Hypermasculinity and homosexuality: african american culture

Through past experience and research, hypermasculinity has led African American culture to be defined as a culture that strongly fights for their sign of status, and sexual aggressivity and dominance appear to be highly regarded. Research has concluded that media and false misinterpretations of hypermasculinity are the main causes, and the strong influences they have are causing these dominant, aggressive and demanding behaviours. Research has been done through personal interviews, field work and observation. Perhaps present and previous research is showing a better understanding for many cultures as to why African American men display certain characteristics, in which demonstrate power and control. Furthermore studies are creating awareness for society, although they are not justifying these behaviours as being acceptable.

Introduction:

Life threatening situations are brought upon us every day as we walk out the front door, into the bus or into the front doors of school. Growing up in today's society and conforming to various norms, values and behaviours in which one witnesses, is traumatic and time consuming amongst young men and women, especially young African American men. Gender roles and societies' expectation are presented at such a young age, this leading to pressure and unjustified behaviours, such as drug trafficking, prostitution and pimping. Within African American society, gender roles are depicted precisely and followed. Various different ethnic groups live in different parts of the world, but the " status of black males in American society has been in flux for the last several decades (Lips 2001, p. 5)". The reasons why all these groups must show status is to prove their images of what it means to be

masculine. " Sentimental, submissive and superstitious (Lips, 2001, p. 5)" are qualities associated with females in every country. On the other hand males are more likely to be connected to characteristics resembling " dominance, forcefulness and strength (Lips, 2001, p. 5)". In a variety of Hip Hop, Rap music video clips, the images being portrayed of how young men must behave always consists of the same factors; dominance, power, aggressivity and the ' tough guy'. The question of how hypermasculinity is defined in African American culture and why sexual aggressivity and dominance appear to be highly regarded within this culture, has been an ideology for many. Despite false interpretation that the media portrays, and the pressure of " role models" and " real men", the following paper will examine the main points and answers to these questions. Furthermore it will observe the use of the term " nigga" and " gansta" from an open minded point of view.

Hypermasculinity defined and expressed

Hypermasculinity is an extremely important sign of status for black males. Hypermasculinity is defined in the (Oxford Dictionary) as an " exaggerated masculine qualities", although this term can be negative, it is also personalized when examining these behaviours as adaptive or maladaptive impassively. The term ' gansta' for example comes from the word gangster, which means a criminal who is a part of a gang; who would want to be viewed as a criminal. The other term often miss used, is the word ' pimp'. A ' pimp', is an agent for prostitutes who lives off their earnings (Oxford Dictionary)". Today pimp is being used to refer to guys who sleep with many girls, or the ones who can pick up any girl they want. Where will society draw

the line, and who comes to decide whether one corresponds to the definition of a man " an adult human male, sometimes also used to identify a male human regardless of age, as in phrases such as men's rights (Oxford Dictionary)".

DeReef examines African American behaviour and defines masculinity to " the degree where a male is able to successfully manifest their attributes (DeReef, F. J. 2006, p. 46)". These behaviours are being shown in different ways where males are modifying or distorting their real behaviours in order to conform into society, as to what seems to be " correctly" acceptable. Over a long period of time until today black compulsive masculinity has been a dysfunctional response to solving racial domination and has been causing more problems within the environment. In other words black compulsive behaviours is an ideology composed of African consciousness, in which has created a reactionary masculinity in many African American males who " seek to imitate their white male counterparts (DeReef, F. J. 2006, p. 47)". According to Wolfe African American males strongly believe it is hard to achieve masculine identity through usual work or responsibilities. They are justifying their behaviours through assumptions in which they believe that they are the only ones who must work hard and have responsibilities in order to achieve masculine identity. Maladaptive hypermasculine behaviours such as drug trafficking, or being a pimp are the ones being justified because there is not enough employment opportunities given to black men. There has been a correlation between joblessness and higher incidence of various maladaptive behaviours.

