A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Using the characters of Walter Younger, George Murchison and Joseph Asagai write an essay in which you discuss the relationship between pride and race in the play.

In this essay the relationship between race and pride will be discussed. This relationship will be explored through the characters of George Murchison, Joseph Asagai, and Walter Younger in the play "A Raisin in the Sun". The varied responses that these characters show towards race and pride will be shown through their response to various situations. Namely each characters response towards Beneatha, their relationship with material wealth as well as physical appearance. These responses will be discussed in order to establish and explore the relationship between race and pride.

The different male characters in "A Raisin in the Sun" express varied relationships with race and pride. One extreme is present in George Murchison who expresses pride in regard to his wealth not his race. Through his wealth George Murchison is allowed access to the dominant white culture. This leads to a reduction in his racial identity as he strives to fit in with the white culture rather than establish himself as an independent black man. His parents are also shown to be assimilated to the dominant culture. That his parents have forged identities that are implied to be contrary to traditional culture within the dominant community make it is possible to infer that racial pride is not a priority in the Murchison household. Much about George Murchisons relationship with race and pride may be understood through his preoccupation with appearance. Walters accusation that George dresses like one of those white ?college boys? condemns him for turning his back on his racial identity by portraying himself as one of the rich, college attending Caucasians. Georges dismissal of Walters opinion is evidence that he is not upset as being seen to turn his back on his culture in order to fit in with the dominant white culture.

This lack of racial pride is further evidenced in his response to Beneathas haircut. It is telling that he feels her natural hair is not fitting for a trip to the theatre. To Beneatha, her haircut is an act of pride in her race, heritage and culture. To George this pride should be hidden in order to mingle in ?cultured? society of the theatre. He does not experience pride at an exhibition of Beneathas African beauty, he wants her to appear as a status symbol of his wealth, acceptable in the society he seeks to move in. He experiences greater pride in his economic status, and visible symbols of this, than he does in his race. Thus it can be stated that George Murchison is shown to experience a lack of racial pride by the way he uses his wealth to form a new identity within the white culture. Wealth becomes the source of his identity and pride, not his race. Having established above the relationship between race and pride in the character of George Murchison it becomes possible to discuss the contrasting relationship as depicted through the character of Joseph Asagai.

Joseph is depicted, in the text, to be a man who embraces his own race and relates to it as a source of pride. The manifestation of pride is evidenced through his firm attachment to his village in Nigeria as well as his efforts of encouragement towards Beneatha. His gifts and suggestions regarding how to wear her hair all promote a return to her cultural heritage. Josephs desire stay connected with his roots and race is shown through his decision to use the resources at his disposal (particularly his
education) to improve the lives of the people in his village. He seeks to uplift his kin, believing in their abilities and potential. Joseph uses his resources to solidify his identity within his ethnic community as opposed to George Murchison whose wealth and education lead him further from his origins. Physical appearance is a tool used by Joseph to show his pride in his culture. His appearance is one that visibly celebrates qualities of his race. This is evidenced by the description of his hair which is worn naturally. Beneatha states that her hair is "as crinkly as [his]". Joseph's use of the word "mutilate" to describe how she treats her hair has negative connotations. This implies that he does not approve of her efforts to alter her natural appearance and believes she should rather embrace it. His approval of her when she dresses herself in his gift of Nigerian fabric is revealed by his statement that she "wears it well" and shows his encouragement of people claiming their ethnic appearance.

Through Joseph as sense of hope is expressed. His determined optimism further depicts his racial pride. The positive outlook he has for his people exists despite the challenges they face. His encouragement of Beneatha, when the insurance money is lost, shows his faith in individuals abilities to improve their circumstances despite difficult situations. Through the grounding of his identity within his community he gains strength to tackle the challenges he faces. George Murchison and Joseph Asagai demonstrate contrasting views of race and pride, while the character of Walter Younger depicts a developing relationship with these concepts.

Masculinity is a concept that needs to be considered when discussing the character of Walter Younger. The relationship between race and pride that is expressed through this character is affected by the emasculation he experiences in his various roles. This in turn affects his attitude towards both his race and his sense of pride. Walter Younger is initially subject to the belief that monetary wealth equates worth. Therefore due to the fact that he cannot afford for his wife to wear pearls (a white wealth symbol) he feels less of a man. He believes George Murchison to be a good man, not so much due to his qualities but due to his financial situation. This show the link he sees between individual worth and wealth. The imminent arrival of the insurance money provides insight into his belief that financial means will allow him to assume the role of patriarchal leader, which is in line with his cultural heritage and would allow him to experience a greater sense of pride in himself. The conflict he experiences around the issue of his self-worth and masculinity hinder the development of both his racial identification as well as any sense of pride he may experience. He is shown to experience very little self-worth at the start which affects the way he responds to Beneatha.

