

The relationship between the media's representation of Black males and their mental
health and life



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The relationship between Black men and the media's representations

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Abstract

In this present 2021 year, many would argue that society has made much progress in the realm of racial equality. Regardless of whether people agree or disagree with that, it is imperative and a must that the impact the media has had and is still having on people's lives, but in particular, Black men's, be acknowledged. American history contains a vast amount of traumatic experiences in regards to this specific community, dating as far back as the 1800's (Taylor, 2019). A fair amount of these traumatic experiences are related to the media and its publicization of said experiences. These situations Black men were and still are forced to undergo, have impacted the way they interact with the world around them, the way they represent and view themselves and their mental health. There have been many studies conducted to determine exactly how these men are impacted by the media's stereotyping and racist tendencies, and often these studies support the claim that the impact is negative. Future directions that examine how these media-driven stereotypes can be eliminated from society entirely should be pursued, as they are more detrimental than not.

Keywords: Black men, media representations, lifestyles, mental health

Introduction

There is no way to accurately pinpoint exactly when Black men began to experience public scrutiny. Dating as far back to the 1800's, there is evidence that Black men have been faced with public misrepresentations in the media (History.com, 2009). These misrepresentations have become the root of a plethora of problems that rose with the introduction of mass media. Black men have stated that these falsehoods give them a false sense of self, low self esteem, subject them to stereotyping and mental illnesses (The Opportunity Agenda, 2012). Misrepresentations and stereotyping have become so popular and inevitable in our society, that for some Black men, it feels like a rite of passage (Brooms & Perry, 2016).

There is scholarship to support the belief that the media driven misconceptions result in the altering of the public's relationship with Black men (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). A few of the ways the attitudes of non-Black consumers become troublesome post media publications are, but are not limited to the following: widespread hostility towards all Black men, overstated views about Black men and crime, complete disregard for any outside factors that may contribute to their struggles, public approaches to discipline for minute issues and the absolute absence of all sympathy and empathy for Black males (The Opportunity Agenda, 2012). All of these traits reportedly derived from the image painted of Black men with the media's paintbrush. While this is problematic simply because readers are presented with false illustrations, it also provides the subjects of these accounts with the unsaid responsibility to prove others wrong. Beyond the fact that these interpretations are just inaccurate, they are often the reason that the reputations of Black men become tainted.

Accurate representations are extremely important in this situation as the impacts of inaccuracies are great and long lasting. It is just as imperative that the origination of these stereotypes be targeted, identified and combatted.

Goals of Research

The most prominent goals of this research is to bring awareness and understanding to this topic. These continued misrepresentations are not a new problem, nor are they problems that can be fixed within a short period of time. While the media's misrepresentations disproportionately impact Black men, the solution to that must come from people of all races, genders, and ages. I will do this by analyzing the history of Black men and the media, the present relationship between Black men and the media, as well as the impact these relationships have on Black men.

Chapter 2: History of Black Men and the Media

Media outlets have been the pillar of communication for years on end. When social networking sites and electronics weren't yet introduced, there were newspapers and theatrical productions, and before that, just oral communication. No matter what the method of communication is, the goal remains the same: deliver information to consumers. However, in the same way that biases are often present in interpersonal relationships, subconscious or conscious, they are present in these realms as well. Due to the media's widespreadness and societal value, their content has great influence on society. In order to understand the power and development of media, it is pertinent to understand its history. In this chapter, I will visit the timeline, progression and goals of the media in regards to Black men.

America's transitions often align with the way the media portrays people of color. Dating back to 1600's when slavery was alive and acceptable, Black people's worth and importance was that of an animal, if not less. Black women, men and kids were beaten, tortured, bought and sold for terrifyingly low prices and often sexually abused (Elliott and Hughes, 2019). The reason for this is simply because they were considered to be inferior. In fact, it was punishable for slaves to learn how to read and/or write (Thirteen.org, n.d.). These attempts at preventing people of color from advancing in society were unfortunately temporarily successful, as life for Black people did not get any easier even after the abolition of slavery. Due only to what the White people who used to own slaves said, it was nationally understood that most people of color were incapable of doing anything but taking orders and serving those around them.

