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A Historical Perspective: How a Positive Cultural Identity Can Increase Achievement Motivation and Self-Esteem in Young African American Students

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A Historical Perspective: How a Positive Cultural Identity Can Increase Achievement

Motivation and Self-Esteem in Young African American Students

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Abstract

The dropout rates for African American students in the urban areas of western, New York are increasing at an alarming rate. Many young African Americans are becoming victims to gang related violence, drug trafficking and other rills that affect our community. Worst of all, society is producing young people who are uneducated and will be unable to make their communities better economically, politically, and educationally.

Young African Americans aspire to the images they see throughout the media. Being a gangster or “thug life” is more important than getting good grades. Unfortunately many African Americans are unaware of their history. They have never heard the eloquence of Malcolm X or the exploits of Benjamin Banneker or Charles Drew. Once African Americans are aware of the greatness of their legacy, they will aspire to be like their ancestors who overcame amazing obstacles in order to achieve greatness.

Introduction

To be Black and American is somewhat of a quandary in the United States of America. This country is the embodiment of democracy and freedom, but if you are black the experience is rather peculiar indeed. W.E.B. Dubois refers to this experience as double-consciousness. Dubois (1903) stated:

It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 215)

Today's generation must also experience this two-ness as they struggle to create their own identity. Society projects the image that African Americans cannot aspire to the same ideals as White people. At an early age, African Americans realized that the playing field was not level and that they were the underdogs. This feeling of defeat created low-self esteem within black people, which promoted failure. A sense of hopelessness accompanied one's blackness and it would appear that the scales would never be balanced. However, it is important from young African American to deny ideas of defeatism and embody ideas of empowerment. Young African Americans must be proud of their history and knowledgeable of their African legacy. This knowledge sets the framework for a positive cultural identify, which will teach them they can achieve great things, despite the color of their skin, just like their ancestor before them.

At an urban high school in a medium sized city in the northeastern United States, one African American male student spoke about to the power of peer influence and how it relates to academic achievement. If his friends are talking during class, joking, or “horse-playing”, he feels that he should join in as well. He stated that he does not want to be perceived as a “punk” or ostracized from the group. He stated that his friends are doing poorly in the class where as he is not. The tendency for young African American males to identify “blackness” or being cool with academic failure is troubling indeed. It appears to be a painful tug of war that forces the student to choose between what society and peers expect from African American culture and what student knows s/he is capable of (Ogbu, 2003).

It seems paradoxical to assume that African American culture associates academic success with whiteness and academic failure with blackness. The end result appears to be high dropout, unemployment, and incarceration rates for young African Americans. In the novel *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*, by Walter Mosely, the main character Socrates also becomes aware of this conundrum. He realizes that killing black people, going to jail, and not getting your education, is all apart of a *set up*. The final analysis is that an uneducated black man is worse than the racist institutions themselves because *he* is directly responsible for the destruction of his own people.

At the *Tri-State Consortium Conference for Higher Education Opportunity Programs* held April 15-18, 2007, program founder Arthur O. Eve expounded how African Americans are currently in the worse crisis since slavery. He proclaimed that African American males are an endangered species and would surely become extinct without education. He observed that even during slavery black people had jobs.

Sardonically, he was able to illustrate that enslaved blacks had a purpose and identity even if it was that of a slave. His words were harsh and impactful, but his sense of urgency was accurate and needed. Without education blacks have no purpose and no future. It is critical that the performance of African American students in school is examined so that corrective measures can be taken. It is important to confront the stereotypes that bind African American students and replace them with a sense of pride and achievement. Hopefully, this will lead to academic success. Caring, acculturation, and challenging African Americans' notions of racism and the affect upon them may begin to reverse this horrific social trend.

African American males are underperforming academically at an alarming rate. Societal forces such as stereotyping, identification with one's culture, and lack of empathy amongst educational staff are some of the factors that underlie this issue. John Ogbu's (2003) cultural-ecological theory espouses some of the factors that lead to academic disengagement amongst African American students. Particularly, at an urban high school in a medium sized city in the northeastern United States, it will be crucial to discover the factors related to academic achievement for a group of ninth graders who are in danger of repeating the ninth grade. Their situation appears to be a cultural trend that seems to be evident throughout African American history. Lynn (2006) concluded that:

African people in the United States still have some prevailing misconceptions about their education and education in general. We were not brought to the United States or to the so-called New World to be educated. We were brought as part of a massive labor supply. Some slave owners saw fit to train their slaves in the repair of farm equipment and certain aspects of the blacksmith trade. What the slave

masters permitted was training, not education. African Americans in the United States were trained to serve (p. 1).

This is a powerful illumination of the historical relationship between slavery and the current academic underachievement of African American students. Education was not intended for us. While slavery longer exists, it seems that there has been a ripple effect whose presence can still be seen today. African American students are in a fight for their economic and physical survival as they struggle against a past social structure laden with shame, domination, and racist ideologies about their academic abilities.

