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Effects of Masculine Stereotypes in the African American Community

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Chapter 1: Introductions

This study is used to help understand the detriment of stereotypes that are prevalent in the African American community. This topic is important to me, because it helps me to learn more about how my upbringing could be impacting my relationship. As a black male, I personally have seen, and been a perpetuator of the culture in which we are raised. I was raised in a very interesting family dynamic, where my father was a drug addict, and my mother had to work to provide. Because of this, I was always pressed to further my education, to break the “curse” that my family had been under, and achieve financial freedom. In my pursuit of “freedom”, I developed several walls (mentally) that prevent me from showing emotion. Being exposed to so much at a young age, I never allowed myself to show weakness. The mentality was basically, “when life happens you have to keep going and stay focused”. Being taught to be “strong”, I believe has left me somewhat calloused and emotionless, neither of which are beneficial in any meaningful relationship. I want to learn more about how the psychology of these “teachings” have helped to mold me into the person I am today. Overall, I would say that I have reached a level of success that neither of my parents did, but it hasn’t come without a cost.

The purpose of this study is to help others understand why they exhibit certain behaviors, and to show that they aren’t alone. The target audience is other black men who may want to understand the reasons behind their actions. Personally, I think understanding how the family dynamic and culture in which you were raised can impact your current relationships is of the utmost importance. Part of being able to have a functional relationship with others, involves understanding and taking responsibility of your actions. The research questions are as follows: “What are the pitfalls of gender stereotypes as they relate to masculinity?”, and “How do gender roles negatively impact African American males?”

It’s important to understand the few limitations that do exist when conducting a study such as this one. There are mainly two: the lack of statistical data to support theories based on emotion, and
the willingness of participants to explore subjects of their past and be willing to discuss their hardships as a result. Most of the terms that will be used are self-explanatory, with the exception of “manly”.

“Manly” in this report is defined as displaying traits associated with masculinity. Those traits are rough, tough, emotionally resilient, and macho. Negative manifestations of those traits are being emotionally unavailable, egotistic, narcissistic, and/or guarded.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

**Research Questions:**

What are the pitfalls of gender stereotypes as they relate to masculinity?

How do gender roles negatively impact African American males?

**Defining Masculinity**

“Real men don’t cry!” “There’s no crying in baseball!” These are just some of the negative statements made to young boys when trying to express emotion. Understanding these “gender norms” and how they can negatively impact those same boys as they become men, is of grave importance. These boys are future husbands, workers, leaders… maybe even fathers. They then teach these same behaviors to their children either verbally or demonstrably. This literature review aims to shed light on the false notions assumed by masculinity, and the negative effects that it can have on men…specifically African American men. Before beginning, it’s important to provide a definition for masculinity. By definition, masculinity is possession of the qualities traditionally associated with men. Synonyms are manliness, machismo, vigor, and strength. Masculinity is what you think about when you tell someone to “be a man!”. Usually it implies toughen up, be rough, or take control. While there are times when these thing are necessary, it’s also important to understand the negative connotation that this mindset can leave behind. In the black community, these reinforcements have led to an unhealthy need to prove manhood in areas such as financial control, emotional intelligence, sexual orientation, and even artistic expression.
Prevalence of Gender Roles and the Impact

According to Bell (2014), black culture and the black male perspective took a front stage thanks to the popularity of rappers – in his example, he uses Jay-Z. With hip-hop becoming mainstream, America got a glimpse into the mindset and upbringing of the average black male. Rappers, like Jay-Z, pride themselves on telling their stories - stories that are similar to many other black men - about their perspective on the world and their upbringing. The music glorifies masculinity, the acquisition of money, and often times the objectivity of women. When younger black boys hear those lyrics, they are then trained to believe that this is the life of a successful man. As a result, more black boys grow up trying to become rappers, musicians, and athletes, than trying to explore any other industry. One of the biggest issues with this mindset is that not even 5% of them will achieve this level of success (Bell, 2014), so where does that leave them? What do they have to work towards? Another example is Lil Wayne, whose music can be studied to understand masculinity as well the homophobic culture. According to Graham (2016), Lil Wayne’s music is the voice of the young culture, where homophobia is prevalent, and immediate success is desired. Rappers like Jay-Z and Lil Wayne become the mentors for young black males, and if they don’t use their platform wisely, then the result is a new generation of misguided individuals. Now it’s important to understand that rappers, athletes, and entertainers aren’t solely responsible for the choices of every African American young man. These examples are designed to shed light into stereotypes and how an image that is undergirded by the media can have a negative effect on an impressionable youth. It is the responsibility of the familial unit to affirm the talents within young boys, and help them see that there are other options.
Methods to Breakdown Gender Roles

There are many methods described to help breakdown the negative gender roles that are rampant in the African American community. One of the best methods is to give positive mentorship and provide opportunity for different experiences (Dancy, 2010). In the article “African American Males, Manhood, and College Life”, Dancy explains how college aged black males, studied as part of his observation, initially showed roughness, aggressiveness, signs of homophobia, and were treated differently than their white counterparts. This led to them continuing to act on their beliefs of masculinity. Another finding of Dancy was that when there were diverse faculty mentors, diversity programs, and an effort to include them, the black students often times displayed different dispositions, and were able to better relate to the other groups.