During the enslavement of Black people, many stereotypes began to surface. These same stereotypes would hold their place in today's society. Black men and women are considered to be hypersexual, aggressors, academically incapacitated, as well as lazy (Samuels, 2007). The

comparison often made between Black people and primates began in this time period too. When slave traders were attempting to justify the purchase and exploitation of Black people, traders often compared them to animals, to make their actions not seem so grotesque. The sole purpose of this was dehumanization. Additionally, "...a simian's behavior portrays popular negative stereotypes of Blacks that inadvertently reinforce the association between monkeys and Black people. The animals are lazy and avoid work, have super strength, are good dancers, jokesters, and are not very intelligent", Edith Campbell writes, in a 2019 article titled *The Problem with Picture Book Monkeys: Racist imagery associating simians with Black people has a long history*. Presenting these subliminal messages to those that are less likely to, and may not ever, pick up on them is a common strategy. This is similar to conditioning. Though the reason behind it may have now changed, this racially motivated development is still utilized on many platforms and works to train consumers to adapt these ideologies. Frequently these methods are directed towards one specific group of people: children. There are several children's books, television shows, nursery rhymes like "*Three Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*", and more child oriented commodities that feature this stereotype. The original lyrics to the aforementioned nursery rhyme actually contain a slur. In place of the word monkey, there was a very offensive word used to refer to Black people (Powell, 2014). While the lyrics are harmless when the slur is removed, it is significant to note that the other lyrics are about monkeys jumping and acting unruly, actions that are typically negatively associated with Black men.

In 1830, in New York, the first minstrel show was born. Minstrel shows are defined as an "American theatrical form, popular from the early 19th to the early 20th century, that was founded on the comic enactment of racial stereotypes" (Britannica, 2021, *Minstrel Show*). Actors would exaggerate their mannerisms, speak with incorrect grammar, pose as thieves and act

illiterate, all things associated with common Black stereotypes. They were characterized by white actors who painted their faces pitch black and wore raggedy, tattered clothes. Often they used shoe polish or burned cork ashes to color their faces, an action that is now referred to as “blackface”. Eventually these shows migrated from just the stage to other platforms and became movies and radio and television shows as well. Minstrel shows lost their appeal in 1964 and were then performed much less. However, their impact was long lasting.

Generally, Black people continued to be underrepresented in the media. However, when they are in the media, seldom is it in a positive light. Racism is a learned behavior (Davis, 2020). No child enters the world already aware of the prejudices that have been in place for decades or centuries even. Thus, lining children’s media with racial implications is likely the reason these stereotypes continue. In March of 1998, 1,200 children, ages ranging from 10 to 17, participated in a study titled *How Children Perceive TV’s World of Diversity*. The article reads, “The findings show that kids of all races are aware of media stereotypes starting at a young age and understand the power of television to shape opinions”, Lois Salisbury says (1998). The polls also found that because of the content children absorb through television, they often associate positive traits with White fictional characters and people, and negative ones with Black fictional characters and people. Among the positive traits are: financial literacy and wealth, intelligence and leadership, with the negative traits being: laziness, rebellion and lawbreaking and poverty. One of the White, female participants even told interviewers, “You always see Black people doing drugs and carrying around drugs, shooting people and stealing things” (1998). The media begins its subliminal targeting of Black people at a young age. It is nearly impossible for anybody to completely avoid exposure to the stereotypes. Additionally, the exposure is also not exclusive to just White children, impacting the way they view themselves and their counterparts

of other races. Black children, too, are exposed to these stereotypes that are harmful not only to the way they view their family members or friends, but themselves as well (McCool, 2019). The lack of representation, accurate or not, opens the door to several issues surrounding Black children and eventually adults' understanding and views of themselves. As a child of color, to only witness a character that looks like them exhibit negative behavior, this can cause problems with self esteem and can be the reason for the development of an inferiority complex (McCool, 2019). These juvenile insecurities often follow Black men into their adulthood.

In the following time period, the 1960s to the 1970's, the media field was dominated by White people. This caused Black people to not really be in control of the roles they played or messages that were being relayed. Additionally, oftentimes White people played the role of Black people, implying Black people were incapable. Because Black people were not provided with the chance to represent themselves in the way they wanted to, if they were given the chance to act at all, this caused other races to only see what life as a Black person was like from one point of view. And frequently, the point of view was negative. An excerpt from *Diversity in U.S. Mass Media*, reads: "The harmful depiction of Blacks was problematic because these films were successful and often provided a segregated society, the only glimpse into Black life available to White Americans" (Luther wet al., 2012, p. 59). Since the stereotypes about Black people that are acknowledged today were created by their White and Non-Black counterparts, this is counterproductive for the elimination of them.

