its imagery. Mercer describes how the black male subject

. . .is objectified into Otherness, as the size of the penis signifies a threat to the secure identity of the white male ego and the position of power whiteness entails in colonial discourse. Yet the phobic object is “contained,” after all this is only on a two-dimesnsional plane; thus the white male viewer is returned to his safe place of identification and mastery, but at the same time has been able to indulge in that commonplace white fixation with black male sexuality as something threatening and dangerous, something Other. (134)

It can be said here that black male bodies are positioned as spectacle and are barbaric fantasies seen as threatening, but highly desired and interesting to white society. As an object of sexual desire and fear, black men were put under a vicious microscope and labeled as such. As stated prior, black men (and black culture) have “reclaimed” these stereotypes to their own advantage in society, but the underlying consequences of internalized lust and sexualization came with that reclaim. It can be understood then, why black men cannot see a need to show affection unless there is sexual intent. Black men are only viewed as sexual dominators, and their bodies are envied and desired; this leads to the notion that the only way black men can be intimate with one another must be through sexual expression and domination. It is at the root of this socially constructed culture do we find the rift of homophobia in blackness and masculinity alike. This gives context to this research that is attempting to shed light on these falsehoods that cloak the black bromance, haunted by the toxically built black masculinity that is fueled by white supremacy. This further supports why bromances would never be considered seriously by this group and why it would be labeled as homosexual and erotic fantasy.

This research does not aim to summarize the complexities of black masculinity, but to bring supporting research in regard to the “bromance” subject matter to support the complicated relationship black men have with platonic intimacy and its origins. With the larger roots of black masculinity identified, it can be utilized by this research to further support the stemmed disparity in black bromances. By breaking down black masculinity to the bare bones of its matriculation from racism, sexualization, stereotypes, and mass media projections; it reveals the substantial effect on the view of black men due to the existing social construct of white supremacy. Patriarchal standards only allow for the racist and stereotypical view of black men to be supported throughout society, while all other aspects and views are ignored. This only further perpetuates these harsh standards on black men. One of those views being ignored is the platonic intimacy between black men.

Black Men, Fraternities, and Organizations

Fraternities and organizations have a huge impact on the emotional and social development of young black college men. In this social setting, black men are challenged to rethink their relationships with their peers and how they interact with them. Michael J. Cuyjet, along with academic associates, discusses the importance of these relationships in *African American Men in College*, a book that addresses the disparities faced by African American men in college. There is a section that focuses specifically on the effects of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) on African American men in college. These organizations emphasize intimate relationships among black men and how they become closer to one another as a result, with the additional benefits of learning and growing with one another. These affiliations give black men an opportunity to build emotionally vulnerable relationships with fellow black males, which are rarely discussed or encouraged in our social climate. These organizations provide imagery of these seldom discussed relationships and provide insight to the African American male community to seek and cultivate these relationships despite social interference from mass media and critical social constructs. This section of this research will be beneficial to understanding the deeper meanings of these organizations and how the cultivation of these peer relationships can be utilized by the larger black community. I am a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America, which is not a BGLO, but my chapter, the N.A.S.T.Y. Eta Xi, was founded on the campus of Tennessee State University (an HBCU) in 1956. My personal experiences with these interactions and forming these relationships as well as my experiences with fraternity and black men can also be examined to further support the effects of these organizations on black male peer relationships.

Black Men, Contact Sports, and Martial Arts

Contact sports and martial arts are an arena for black men to interact and develop social and emotional peer relationships. Men, in general, see athletic teams as an integral support group that not only allows for peer relationships to form, but also provides affirmation of individual masculinities through healthy physical interactions, rough play, and physical dominance. Rough and Tumble Play (RTP) is a behavioral concept that highlights the human need for physical contact and play through form of high-energy physical activity that takes place in a playful context and can be done with others or individually (Harbin). Boys have been projected to resort to these physical expressions that stimulate social and emotional development while still fitting into the context of American masculinity standards. It is a safe space for the average American men, but is further complicated when race is accounted for in this social climate. Black men see contact sports and martial arts as a safe haven for black masculinity, thus lowering guarded feelings and enhancing physical expressions. American society's projections of black men to be violent and physical beings on further implicated Athletics as a "safe" space for black male expressions. It is socially acceptable for black men to be more emotionally and physically expressive in these social climates, thus cultivating the mythical black bromances discussed in this series of writings. This section will analyze the tolerance of these behaviors in American society and challenge the idea that these behaviors be confined to a limited social climate for African American men.

Examining Black Bromance

What's important here is not only the specificity of these social climates (fraternities and athletics), but also the cultural shift that happens with bromance relationships when taken out of their context of athletics and fraternities and put into other social settings. There is a sacredness to athletics and fraternity, where it is socially acceptable for men to be emotionally and physically intimate (platonically). Although this social spectacle could be further elaborated on, for the sake of this research, I will be speaking on the interactions of black men in the context of athletics and fraternity, shedding light on the notion of how black bromance already exist in this context but are unacknowledged outside of it. Discussing the dialectic relationship between black masculinity and social settings will be key to understanding the lack of social support for black bromances outside the context of athletics and fraternity.