Purpose

The purpose of the review is to shed light on black masculinity, and ways to help curb the negative side effects. While there are times when masculinity is necessary, this review aims to point out the negative aspects of masculinity, and show that there is hope. Often times, as a black man, I find myself actively working to create distance between what I was taught at a young age and what I know to be true today. Even recently, when considering a job in a different state, I was met with great resistance from my family, who has largely remained in the same city all of their lives. While there’s certainly a degree of sadness that comes into play when moving away from family, the reasoning for their aversion was more so out of fear of the unknown. It’s that fear that stops black men from pursing things that may be considered “different”. In the minds of my parents, there is a set formula for success, and anything outside of that formula is uncertain and should be avoided. The complexity comes into play when the same lessons that I was taught while growing up, one in particular to “have your own mind”, causes friction when employed in situations that are considered against the grain. While I’m taught to
be strong, and push past others that may try to hold you back; I should never stray outside what is comfortable and deemed safe (because it is known).
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The design plan for this study is qualitative research. This method is best because it allows the researcher to explain complex phenomena or ideology through words and academic writing. Qualitative methods are also great for analyzing thoughts, beliefs, and explaining behavior observations. The most difficult part of the project, is figuring out how to substantiate personal ideas in regards to gender norms and the African American community. Currently, there isn’t much research that caters to this topic, but by switching research methods (wording and phrase combinations), I am able to gather the proper information on subjects that are close. Through this research phase, it becomes apparent that the best type of information to gather would be qualitative as opposed to quantitative. Quantitative methods yielded articles from which I could unpack further examples and ideology. It’s a great approach for this specific topic, because a subject like this one doesn’t necessarily looking for data and analysis. The drawback of quantitative is that it doesn’t allow for much logic, which is a strong foundation of this argument. When looking at the effects of stereotypes, theory is more needed than data. If the topic were on the number of males impacted, then I would’ve needed statistics to prove that point. With that being said, the obvious method of choice is qualitative research.

The qualitative research method is very beneficial with helping to uncover different ways that stereotypes of masculinity have been manifested. I found articles that detailed different areas from film, to learning institutes, to even hip hop music. All of the articles discussed how being reared with a certain set of cultural values played a major role in the behavior of the African American subjects. Also in each example, was information about how that behavior impacted others that were around them. In the case of the hip hop article, it discussed how the stereotypes find themselves manifesting in the music. As a result, the culture that those stereotypes re-enforced has found itself into mainstream American culture. Drawing these types of conclusions are only able to be done via qualitative methods, as it lends itself to expanding on logic, versus dealing with facts, figures, and stats.
Data collection methods include not only finding scholarly articles that give various perspectives, but also a questionnaire that can be used with any willing subject. The questionnaire is especially helpful because it gives the subject a chance to explain their own experiences. Being realistic is very important with this type of research, because it shows that there is truth to the articles, and the assumptions they make.

There are specific ethical concerns that arise in research that involves humans. Examples include the following: full disclosure issues, equal appointment of subjects, and minimizing the risks involved in accumulating data. For this specific research, there aren’t necessarily ethical concerns, outside of full disclosure when deciding to interview subjects. When taking that route, it’s important to ensure that there is full disclosure of the research question, omission of any names or tracking information from the paper, and sharing of the true intentions with those subjects. Publishing this project, it is possible to apply for Exempt Review, under the following guideline:

Research involving survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior, provided that any disclosure of identifiable information outside the research setting would not place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation ("Exempt Review", 2016).

Based on these guidelines, this project can be considered for exemption, as it only involves interviewing adult subjects, and isn’t about any topics that would damage any of the areas above.

