Controlling Images: Black Male and Female Representations

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Abstract

American culture has a very rich history that has shaped our society in the present day. One thing in history that has stayed with us throughout the years is racism. This phenomenon has had a big impact on our society throughout the years. And if it never came into existence, our world would be a much different place. Racism affects any and everything imaginable. It affects the way we see each other, communicate, and interact with each other. Slavery was a turning point for racism and it allowed for racism to flourish by dehumanizing people just because of the color of their skin. This concept transgressed itself into the civil rights era. Here, black Americans were freed from their physical shackles and indentured servitude, but they couldn't escape the shackles placed on them by society. They are hard to throw away because the images that were used to justify the harsh reality of slavery are still used to justify the mistreatment of black Americans today. This paper will examine how images that were created in the past that depict black people as less than are still being used today to continue the ongoing narrative. These images were made from white supremacists beliefs to keep black people as subservient. After being treated as such for decades, it is hard to break the shackles of white supremacy. In order to be seen for our full potential, we have to get rid of these ideals to further help black people advance in society socially and economically.

Introduction

Powerful controlling images have created and maintained misguided messages about the black community for decades. These images are major contributors to the oppression and discrimination that the black community faces today and aid policies and behaviors that are created to maintain the structural barriers that impede black advancement. Collins (1998) insists that the dominant group uses controlling influences to justify racism, sexism, poverty and other

forms of oppression as a natural part of everyday life. Anti-black policies first became a popular technique to keep the black community as secondary after the abolishment of slavery through the thirteenth amendment. Even prior to this turning point in history, these controlling images were already circling around society and established how black people were represented by persuading everyone to believe that black people are animalistic savages who need to be controlled. These representations have created a strain between these races. So how does this relate to the present day? Well, these images have been brought down through the line of history. And though the exact depiction of these images aren't the same as they were before, they are equally as damaging to African Americans today as they were to those back then. For example, the image of the brute was used in history's past to display black men as savages who needed to be supervised and punished through labor. This image can be seen in today's society through the depiction of black men as thugs. Another example would be the image of the sapphire. This image portrays black women as outspoken and aggressive. This can be translated intoday's society through the image of the angry black woman. These images will be further discussed later in this paper.

The question that is left unanswered is how has history's representation of Black Americans affected their relationship with society in the present day and what images have been used to impede black advancement? This question is important because a change needs to be made to fit the changing societal norms. Discrimination should be a thing of the past. Black people being the recipients of the abuse has stopped their chances of succeeding and held them back. We deserve to be seen as equals, so bringing attention to this issue is the one way we can produce much needed change.

This thesis is structured upon the theoretical works of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks. These women detail powerful messages of black apprection, self love, and the betterment

of black people. They explain this by looking at the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism. Their works described in detail how all of these tactics were created and used by the dominant group to keep black people as secondary citizens in all regards: socially, economically, etc. Combined with the theories of these legendary feminists, academics, and theorists, labeling theory is used to describe this phenomenon of the mistreatment and judgment imposed onto and within the black community.

While keeping everything in mind, answering such a loaded question comes with doing a lot of reading and pulling from my own experiences as an African American woman in America. I looked at the representations that were used to depict black people and looked at the negative effects that these images have and how they shape the perceptions that follow this group of people. To do this, I divided the literature into two sections. In the first section I looked at images that desexualize and hypersexualize black women. These images include the mammy, the matriarch, the sapphire, the jezebel, and the welfare mother. In the second section, I looked at images that hypersexualize and criminalize black men. These images include the brute, the savage, the mandingo, and the angry black man. I then explained how these images are destructive through the use of labeling theory. Finally, I used these images to support the theory that these images which were derived from white supremacist fear and intimidation is the reason black people aren't able to move outside the box that keeps them subservient socially and economically.

Historical Background

America is supposed to be a place that is accepting of all people from various, widespread backgrounds. We're expected to be able to provide new and fair opportunities for everyone and care for the well being of all. If this is the goal and purpose of American society,

why does only one specific group of people benefit from everything that America is supposed to offer, while leaving the rest to fend for themselves? White people in America have always taken the role of being superior to everyone else. Slavery is a prime example of the superiority complex that has consumed them as far back as we could possibly imagine. Taking on this assumption of overruling power, it has left many other racial groups behind making it harder for them to survive and advance above the barriers that stand in their way. The one group that's most affected by the effects of white supremacy are Black or African American people in American society.

