Black America: The State of Black Men and The Effect of Stereotype Threat

April Berry[1]* and Linda J. M. Holloway[2]

[1]*Master's in Clinical Psychology, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, United States of America*
[2]*Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, Alabama, United States of America*

*Corresponding Author: April Berry, Master's in Clinical Psychology, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, United States of America.

Black Men and Stereotype Threat

Black men: the men of color, the men who most lack education, the men who lack being a man in the household, the men who are pressured among society, and the men who prisons were designed for [1]. These are stereotypical remarks that have been placed on black men within society. These remarks have shaped the way black men think of themselves and has affected their performance in different situations. This explains why black men underperform on certain tasks because of different remarks that have been embedded within them. What happened to the once hard-working black man who took care of his family, provided for his family, and led the family down the right path? This question can only be answered by one simple word: love. Somehow, someway, the black man once felt that he was no longer loved or was no longer needed, and fell from what was right to what was wrong. He began to lack the affection, the care, and the love that he rarely received. Now in today's time, the black man that once was, is now hard to find or maybe even, extinct. The question one might ask, "What stops a black man from succeeding?" These remarks are related to: education, family structure, socioeconomic factors, and the prison system. If these four factors are examined closely, researchers can understand why black men are negatively remarked in each of these four categories. As a whole, the world should come together to allow a way to get black men back on the road to success and away from stereotype threat.

Stereotype Threat, formed by Claude Steel [2] and his colleagues [3], is a theory that focuses on one being evaluated based on some type of negative stereotype. Stereotype threat is seen every day among our society. Steel [2] and his colleagues [3], say that people perform worse in situations where they are afraid they will be stereotyped negatively. A person begins to accept the stereotype, not realizing that he or she could be that one exception and could change the outlook that is being portrayed.

Michelle Alexander wrote a book titled *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* [4]. *The New Jim Crow* is a prominent account of the reawakening of a caste-like system in the United States. It has resulted in millions of African-Americans, particularly African-American men, incarcerated and then lowered to a permanent second-class status. This results in denied rights that were rightfully won in the Civil Rights Movement. Since Alexander's book publication in 2010, *The New Jim Crow*, tells a truth about our nation that our society has feared to face.

In society today, the current topic that relates to this theory is "The State of Black Men". Ebony Magazine had a write up in May of 2013 about this trending topic. This theory of Stereotype Threat supports this current topic because it shows how black men are evaluated based on negative stereotypes. These negative stereotypes influence black men's reputation throughout society and have a major impact on the African American race. Sometimes black men are placed in stereotype threat situations and those situations have immediate effects on their lives.

The theory of Stereotype Threat can be used to support this current topic by exploring how different stereotypes affect black men. It needs to be examined why black men are the men of different stereotypical remarks and why they tend to accept these remarks. This will lead to an understanding of this theory. No one should actually accept roles assigned to him or her. Different stereotypes are, in all reality, a social role that has been embedded among humans and accepted subconsciously or consciously and now has become a belief within an individual receiving a stereotypical remark. Due to this, individuals, such as black men, perform negatively when placed in situations that they have been stereotypically remarked about. These stereotype threat situations are affecting black men's reputation every single day and there is something that needs to be done.

Education

Young black men and education produces a stereotypical outlook. Most people in the world view a young black man as a failure before he even opens his mouth to speak in an educational setting. The question becomes, does the road to an education lead to prison? Maybe or maybe not. This is so hard to actually even consider. It is so sad to see a young black man having a label hanging over his head. Examining statistics among black men, one can see that when it comes to education, only 5.5% of black males 18 or older are in college [1]. The black society is raising our young black men to accept the degrading remarks and move on in life, when that should not be the case. It is bad for a black man to walk onto a school campus and be labeled as bad, or to walk into a store and be labeled a thief, or walk down the street and be labeled a murderer. As a black society, we should try to instill in our young black men that education is there for them just like anything else. If they believe they can succeed and the black society pushes them, the degrading remarks can once come to an end. Black men think that they are going to be a failure, and they are aware of the statistics, and they are aware of the stereotypes that they have and this is what keeps them from being successful in school. Only 10% are deemed proficient in eighth grade reading [1]. It is bewildering that only 5.5% of black men make up the U.S. population and college population [1]. There has to be steps taken now before statistics become lower and lower among our black men and education. If black men and the black society do not take the effort to stop this, the degrading remarks will still continue and black men will never become successful in education.

Family Structure

Education has produced a stereotype on young black men and so has family structure. Black men see the education system for them as a dead end, and now the time for family has become no hope for them. When a young black man lacks an education, it is more difficult for him to have a stable family of his own. A young, black, educated, and successful lady looking for a young black man will not look at one without qualities of her own. Therefore, this leaves the young black man unable to have a family. This is what stops a black man from being the head of a household, the position he should be. One may begin to wonder why is it that a young black man has so many hard times when it comes to family structure. The answer is simply: what happens at home. Black parents, that have great intentions, can sometimes sink their boy's chance of doing well by already having low expectations. Looking at family, only 6% of black male parents are authoritative, which means they are more responsible of their child, affectionate, establish rules, and punish children when rules are violated (Mandura, 2013). A low expectation of a young black man is the last thing that he needs. He is already labeled as a stereotype all because of the color of his skin. When black parents make low expectations of their black son, it adds to what is already labeled of him. Family structure is very hard for a black man because he first has to be raised correctly and with high expectations. The household he comes from is what is going to be the breaking point of him becoming successful. If he comes from neglect and bitterness, he will eventually fade away and become one of the statistics. In the black society, we must try to stop the statistics and not continuously add to them. A young black man should want to be that successful man that has a family that he takes care of and not behind prison walls. If the home is not what it should be, then the black man cannot be what he should be. It starts at home and builds continuously. The black society must come together to raise our young black men correctly and stop statistics, so that family structure can be established for him.