The following essays have been formulated to combat the lack of information on black bromance relationships by pulling from resources that cover closely related topics. These topics are included but not limited to: black masculinity, queer theory, academic/university climate research, mass media projections, colonialism, neo colonialism, etc. For the sake of this research, the analysis of black bromances will be

through the lens of Fraternal organizations and Athletics respectively. The term organizations will be used to reference groups that act in the guise of fraternities, but are not recognized as such. The term Athletics may be used throughout this research to substitute reference to contact sports and martial arts. These are not the only areas where black bromances occur, but also are two major areas that I have identified as mutually understood and engaged in by the black male community. It is important to note that these two social climates converge within the University setting and are usually where most young black men may come to find their initial experience of emotional-platonic intimacy with peers. This research has taken this route to provide proper insight to the information presented here. This collection is not intended to serve a seminal presentation on the broader topic of male-to-male intimacy, but to investigate the specific niche of black male peer relations within its context and what deters these relationships outside of context. I feel it is important to express that bromances are a non-sexual relationship. The eroticism implied in this relationship is a result of the sexualization of black male bodies discussed prior and the misuse/misunderstandings of terminologies, sexualities, and social constructs. This research has no intention of emasculating black men, but rather to open dialogue about the platonic intimacy (and lack thereof) in the black male community. As a male of mixed racial backgrounds (Hispanic and African American), it is my hope that the value of this connected information will spark discussion around the neglected topic of black male platonic intimacy.

“Brother to Brother”: Black Men and Fraternity

This essay will begin by discussing the racially discriminating history of fraternities (along with similar organizations) and the academic institutions that house them to shed light on the formation of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) and Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). This research is intended to analyze the benefits, classism, bias, and value of these organizations in relation to African American men. It will further be elaborated on how the “bromance” relationships formed within these social groups are ostracized by American society outside of its exclusivity and what can be gleaned from these organizations to be utilized by the larger African American male community outside of membership and affiliation. This research will also speak to the critical support HBCUs provide these organizations for black men and the need for similar organizations at other academic institutions. This research is not intended to criticize fraternities and organizations on the exclusivity and privilege enjoyed through membership; morseso, it is a critical analysis of the lack of social support for these much needed relationships outside of the boundaries of organized brotherhood. This research is also not intended to criticize the climate differences of HBCUs versus other institutions, but to challenge the communities of other institutions to be more aware of how HBCUs cultivate a rich environment for these organizations and relationships and how to better implement these conditions. This essay is written with the hope that conversations about intimacy between black men who are not affiliated with organized brotherhood are provided with the same opportunities and support to cultivate similar “bromance” relationships.

Establishing Black Brotherhood

Fraternities are a well-known facet of matriculation in the University climate that can be traced back historically for decades in American culture, specifically. This culture has opened opportunities and created vast networks nationwide on a grand scale. These greek letter organizations, young and old, have paved new pathways for future members and honor the ideals of its founding members. While the notion of fraternity stems from a concept of organized brotherhood, gathering men with similar interests and professions, some of these organizations were formed in resistance to oppression. Racism, segregation, and discrimination were (and still are) plaguing this niche of society to the point that the participation of African American men were non-existent and not welcomed in these organizations as well as the academic institutions that housed these organizations. This led to African Americans establishing their own greek letter organizations to combat this oppression and build their own support network within their

university communities known collectively as Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). The establishment of BGLOs (and like organizations) expanded with time and eventually have become the norm of campus activity, specifically at Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs).

HBCUs were established in the 1800s in response to African Americans being barred from attending colleges/universities and provided African Americans with access to higher education. With the civil rights movement and racial integration in universities and colleges beginning in 1963, the institutional options for African Americans gradually broadened exponentially and have allowed African American students access to institutions of higher learning nationwide. HBCUs have continued to thrive, and today, they produce some of the most qualified professionals in all fields and of all races. Just as BGLOs were established as a means to provide the black student community with peer and professional relationship development that they were denied by prior established organizations, HBCUs were established as a means to provide higher education to the black community that was denied by other institutions.

The first BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc. was founded in 1906 on the campus of Cornell University as an organization that was initially formed as a study group for black men who were confronted with racial prejudice within the classroom and social settings at the university (“Our History”). This BGLO was set in motion by seven black college men, known as the “Jewel founders,” who identified the need for a strong brotherhood amongst African American men (“Our History”). The core principles established by the Jewel founders helped to solidify the foundation for the organization and its future members. These principles were “scholarship, fellowship, good character, and the uplifting of humanity” (“Our History”). With these core values in mind, members understood that membership was not just for professional networking or accolades. Membership also constituted and encouraged “fellowship” amongst peers and placing values on relationships beyond professional gain, whilst encouraging scholarship and uplifting humanity. It is important to acknowledge that the climate of an HBCU had (and continues to have) a profound effect on the success of these organizations compared to other institutions that had to find alternatives to cultivate access to these kinds of organizations for African Americans.