The effects of slavery have plagued the mindset of this country. With its creation, slavery has led to years of discrimination, racial bias and injustice, etc. The people who pay the price are the descendants of those who were stolen from their homeland in Africa and were forced to come to America facing unsafe working conditions, horrible treatment and punishments, and living as though they are lesser than everyone else. Emerged from slavery came segregation. Segregation in America was a nasty truth that we had to bear and be the recipients of. If we truly think about it, slavery and segregation arent that far in the past. Slavery wasn't abolished, legally, until December 6, 1865 with the passing and ratification of the thirteenth amendment and segregation did not end until, first, the passing of Brown v. The Board of Education, which desegregated schools in 1954 and it wasn't officially over until the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. These are very recent dates in American history that have granted people of color, but specifically African Americans, equivalent rights to White Americans. Yet, not much has changed from then to now.

As a black woman living in American society and learning about the abuse and trauma that my people have endured is heartbreaking. Even in the present day, black people continue to

be treated as subservient and face similar abuse as back then. The only difference in the abuse we face now compared to back then is the fact that it has modernized itself to fit into the present. Racism and discrimination still exist greatly. The scary thing is, not as many people are as open with their racist beliefs or there are a significant amount of laws that have been established that allow racism to go undetected and unpunished.

Where is this going? Why is it 2023 and African Americans are still seen as secondary? That is due to the way African Americans were represented in our nation's past. Many damaging stereotypes were created to harm African Americans and to trick them into thinking that they are less than and to have all of society continue to think that they are less than. These images continue to be one of the leading causes as to why it's so hard for black people to advance and break free of the images that control how they are viewed in society. These controlling images and inaccurate representations of black people are harmful and damaging in advancement, mentally and physically. With the repeated use and abuse of these images, white supremacist values will continue to thrive in its mission, which is to keep black people in the bottom so that they can remain superior.

Literature Review

This controversial opinion is something that has continued to remain in constant debate: Black women are the most oppressed group in America. Let me explain why we're the most oppressed. To preface, I do not take the topic of oppression as a battle between different societal groups because each group faces their own struggles that make it hard to advance. My saying black women are the most oppressed is due to two prominent things: One being, they're black, obviously. If you know anything about American society, then you know that black people in America aren't treated fairly in all regards. Secondly, women have always been viewed as

subservient to men. No matter what race, that phenomenon stays the same. Men and women aren't equals because men are viewed as superior.

Hypersexualization and Desexualization of Black Women

Black women face a double burden: being black and being a woman. This group of women withstand many pressures that are placed on them due to society's standards and norms. These standards and norms emerged from controlling images that have and still dominate black women's representation today. We have images that represent the desexualization of black women, hypersexualization of black women, and that focus on the criminalization of black women. All of these representations are equally damaging to the perception of black women, hence aid in the hindrance of black advancement.

To focus on desexualizing black women, we have to look at the representations that further push this agenda. First we have the mammy stereotype. The mammy is usually depicted as a darkskin black woman who is "obese" in efforts to desexualize her physically. The mammy can be seen with a big smile and hearty laugh to ensure that she is happy in her servitude. She is known to be loyal, nurturing, and motherly, not to her family but instead to white children and their families. This image of the mammy was designed to justify economic exploitation, serve as a symbolic function to maintain race, gender, and class oppression, and to shape black women's behaviors as mothers and eventually to working women.

In Patricia Hill Collins' *Controlling Images and Black Women's Oppression*, the mammy is described as the faithful, obedient domestic servant. This image first came about during slavery to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves (Collins, 1991, pg 266). Then this images' meaning transgressed to be the standard for Black women's behavior. Mammies are

expected to love, nurture, and care "for her white children and 'family' better than her own," and symbolize "the dominant group's perception of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power," (Collins, 1991, pg 266). Collins perfectly explains the power dynamic and relationship between white supremacist values and black advancement and can be compared to similar words said in Lewis' *Beyond Mammy, Jezebel, & Sapphire: Reclaiming Images of Black Women*: mammies are "'happy to be in service,' to alleviate white guilt about the inhumane treatment of Black people during slavery," (Lewis, 2016, pg 18). Its roles, such as these, that enforce the idea that black women are lower on the totem pole and are encouraged to accept that role. If they fight against it, they are scrutinized and punished in some way. The mammy image plays a big role in how we view black women as mothers. Mammies are expected to care for white families, but what are they expected to do for their own children? They are supposed to instill in their children the ideals of a mammy: care and nurture white people. This further pushes white supremacist agenda by keeping generations of black children to remain secondary to their white counterparts. Mammies were "effective conduits for perpetuating racial oppression," (Collins, 1991, pg 267). The mammy challenged gender norms for black women. White women were expected to deny their sexuality and devote all attention to the growth of their children, while black women, as the mammy, were seen as an "asexual" surrogate mother focused on the growth of a white family. Mammies were the basis for black women in the workplace, but were instilling in their children a way to break this cycle of indentured servitude. Black women would discourage their children from believing that they should be servants to whites and pushed them to avoid domestic work as though it is a trap to keep them in second class status.