A very significant part of life for Black males in the 1990's was the Superpredator Theory. The Superpredator Theory, was introduced and popularized by John J. Diluio Jr, a criminologist. Superpredator, which is now often regarded as the Superpredator Myth, proposed that there were individuals that were able to commit heinous crimes and feel no remorse,

specifically people under eighteen. This belief caught light a few years after a vicious attack, with alleged assailants known as the “Central Park 5”. The gory attack took place in April of 1989 in Manhattan, New York’s Central Park. A White woman that was jogging through the park was barbarically attacked and raped. Less than a year later, 5 teenage boys, 4 Black and 1 Hispanic, were accused and sentenced to serve anywhere between 5 and 15 years in prison. Despite there being evidence that the group did not commit this crime, they all spent the remainder of their juvenile years imprisoned. The group’s charges were eventually vacated in 2002.

These juveniles, among other juvenile boys of color, were disproportionately affected by the Superpredator myth. DiIulio alleged that in the next decade following the Central Park attack, the number of juvenile criminals would increase by 30,000. However, this was false. Even though the number of juveniles arrested and convicted decreased, the media still made use of this. During the superpredator era, children that were found guilty of crimes were often tried and treated as adults.

As we approach the present time period, we see these stereotypes surface even in non-fiction platforms. Sometimes when news reporters are covering a story and the allegations are directed towards a Black male, their coverage is more about their criminal history, if they have one, than the present problem at hand (Gray, 2020) . Frequently irrelevant parts of their histories are recalled and included within the news article. Sometimes news outlets even use a mugshot or an inappropriate picture of the subject. In a study conducted by Media Matters, they found the following: “...between August 18 and December 13, 2014, the stations (WCBS, WNBC, WABC, and WNYW) used their late-night broadcasts to report on murder, theft, and assault cases with Black suspects at much higher rates than Black suspects were actually arrested

for those crimes.” They also said “According to New York City Police Department statistics, African Americans were suspects in 54 percent of murders, 55 percent of thefts, and 49 percent of assaults. But the suspects in the stations' coverage were Black in 74 percent of murder stories, 84 percent of theft stories, and 73 percent of assault stories. Despite these numbers, Black people were still disproportionately affected by the coverage. Consumers rely on local and national news outlets to deliver pertinent information to the public. But when the information that is being delivered is deliberately damaging the reputation of one race in particular, more than just information is being delivered.

Additionally, in an article written by Richard J. Lundman, he hones in on the “newsworthiness and selection bias in news about murder”. Lundman analyzes past research about the topic to determine what aspects of a crime must be present in order to be considered newsworthy. Lundman found that Black on White crime is more prevalent in the news because of the insinuations that inevitably present themselves. He writes, “Homicides involving Black violators and White victims are therefore more likely to be seen as newsworthy because they can be scripted using stereotypes grounded in White racism and White fear of Black Crime (Lundman, 2003). He continues to say, “Conversely, homicides with White violators and Black victims and homicides with female violators and male victims are less likely to be perceived as newsworthy because they are contrary to taken-for-granted assumptions grounded in race and gender stereotypes, lack obvious templates and are therefore more difficult to script (Lundman, 2003).

The media's tactics for representing men have changed with time, but their delivery still ultimately provides the public with warped perceptions of Black men.

Chapter 3: Media and News Depictions

Similar to the stereotypes from years ago that were present in Minstrel shows, Black men are still mostly portrayed as the following: murderers, drug dealers, absent fathers, abusers, uneducated and poor, among other things. Whether it is a television show, newstory, social media posting or movie, Black men are continuously casted as these roles, and perhaps the reasoning behind this is simply because the writers and producers are White, male or both. According to statistics collected in 2017 by Fortune magazine, about 89% of the executive producers for the four major broadcasting stations in the United States, ABC, Fox, NBC and CBS, are white and 79% of them are male. In this chapter, I will address the consistent representations of Black men that consumers see across media platforms in regards to: occupations, family dynamics, intelligence and character traits.