Outside of the HBCU Climate

The conditions for organizations cultivating peer relationships between black men at HBCUs continued to prosper; however, black men who attended PWIs began to face challenges that were not solicited in HBCUs climates. PWI refers to predominantly white institutions--basically any institution of higher learning that wasn't labeled an HBCU prior to 1964. These institutions usually have student bodies made up mostly of whites, with sprinkles of different races such as African American, Hispanic, Asian,

and so on (Nicole). Michael J. Cuyjet's book, *African American Men in College*, features a descriptive case study involving African American men who attended a PWI and illustrates the value that organizations, such as fraternities, have to African American students. This study utilized “. . . qualitative research method[s] conducted at a predominantly white public research university to collect information and identify those out-of-class activities that have a positive impact on the involvement of African American students in campus life . . .” (Cuyjet 50). This study gave insight to the positive effects peer relations had on students success rate in school and their personal growth as individuals. The focus groups unanimously agreed that “bonding and having friendships with other African American males contributed greatly to their survival at [a] PWI” (Cuyjet 60). These friendships and bonds can be understood in the scope of fraternity as brotherhood and the scope of this research as bromance. Although it has taken different names in varying contexts, the overall link between them is the acknowledgement that black men are more successful professionally and personally when they are given the opportunity to intimately relate to one another in a safe space that cultivates their mental health. This study mentions specifically the “survival” at a PWI that not only further indicates the importance of these relationships for African American male peer relationships, but also acknowledges the harsh social climate African American men face at these institutions (Cuyjet 60). The individual mental health of African American men in college was directly affected by these relationships or lack thereof.

Peer relationships among black male students are established, influenced, and are further cultivated through organizations that focus on concepts beyond academic and professional development. According to the prior mentioned study, “peer relationships [Fraternities/BGLOs] among and between African American male college students can help to reinforce a sense of purpose, self-identity, and positive perception that fosters a more positive educational experience for these young men” (Cuyjet 61). The personal development of the relationships and individuals of the group are also valued on the same spectrum as academics and professional career advancement. Fraternities/organizations reinforce peer relations among black men, valuing members beyond their academics and professionalism, allowing for identity to be developed in a safe environment and changing perceptions of young black men who may have been exposed to harmful social constructs prior to their interest and exposure to an organization. The establishment of these relationships allow for healthy homosocial bonding that has been proven by this study to be essential to the development of African American men in college and beyond.

Black Males in Other Organizations

BGLOs have established and stimulated a way for African American academic communities to connect and bond. Any organization that allows black males to freely interact with one another, in a socially accepting climate, could cultivate this same culture of comradery. As a member of an organization that is not specifically a BGLO, I have experienced these relationships on a personal level during my matriculation through my undergraduate career. Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America (PMA) is a collegiate social fraternity founded in 1898 for men with a sincere interest in music:

Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia is the world's oldest and largest secret national fraternal society in music. Sinfonia was born on October 6, 1898, at the New England Conservatory in Boston, when a group of thirteen young men under the guidance of Ossian Everett Mills met "*to consider the social life of the young men students of that institution [and] to devise ways and means by which it might be improved*" . . . For over a century, Sinfonians in nearly every field of study and professional endeavor have transformed music in America. The opportunity of becoming a Sinfonian is offered to as many men as possible who, through a love for music, can assist in the fulfillment of the Fraternity's Object and ideals either by adopting music as a profession or by working to advance the cause of music in America adopted its mission in 1901 ("Phi Mu Alpha," emphasis in original).

Founder Ossian Evertt Mills sought to cultivate social interactions between male students and attempted to improve their climate at his institution at the time. This sentiment remains active with Sinfonians (members of PMA) today through the implementation of this interest through the mission. The mission, known as "The Object," states that "The Object of this Fraternity shall be for the development of the best and truest fraternal spirit; the mutual welfare and brotherhood of musical students; the advancement of music in America and a loyalty to the Alma Mater" ("Phi Mu Alpha"). The first line of "The Object" speaks directly to the peer relations of men through the "fraternal spirit" of brotherhood. PMA's first and most important objective focuses on the development of individual men and their brotherly spirit overall. Each member is valued beyond their interest in music and is developed on a more personal and individual level that professional organizations typically do not venture.

The N.A.S.T.Y. Eta Xi chapter of PMA was founded on the campus of Tennessee State University (an HBCU) in 1956. This chapter of PMA was one of the first four chapters established at an HBCU with a predominant population of African American men and people of color that cultivates, nourishes, and advances the aforementioned Fraternity/BGLO culture. As a sophomore in 2013, my initial interest in this organization was sparked by the way members interacted on campus. They were close beyond their organizational obligation and were open about their personal care and investment in one

another. Consistent affirmation of these bonds were observed such as sharing meals, commuting together, assisting one another with any and everything, being accountable for one another, and ensuring that each brother was healthily accounted for (physically, mentally, and emotionally). In Spring 2014, I was fortunate enough to participate in the semester-long process of membership into Eta Xi. Through this process (and after), I was able to experience these observations from the prior year for myself and could now speak to these witnessed experiences of brotherhood among black men.