Hypersexuality and homophobia

Black males, especially young men are so afraid to be referred to as " wimps", or " homos", that they have even created the term " no homo (Masculinity, homophobia and Hip Hop, n. d)",. The term ' No homo' must be said at the end of each sentence, in order for people not to think they sound gay, or they said something gay. During an interview regarding the term " no homo", males claimed not to be reinforcing that their not gay because they know they're not, but they are just making sure that when they speak others don't assume they're gay. Homophobia is a big issue that has aroused and has become serious within the generation today. Elijah G. Ward, discusses how the black churches are also encouraging homophobia amongst black males and most of the time those who are against homosexuality are uncertain of their own sexuality and fear that they will be categorised as a community. This strongly emphasizes their powerful beliefs that heterosexuality is the right way. Many cultures do not support homosexuality, a significant amount of black people according to Elijah G. Ward, see " homosexual relationships as unacceptable and morality wrong p. 494". In the black community a famous gansta-rapper Ice Cube has implanted in one of his famous songs " true niggers ain't gay (Ward, G. E . 2005, p. 497)". Homosexuality is seen to be a sign of weakness and is associated with feminine characteristics, these also encouraging labels towards men such as ' fags' or ' queers'. The black church strongly enforces that homosexuality is not what a ' man' is and a man should be violent, demanding and have control. Their main priorities are their labels and they pay close attention, not to be called ' sissies' which is the opposite of being cool. They want to portray that hard core ' gansta' rapper role model who is

an " intensified, black male cultural reflection of patriarchy, sexism, hetorosexism and gansta-style (Ward, G. E. 2005, p. 497)".

Violent behaviours and " gansta"

Throughout history, the black population have undergone several changes some harder to adapt to then others. The main issue with behaviours constantly changing and deviance sometimes being accepted, is when you adapt to an aggressive dominant behaviour you don't want to let go of that control you have obtained. A problem which has occurred and is important to understand is to know the difference between, understanding what you have been told and believing and making your own judgements accordingly; if it is right. For example in the black society it is a " sign of status", to sleep with as many women as possible. William, A. & Wolfe, summarize in their article that " it is right to deceive a girl in order to have sex with her (Wiliam, A. & Wolfe 2003, p 848)" and that they don't believe in the use of the condom for a simple reason that they would be " undermining their masculinity (Wiliam, A. & Wolfe 2003, p. 848)". Black males have been socialized into using their penis as a way to achieve manhood. Different expectations within a culture or society and how values have changed over time. This has also caused many African American women to fear their partners, and studies say that a woman has been in an abusive relationship is more likely not to speak up and fight her partner. In regards to sexuality and power the black African American society believes that when " sexual aggression exists in a relationship (Wiliam, A. & Wolfe 2003, p. 848)", this shows violence is involved therefore he is a man; concluding violence is manly. Adolescent black males are also accounted for having a " higher victimization rate than

any other racial or age group (Gregory, S. 2007, p 371)". African American women compare to their counter parts are the ones to usually get involved in abusive relationships and stay quiet due to their surroundings and or an abusive father. African American women are more vulnerable and listen to their partners when they use aggressive behaviours. This also brings out statistics which show that over " fifty percent of babies are born to minor females, fathered by African American men. They also show that the father is usually on average 26. 1 years older (Wiliam, A. & Wolfe 2003, p. 849". From this one can clearly conclude that a young African American female is no way has interpersonal skills and dominance over her partner to demand the use of a condom.

Furthermore, black males are often taught or trained to control their emotions internally towards exercises that stimulate minor frustration, although this does not emphasise the power that long term " maladaptive, self destructive and life threatening (Gregory, S. 2007, p. 386) " consequences have above it all. An infant who is brought up in a dangerous neighbourhood, attended an unsafe school and dealt with racism is more prone to recognize feelings towards aggression and violence. Black men who have experienced a tragic event of a life threatening situation will want to be prepared if it ever happens again, this is why Gregory, S. discusses the use of carrying of a weapon. In most neighbourhoods today and schools, young teens will not walk around with knifes and use it as an excuse of security purposes, although in neighbourhoods where there are at least three people getting stabbed every day, these young kids want to feel safe. The college of New Jersey evaluated that males are more likely to carry a weapon than