The issue with self-worth is shown through his frustration at the work he is required to do, namely chauffeuring, which undermines his concept of worth. Walter's relationship with Beneatha mirrors the development of his personal relationship with race and pride. Beneatha exhibits conviction towards her racial identity as well as her individual purpose and goals. This sense of surety unsettles Walter as it highlights his own insecurities and vagueness in these areas. Mr Lidner's offer to buy them out of their new home presents Walter with the distinct choice between money and pride and forces him to redefine his own purpose and goals. His rejection of the offer evidences an acknowledgement of his race as well as pride in his history. Thus his progression through the no-man's-land of role confusion within racial structures and lack of racial pride is shown. This is achieved by the acknowledgement of his
ancestry (he is the fifth generation born of slaves), his pride in Beneatha ("this is my sister, she is becoming a doctor") and his rejection of Mr Lidners money. As shown above Walter Younger experiences a shift in the way he sees himself which allows him to develop a sense of racial identity and in turn experience pride.

In conclusion it has been shown that the relationship between race and pride is as unique as the individual who experiences it. Individual responses to the same external factor may vary greatly. This relationship is not stagnant and may undergo change and growth as the individual goes through life. The result of these variations, and ability to develop, is shown above through the characters diverse responses to wealth, African women and unique appearance. These points have been used to illustrate the relationship between race and pride unique to the particular characters discussed above.

Hi R Behari,

In the vein of old exam papers I struggled with this question, I would greatly appreciate feedback on my response. Thanks!

**Critically discuss how gender stereotypes impact on the dreams and aspirations of characters in the play. Refer to at least 4 characters.**

The following essay will address the manner in which gender stereotyping effects the dreams and aspirations of various characters in the play by Lorraine Hansberry, "A Raisin in the Sun". The characters of Walter Younger, Ruth Younger, Beneatha Younger and Mama Younger will be discussed. In order to explore how the above mentioned impact occurs within each character, their personal dreams shall be outlined. Thereafter the stereotyping they face shall be considered in order to comprehend their unique responses and how these impact their dreams.

Walter’s response to gender stereotyping causes him to redefine his dreams. The stereotype Walter tussles with is one of patriarchal leader which is a legacy of his African culture as well as an expectation of 1950’s American man. His actions are affected by social constructs and through his response to them he is placed in a position where he has to readdress his values. Walters’ aspirations are initially linked to financial well-being which affects his concept of masculinity. His ability to perform as a father, husband and son are linked to economic oppression. His preoccupation with money is evidenced when his mother’s query leads him to state “Because [money] is life, Mama!” page 74. His dreams of financial wellbeing are further revealed through his desire to see his wife in pearls, his son in a good college and a shining car in his drive way, in other words obtain wealth that would allow him to develop into his image of what it is to be a man. Walters’ inability to care for his family financially, in the way he would like to, has an emasculating effect. This emasculation, caused by the inability to fulfil what he believes to be his gender role, ironically causes him to compromise his morals by considering Mr. Lidners offer. This shows that through his desire to fulfil the gender stereotype of being a man of financial means he is prepared to jeopardise the integrity that make him one in his families eyes. The process that Walter undergoes, mentioned above, does not occur
in isolation. It impacts other members of his family such as his wife Ruth who deals with the impact of gender stereotyping on her dreams in her own way.

An example of gender stereotyping causing a person to develop character in order to pursue their dreams is given through the character of Ruth Younger. Ruth desires a clean home away from their current situation which includes rats, dirt and lack of space. This dream is shown by her statement on page 140, “Lena- I’ll work… I’ll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago… I’ll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to- but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!!” however gender stereotype of married woman in the 1950’s viewed woman as someone whose sole purpose was keeping home, raising children and doting on her husband. This stereotype essentially prisons women in their homes and makes them dependent on their husbands. As Walter suffers from emasculation and an inability to facilitate Ruth’s dream, she quietly defies stereotypes by working to the point of exhaustion in other women’s homes in order to improve her chances of attaining it. Hence a focused commitment to her dream is evidenced and acted on in order to alleviate her family’s situation. This commitment develops as a response to the difficulties she faces as a result of the two pronged impact of gender stereotyping within the context of her role as a wife; Walters inability to provide her dream and her willingness to break the gender mould in order to achieve her desires. The concept of woman working towards their own dreams is developed through the character of Beneatha Younger.