The unconditional love we share is undeniably the epitome of what a bromance entails. Beyond our organizational bonds, the relationships among these men and I are emotionally intimate. We share personal experiences and feelings that we are not able to (in most cases) outside of these relationships. Members and I casually shared platonic affection for one another in public settings. It was not out of the norm for brothers to exchange hugs, handshakes, and affectionate banter while passing each other on campus. My brothers and I would enjoy extensive quality time with one another through schoolwork, rehearsals, meals, and social events. We are a tight-knit family that openly acknowledges one another on an emotional level. Other people observed, just as I once did, how we intimately cared for one another on a deep, platonic level. Onlookers were intrigued and impressed with the closeness we shared and how (unlike some organizations on campus) openly affectionate we were with one another. This admiration, although appreciated, only shows the need for more public representation of these relationships in the broader social environments, such as an HBCU campus. My membership with PMA not only has allowed me and other brothers of Eta Xi to bond and cultivate peer relationships, but also influenced other African American students by showing that these bonds were possible for black men to obtain and cherish as a part of individual social development.

Limited Access

Organizations such as Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and the Eta Xi chapter of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America provides African American men with social climates for brotherly love and affection to be nurtured and further cultivates the development of members involved overall. But access to these organizations, as welcoming as they seem, are limited to being fortunate enough to be chosen to matriculate through the process of membership. A man desiring brotherhood and bonding with peers are not the only requirements for selection. These organizations, much like the job market, receive a surplus of applications that are filtered based on criteria determined by the standards, needs, and desires of the organization. Assets and liabilities are taken into consideration such as GPA, current involvement on campus, classroom behavior/reputation, character, affiliations within (and outside of) the University community, economic status, relation to Alumni members, and etc. The determination for selection can be

as critical or lackadaisical as permitted by the collegiate chapters of these organizations. This leaves individuals who have not been selected for an opportunity for membership without access to this community and much needed peer relationship cultivation. This is not to say that these organizations are responsible for the lack of these relationships in the University community for black men and should be allowing anyone to join on their own merit. This observation is more of a critical analysis of those who are not selected or even exposed to these organizations and how these relationships taken out of the context of brotherhood in regard to Fraternity is stigmatized, and thus, barring those without membership to these types of organizations marginalized and shunned from the possibility of cultivating similar relationships.

The Fraternity Privilege

These bonds of brotherhood (bromance) are clearly being cultivated and nurtured within these organizations with vigor as seen in their missions, principles, and actions as a unit and individuals of that unit. If you strip away the mutual professional commitment of membership that cloaks these organizations, what remains are bonds among black males that are emotionally intimate and tethered only by their relationship with one another. Removing the mutual benefit and dedication to organizations such as Alpha Phi Alpha and Phi Mu Alpha, these relationships and bonds are revealed as something that can be cultivated by other black men without the tutelage of organizations' oversight. The issue that is now identified is that without the organized brotherhood offered by fraternities and organizations, these relationships are not commonly identified (or accepted) as platonic intimacy between black men. Privilege is enacted (whether intentional or not) to those members of fraternities and similar organizations. Privilege, according to Evin Taylor, "is the 'cultural currency' afforded to a person or group who are recognized as possessing a desired social or political characteristic" (93-5). This social characteristic in relation to fraternities/organizations is the platonic and intimate bonds between black men or what this research refers to as bromance. These relationships are acceptable only to those privileged to be members of these organizations, but for those outside of these tight social circles, are stigmatized as taboo amongst black men or are labeled as homosexual desire and erotic intimacy.

The takeaway here is that black bromances exist within the context of organized brotherhood and are socially acceptable despite their connotations of intimacy beyond emotional interaction. (e.g., physical embrace, horseplay, extensive quality time, playful teasing and simulating sexual acts, etc.). These organizations add a layer of hypermasculine reasoning (or social coverage) for these relationships to be considered acceptable to the larger part of American society and recognized as "legitimate" causation for platonic intimacy between black males. The conditions of fraternities (and organizations similar to them)

are so potent with the guise of hypermasculine attributes that bromances (deeply platonic interactions between males) are written off as simple normalities within this exclusive community. It can be said that black bromance (brotherhood) finds its shelter (for the most part) from homophobic stigmas in fraternities and organizations that champion these relationships, but are simultaneously isolating the cultivation of these relationships to only be possible in the exclusivity of membership and affiliation. This is the unintentional effect of these organizations existence in the frame of American society and is only enforced by its relation to communities outside of itself. The attributes of bromance outside of the exclusive membership of these organizations are classified as erotic fantasy and homosexual desire or romance.

The Desire of a “Black Brotha”

Black males are hypersexualized constantly though mass media and the American social rhetoric of black men to be violent sexual conquerors. These constant projections of black males as hypersexual beings, only able to express themselves through their violence and sexuality in American society, has been internalized by this African American men and beyond. bell hooks identifies the compulsivity of black men to root their existence and relation to anything outside themselves as sexual insofar as how sex “. . . becomes a playing field, where the quest for freedom can be pursued in a world that denies black males access to other forms of liberating power” (74). To be the “player “ is an image that is projected as the route that provided black men access to expressive freedom that was constantly associated with dominance and power. Media projections and American social rhetoric prevented black men from identifying (or even pursuing) any alternative forms of liberation from white supermacist subordination, and it tragically has been translated to black men finding false liberation and power in overexerting their sexuality and suppressing their vulnerability. This confirmation of dominance made black males feel they had an upper hand (at least in the area of sex) over white males. Freedom, power, and liberation for black men came to be understood that even though white men may “. . . dominate them in other spheres of power, when it came to sexuality black men ruled. And the sex black males openly bragged about was centered always and only on conquest and penetration” (hooks 75).