The matriarch stereotype is another image that is used to desexualize black women. The matriarch is very similar to the mammy, yet different in her own way. The matriarch controls

how black women are viewed as mothers to their own children, not the white family they work for. The matriarch consummates the similar role of explaining a black woman's place in the interconnecting systems of race, gender, and class oppression. The mammy symbolizes the "good" black mother figure in white families, while the matriarch symbolizes the "bad" black mother in black households. The matriarch in modern day is now called something along the lines of a black single mother. Being as though the martirach is the head of the household, she fails to fulfill her traditional "womanly" duties because she is a working woman who spends a lot of time away from home, and cannot properly tend to their children leading to their child's failure in school settings. This group is to blame for either the success or failures of their children. The idea is that anyone can rise above poverty if those values are instilled in the home, but the matriarch not properly doing her job and instilling those values in their own children are believed to be the cause of black economic subordination. Black matriarchs are described as "overly aggressive, unfeminine women," (Collins, 1991, pg 268) who emasculates their male counterparts. Patricia Hill Collins states it perfectly when she describes the matriarch from a white male perspective: "the matriarch is essentially a failed mammy, a negative stigma applied to those African American women who dared to violate the image of the submissive, hard-working servant," (Collins, 1991, pg 268). The same stigma is not applied to white women. The matriarch serves as a learning lesson to white women as to what happens if they were to disobey the patriarchy. The punishment would be being abandoned by their men, become impoverished and are deemed unfeminine. It is believed that the matriarch is also the reason for racial oppression. Slavery created reversed roles for black men and women. The matriarch questions patriarchy in a black household, deeming the household as "deviant because they challenge the patriarchal assumptions underpinning the construct of the ideal 'family'," (Collins,

1991, pg 269). The missing patriarchy in black households is used as evidence for the reason that black culture remains inferior.

The matriarch is a powerful image. The way that she is defined can be applied to many black women today, my mother included. My mother is a single mother who works in order to care for my brother and I. I do not agree with the fact that the matriarch takes away from patriarchal power because in today's society, not all women have the choice to be the head of the household due to many unforeseen circumstances. My mother is a prime example of this. She has had to consume the role of both the matriarch and the patriarch because she has responsibilities in her household she has to take care of. This doesn't make her any less feminine or any less of a caring and nurturing mother. This stereotype, like most, is not accurate nor inclusive of all situations and can cause serious damage in the progression of black women.

The final stereotype that desexualizes black women and will be discussed is the Sapphire, or interchangeably known as the angry black woman trope. The Sapphire has been defined in many different ways. Lewis describes the sapphire as "the siren to simply be the no-holds barred evil harbinger of what would happen if the *natural* patriarchal and racial societal order was destabilized by granting women and Black people equality," (2016, pg. 18). Another source describes her as "verbally aggressive, nagging, and argumentative," (Jerald, 2017, pg. 488). It is believed that the sapphire derived from a character named Sapphire. Sapphire was a character born from the reflection of an enslaved female field worker who was a dominant and strong, both physically and mentally, woman that emasculated men and dispel male authority (Lewis, 2016, pg. 55). Her character was also described as loud, crude, callous, argumentative, and full of verbal assaults (Townsend, 2010, pg. 274). The sapphire, similar to the matriarch, is seen as unfeminine because of her presumed aggression and outspokenness. This character has

transgressed into the world of media as the angry black woman. These characters are usually depicted as loud, assertive, don't back down, and independent women who can handle things themselves. In the aspect of labor, she can be compared to another damaging stereotype, the mule. The mule was an enslaved black woman who was "perceived as insensible brutes and subhuman beasts who were only to be valued for their labor," (Simms, 2001,pg. 883). This stereotype validated white male superiority and black women's inferiority. In terms of societal relationships, she demonstrates everything that a woman shouldn't be. That's why society deems her as a person with secondary status, closely relating her to an outcast that is facing punishment from society. This stereotype is especially damaging because it teaches black women that they have to be quiet and obedient. That is because these women challenge the patriarchy and we all know that men don't like to be demasculinized. In my case, this stereotype makes it hard for me to succeed as a black woman because I will stand my ground against anyone and not let my mind be swayed unless it can be proven with factual evidence. This has caused many men that I have encountered to call me angry and stubborn for asserting my dominance. It made me question if I was actually angry or were these men just intimidated because I wasn't being submissive under their will. These women shouldnt be viewed as angry just because they know what they want. These women are seen as uncontrollable. In the words of Hooks, "wild is the metaphoric expression of that inner will to rebel, to move against the grain, to be out of one's place. It is the expression of radical black female subjectivity," (1992, pg. 49).