females, and a survey in 2007 showed that 27% of boys did carry a weapon (Gregory, S. 2007, p. 369). Carrying a knife or a gun is a sign of security, despite its encouragement towards violent behaviours. A weapon stimulates the " fight or flight" response which is a decision you make when experiencing a dangerous situation. Is the individual going to walk away, or will he make a decision and fight. In a situation where someone is carrying a weapon, almost one hundred percent of the time if they feel secure enough to fight and win, the weapon is their support and will cause them to partake in this dangerous behaviour. Statistics show that" in 1994, gun control accounted for approximately 1, 700 Black youths aged ten to nineteen (Gregory, S. 2007, p 368)". The following statistics tell us that most of crime is being committed at a young age by youth. Young children are the ones who are victimised, especially in schools in poor neighbourhoods and the fear they experience is unpleasant and it creates an awareness of danger.

Hip Hop; a justifiable reason leading to hypermasculinity

The third point, if not one of the most influential one in society influencing power, dominance and control is Hip Hop. As a whole Hip Hop has become a culture for most black African American men and this has brought up a new image of acceptable behaviours and hypermasculinity. Many video clips you watch or lyrics you read are not only full of vulgar language, but it's always a battle over a girl, power or insulting someone's mother. Rap has created a new lifestyle for young men, and also many role models like Eminem, 50 cent and Tupac. Luxury has also become a big part of status. Many African American men today believe that rap is a way to express their true black life. There are different kinds of rap music, this having an influence on different

kind of behaviours that are being acted out in society. Rap is categorised using five different forms. " Teacher-rap, nation conscious rap, gansta rap, player/lover rap, porno rap and last religious rap (DeReef, F. J. 2006)". These different kinds of rap all influence different ideas from social commitment to struggle, romance, sexual aggressive behaviours and spirituality of Christianity and Islam. It is amazing to listen to a rap song and interpret all these different ideas, and thinks to yourself, how can a young fifteen or sixteen year old kid understand this. What is being said is sometimes due to a personal experience or the rap artist is expressing his feelings and or emotions. Media has shown violence to be a part of masculinity, that it has become a norm and is no longer deviance within society. Statistics show that one in four men will use violence against their partner, and eighty-five percent of murders are being committed by men. As one can witness sexuality, criminality and violence play a strong role as being partners. Hip Hop role models like Lil Wayne display high rates of criminality for young African American men, and also use violence and strength towards sexuality. Young males are being brain washed and influenced in regards to these being the real characteristics of men and it's a direct justification for hypermasculine behaviours.

Roots of slavery

The 17th century African American slavery was devastating and today has become a part of history. Slaves were not entitles any equal rights compare to what other had. They were demanded to do hard labour work and were treated with cruelty. Slaves were working ridiculous amount of hours a day and weren't even treated as human beings. These slaves were being sold as

if they were commodities from city to city. Slaves were seen by many as a different class of people in society. Many slaves tried to fights their master although there was not much success as they would be arrested or sent somewhere else. Slavery today plays a role on how society view black males and how they view themselves compare to society.

The word " nigga"

The word " nigga" is a good example or a word that has different meanings and that has been re-appropriated in society depending on who uses it. The word " nigga" comes from the word nigger which was originally used to refer to black people. The word was also used in the time of slavery for the black who were trying to escape. Today many African American men use the word amongst each other like white people would use the word " brother". Although if a white person were to use the word nigger it is seen as insulting and some African American men take it to the extreme of being offended they might even beat someone up. Nigger for the African American culture is a sign of self identity amongst one another and pride. It is a moment in time of history and they want to hold onto this. In the 1970 the word nigger was seen as racists, offensive and as early as today it is a word that many will refrain from using.