Black men are faced with fitting into projected stereotypes to gain “power” and “freedom” or deviate from the poorly prescribed path of black masculinity and risk the multiple accusations of treason and defamation against the African American community. This has lead to a range of issues such as pent-up aggression, self-consciousness, promiscuity, infidelity, and jealousy (to name a few). Kobena Mercer attests to this internal conflict black men face as these issues are

. . . symptoms of underlying emotional conflicts in heterosexual relationships that are engendered by the ascription, and internalization, of sexual “superiority.” In seeking to live up to expectations shaped by received images of black male sexuality, black men experience interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts . . . (Mercer 150)

These conflicting connotations are further transcribed into how black men interact with one another. If this is what lies at the roots of black masculinity and expression, it is easy to see how any type of intimacy black men partake in is sexualized. If this mindset, now internalized by American society (more specifically, the black community), is taken into account when black men attempt to have platonic intimacy with one another outside of the protective guise of fraternities and organizations, it can be inferred that these relationships will be seen as taboo in fear of homophobic ridicule. This leads to homosexual connotations of black bromances and stigmas that are formed due to the internalization that the only form of expression allowed by black males is “conquest and penetration.” It can be further understood how homophobia seeps its way into the ideology of black masculinity, as intimacy on any level is internalized and identified as the desire to sexually conquer and penetrate. Thus black bromance is identified (overall) as a homoerotic fantasy.

Black Brotherhood For All

Fraternities and organizations that value brotherhood and intimacy between African American men can drastically improve the self-esteem, self-identity, and social development of individuals in this group. These organizations strive to develop each member on a personal and emotional level and has lasting effects on those involved. The ideologies of bromance permeate throughout these organizations and are marked safe (for the most part) from homophobic scrutiny. Those who are fortunate enough to be a part of these organizations are able to develop life changing relationships that are emotionally vulnerable and intimate with like-minded peers. Those who are not so fortunate are left to feel isolated and ridiculed for wanting such intimacy and labeled as “queer-loving sissies.” This stigma blocks African American men from the valuable brotherhood offered right on the other side of the exclusive doors of Fraternity and similar organizations. There is no need to open these doors to all, as not everyone who wants an intimate-platonic relationship with their peers necessarily wants to be a part of an organization. I have bromances with several black men who are not affiliated with any “organized brotherhood.” Black men should be allowed to cultivate these same bonds of dedication, concord, loyalty, trust, love, and support within their own communities without the needed protection of “frat” to give them social permission and access. There are African American men who are longing for the brotherhood that they are told (by American society) is too exclusive for them to participate in (fraternities/organizations) and

too feminine for them desire (bromance). We are all human. We are black men, we are all brothers. and we all deserve platonic intimacy even if we're not an Alpha man or a Sinfonian.

To the black men reading this: You are loved beyond your body and sexuality. You are more than a sexual being or object of desire. You do not have to conform to the stigmas forced upon you. Love your fellow black brothers inside fraternity and out! We are in this together. I see you, I feel you, and I am with you.

“I bet you won’t swing!”: Black Men, Sports, and Martial Arts

This chapter addresses how contact sports and martial arts positively stimulate platonic physical expression and intimacy among black males and identifies the lack of tolerance outside of this social context. It will begin by elaborating on Rough and Tumble Play (RTP) behaviors and how this phenomenon matures in the form of contact sports and martial arts. It will be further inferred on how these behaviors are necessary for social development and positive emotional expression in men, specifically. Furthermore, this chapter discusses how athletics and martial arts, in particular, affect African American men who participate on a societal level as well as impact the tolerance of platonic intimacy (bromance) in this context. Finally, it addresses how RTP is a necessary, yet neglected, part of peer relationships among black males and how it is stigmatized outside of the context of contact sports and martial arts. The subjects elaborated here are brought together in hopes of understanding how physical intimacy can be platonic in the form of play and illuminate on how black men can benefit from these interactions outside of contact sports and martial arts.

Rough and Tumble Play

A common stereotype about boys is their tendency to horseplay due to the social construct of masculinity that establishes itself through physical domination. Playing rough, wrestling, contact sports, and martial arts have been ways in which young boys have physically expressed themselves. These behaviors are celebrated in youth and become more subtle and socially constructed as the journey to adulthood forges on. These behaviors were studied and discussed in the article “Gender Differences in Tough and Tumble Play Behaviors,” a research study executed by S. Julie Harbin. Rough and Tumble play (RTP) is a form of high-energy physical activity that takes place in a playful context and can be done with others or individually. This includes activities such as chasing, wrestling, horseplay, climbing, falling, running, etc. (Harbin). RTP easily can be interpreted as (and even escalated to) serious conflict and is discouraged behavior after the preteen age range (13 or younger) due to this possibility of violence and aggression. Although this can be the case, it must be understood that “children can develop social competence as a result of RTP interactions” (Harbin 1). These playful activities cultivate an environment for physical bonding amongst children, especially boys. This study by Harbin notes that boys who participated in RTP expressed more positive emotion and engagement with peers. This can account for the tendency for boys to participate in RTP more often, as positive (and platonic) physical engagements allowed them to express their emotions through a healthy outlet of wrestling, running, play fighting, and etc. This research by Harbin also supports the claim that RTP behaviors aid young boys in their social and

emotional development. These RTP behaviors are socially policed as boys mature to adulthood and experience a social metamorphosis into contact sports and martial arts.