Socioeconomic Factors

The young black men are not only kept from becoming successful because of education or family structure, but also because of socio-economic factors. When examining socioeconomic factors, one can see that 38.2% of black males currently live in poverty (Harvard University, 2013). These factors are what lead to young black men being taken into prison. These socioeconomic factors usually start at home, just like establishing family structure. Most young black men grow up in a single-parent household. The mother is usually working two jobs and serving as a mother and a father in the household. The young black man sees his mom struggle, and thinks he needs to put an end to it. He goes running to the streets waiting arms. This is where he begins selling drugs, using drugs, and stop going to school. This is what contributes to the statistics and stereotypes our young black men have. Mothers seem unable to protect their boys like a father would and they let them go. Young black men are influenced by what is going on in the streets and peer pressure. It hurts to see that black mothers focus on their daughters becoming successful, but tell their young black boys that survival is what they need to focus on. This is what leads the young black man astray. Without the influence of strong churches, businesses, community centers, and political organizations, young black men are going to continue to go astray. If a young black man is not getting the love or support they need from home, they began to think it does not matter what they do, they are going to get in trouble anyway. The a black society, should come together and embrace our young black men and explain to them that these socioeconomic factors can be prevented, if they just believe that they are somebody. Neglecting our young black men is the last thing that the black society needs to do. The more we neglect and push them away, the more they are going to feel like they got to do something to get attention. Black parents and the black society must come together to try to help our black men become successful, and steer them down the right path away from these factors that are prohibiting their potential success.

Criminal Justice System

All of the difficulties that a young black man faces in school, at home, and on the streets all serve to lead black men to the American criminal justice system. There is no other country in the world that imprisons so many of its racial and ethnic minorities like the United States of America. Our society is so quick to punish young black men for anything. It starts in the school system and goes to the real world. A young black boy in school can do one little thing and get suspended or expelled. In the real world, a black man can do one little thing and be quickly sent to prison. It seems that society never deals with the reason why something happens-almost like they do not care. It hurts to see the black men population diminish because of imprisonment. If the black society do not come together and stop our black men from going to prison, there will steadily be an increase of young black men going to prison. It is so astonishing to see the statistic that 3 out of 4 young black men in the poorest neighborhoods can expect to serve time in prison [1]. Observing the prison system, one can see that 800,000 black males are currently in prison [1]. These statistics should be stopped and the only way it can be stopped is if we come together as a black society and put our black men on the right path. Once a young black man is put behind prison walls and is once freed, he is still labeled as part of the system. It is so sad to know that once a black man goes to prison and gets out, it seems as if he is stripped away of his rights. He always has difficulty of finding a job, getting a house, starting a family, and getting on his feet again. If the proper care starts at home and society and organizations step in, the black man can become successful again. It only can happen if we all come together to put statistics about the black man down the drain along with stereotypical outlooks. When statistics are thrown at black men time and time again, they begin to get the mindset that, "I will just be another statistic", instead of turning the statistic around and making it more positive for society. These statistics prove that as black men go through society they will always be pressured to fit what has already been set before them.

The State of Black Men Today

"I can't breathe." "Hands up." "Black lives matter." These are all statements that have been developed in reaction to the deaths of unarmed Black men: Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Alton Sterling, Eric Garner, and many others. To community members, activists, and racial scholars, these deaths were seen as preventable and are only examples of racial injustice that has shaped our country [5]. In each of these instances, the White police officers were not indicted for the crime or even taken to trial. Despite the attention drawn national and

international through the media, they are by no means isolated incidents. These cases shed light on how racism, defined as a "system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on race, that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities," and advantages others affects communities of color daily realities [5]. When we analyze these cases, we can tell that each of these Black individuals were subjected to Stereotype Threat. Most of these black men were from low poverty areas. That factor is one of the main factors that affect black men in society today. As we continue to see black men gunned down and murdered, it is important that we step up and help our black men change these stereotypical remarks deemed over their lives.

Future State and Implications

The State of Black Men is in need of revision. The only way the black man will ever become successful is if society come together to stop the statistics from rising and the stereotypes from producing. Black men are in need of help and society has to start in the education system, the family environment of the black man, the socioeconomic factors that are affecting the black man, and the criminal system that houses the black men. The young black man will someday be able to walk the path of success, but it will take time and work. It is important that mental health professionals and advocates for civil rights reach out to the communities that our black men are a part of and change their perspectives. Research is continuously produced in regards to black men and the criminal justice system and education system, but now it is time that society as an entity come together to aide our black men and give them the chance at life they so deserve. Black men will continue to be labeled as failures if nothing is done, but that degrading remark can turn into a positive aspiration [6,7].

Bibliography

1.   Chiles Nick. "The State of Black Boys". *Ebony* (2013): 123-142.

2.   Steele CM. "*Whistling Vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us*". New York: Norton (2010).

3.   Steele CM., *et al*. "Contending with group image: The Psychology of stereotype and social identity threat". In Zanna, M.P. (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, San Diego: Academic Press (2002): 379-440.

4.   Forman James J. "Cial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow". Faculty Scholarship Series. Paper 3599 (2012).

5.   Garcia JJ and Mienah Z. "Black Lives Matter: A Commentary on Racism and Public Health" (2015).

6.   Myers David G. "Social Psychology". New York, NY: McGraw Hill (2012).

7.   The Schott Foundation for Public Education. The Urgency of Now (2012).

Volume SI Issue 1 July 2017