Slavery and hypermasculinity

Men have enslaved other men to show their mastery over them, and think it is a weakness to show or express their feelings towards other human beings. Patriarchal masculinity has caused problems that are so complex. Long after " legal racial segregation ended (Lips, 2001, p. 2)", it is still clear how the

white society treats Black men. Unless close attention is being payed to little factors which make a difference; often Black men are " referred to not as men but as boys (Lips, 2001, p. 20)". Black men lived through times where they were never given the same privileges as white men, and they always had to earn their masculinity, most of the time not feeling good about being a man. Black males were always viewed as inferior to other cultures and always had to prove themselves one way or another. They were always stereotypically related to drugs, poverty and violence. Black American youth during the period of black power to Hip Hop, were denied opportunities to exercise their citizenship; this having an effect today, they don't want to fall back down beneath everyone. Being denied opportunities, rights and not able to achieve personal goals has stuck with the black society until today. Not only is being labelled " black" a mental damage, but creates physical aggression as well.

It seems that an individual who has been constantly emasculated over the years would at least try to conform to the dominant culture in hope of their being some acknowledgment of acceptance. It has been proven throughout society especially in the United States, that growing up as a black male has been a tough process. " Being a black male is a burden at times because some people see and think of me, and men like me, as " menaces to society." The masculinity that has been a part of my life has been one that has been used to oppress others and oppress me (Clifford, A. 2006, and p. 4)".

The status of poverty for African American youth is the one that is the most revealing. " In 2001 among all American children under the age of eighteen,

the poverty rate was sixteen percent, but it was three times as high for black children; 30 percent (Collins, H, P. 2006, p. 3)". Black youth are the ones who are affected the most by social problems. Increasing employment opportunities for African American males would be ideal, this would give them a better environment, better surroundings and influence them that they are like the rest of the society. This is also why many black males rape, because that act of aggression towards a women is a form of status in which they would use in a workplace which is often not available for them. In other words, having the right to work and live a " normal life style", will affect them positively. Several African American men have shaped their understandings and realities based on the past and keep exercising those actions. Having a normal life style remains a dream for many black youths living under the age of eighteen. The main problem that touches upon poverty is the " ineffectiveness of political strategies that strive to resist it (Collins, H, P. 2006, p. 9)". The civil rights movement was the primary strategy to solve racial integration, although African American politics are trying new social challenges to meet old responses. Despite some accomplishment, African Americans are frustrated because they don't see anything opening up ahead of them and they are still dealing with high unemployment rates. Beyond social problems resulting to poverty, unemployment and lack of civil rights, masculinity today is a big part relating to the past. African American societies have developed strong personalities to prove who they are and what they are capable of. For instance when you look around today, you will see more black males working, neighbourhoods are less poor and opportunities and chances have been and are being given to black communities. Considering that young African American males

occupy such a visible position within society, they have demonstrated a zero tolerance for " race, nation, gender, age and sexuality (Collins, H, P. 2006)". All these different aspects that influenced black men have created the drives towards manhood today. When black men were in slavery they were being ordered around and always given commands; comparing that to this new generations they are the ones who are in control, and for the most are the ones giving commands.

Conclusion:

The issue of hypermasculinity is one that is quite complex and a total solution cannot be found. Research has shown that African American men believe in proving themselves as " real men"; this leading to behaviours in which can no longer be controlled. These actions are being ' tolerated' by society today especially for young black males. Sexual aggressivity, dominance and hypermasculinity are highly responded within the culture for a countless amount of reasons. Media is portraying false misinterpretations as to what it means to be masculine, there is always a constant pressure being brought upon black males which enforces violent and controlling behaviours and they are being accepted as ' normal'. Thirdly, African American culture has such a strong influential past of slavery that their culture is looking at society through a different lens.

Black male needs to accomplish giving themselves an identity that will cause them to be comfortable with themselves. Ideally black males should critically assess the dominant culture's norm of masculinity instead of reworking the norms to satisfy their social situation. Many black males have failed to see

the problem of the dominant culture's norms of masculinity in their lives. Society in general has labelled black men as being dangerous, and regardless if you know the person or not before even speaking to many black men they fall into that category that they are violent, dangerous or a sex maniac. Society has enforced black males to feel this way and cause them to do things in which they shouldn't do. It has caused a psychological problem which is hard to erase. In no way do African American men believe they can show weakness, this would mean they are not men. Violence in the media is glorified, and is exposed to children of all ages. Police will not hesitate to use violence against suspects, and these young black males are often the targets of violent behaviours in their neighbourhoods; drugs, rape, gang related fights or domestic violence.