As boys mature into young men, RTP behavior becomes a socially ambiguous stage. As notions of masculinity makes its introduction, young men who wish to participate in RTP with peers are harshly ridiculed by society. Cultural expectations about what young men can no longer do plague the transformation of RTP to contact sports and martial arts. Suddenly, with maturity of age comes restrictions of expression as American cultural expectations of masculinity impose restrictions and social commentary such as “you’re too big/old for that now” or “real men don’t do that.” The only form in which RTP is then deemed socially acceptable is through contact sports and martial arts. With this cultural expectation in place, men turn to these activities in their adulthood to supplement their emotional and social development that becomes pigeon-holed to organized activities limited to members of this group.

Male Bonding

The males of American society struggle to form close bonds with one another due to the forced expectation of their gender role to be emotionally vacant, stoic, and self sufficient. According to the aforementioned research, RTP is an essential part of social and emotional development for young men. RTP aided young boys in emotional and social development only to be met with disdain for these attributes as they enter adulthood. This suggests that these bonds are appropriate in youth but must conform to new social constructs (or perish) as cultural expectations of masculinity reshape the acceptability of male bonding. This topic is discussed in an online article on thrivetalk.com, “Male Bonding Through Sports and Martial Arts.” ThriveTalk is an online therapy platform for licensed and professional therapists to establish a private practice and match them with potential patients seeking therapeutic practices. This site also offers short (but beneficial) writing material on mental health subject matter by alias authors. Sam, the alias author of the prior mentioned online article, speaks directly to the notions of masculinity that “seem to restrict the ways in which it is considered to bond with other men.” This socially constructed bond has limited the development of male bonding and is a clear indicator of the struggle for men to form close bonds with one another. Male bonding is nearly impossible in a society that only offers criticism and restrictive expressions for this group. According to Sam’s article on male bonding, “Many men feel most comfortable bonding with other men in an active way, especially in the form of organized inter-personal violence. When engaging in full contact sports, such as American football or martial arts, men can develop strong bonds with each other.” Contact sports and martial arts are areas that have been developed to stimulate the now taboo RTP. Men are more comfortable with these

forms of bonding due to RTP developments at an early age, but it also is a result of the cultural expectations of males to be aggressive, violent, and physical. These expectations and stereotypes make this form of bonding comfortable for men because of its acceptability in American culture, thus relieving pressure from males who desire to participate in RTP activities.

Deeper Damage

African American men are affected on much deeper levels. Stereotypes of black men to be violent, physical, and aggressive are only enforced as representation of black males in contact sports and martial arts are high in frequency (much like the phenomenon of pornography). These stereotypes are used to negatively label African American males and has been internalized to the point that black men “fit” best into sports and similar physical activities per American society. This suggests that black males, who are stereotyped as being violent, aggressive, and physical beings, can “do what they do best” for the benefit of entertainment in sports and martial arts, whereas their white counterparts are glorified as problem solvers and critical thinkers on the same playing field. Michael J. Cuyjet analyzes this racial disparity in his text *African American Men in College* when he, along with colleagues, address the dominating rhetoric of African American male athletes in higher education: “African American male student athletes have to combat the myths and stereotypes that they are less intelligent, more violent, and poor” (Cuyjet 164). African American male college athletes take on unnecessary burdens from their race being profiled and are faced with having to prove themselves as capable in other aspects. African American male athletes were perceived as “dumb black jocks” that hold no value beyond their physical attributes in athletics: “African American male student athletes are shocked when they arrive on campus. . .many are surprised to find that their professors, administrators, and peers see them as ‘dumb jocks,’ which leaves them with feelings of deflated self-esteem, abandonment, and isolation” (Cuyjet 163). Black male athletes are pigeonholed not only by “jock” stereotypes but on a deeper level of systematic racism and discrimination in the realm of athletics. Black men in this group continue to have their self-esteem damaged by racial stereotypes, which perpetuates the idea that black men are unemotional, aggressive, violent, and unintelligent beings. Although African American men face harsh racial conflicts in athletics, the exclusivity of contact sports and martial arts still provide a privilege even to the black men in this group.

The Athlete Privilege

It can be said that African American men who participate in contact sports and martial arts are privileged to continue their emotional and social development that began at an early age for most youth in the form of Rough and Tumble Play. Of course, black athletes face their own challenges in this system due to racial and social barriers within this context. This privilege is identified as a critical examination of how male bonding through RTP is permissible (and even encouraged) in the privileged group of athletics and martial arts that is not accessible by all black men. Within the guise of athletics and martial arts, black men are allowed to be more physically intimate (on a platonic level), and it is deemed acceptable. This tolerance is due to the notions of masculinity and cultural expectations of men that fuel these activities for emotional and social development. Masculinity, in this regard, acts as a positive courier to give black men access to RTP behaviors in an organized manner that is acceptable by American society. Examples of physical platonic intimacy tolerated in the realm of athletics and martial arts are actions such as butt-slaps, bear hugs, kisses, piggyback rides, and etc. The masculine rhetoric of dominance--status seeking, risk-taking, and competition--gloss over these platonic intimacy acts as physical expressions of comradery and team chemistry. Men, specifically black men, can prove their masculinity by participating in risky sports and competition that results in dominating opposing rivals: "When engaging in such sports in a team, the heightened risk involved can bring men closer together, as they are all looking out for each other's safety" (Sam). These factors play in favor of the social construct and cultural expectations of masculinity, and therefore, it can be said that this (along with other variables) allow for tolerance of physical platonic behaviors amongst black athletes and martial artists.