Being a black woman can be equated to a double edged sword. On one side, you are desexualized and diminished as a female. On the other, you are hypersexualized and exude femininity, but that's not necessarily a good thing. You're judged for not being feminine enough but you're also judged for being overly feminine and overly sexual. Either way, society will find

a way to punish you if you display any of these. We have discussed stereotypes that desexualize black women. It's time to turn our focus over to stereotypes that hypersexualize black women.

It is believed that the hypersexualization of black women sprouted its roots in the times that slavery plagued American culture. The jezebel is a prominent figure that came from slavery. The jezebel has been defined in many different ways across literature. In one source, she is characterized as hypersexual, seductive, and manipulative (Jerald, 2017, pg. 488). In another, she is described as typically a mulatto woman, which is a derogatory term used to describe women who are biracial and light skinned. This woman is perceived as seductive, manipulative, and unable to control her sexual drives (Townsend, 2010, pg. 274). The function of the jezebel was to associate all black women to the category of women who are sexually aggressive (Collins, 1991, pg. 271). This stereotype serves as a justification for the sexual assaults of black women perpetrated by white men. The jezebel portrays that black women would enjoy being ravaged by her master and his sons and this satisfied her sexual desires and classifies her as a "breeder" (Simms, 2001, pg. 883). This stereotype further incites that black women enjoy anything that remotely relates to sex. This is damaging because this aids in discrediting black women who are victims of sexual assault.

The Welfare Mother, also known as the welfare queen, is another stereotype that hypersexualizes black women. The Welfare Mother is a fairly new phenomenon. She was born from the post-World War II welfare state. She is essentially a modernized image of the breeder that grew increasingly dependent on welfare. She is used to harness black women's fertility to the needs of a changing political economy (Collins, 1991, pg 270). These women greatly benefitted from structures within the welfare system such as Social Security, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, unemployment, voting rights, antidiscrimination legislation, and

minimum wage. It's funny that they mention antidiscrimination legislation because welfare is a service that is provided to everyone in need, not a specific race in need, so for them to basically say that black women are abusing the system falls into the category of being discriminatory. The welfare system seemingly induced that this group can no longer be subject to exploitative and cheap labor, yet they have become "a costly threat to political and economic stability" (Collins, 1991, pg 271) and making them comparable to nonworking, middle class white women. The Welfare Mother pulls qualities from both the mammy and the matriarch, yet she is deemed more sexual. She is seen as a bad mother, like the mammy, because she doesn't pass the trait of work ethic to her children, furthering the cycle of poverty in the black community. Opposite to the matriarch being aggressive, the Welfare Mother isn't aggressive enough and has no male authority to help her. She is basically the image of another failure mammy. The welfare mother justifies the systems of race, gender, and class oppression. To make the image of the Welfare mother more realistic, Ronald Regan deemed a woman, whose name was Linda Taylor, the new face of the Welfare Queen during the late 1970's. She was arrested because she abused the welfare system by using eighty names, thirty addresses, fifteen telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four non-existent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare. This set the stigma that this is all black women would amount to if they didn't have a male authority present and added to the phenomenon of black female criminals on the rise.

Hypersexualization and Criminalizing of Black Men

In comparison to black women, research about stereotypes and its relation to black men are very scarce and hard to find. One thing that frequently appeared was stereotypes about black

men and their relationship to parts of the criminal justice system. That aspect will be touched on in this paper. But first we need to look at stereotypes that preceded black males' negative relationships with the criminal justice system. Similarly to black women, I believe that black men are oppressed because of their race. I don't believe that black men are as oppressed as black women because at the end of the day they're still men and will always be more respected than women in all regards. As previously explained, I do not think that oppression should be viewed as a competition because both groups' struggles should be taken seriously and fixed to aid these groups in the succession they deserve. Just because they aren't as oppressed as black women doesn't mean they aren't affected by racial stereotypes that have been placed upon them.

Black men have to deal with the pressures of society that pertain to their race and also their masculinity. Black men set the standard for what it means to be masculine. When you're seen as the norm for how a man is supposed to act, that comes with the pressure to constantly live up to that expectation and can have detrimental effects on their relationships in society and their mental health. Intertwined with black masculinity, black men also have to face hypersexualization. But instead of being able to live in both spaces of hypersexualization and desexualization like black women do, a black man's only choice is to be hypersexualized. Unlike black women, their hypersexuality is seen as a threat to society. Images that reflect both a black man's masculinity and hypersexuality include, but aren't limited to, the angry black men, the mandingo or the black buck, and the uncle tom/sambo. To shift to the present day, the new controlling image that harms black men in America is depicting black men as criminals. This controlling image is intertwined with other images such as crack addicts, drug dealers, thugs, and laziness. Stereotypes such as the brute and the savage play into black men as criminals black male masculinity, and the hypersexualization of black men.

