Free research paper on stereotypes and the african-american male

Countries, United States

The process of stereotyping has done harm to the African-American male's image, in the eyes of their daughters, sons and society at large. African-American men have started to believe the stereotype and as a result are living down to the derogatory and demeaning assumptions about their behavior. The way they comport themselves as fathers, employees and as people come too often as a sarcastic resort to the expectations in the world about them. The news organizations, mass media, clothing manufacturers and other sources of input into society's mainstream have succeeded in rendering African-American males in a stereotypical way that disproportionately describes them as felons, worthy only of the ghetto. There are many examples of this stereotyping that have taken place over the past centuries that have made these behaviors a simple part of the way things are.

The harmful notion that African-American males are lazy, shiftless, and aggressive to the point of savagery has long been a stereotype in Western culture. These images date back to the first days of slavery, the early 1600s. Stereotyping has become one of the most important points of references influencing the perceptions that people have of others from different ethnic backgrounds. Even when the outsiders have very little knowledge about the culture, ethnicity or values of a group, they use stereotype to form their judgments. This process is so common that people now stereotype others within their own culture and ethnicity, using age, clothing, address and even name to form their own judgments. Even the schools that they attend are valid sources for stereotyping.

It is difficult to intervene when people have made assumptions on the basis

of images from such sources as television about a person or a group. One of the most popular television series in the 1970s portraying African-American males was Good Times. Running from 1974 until 1979, this show portrayed a poor African-American family doing its best to get along in the housing projects of Chicago. There were not many other programs that showed what life was like for the average African-American family. As a result, this program became the stereotype for the way that African-American families lived, struggling and poor but never managing to get anywhere. This show painted the image of the average African-American family large across American culture. Viewers came to think that black families had to struggle for freedom and equality whether or not they had an education, and the only outcome from that struggle was continued oppression. African-American people became classified as the poor in the working class. Even African-Americans cheered the show, forgetting that this was not the proper way to live, or to portray African-Americans as a whole. They did not understand that the characters would turn into an archetype of the black family and their role and status within society. At that time, it was more important to the African-American community that an all-black cast appear on mainstream programming. Because there were no positive images of African-American families on television, the larger culture received a misguided portrait of the African-American family and, in particular, the function of the male. While African-Americans would later realize the ignorance at work in Good Times, leading to the creation of more evenhanded and more accurate portrayals, even moving to a depiction of the bias itself, as in the movie Crash. This 2005 film exposed the truth about bigotry, racial profiling and stereotypes.

One example of this is the invention or the variation of traditional names to create unique ones for African-American children. Adding suffixes like -ique or -isha to traditional names, or prefixes like La-, or adding punctuation marks like dashes or apostrophes, are just some ways to change names. Stereotypes, though, have led to the labeling of those names as " ghetto" in origin and quality. If a hiring manager receives a resume or job application with one of these names on them, he or she is likely to make a determination about the applicant before even meeting that person. Even African-American comedians often make jokes about the names that African-American parents bestow on their children, bringing even more emphasis to the stereotype. One example is the name Shequita Jackson. A prospective employer is likely to think that she is going to act " ghetto" band be loud, because one of the stereotypes about African-American women is that they are often ignorant and boisterous. A hiring manager is likely to set one of these applications and resumes on the pile of people not to call. Even something like a ZIP code or an address can serve to feed stereotypes, because there is the idea that, while you might be able to get someone out of the ghetto, you just cannot get the ghetto out of the person.

Young African-American males have been the target of particularly pernicious stereotyping through the practice of racila profiling. Consider a young black male driving around in an expensive, flashy automobile that has spinning rims on the tires and tinted glass, while the stereo plays hip-hop music at high volume. He would be almost an automatic target of racial profiling. Society would automatically assume that this person was dealing drugs, meaning that the legal authorities could pull him over whenever they

wanted to. This sort of bias can lead to considerable damage because of the stereotyping at work. Positioning young African-American men as hostile, angry and beyond control places their very lives at hazard. It forms one of the most harmful issues in African-American culture today, because the right to self-expression is something that these young men have lost. Fashion, cars, jewelry and other methods of expression have attained a particular status within the African-American community, just as they have within other communities. However, it is the young African-American men who become targets when they use these items to show their own status. Parents now teach their children to hide their true selves in order to conform to expectations and avoid danger.

Stereotypes have even made their way into educational institutions. If an African-American male has a degree from a historically black institution rather than a majority-white institution, hiring managers look down on that degree. There is the stereotype that a degree from a historically black institution is not as valuable as one from another school. However, the only area of differences comes in the outcome from the education.

In general, stereotyping African-American males had caused significant harm when it comes to their experience in greater society. It often begins in the early elementary school years, so that by the time these young men emerge from high school, they have already been pigeonholed into harmful, archaic stereotypes. Their very behavior works against them in ways that are not true for members of other ethnic groups. When all African-Americans have to live under the same sort of stereotypes, society works less effectively for everyone. Instead, the better choice is to help all people work toward a

common ground of understanding, rather than to stereotype one particular group of people because of the names they have, the clothes they wear, or the music that they listen to. The only thing that stereotypes do is divide society, bringing fragmentation instead of harmony.

Imagine how differently a trip to the mall, or to a basketball game, or how differently an evening news report would be without the harmful effects of these stereotypes. How many reality programs involving law enforcement feature African-American males who are living down to the stereotypes that society has built for them? The problem is not a lack of desire to succeed for anyone within the community. The problem is that too many African-American males believe that even if they want to succeed, there are too many forces at work opposing them. If they work hard in school, they have to fight the stereotype that doing well in school makes you " too white." If they go get some of the fashion items or accessories they want, and they wear them out, other people just make too many assumptions about them. Even if they dress nicely and happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, people make many of those same assumptions. Too often, the answer is just to give in and let the stereotypes turn into truth. The problem is that leads to the wasting of far too many lives.

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