The concern being expressed by this essay is the lack of tolerance of RTP outside of the context of contact sports and martial arts. Once matured past adolescence, men are confined to execute these behaviors only in the context of contact sports and martial arts with little to few exceptions. Black men have the additional burden of racial stereotypes of being violent, aggressive, hypersexual, and physical beings. With these factors in mind, it can be clearly understood why black men are represented as "better-off" doing labor work or participating in athletics and martial arts. The positive affirmations of masculinity through RTP and the negative racial connotations of black men converge to the complex societal norm of black men participating in physically aggressive activity through sports and martial arts as permissible. However, outside of this context, black men who participate in this behavior are considered wildly-violent and aggressive. The disproportionate focus on black men to be aggressively-sexual beings also gives the perception that black men outside the context of sports and martial arts that wish to participate in RTP are expressing themselves in a sexual manner when this is not particularly the case.

Off The Court

The convergence of positive performances of masculinity (RTP) and negative racial stereotypes of African American men puts this group in a bind that is unique and vastly disadvantageous. There is a large representation and market for black men (who are physically able) to participate in sports and martial arts, which allows those participating members to stimulate RTP activities. Thus, the members of this selected group are able to further develop their social skills and emotional intelligence. These factors at face value are a positive opportunity for black men who are able to participate in such sports and martial arts. It would be fair to say that this only would further encourage influencing black men to invest heavily in such activities for their well-being. The underlying stereotypes about black men and their bodily aggression, hypersexuality, and violence can also influence American society to push black males into these arenas as an only option to appease the beastly nature of the black man and to stimulate their emotional and social development. Social constructs of racism and toxic masculinity are working systematically and psychologically against black men and the larger American society. This provokes the notion that black men are at their best in contact sports and martial arts, and to describe it in a causal sense: putting their aggression, violence, and bodily nature to “good use.” Black men who attempt to go against the norms of American society and participate in RTP on a casual level (e.g., spontaneous play fighting, unorthodox wrestling, casual piggy back rides, etc.) are ostracized and labeled as “suspect” (labeled behavior that alludes to a homosexual preference). The causation of this contradictory and selective tolerance has to do with the tolerance moreso of the context, rather than the behavior.

Black Men’s Access to RTP

Black men who are unable (or will not consider) to participate in contact sports and athletics are put in a situation in which they are criticized and ostracized for attempting to participate in RTP without the context of sports and martial arts. Black men are forced into a dangerous lifestyle that does not easily cultivate male bonding beyond the permitted physical activities of athletics and martial arts. This chapter has already determined that RTP is an essential and imperative part of a male’s well-being. Black men are no different in their needs of emotional and social development. This research also argues that black men actually need it more than men of other racial ethnicities, as these developments can aid in the healing of racial trauma and stereotypes that contradict the necessary emotional and social development provided by RTP.

African American men who desire to participate in RTP outside of contact sports and martial arts are left out in the cold. Every black man does not want to play basketball, football, box, or study the discipline of taijutsu. RTP supposedly matures into contact sports and martial arts, but in reality, these

activities are socially constructed to exploit black men and aid in the racial stereotypes of this group. RTP is a natural behavior of human beings that assists in nurturing social skills and emotional expression. Black men are faced with the daunting choice: 1) participate in contact sports and martial arts, giving into the stereotypes and trading exploitation for social and emotional access to male bonding or 2) denying that participation and shunning any desires for RTP to avoid cultural criticism, abandoning necessary social and emotional development through male bonding. Black men should not have to make this choice. Black men should be able to wrestle with their boys at any age without being criticised, ostracized, and labeled as a potential homosexual. RTP goes beyond sexuality; as this research has proven it is an essential behavior that humans need to continue to develop healthy social habits and emotional expressions. African American men are humans, and they deserve the opportunity to bond with each other without social constructs limiting them and tearing them down at every turn. RTP is for everyone.

To my black brothers: "I bet you won't swing!"

Conclusion: “It’s all love, dawg!”

Black men can be emotionally vulnerable with one another. We should show our emotions to other black men, and we will be seen as brave for doing so. We must let others (especially those closest to us) experience or witness our deeper emotions. We can—MUST—allow ourselves to cry, especially with other black men who are not our fathers, sons, uncles, cousins, etc. We can love other black men. If we do, we’re not assumed to be homosexual or seem to desire sexual contact with them. We can be physically or verbally affectionate, and we will not be seen as promiscuous and less masculine. Onlookers will not misconstrue our relationships and emasculate us for being so “touchy-feely.” Black men have emotions. Black men are strong and hug each other. Black men can care deeply for one another. Black men don’t need to “man-up” and not be “soft.” Black men should be allowed to participate in platonic intimacy with peers and others.