Occupations

On television shows specifically, people of color are frequently shown to work for somebody, as opposed to being the person that people work for (Nittle, 2021). For example, Black people are selected to play the roles of servants, babysitters, cleaners, assistants, unemployed or other jobs that are typically considered to be lower on the hypothetical totem pole. White people, men in particular, are seldom portrayed as anything but the family's breadwinner. They often have high profile jobs, (i.e. lawyer, doctor, CEO), a great educational background and are wealthy. This adversely affects the image of the races but specifically Black children. Carolyn Stroman writes. "...Black parents and professionals became particularly concerned that television might (1) influence Black children's attitudes toward their own racial group; (2) facilitate Black children's development of low self-concepts through its

nonrecognition of negative, stereotyped treatment of Blacks; and (3) compete with Black family socialization by teaching attitudes and behavior that are not taught in the home” (1984).

Intelligence

Like the ways Black people were portrayed in minstrel shows, Black men are often portrayed as unintelligent. In fact, Black men are frequently compared to animals, specifically anything considered to be a primate. Primates is an animal classification that includes monkeys, gorillas, apes and many other kinds of mammals. A few months ago, in September of 2021, the major social media platform known as Facebook was forced to address a mistake made by their Artificial Intelligence software. The software asked Facebook users while they were watching a video of Black men, if they wanted to “see more videos about primates”.

Researchers attribute much of the inability to remove these stereotypes to a theory called the Racial Empathy Gap. The Racial Empathy Gap is built on the premise that psychological and physical pain is not felt by Black and White people in the same way. The more privilege or intellect the subject of the matter is perceived to have, the less pain they are believed to feel and vice versa. In almost all cases, people of color are perceived to have less privilege, thus feeling more pain. A study performed at the University of Milano-Bicocca found that this twisted insight is not exclusive to just non-Black people. Black people, too, assume that people in their community are not impacted by misfortunes in the same way White people are.

Family Dynamics

Research done by Dr. Travis L. Dixon, titled *A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families: representations of families, by race, in news and opinion media*, examined applicable news stories from January 2015 to December 2016. The focus of the research was to determine to

what extent the media warped Black family dynamics and participated in “racially biased coverage, in both word and image”. The study analyzed both print and visual mediums.

The same study found that the media overrepresented Black families as poor and underprivileged. Black families are overrepresented as impoverished by 32%, while White families are underrepresented as such by 27%. Black men, if they are casted as fathers, are often portrayed as absent or seen abandoning their children, even though there is no evidence that this happens at a higher rate in the Black community than in the white (Mohdin, 2017). Another study conducted by the CDC analyzed the amount of time Black fathers spend with their children. Researchers Dr. Jo Jones and Dr. William Mosher found the following: “Black fathers were more likely to have bathed, dressed, or helped their children use the toilet every day compared with white fathers; Black fathers were more likely to take their children to or from activities every day compared with white fathers; and a larger percentage of Black fathers helped their children with homework every day in the last four weeks compared with white fathers (Jones & Mosher, 2013).”

Character Traits

Another very common way that Black men are portrayed in the media is as criminals or gang members. Statistically, 64% of gangster or hoodlum roles are portrayed by Black men, despite them only accounting for 35% of America's off-screen gang population (National Gang Center, 2011). That is not to say that there are not some Black men that are engaged in criminal or gang activity, but those words are not synonymous or exclusive to just the African-American race. Since gang members and criminals are always characterized as violent and belligerent, naturally many people become uncomfortable. In fact, when some White people are presented with the face of a Black male that they do not know, the fear region in the brain, also known as

the amygdala, often lights up (The Opportunity Agenda, 2012), a neurological response that is frequently unnoticed. This is an example of unconscious bias. Since this stereotype has become very common, Black men experience hardships in several settings. When they are hospitalized, some doctors do not give them the same level of care that White men receive (Bridges, 2018). When Black men apply for a job, they may not receive the same consideration as White men (Pager, 2015). While the reason for different levels of care or not being considered for a job may not always be race related, there are certainly times where it is.

A study that was done by Thomas E. Ford titled “Effects of Stereotypical Television Portrayals of African-Americans on Person Perception” (1997) visited the way television role models if Black and White people travel off-screen. He recruited 40 college aged students for this study and asked them to watch skits that feature a White or Black person exhibiting either neutral or stereotypical comedy. The results of the study were that these stereotypes seen in the media are indeed successful at influencing people’s opinions of African Americans, causing them to have a more negative perception. But the skits did not impact the perception of white people.