Beneathas rejection of gender stereotypes fuel her desire to achieve her dreams through independent action. Her desire to achieve individual identity, independence and emancipation through education are revealed through her dream of becoming a doctor, in an era when most woman were expected to be content with assuming roles inferior to men. Beneatha is an idealistic woman (socially frowned upon at a time when women were expected to be seen in the kitchen, not heard to have an opinion). The cultural expectation placed on women at the time is highlighted by George Murchison when he states “I don’t go out with you to discuss the nature of “quiet desperation” or hear all about your thoughts” on page 96. Her response to stereotypes and subsequent commitment to her education is therefore a representation of the betterment she desires. Her relationship with social expectations is further explored through her contrasting relationships with George Murchison and Joseph Asagai. George Murchison represents a passive assumption of the feminine identity (he desires a trophy on his arm that will positively impact his social identity as a member of the black upper class), whereas Joseph represents the empowering of self and the pursuit of education and personal identity. He believes in the power of the individual to shape their destiny depicting the drive for success as an area of independence and available despite adversity, as shown on page 135 “Then isn’t there something wrong in a house- in a world- where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?”. Beneathas choice of Joseph as a suitor shows her choice of his values over Georges. Thus by rejecting George and entertaining Joseph it is shown that Beaneathas rejection of the cultural stereotype of passive woman fuels the pursuit of her dream. While Beneatha pursues her dreams regardless of gender stereotypes Mama Younger shows the contrasting standpoint of succumbing to them.
Due to adherence of cultural norms as a result of the expectations placed on women by gender stereotyping Mama Younger nearly loses her dream home by yielding control of her finances to Walter. Mama dreams of a home that is nurturing and peaceful, where Christian values hold sway and growth has space to occur, this is revealed on page 45 when she states “But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had ‘bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back-”. Despite holding the family together for years after her husband has died and being the matriarch she succumbs to the gender role of women behind men when she gives Walter the insurance money, showing on-going pressure to bow to patriarchy. Therefore by yielding to the gender stereotyping of women needing to defer to men she nearly loses the home she bought which is the realisation of her dreams.

In conclusion it has been shown that the impact of individual responses, to cultural constructs such as gender stereotyping, vary and affect not only individual’s dreams. Furthermore dreams may adapt as a result of personal growth. Responses to circumstances and differ between people, as do dreams and aspirations. However interplay is still present. The response to gender stereotyping stimulates people to act in different ways. Unique components such as personal views and aspirations have been shown to shape the way the characters respond to stereotyping and thus the pursuit of their personal dreams.

**Re: Past Exam Question for A Raisin in the Sun**
by R THEMBA - 29 Apr 2017 @ 20:34

I could answer it like this! A raisin in the sun by Lorraine Hansberry, this is about a patriarchal community in which it is dominated by males. I will Lena Younger (mama), Beneatha (Walter’s sister), Ruth (Walter’s wife) Walter (the elder son in the family) Lena’s aspirations is to own her own big house and provide to her family. Beneatha’s aspiration is to be a medical doctor. The submissive and docile Ruth has dream of having a decent home. At the arrival of the ten thousand dollars, Lena is the one who has the power of having the insurance money but here is Walter who claim to be the man of house has the arrangements of his own for that money. After buying the house from Claybourney park, Lena remained with a balance of 6500 which was supposed to be used properly but with gender in the patriarchal society she decided to give the balance to his son who was to put the money in the savings account for the future use. Walter used the money on his own deals for license of liquor store. Beneatha’s dream was blocked by Walter who used her share of the insurance that was reserved for her medical school. We can see Walter saying "who told you - you are going to be a doctor? just be a nurse like other women or just got married and keep quiet". Asagai the Nigerian boyfriend of Beneatha also is discouraging Beneatha to drop her dreams and go with to Africa where she is going to be a child bearing bullet and being a housewife. George Murchison also a boyfriend to Beneatha stop stressing about education I want a simple wife. But he is a black African who had inherited the deeds of whites. He is doing this to Beneatha because she is a woman. Ruth’s dream is to have a decent home, Walter do not respect her and even not considering her, she is submissive to Walter and docile.
Hi there, I am still going through this but please remember to define key concepts like race and masculinity. It seems from assignment results that this is what the markers want to see.