With the emergence of slavery, the idea of the black man as criminal and animalistic is a representation that has plagued the reputation of black men in society. It all started with one important and damaging image that was used to depict black men's savagery during the time of slavery. This image was that of the brute or the savage. The brute stereotype portrays black men as "innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal–deserving punishment, maybe death," (Pilgrim, 2000). The brute was visualized as hideous and terrifying predators (Pilgrim, 2000), with their prey being white women. This image came after the abolishment of slavery. Many white slave owners thought they did society a favor by keeping black men as servants and secondary status with the use of slavery. They claimed that slavery suppressed their criminal and animalistic appetites and now that they are moving towards freedom, it has brought out their true savagery. In summary, this image was a product of white fear of a black man advancing and being equal to white men. This image has transfigured into present day society with the stereotype of black men as thugs.

Black men have always been seen as criminals. Adding the word thug to the long list of stereotypes was a way to further criminalize black men. Now that the narrative has changed from black men loving their life as slaves to black men cannot be controlled, it furthers the thought that black men who are seen today as thugs have come from how black men used to be seen as black brutes. One powerful, and more modern, depiction of the reason black men are viewed as dangerous savages is derived from the movie *Birth of a Nation* (1915). This movie was an early film in America that depicted black men, who were actually played by white men in black-face, preying on white women in attempts to attack them. "Their brutality is met with propaganda depicting the Ku Klux Klan as heroic and honorable. The result was Blackness becoming closely associated with criminalization. The criminalization of Blackness allowed for White supremacy

to use Black bodies as their scapegoat for all problems, real or fictional. The driving forces behind Black criminality as savage and unmanageable were structurally reinforced by passage of stricter sentencing guidelines in prison and the expansion of the War on Drugs in the second half of the 20th century," (Smiley, 2016). This new image of seeing the black man as a thug is a damaging image. But people don't care about why are black men seen as this. In modern day this image has come from phenomenons in American culture such as the War on Drugs. This campaign created tensions with politics and their relationships with black Americans. After the War on Drugs began, we saw an increase in criminalizing black men which led to more drug use in the black community, escalating rates of crime, and started mass incarceration, which disproportionately affects black Americans because all though we only make up roughy thirteen percent of the American population we are the dominant population in the American criminal justice system. One article summarizes a survey that was conducted pertaining to drug use among the races. White people were more frequent users and abusers of drugs, yet black Americans were disproportionately arrested and incarcerated for drug related crimes (Williams, 2020, pg 419). This came about when the 1914 Harrison Narcotics Act was passed. This, in combination with other drug policies, created a link between drugs and crime to black men and aided in furthering the image of black men as drug dealers and crack addicts. These images are used to criminalize black men and justify arrests, incarcerations, and killings of black men (Williams, 2020, pg 419).

To connect the representations of black men as criminal and hypersexuality, the image of the Mandingo or the Black Buck can be used to describe both of these phenomenons. The mandingo stereotype was used by white slave owners to promote a black man's strength, breeding agility, and muscular agility (nmaahc.si.edu). The mandingo is similar to the brute in

many ways. This stereotype focuses more on the sexual predator aspect of the brute. Similar to the brute, the mandingo is seen as a threat to white men because they are thought to be predators to white women. This was also created as an excuse to protect white fear of an advancing black man. It was believed that black men were animalistic and savage in their sexual desires, hence this image was born. This image crosses over to modern day with its use in the adult film industry. There's not much literature connecting this stereotype to its effects on black men. This stereotype aids in the impediment of black advancement because it will always be a reason to deem black men as sexual predators. Its use in pornographic films doesnt help change the narrative. In today's society, the mandingo archetype is seen as a double edged sword. On one hand, black men will never be taken seriously because they are fetishes by the mandingo role and are wanted because of an extremity of theirs that has been highlighted in use of female sexual pleasures in pornography (Samuels, 2019). On the other black, black men will never gain respect because of history's view of them as sexual predators who can't control their appetite. Much similar to the role of the jezebel placed on black women. The mandingo archetype can also be fuel as to why black men are criminalized in American culture.

The angry black man is a trope that has been used in a more modernized setting when compared to other tropes that were previously discussed. The angry black man is one of the commonly known stereotypes placed on black men, besides black men as criminals. This trope is a product of the generational trauma that not just black men face, but the entire black community as a whole. As previously stated, the black community has endured abuse in all forms that span over a numerous amount of years. As black people, we are expected to let go of what those who came before us had to struggle through because it was in the past and it didn't directly happen to us. "In a racially stratified society, black people are more likely than white people to confront

conditions of powerless- ness and chronic stress that may generate anger," (Wilkins, 2012, pg. 36). Even though that may be true, it still doesn't excuse the trauma that black people have suffered through even in more modern stories of our history. With events such as the release and screening at the White House of *Birth of a Nation* or unjustified lynchings of young black men such as Emmit Till, black people, especially black men have a lot to be angry about and our nation's history is proof and can be served as a justification for this anger. The angry black man is a trope that was created by white people and was used to validify "weaponizing whiteness", which basically allows white people to use their fear of black people as a weapon against the black community (Acho, 2021).