The reason for this is unknown. However, speculation suggests Black people are able to deal with the side effects of these stereotypes because they have had to for years and eventually become desensitized to it. While racism definitely impacts the Black community at a higher rate than the White, it is unsafe to assume that every person of color has experienced racism directly. But, because television shows, movies and other mediums depict Black lives in one consistent way, that is often viewed as the truth. For those who do not hail from a heavily diverse background, they have no experience to compare it to, resulting in the development of an inaccurate understanding of people of Color.

Dylann Roof is a White man that has now been charged with the murder of nine Black people in a church. When it was breaking news, the coverage his story received was very different from that of his Black criminal counterparts. An NBC News headline read “Charleston church shooter Dylann Roof was caught in ‘internet evil,’ family says”, instead of including the facts. The fact is, his motivation for the murders stemmed from deeply rooted beliefs in White supremacy. However, when a young Black man was on the news for shielding his mother from gunfire in the same time period, the news headline read “Son with troubled past shields mom from gunfire, dies saving her in South Chicago.” The news oftentimes highlights the accomplishments of White criminals and lists a possible reason behind the crime, while they do the complete opposite for men of color. A study conducted by the University of Pittsburgh’s Office of Public Affairs revealed the following: “young Black men and boys rarely appear in daily national and local American news media. But, when they do, the tendency is to present them as the focus of crime coverage, replete with mug shots and perp walks” (2011). In doing this in lieu of writing a leading headline, this can subconsciously encourage people to make inferences about the alleged.

In a 2020 report conducted by Nielsen titled “Being Seen On Screen: Diverse Representation & Inclusion on TV”, they studied 2019’s top 100 programs and used the top 10 stars to determine the breakdown of representation. One of the major findings of the study was that heterosexual white men are overrepresented in television. White people of any gender are on screen about 81% of the time, yet white people are only 60% of the population in the United States. The roles of white men do not often vary.

Chapter 4: Fallacy of Media Portrayal

In many articles I have read on this subject, it seems that the word “fear” has been found to be almost synonymous with the word “Black”. Studies have been conducted on this exact topic several times, but with different methodologies. However, the results have been fairly uniform: Black men are most often criminalized and feared by other races. The criminalization of Black men, or Black people in general, is a very well researched area. In this chapter, I will examine the damage the media’s representation has done in regards to Black men.

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and the unfortunate plethora of those unarmed that were killed before and after them, have had a continuing impact on the world, but specifically the lives and mental health of Black people, and even more specifically, Black men. As a result, they have had to alter their lifestyles and some have become mentally ill.

As I’ve previously discussed, the media has a large impact on consumer opinions, views and beliefs. A study conducted by Eric Arias in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2019 utilized an audio soap opera that demoralized abuse against women and attempted to combat gender norms. Participants were invited to listen to the performance in either a public setting with others present, by themselves or through a speaker in the town. The study found that information that is being shared in a social or face-to-face interaction does indeed influence viewers’ beliefs, more so than when information is shared privately. This is similar to the impact news media has on society when their portrayals of Black men are broadcasted, since the broadcasts are public.

Studies are undoubtedly a good way to receive information about a topic. But an anecdote can also provide insight into situations that may be unfamiliar to some. In an interview done by Michel Martin, a writer for National Public Radio (NPR), discussed societal experiences

with Black men. A law professor at Georgetown University named Paul Butler, spoke about one of the times he was racially profiled by police officers. He talks about how he was followed by police officers through his fairly affluent neighborhood in Washington, D.C. The officers asked that he enter his house before they felt they could leave, because they believed he was a burglar. Even though the officers following him were Black too, that did not alleviate the stigma. Another participant, a blogger by the name of Doyin Richards, talked about his experience with a similar situation, only his interaction was with another civilian. The people near him, complete strangers, were too afraid to stand next to Richards and his daughter while they were at the bank. He recalled explaining to his daughter that this type of situation was not foreign to him, as his skin color is frequently weaponized. In both situations, the victims talked about how they realized they were in this situation simply because of the color of their skin. Neither one of these men had any prior encounters with their accusers.

Although racial stereotypes do disproportionately affect Black men, they are no strangers to the fact that their peers are sometimes responsible for crimes. But, they also acknowledge they are not the only subgroup that is. It is important to take the fact that stereotypes are frequently founded on the basis of interactions with individuals, as opposed to groups, into account. It is clearly impossible for people to interact with every person of one race before determining whether or not these accusations are accurate, resulting in the discovery of other methods.