A bromance is an intimate, non-sexual relationship between two or more men. It is a tight, affectionate, homosocial male bonding relationship exceeding that of usual friendship, and is distinguished by a particularly high level of emotional intimacy. ("Bromance")

Although, the aforementioned definition of bromance is a contemporary term that is gaining traction as a subject within Gender Studies, it is a stigmatized term in the black community. The term bromance is marked as culturally insufficient or categorized as “white people shit.” This comes from the internalized mindset that concepts deemed too difficult to access (or understood) by African Americans are labeled as beyond the reach of blackness; it’s a luxury “for them privileged white folk.” This lack of access to bromance relationships is interpreted to be the fault of the African American community’s lack of support for one another, but this is not necessarily true. Moreso, it is a harmful side-effect of colonialism, racism, white supremacy, and internalized oppression of African Americans (especially the complexities of black masculinity) that have taken root in black culture and have lead African Americans to unknowingly indulge in self harm as a community.

Bromance is a term used by this research to give clarity to a concept that ascends beyond common friendships and does not nullify other referential terms used in its place (e.g., friendship, homeboys, nigga, cuz, bro, bruh, etc.). The term is utilized to assist in deeper understanding without subjecting the subject matter to lengthy and vague compound phrases (e.g., brotherly bond, close friendship, best friend, emotionally intimate-friendship, platonically-intimate friendship, etc.). The term bromance is a crossover of brother and romance, which can explain (somewhat) the distain or parody of the urban term. The reference to a brother, a sibling, someone who you deem close as family and blood; meets with romance, pertains to intimate relationships of splendid affair and possibly sexual in nature; to

form the term Bromance. This interpretation of brother and romance fused together creates a pseudo-sexual relationship that is interpreted by the broader American society. However, this is false to a point. There is a cultural misunderstanding within American culture (especially among African Americans) about the term romance. Romance does not, by definition, allude to sexuality, sexual desire, or preference.

The term romance plays dangerously close to the line of sexual desire, but is only pushed across by misuse and misinterpretation. Romance is widely defined, but this research infers on the following definition, “the colorful world, life, or conditions depicted in such tales” (“Romance”). With this definition in mind, the romance in bromance refers to the over-play of the brotherly relationship. A colorful world or fancied envision of male bonding. This goes along with lines such as “you’re like a brother to me” or “I wish we were brothers.” This also accounts for the idea that bromances are fanciful or exaggerations of intimate bonds between males. This exaggeration can be considered parody, but it is inferred by this research to be a methodology for mutual understanding through a term that literally defines the male bond that surpasses blood relation. It also can be understood that male bonding was a “fantasy,” a romantic tale of men actually sharing emotional connections. The stereotypes about men (black men, especially) to be emotionally vacant can attest to the notion of bromance as a fantasmal endeavor, unheard of except in tall tales.

The misused definition of romance as sexual desire also has deeper implications when interpreted by the African American community. The internalized projections of the black male to be physical and sexual ties a devil’s knot with romance misinterpreted, implicating that romance for black men is equivalent to sexual expression and desire. This is a learned stereotype that only plunges deeper into misunderstanding romance when combined with brother to create bromance. It can be understood why bromance is seen as an unfitting term that alludes to something sexual. This research has considered the prior mentioned factors as another important variable for the lack of bromance representation of black males. Conversations and inference (such as this research) can help to uplift the cluttered social constructs that block mutual understanding across American society.

The African American bromance is an imperative aspect of black male emotional and social development that is overlooked by American society. The previously mentioned claims at the beginning of this essay provide examples for peer interactions between black males that should be socially acceptable. The social constructs of the 21st century need to be (re)assessed to unpack the deeply rooted stigmas of African American men and platonic intimacy. Black men struggle to form close bonds with one another due to the lack of discussion around this subject matter. The myth of black bromances can be lifted if the conversations are allowed to be cultivated. This collection of chapters has begun this

discussion and does not end here. This research analyzed the potential of black bromance through the lens of organized brotherhood (fraternities/ like organizations) and contact sports and martial arts (athletics) as a means to sympathize with the lack of discourse around these subject matters and to better relate to the typical American reader. There are an abundance of unexplored territories of American society in which bromance could form that could be further investigated (family dynamics, workplace, recreational activities, music, dance, gaming culture, etc.). There is an abundance of variables and contexts that can be (re)evaluated to assist in lifting the myth of African American males and the tolerance of platonic intimacy among them. A “myth” that is clouded by a brutal history, mass media projections, homophobia, and negatively developed coping mechanisms; a bromance in African American community is a rarely documented or understood occurrence, but it clearly exists. Through all of the complicated social constructs, gender bias, double standards, systematic racism, and stereotypes, black bromances are barely surviving.

To all of my black men out there: Love those closest to you. Care for your homies. Hug them, kiss their foreheads, and let them know that we're not supposed to hate each other and kill each other. Express yourselves and lean on each other. Break the mental shackles that are stopping your emotional and social development. It starts with us. Black Bromances are possible with support for one another, and this culmination of research is my support to you, my brothers. Spread this information in your mind, hearts, and to the world around you. I love my fellow black men (even those still unconvinced), and you can too! It's all love, dawg!

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