In life there are always lessons to be learned. Lessons can come into fruition via many different mediums and methods. The way people adapt to these lessons can influence their lives greatly, whether it is for better or for worse. Taking into account a particular short essay, “Black Men and Public Space” by Brent Staples, a reader can deduce how sudden realizations, adaptation, and lessons learned can affect a person’s life. Sometimes fate can throw a person a curveball and how they react to it can determine or demonstrate the type of person they truly are.

In “Black Men in Public Space,” Staples writes about how a black man is faced with the negative racial stereotype, how he has to deal with it day by day, and how he ultimately “resolves” it by changing the way he presents himself to people. Staples states the idea of how conformity and adaptation to the way a person presents themselves to society can benefit them. This is true because sometimes in order to make a good lasting impression someone a person has to change the way they act or look; a good example of this is when a person is trying to be presentable for a job interview. In the story the idea that all black men are viewed as nefarious due to the statistics of the majority black male population being thugs, hoodlums, etc. The main character in the story struggles with the fact that he is treated differently, in a negative way, even though he is a really well rounded person.

Self-awareness can be viewed as a positive or negative. More often than not, self-awareness is useful because it can open a person’s eyes to things or qualities about themselves they would have never noticed. In Staple’s story the main character states “it is not altogether clear to me how I reached the ripe old age of twenty-two without being conscious of the lethality nighttime pedestrians attributed to me,” here he even though he doesn’t fully understand why he is seen negatively, he begins to realize that it is inevitable. He sees and understands society, mostly women, perceive him in a negative way due to “women in particular are prone to street violence and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence.” He realizes that even though he chose to “remain a show –timid, but a survivor” of his past (people he grew up with which were killed or arrested), just the fact that he is a black young male, he will be seen as a potential threat to people.

Learning by definition, means “To gain knowledge, comprehension, or mastery of through experience or study” or “To become aware of something.” The main character in Staples’ story, with his realization that he had to adapt, he learned that in order to change the way society views him, he would have to change something about himself. So he begins to “take precautions to make myself less threatening,” meaning he began doing things differently in order to appeal to people as he went about his day to day activities. He began to avoid people who seemed nervous, not follow people directly, and he employs what he calls an “excellent tension reducing measure” which is whistling classical music while he walks in the late hours of the night. He admitted that it really helped with people who were real timid or afraid because they eased up and would whistle along with him.

Education can be a person’s greatest asset. Being educated can help a person out in many situations where it can be needed. The main character was thoughtful and open minded to things he had to do in order to adapt to benefit him in society’s eyes. In the story, the main character uses the composers Vivaldi and Beethoven as a method to “escape” the social prejudice. He also whistles it because thugs and hoodlums are never expected to walk around whistling, especially whistling classical. People who saw him doing these things automatically flipped the switch because they didn’t see him as a thug anymore; they saw him as an educated man due to the fact that he knew classical music. An uneducated person would not be likely to know classical or know that it has the ability to calm people.

Staples begins the story with “My first victim was a woman…,” this is the first time that he noticed what being a black male can do to person’s perception of safety. He saw that black males have the ability to change the atmosphere of places around them to an unappealing and unpleasant environment. In the end, the main character could not change the fact that he was black but he learned that he could change the way he presented himself to people. This was an interesting thing because he began to teach and influence people around him to not automatically assume things about black males, because not all of them are bad. He showed society that he wouldn’t quit on that curveball, of being black, he just used his knowledge and education to change the way he presented himself and in turn change society’s view.