The angry black man is a trope that is tied to another, black masculinity, that has been used to further perpetuate the idea that black men are inferior to everyone else. Black men have always been used as trophies for the white community. They highlight a great talent or strength of Black men and exploit that for some sort of gain. Black men are highly viewed in the realm of athletics. Their athletic ability outshines their intellectual strengths because that's not going to benefit the white man if a black man is known as a scholar. Athletics are used as profit for white men so of course they cherish the people that bring in the most money. Black masculinity aided in supporting tropes such as the angry black man. Black masculinity is tied with athleticism in black men. If you are one who participates in sports, that measures your level of masculinity, while if you're not athletic or a part of a sports team, that deems you as less masculine (Wilkins, 2012). For example, my brother, as a black man, values his intelligence over athletics. He was never known to be athletic and was made fun of because of that. He was seen as less masculine and didn't live up to the standard that Black men embody of being masculine. On the other hand, my boyfriend, who is also a black man, is very athletic and earned that title due to being involved

in sports at such a young age. He was always valued for his athleticism, but no one ever cared about his intelligence. He was always seen as a source for profit, especially due to his skills in the game of basketball. For this reason, he is seen as being more masculine because he is a very talented athlete. Coming with the status of an athlete, you are seen as cool and you receive more attention from white women who pursue athletes as sexual and romantic partners (Wilkins, 2012, pg. 43) and in some way it fetshizes black athletes and feeds into black masculinity. In contrast, "Other campus participants stereotype them as less intelligent and academically unmotivated. I have observed white students roll their eyes when black athletes speak in classes; in informal conversations, faculty members and graduate students characterize athletes as academically unprepared; nonathlete black students in this study dismissed athletes as 'not taking their education seriously'; and athletes in this study themselves complain that they are steered away from majors that are considered difficult or time-consuming," (Wilkins, 2012, pg. 43). Athletes are also seen as lazy in regards to their studies and anything that pertains to activities not involving athletics. On the other hand, if you aren't a black man who is an athlete, you are seen as less masculine and "gay":"Being a black man but not an athlete is a liability in campus erotic markets. Students, both black and white, often assume that regular black men are gay", (Wilkins, 2012, pg. 44). Black masculinity is so damaging to the black community because there is no way we are expected to meet these expectations and yet if we do it's still an issue that becomes ridiculed and criticized. For there to be true change, we have to change the narrative ourselves.

Theoretical Framework

In regards to this topic, there are a broad range of theories that could be applied. For my topic, I took a lot of information from different works that were written by two black women who specialize in advocating for black people to help us be understood and to aid us in

advancing to our fullest true potential. Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks are very influential theorists in regards to the socialization of black people. They dig deep into the challenges that we face that are rooted in our nation's past treatment of black people that include the intersectionality of race, class, and gender oppression. Their works have been a great asset to providing more insight and knowledge to writing this thesis. They have taught me many things about my identity as a black woman and that it stems from different theories that explain the effects and aftermath from the immense amount of trauma black people have had to endure.

Even though Patricia Hill Collins and Bell Hook's are theorists, they don't lay down a concrete and definable theory that explains the phenomenons of why history chose to villainize us through such harmful depictions and how this stereotyping has affected our relationship with society. One theory that I feel as though properly explains this is labeling theory. Labeling theory is defined under the studies of sociology and criminology. The definition of this theory is similar in both of the studies, but they slightly differ in their social settings. Labeling theory, which is also defined as social reaction theory, was created by sociologist Howard S. Becker. Becker's book, titled *The Outsiders* (1963), popularized labeling theory. This theory states that it is built "from the symbolic interactionist tenet that people define and construct their identities from society's perceptions of them," (Shulman, 2005). In relation to criminology, this theory is used to support and be a basis of why people commit deviant acts or exhibit deviant behavior.

This theory can be used to explain many different aspects of my thesis. Labeling theory affects black women by labeling them with negative stereotypes such as the mammy, the jezebel, or the angry black woman. When that's all society sees you as, you begin to live up to that expectation because that label was forced on you and no matter what you do, that's all that society will choose to accept from you. This can really be applied in terms of sociology and

criminology in relation to black men. Black men are more criminalized than black women and that's due to the way they've been represented through stereotypes in history. This theory, in relation to black men, "explains" why black men are more prone to deviant behavior. When all you're seen as is a criminal, the way society views you wont change because their fear and fragility wont allow them to see you for who you really are, it only allows them to reinforce that fear and overly criminalize every move you make. Labeling theory is one that relies on social interaction, but it can be misused when race, class, and gender bias are brought to the foreground.