One of the most common stereotypes associated with Black men and arguably the most damaging, is the belief that Black men are naturally aggressive and violent. In Birt Duncan's 1976 study titled *Differential social perception and attribution of intergroup violence: Testing the lower limits of stereotyping of Blacks*, he conducted an experiment using 96 White college students to record their perception of both Black and White people when they were seen shoving

another person. His study found that the shove was perceived to be of a more aggressive nature when it was done by a Black person than it was when the perpetrator was White, despite the interactions being identical. Perhaps his findings, that support this stereotype, are related to the excessive force used by people in power.

Ahmaud Arbery was running near his home when he was approached, shot and killed by two White neighbors. Trayvon Martin was returning home from the local gas station carrying a drink and candy, when he was shot and killed by a volunteer watch person. Tamir Rice was shot and killed almost instantly when the police responded to a call about a suspect playing with a gun, despite the fact that Tamir was a young twelve years old and the gun was fake. George Floyd was murdered by a police officer after being falsely accused of using counterfeit currency. Breonna Taylor was murdered by a police officer while she was asleep in her own bed, in her own house. None of these specific acts that led to their murders were violent or punishable by law, yet these actions were still met with death. These deaths work as examples of how Black men are feared, simply because of their skin tone.

Their deaths each received a great deal of media attention and sparked controversy, but simultaneously did more than just that. According to a statistic released by the Washington Post, between the time period of 2015 to September of this year, 2021, 37 per million Black people were fatally shot by police officers, compared to 15 per million White people. These stereotypes that are often derived from media platforms are responsible for being detrimental to more than just reputations.

Derrick R. Brooms and Armon R. Perry's, "It's Simply Because We're Black Men": Black Men's Experiences and Responses to the Killing of Black Men", examines the aftermath of the murders of Black people by police officers. Researchers asked participants how being

racially profiled and stereotyped feels. They listed several emotions that include but aren't limited to feeling embarrassed, disappointed, pissed off, annoyed, enraged, furious, powerless, vulnerable, and less than human.

For Black men all over, fear skyrocketed. Knowing that their brothers, fathers or even themselves could be treated with such little compassion but such great violence for doing something as simple as running in their neighborhood, getting candy at their local convenience store or sleeping in their bed has caused them to move with much hesitance. In the wake of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd's murders, Shawn Drogmole began to be afraid to do things that he previously did fearlessly. In his interview with the Washington Post, he says, "What happened to these men could easily happen to me. I became scared to walk past my porch". He continued to say: "Yesterday, I wanted to walk around my neighborhood but the fear of not returning home to my family alive kept me on my front porch" (2020). People being afraid of Black men has in turn resulted in them being afraid too.

Because of the biases ingrained in society, some Black men report that they often find themselves attempting to make themselves seem less threatening to others around them. In the latter half of the aforementioned NPR interview, the interviewees talk about how they work to be appealing to other races, in hopes of not being feared. Butler said, "When you're in an elevator or walking behind somebody and you feel like you have to perform to make them feel safe, it's like apologizing for your existence. So I am in an elevator with a white woman and I have to look down to make her feel comfortable. It's like 'excuse poor Black me.' And you get angry and you get tired. But as a prosecutor, you also kind of understand where some [of] these attitudes come from." Richards sympathized with that experience and spoke about the ways he, too, has to make it clear that he is not a threat before the stereotypes surface. He recollects the way he would have

to whistle or sing kid-friendly songs, as a way to let outsiders know that beyond his skin color, he is a human and a father, somebody that doesn't have to be feared. This is a process known as signaling.

A 2019 statistic alarmingly shows that Black Americans only account for 13% of the population. Conversely, they account for 23% of those killed by police officers. A study conducted in the same year by McLeod, M.N, et. al, found that most of the studies they reviewed recognized strong associations between police encounters, fatal or not, and mental distress (2019). The associated mental illnesses include but are not limited to psychotics experiences, depression, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and suicidal ideation and actions.

Rashawn Ray, an associate sociology professor at the University of Maryland spent some time studying the way men of color represent themselves in public (2020). He conducted both a quantitative and qualitative study, constructed of 500 working class and educated Black and White individuals. He found that the Black men that were a part of communities, professionally or personally, that are dominated by White people, commonly felt uneasy. The uneasiness stemmed from witnessing those of the same race die for doing typical daily activities. His data also supported the belief that Black men not only felt uncomfortable during these times, but also felt their lives were at risk. Continued feelings of fear and unsafety can result in the development of clinical depression, PTSD, etc. (Delagran, 2020).

