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“When Does the Exception Become the Rule?”

The neuroeconomics field has established that it does not take many occurrences to establish a “trend” in the psyche of economic agents. In other words, if a particular incident occurs more than twice, then those occurrences establish a pattern of expected outcomes for which we develop “appropriate” responses.

This process of developing behavioral responses has important economic implications for Black American males, who are identified increasingly in the media as exhibiting profligate behavior. For example, in the past week, certain easily recognizable Black males were featured prominently in the media as exhibiting inappropriate behavior: Bill Cosby, Jameis Winston, Adrian Peterson, and Dwight Henry—just to name a few. Even President Barack Obama was chided in the media for overstepping his presidential powers as part of his immigration reform agenda.

At the same time, there are millions of Black males who look caringly after their families, go to work each day, and who contribute positively and persistently to the nation’s success. Therefore, without inferring innocence or guilt or casting aspersions, we must ask: “Are the aforementioned personalities the exception or the rule?”

Given neuroeconomics, the five media stories are more than enough to establish a “rule” in the psyche of economic agents (both Black and White) that Black males engage in inappropriate behavior. Unfortunately, there was no simultaneous wide release of information concerning easily recognizable Black males engaged in favorable and productive behavior.

Without doubt, this neuroeconomics process causes Black males to experience suboptimal economic outcomes. For example, because of the process, employers are more likely to overlook Black males when it comes to employment. Educators are more likely to work less diligently with Black males when engaged in efforts to transmit knowledge. In addition, medical professionals are more likely to expend less energy healing Black males who experience health crises.

The evidence lies in the facts. When one considers discouraged workers who have dropped out of the labor force, the Black male unemployment rate is the highest among all major ethnic and gender groups in the nation. Black females far outstrip Black males in the nation’s colleges and universities. Finally, Black males have a significantly shorter life expectancy than White males and females and Black females.

The typical retort to this analysis is that Black males should discontinue performing profligate behavior. Our response is that no group is perfect and that Whites, too, exhibit inappropriate

behavior. The difference is that the media presents more balanced (positive and negative) images of Whites, while presenting a constant diet of negative images of Black males.

The evidence speaks for itself and, based on that evidence, it appears that exceptions have already become the rule. Therefore, Black males have faced, and continue to face, an unfair economic game in the United States and elsewhere around the world. When the game is unfair, the logical options are to: (1) Change the rules; (2) quit the game; or (3) resort to extreme measures to balance the playing field. Of these three, the only option that can be adopted without severe negative implications for the entire society is to change the rules.

Unfortunately, nearly 400 years of US history has established in the psyche of Black males, at least, that the media refuses to change the rules. Fortunately, two options remain.

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