Discussion

Through summarizing others' research and using theory to connect it all and relate it to my topic, I have to now assess the use of these images, how they relate to white supremacist thought, and how this gets in the way of black advancement. All of the images I previously mentioned, which includes the mammy, jezebel, brute, etc., are all amalgamations of white supremacits ideals that stemmed from their fears and insecurities. These images have shaped how society views black people and how they are perceived can affect their advancement socially and economically. As expressed throughout this paper, while both groups face equally threatening images, black men and black women have different stereotypes placed on them that shape the way they are represented and perceived. These representations keep both groups trapped in these boxes that don't allow them to escape and become their better selves. The use of these images keep Black people in a confined space that does not permit us to grow economically and socially. Not only do these images limit the black community, but they also contribute to the dissolution of black families by using these images as a tool to keep black people from fitting into societal standards, such as accepting the patriarchy and the typical

household dynamic, further keeping them as outcasts. "As long as black people foolishly cling to the rather politically naive and dangerous assumption that is in the interests of black liberation to support sexism and male domination, all of our efforts to decolonize our minds and transform society will fall," (Hooks, 1992, pg 101).

The images used to depict black women that were discussed in this paper are the mammy, the matriarch, the sapphire, the jezebel, and the welfare mother. These images and their meaning vary from one another, but they are all a part of the effort pursued by white supremacist ideals to keep the black community as subservient and not allow for any room for success or advancement. The mammy, matriarch, and sapphire are all destructive images that have been used to represent black women and desexualize them. These images keep black women locked in secondary status in their own ways. The mammy and the matriarch don't allow space for social and economic succession by continually perpetuating the idea that black women enjoy being laborers for the white patriarchy. As stated earlier, these two images were effective conduits for the continuous perpetuation of racial oppression. These images impede the advancement of black women because it keeps us confined economically by forcing us to stick to roles that support the continuous succession of white people. These images will never allow us to be taken seriously in workplace environments because these stereotypes reinforce the idea that black women are happy to work for white men. Socially, these stereotypes impede us from being seen as good mothers to our own children. The mammy reinforces that they are happy to be in service to white people and they take joy in caring for white children. She is encouraged to teach her own children to do the same, keeping future generations trapped in their subservient status. The matriarch, on the other hand, is seen as the main culprit of black economic and social inferiority. She is seen as this because there is a lack of patriarchy in the household and there is also a lack

of nurturing from the mother. Essentially, this hints that because black mothers "aren't able" provide everything needed for their children because they have to work and keep the home afloat, they fail their community by raising children with no work ethic and lack of respect for the patriarchy. The sapphire similarly portrays this reason for the lack of black economic and social succession by their outspoken and aggressive nature and their celebrated status as good laborers. This image perpetuates the idea that their outspoken nature is the reason they are forced to be laborers which further impedes advancement because it shows that women who display traits similar to the sapphire deserve to be punished for their aggression.

  The jezebel and the welfare mother exhibit the black woman as hypersexual. This takes away credibility and respect from black women, which forbids them from their ability to succeed socially and economically. The jezebel impedes black women socially, while the welfare mother impedes black women economically. Beginning with the jezebel, she impedes black women in social contexts because she is the ultimate amalgamation of hypersexuality. She is portrayed as a sexual predator who will stop at nothing to have her desires fulfilled. She is damaging and impedes advancement because this image served as justification for sexual violence against black women. This takes away from a black woman's credibility in situations that involve her as the victim and further incites that you can continue to treat black women however you want and they'll remain resilient. The welfare mother impedes black women economically by perpetrating her as a bad mother who cares more about men than her own children and she abuses government funding. In a way, this image also criminalizes black women by painting them as thieves who steal from the government. The welfare mother took the place of the modern day breeder and was a huge staple in the economy after World War II and during President Richard Nixon's War on Drugs (1971). She impedes the advancement of black women because she is

seen as nothing more than a bottom feeder who abuses government assistance painting the narrative that black women are a threat to our economic stability. In reality, she is judged because the welfare mother is the equivalent to the middle class white woman and white supremacists dont want black people to have the idea that they can have access to the same privileges as they do.

