RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE SUMMARY

Influence of Self-Concept on Young African American Males

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There have been numerous studies examining school performance in African-American males. Some of these studies have examined the effect of gender specific classrooms on student's self-concept. Other studies have examined how father's absence has contributed to poor school performance and academic achievement. The current study examines how father's absence and teacher's gender interact to influence self-concept in young African-American males in an urban environment. The results indicate that there are positive effects associated with interactions between male teachers and male students, particularly when a child is not residing with his father. The results suggest that we need to explore more societal and family dynamics as we examine the racial academic achievement gap.

Research has consistently shown that African-American male students often experience difficulties within academic settings (Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2009). This struggle in academic settings is supported by high school graduation rates, those enrolled in special education, expulsion rates, reading proficiency, and assignment to behavioral classes. These educational trends are highly correlated with other societal issues such as antisocial and criminal behaviors. As a result of the disproportionate representation in these areas, these negative school experiences have become a part of how many African-American males view themselves within the context of the dominate society.

One area that should be explored further is the link between self-concept and scholastic performance. Early works by Horney (1950/1970) offer that self-esteem directly impacts the identity of children. Alder (1963) also suggested that self-concept influences behaviors in addition to how one responds to others and societal institutions. One area that should be explored more is the understanding of how parents and teachers play a role in the development of a child's identity through their interactions ad provision of information. In order to facilitate a more positive concept with African-American males it has been suggested that they might be more successful in environments with all male classes with an African-American role models. A number of research studies support the idea that male teachers provide models of masculinity through teacher-child relationship and teaching approaches (Sullivan, 2009). This type of socialization in the classroom has been linked to a child's self-concept. As stated earlier, a boy's

self-concept is highly influenced by both parent and teacher. One should question how self-concept is developed in young men without a strong male teacher or residential father. This is particularly important in light of the research by Thompson (2006) & Miller (2005) which highlights the importance of parent-child interaction effects on the development of self-concept.

Given the importance of teacher's and parent's influence on a child's self-concept we examined how father's presence might moderate the impact of the male teacher on self-concept. The research literature supported that each of these relationships were important to the development of self-concept in young boys, we expanded this and examined how father's presence moderated this effect.

The study utilized the McDaniel-Piers Self Concept Scale to measure self-concept in all students enrolled at two inner city schools in Baltimore, Maryland. Some of the students were enrolled in all male classes taught by male teachers while other students were enrolled in a more traditional setting.

Research Findings

The results showed that there was a significant difference in the self-concept of African American male students with male teachers and those in traditional classes with female teachers. This difference suggests that a male presence during the early education years may have some effect on self-concept. The study also found that there was a significant difference in self-concept among children who reside within a single mother home and those in traditional classes with male teachers. The results might suggest that there can be positive effects associated with interactions between male teachers and male students, for those children where the father does not reside within the home.

One Year Follow-up Study

A subsequent one year follow-up study revealed that once the male students were returned to traditional settings there was significant decrease in self-concept. This suggests that the effectiveness of all male classroom settings and having a male teacher on self-concept, return to pre all male classroom settings. In short, once students are removed from the protection of these non-traditional classrooms, they no longer exhibit improved levels of self-concept.

Implications

It is quite clear that young African-American boys gain some benefits from being in all-male classes with a male teacher. These children have significant higher levels of self-concept in these academic settings. The issue is not if African-American boys are better off in these settings but the lack of resources to support these types of educational settings. Given the scarcity of African-American male teachers it is not possible to provide these at risk students with these non-traditional environments. The educational system needs to be aware of the need on an increase in African American male teachers, and do all it can to recruit and retain this precious commodity. Other school personal should focus on providing African-American males the opportunity to

develop meaningful interactions with African-American male figures. It is imperative that school support personnel be mindful of the need to provide these young African-American males with services to allow positive interactions with other African-American males. These services are even more important to young African-American boys from fatherlessness homes.

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