Research done by Stanford University Psychologists, Jennifer Eberhardt and Phillip Atiba Goff found that people who were born much after the civil rights movement, claimed to have no prior knowledge of the ape narrative. However, their judgments of Black people reflected the opposite. In one of their studies, they found that white undergraduate students were more likely to attempt to justify brutal acts by police officers on Black suspects when their

actions and characteristics were described with subtle, yet specific words. The words were all words that are often associated with primates, words such as “chimp” or “gorilla” (Staples, 2018).

The portrayals of Black men in the media could also be a factor in the mistreatment they receive from police officers. The Rutgers school of public health conducted a study, focused on the role of the media in the relationship between police officers and Black males. The study focused on the coverage of Michael Brown's murder in Ferguson, Missouri. This murder was heavily publicized because of the manner in which he was killed and the aftermath. Brown was fatally shot by officer Darren Wilson in 2014. Ferguson was filled with protesters and ultimately forced their governor to declare a state of emergency. The Rutgers researchers, the lead one being Pamela Valera, reviewed 40 articles from some of the biggest newspapers. They analyzed The New York Times, The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times, focusing solely on how race, the physicalness and the masculinity of both the victim and murderer, were portrayed. Reporters covered both of their childhoods and backgrounds, using very different sorts of words. The study's results makes mention of one news outlet including a quote from Wilson, in which he referred to Brown as a monster and compared the tussle that ensued between the two to “a 5 year-old trying to hold on to Hulk Hogan”. This comparison aligns closely with a long-standing stereotype of Black men. Black men are often considered to be hypersexual, aggressive, scary or violent, even if they have no history of that.

Black boys and men are not only misrepresented in the media, but overrepresented as well. Black men are accused of committing violent crimes more than any other race. No matter who the consumer is, people are still susceptible to absorb the negative stereotypes presented by

the media. Studies show that because of the aggressive nature Black men are associated with, they are often assumed to be able to withstand much more pain and presented with less empathy.

The Black race is so frequently predisposed to trauma. Black people have been subjected to cruel and unusual punishment, as well as several types of abuse frequently during the United State's history. In the 1800s, Black people were ripped apart from their homes, parents, kids and lives as they knew it and forced into enslavement where they were viciously beaten, raped, bought and sold, forced to provide labor for free in less than humane working conditions and often died during the process. They were also prevented from learning how to read and write (Thirteen.org, n.d.). In the same year slavery ended, 1865, Black Americans were then faced with the plague of the Klu Klux Klan, or KKK. The KKK was notorious for the lynching of Black people, most often Black men and boys, and harrassing them. Shortly after, in 1877, Jim Crow laws began, segregating Black and White lives, providing White people with luxurious amenities, while prohibiting Black people from using them. The harassment continued. Even then, police brutality had a place in society. Black men were also used unethically in the famous and unfortunate Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, involving 600 Black men and killing at least 28. Following the experiment came the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, where Black people were forced to suffer through the attacks of White Supremacists, like the Birmingham Church Bombing. Black men and boys had to suffer through situations like the aforementioned Superpredator Era in the 1990's. All of these injustices leading up to the current and heavily publicized #BlackLivesMatter movement, a movement aimed at creating awareness for police brutality. Though the majority of Black people alive today did not live to see every one of the historical landmarks previously mentioned, the effects are still felt. This lengthy and painful

history is responsible for the way Black men are forced to live their lives today: afraid, depressed and traumatized.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

After much research and reading, I have concluded that this battle of Black men versus the media, is not new and is very well explored. Even before the media platforms evolved into what they are today, Black boys and men were and still are subjected to these negative stereotypes.

The media plays a large role in the perception others have in regards to Black men, as well as the image they have of themselves. However, the vastness of it has shown to be more harmful than helpful. Looking forward, the public elimination of the stereotypes that have society in a chokehold, would be beneficial for Black men. In the same way that the media is responsible for the spread of these stereotypes, they should also be tasked with the removal.

Through the research I conducted, I did not find much scholarship about the stereotypes about White men or the way the media impacts them. In the future, this should be pursued, as it could be a very helpful aid to compare the ways they are stereotyped, to the ways Black men are.

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