After discussing the images that plague black women, let's switch gears to discuss the images that endanger black men. In relation to black men, there isn't as much detailed imagery to depict them as there are for black women. Still there have to be some images that impede them from moving up the social and economic ladders. These images have already been discussed in detail. Now we have to explore how they limit black men from moving out of the subservient space. All of the imagery that represents black men are all rooted in one main concept: toxic masculinity and the patriarchy. One of the reasons for the lack of mobility socially and economically is because once black men were freed, they wanted to get as close to the white male patriarchy as they possibly could. As explained by Hooks, black men "wanted black women to conform to the gender norms set by white society. They wanted to be recognized as 'men,' as patriarchs, by other men, including white men. Yet they could not assume this position if black women were not willing to conform to prevailing sexist gender norms," (1992, pg. 92). After being freed from the shackles of slavery, black women didn't want to transition from serving white masters to serving black masters. Forcing women to conform to the patriarchy can be seen as another embodiment of slavery, which caused a strain amongst black men because they would never be viewed as equals and work their way up the social and economic ladder.

Aside from the patriarchy, other images aid in the impediment of black men: black man as a criminal, mandingo/black buck, the brute/savage, and the angry black man. All of these

images contribute to the harmful and hateful representations of black men. The black man as a criminal impedes black male advancement for obvious reasons. To further paint black men as criminals, images such as the brute were used to depict their "savage and criminal nature". These images keep black men feared and locked in place because it suggests that without someone being above them and in control of what they can and can't do, basically all hell would break loose and the stability of society would be at stake. This image created space that accepted the thought of black men as thugs. The brute was also a huge symbol that showed black men as laborers. This image contributes to the societal punishment that white people want black people to have to endure and further keeping us in a box that stops us from growing.

The image of the mandingo further pushes the agenda of depicting black men as criminals, but the image also hypersexualizes them in a similar way that the jezebel hypersexualizes black men. Just as the jezebel cannot control her sexual desires, neither can the mandingo, only he is seen as a threat to white women due to their "ravenous" nature. This image contributes to the current thought of all black men as sexual predators. It impeded the black male advancement because this image is a popular genre among pornography. This status makes black men feared for their uncontrollable sexual nature, takes away from their credibility, and adds to the fetishizing of black men. This stops black men from moving up socially and economically by painting them as criminals.

The angry black man is another image that impedes black advancement because it ties into elements of black masculinity, which is a harmful dynamic within itself. It aids in impediment because the angry black man is justified through generational trauma which allows white people to use their fear of the black community against them. The angry black man trope will never allow black men to be seen as anything other than savages and this is harmful because

if that's all a person sees they either begin to embody that role or people will perceive them as that and that doesn't allow for black men to move outside of this status and be taken serious.

These images all contribute to the idea of labeling theory. Labeling theory plays a huge role in keeping the black community trapped in this space that allows white people to judge us and label us as exactly what they want without any consequences on their part. Their mission continues to succeed because through labeling theory, these images begin to not only be projected by white people, but it is weaved into the unconscious though among the black community. These images have been used for so long, that black people themselves have been fooled into using it as weapons against each other. The weaponized hate speech, discrimination and damaging images all contribute to the reason why the black community is unable to mobilize outside of the infrastructures that keep them trapped in the subservient box. "As long as black people foolishly cling to the rather politically naive and dangerous assumption that is in the interests of black liberation to support sexism and male domination, all our efforts to decolonize our minds and transform society will fall," (Hooks, 1992, pg. 101).

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, this paper is written based on the theories presented and explained by Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks. Without their insight, this paper wouldn't have had a leg to stand on. Their theories brought together the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism which is used to explain why powerful controlling images have been a large part of the reason that the black community hasn't had the opportunity to advance and prove themselves.

The readings have provided us clear definitions of the images used to describe black people. These images that were created by the imaginations of white supremacy depict them as having a naturally aggressive nature that makes them seem unapproachable and feared. This is

damaging to the black community because it keeps us with this negative title associated with black people. It has broadcasted negative stereotypes that impact the way we are represented and viewed. It paints this picture as though we deserve this secondary status and allows others to judge us and have control over us.

As suggested earlier, the only way to push black advancement is to take back and reclaim the damaging narratives that have been set in place and used as a precursor on how black people should be treated. This affects the interactions that black people have with society because these images allow for anyone, including black people themselves, to think they know us based on the way history has depicted our people and leave room for judgment, discrimination, and unfair treatment. There are so many policies that have been made to keep the dominant group at the top and the rest at the bottom. For the future, there should be hope that black people will take back these damaging narratives and repurpose them in order to produce change and hopefully force society to view us as equals. We envisage a society where race is not a factor in the distribution of opportunity or resources or in the assessment of merit and character. When Dr. King proclaimed a similar vision for the United States, what followed was an era of color-blind racism (Hadden, 2016, pg. 346). To avoid another era of color blind racism, these white supremacist amalgamations have to be turned around to benefit the black community instead of punishing them like they have continued to do for many decades.

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