As it relates to research about gender roles and the negative impacts of masculinity, the belief is that there are definitely pitfalls that can go along with having to confine to those stereotypes. It’s important that the researcher isn’t biased, and is aware of any personal struggle with some of the residue from being pressured to behave a certain way. Personally, my short comings are more connected to wanting to be successful, than macho. In that regard, the researcher should be able to
relate to the subjects (that are chosen for an interview), but there aren’t any anticipated conflicts. If there are opposing views, simply ask the subject to further explain their standpoint, as there may be information that can shed light or provide further development. While stats and numbers speak for the majority of people, there are always outliers who have a different opinion. It’s important to respect everyone’s opinions, and glean what nuggets can be valuable no matter what side of the argument they may sit.
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The expected results of the research project are as follows: increase awareness of how gender stereotypes in the African American community can have a negative impact, and also that impact plays a factor on how African American males interact with others. These are predictable per the articles discussed, as well as the anticipated responses from the questionnaire. As the researcher, I have a personal stake in this topic, and have lived many of the negative effects. If the expected results do not occur, then there is a chance that the researcher is not looking for the most accurate data or interviewing subjects that are ready to express themselves. While there can always be exceptions, those who are not currently affected by those stereotypes have more than likely found a way to overcome them. That perspective is important also, as it helps to shape the next steps to the research which is - how do we move forward?
References


Lissana, S. (2010). To see who was best on the plantation: Enslaved fighting contests and masculinity


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Appendices
ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Effects of Masculine Stereotypes in the African American Community

Principal Investigator: Kenneth Washington

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Department (School, College): School for New Learning

Faculty Advisor: Professor Kevin Downing, Earth Sciences

What is the purpose of this research?
We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the negative effects of gender stereotypes in the African American community. This study is being conducted by Kenneth Washington at DePaul University.

We hope to include about 3 people in the research.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?
You are invited to participate in this study because you are an African American male who has experience with the effects of gender stereotypes. You must be age 18 or older to be in this study. This study is not approved for the enrollment of people under the age of 18.

What is involved in being in the research study?
If you agree to be in this study, being in the research involves simply filling out a questionnaire that will gather your insight on a number of topics. Those topics range from your childhood experiences, how you define “manly”, and who are some people that you admire.
**How much time will this take?**

This study will take about 60 minutes to complete. There is the possibility that it can take longer if there is more conversation to be had based on the questionnaire.

**Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?**

Being in this study does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life. You may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about answering certain questions. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to. There is the possibility that others may find out what you have said, but we have put protections in place to prevent this from happening.

**Are there any benefits to participating in this study?**

You may benefit from the research by further understanding how you have been impacted by gender stereotypes.

We hope that what we learn will help you identify why/if certain behaviors are exhibited, and ways to combat any negative behavior.

**Can you decide not to participate?**

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the research after you begin participating.

**Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?**

The research records will be kept and stored securely. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study or publish a paper to share the research with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. We will not include your name or any information that will directly identify you. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. However, some people might review or copy our records that may identify you in order to make sure we are following the required rules, laws, and regulations. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board may review your information. If they look at our records, they will keep your information confidential.
You should know that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or neglected or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

Please be aware that disclosing experiences with sexual or relationship violence during the course of research does not constitute a formal report to the University and will not begin the process of DePaul providing a response. If you are seeking to report an incident of sexual or relationship violence to DePaul, you should contact Public Safety (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7777; Loop: 312-362-8400) or the Dean of Students and Title IX Coordinator (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7290; Loop: 312-362-8066 or titleixcoordinator@depaul.edu). Individuals seeking to speak confidentially about issues related to sexual and relationship violence should contact a Survivor Support Advocate in the Office of Health Promotion & Wellness for information and resources (773-325-7129 or hpw@depaul.edu). More information is available at http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/hpw/shvp.html. Individuals are encouraged to take advantage of these services and to seek help around sexual and relationship violence for themselves as well as their peers who may be in need of support.

If you do disclose an experience with sexual or relationship violence, we will also provide you with a resource sheet containing this information at the end of the study.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Kenneth Washington (773) 241-1362 kenneth8239@gmail.com.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University’s Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You may also contact DePaul’s Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
• You cannot reach the research team.
• You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent from the Subject:**

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the research.

By completing the survey [or other study activity] you are indicating your agreement to be in the research.

Signature:_______________________________________________

Printed name: ____________________________________________

Date: _________________
Data Collection Instrument
Effects of Masculine Stereotypes in the African American Community Questionnaire

Research questions:

What are the pitfalls of gender stereotypes as they relate to masculinity?

How do gender roles negatively impact African American males?

1.) Tell me your definition of being "manly".

2.) What, in your own words, does it mean to be a strong, black man?

3.) Tell me about your relationship with your parents.

4.) How do you think that society views you?

5.) Who is one person you look up to the most? Why?

6.) How do you think gender norms affect male behavior?

7.) What stereotypes of a black male do you think are accurate?

8.) What stereotype of a black male do you think are most inaccurate?