Some of the forces inhibiting African American students' ability to perform at a high level academically will be discussed. Suggestions for possible interventions leading to higher achievement motivation in the classroom for this population, graduation from high school, and access to higher education will be presented.

Review of the Literature

Ogbu stated, "... repeatedly that school factors and community factors work together to shape academic outcomes for minority youth and that both are influenced by societal structures that privilege some groups at the expense of others (Gibson, 2006, p. 585). Ogbu (2003) also found that minority student's engagement and performance in school are influenced by two sets of factors. These are "system factors-the historical and current treatment of minorities by the larger society and by the schools, and by the minority group members' interpretations of and responses to their treatment, which Ogbu called 'community forces'" (Ogbu, 2003, p. 51-52).

In conjunction with this view Ogbu (2003) found four types of barriers that he identified as contributing to academic disengagement. All four center attention on the

students themselves, or their peers and their parents, rather than on how the teachers or school structures or larger school climate are implicated in student disengagement (Ogbu, 2003). “The four are students’ feelings of not belonging or fitting in socially at school; their mistrust of teachers; peer influences that undermine academic striving; and what Ogbu terms ‘missing connections’” (Gibson, 2005, p. 585). The latter could be attributed to the absence of minority student culture in the educational process.

Ogbu (2003) concluded that students were not engaged in their schoolwork ‘partly because they were not getting enough “caring” and partly because they did not evaluate their teachers and schools in terms of expertise in useful knowledge.

This mode of thinking would seem more realistic for an older adult (25 years of or older) who has a strong sense of self and identity. High school students are developing emotionally, personally, and psychologically. The adults in their life impact their social development of the student. Teachers become caregivers in a sense who help to shape the students identity similar to that of a parent. When a parent neglects their child, the impact is immediate. There is a “cause and effect” that occurs when a teacher is neglectful as well (Gibson, 2005).

Due to the societal forces that African American males must face, this population often developed a rebellious disposition in regards to social institutions in general (Taylor & Graham, 2007). Taylor and Graham (2007) found that:

From cultural-ecological theory, it has been suggested that ethnic minority male adolescents from economically marginalized groups sometimes adopt an oppositional identity in which they display indifference to or even disdain for

doing well in school because such behavior is perceived as a threat to their emergent ethnic and masculine identities. (p. 52)

This perception of African American males as tough and cool is reinforced by rap videos, thug culture, the media, and the American social culture at large (e.g., Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl & Van Acker, 2000). These images increase the likelihood that this population will be labeled by teachers, suspended or expelled from school, or become apart of the juvenile justice system (Skiba, 2001). Labeling includes descriptions of African American males as stereotypically violent, hostile, aggressive, and unintelligent, which decreases their interest in school (Graham & Hudley, 2005; Noguera, 2003).

Racism

Suarez-Orozco (1989), stated that “high aspirations and a belief that formal education is the path to a better life frequently prove insufficient in the face of assimilationist pressures, institutional racism, and low teacher expectations” (p. 135). Ogbu (2003) noted that black students, “began early in life to develop an awareness of the pattern of race relations, including their subordinate status” (p. 68). This perception is the embodiment of a feeling of shame and inferiority that affects the student’s ability to achieve in the classroom. This mind-set puts the minority student at a disadvantage in his/her pursuit of an education.

It is important for African American students to feel that their teachers care and believe in them otherwise they intrinsically believe that they are doomed to fail. “In the sociological literature, researchers have argued that perceived barriers to opportunity may partly explain why some ethnic minority youth come to devalue the importance of effort

and trying hard in school” (Taylor & Graham, 2007). Basically, ethnic minority youth believe that because they are of color, racial inequality and discrimination practices prevent them from attaining certain jobs. This is equated with low socioeconomic status throughout their lives (Mickelson, 1990). These beliefs are directly related to the value of education and their school engagement (Taylor, Casten, Flickinger, Roberts, and Fulmore, 1994). “There is also evidence that educational and occupational barriers to opportunity are perceived by ethnic minority boys even as young as 2nd grade and that perceived barriers increase with age (Taylor & Graham, 2007).

Peer Influence and Self-Perception

Ogbu (2003) reported the pressures placed on Black students to not look smart in front of their friends. “Smart students were defined as those who paid attention during lessons, raised their hands to answer questions, always got the right answer, and did their schoolwork and homework” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 201). Being smart in class, moreover, was defined as ‘acting White’, and students who acted White risked being teased or even ostracized by their peers (Ogbu, 2003). To prevent being made fun of or accused of abandoning their racial identity, some African American students simply slacked off from their schoolwork (Ogbu, 2003). Students placed in the lower-track classes tended to be those most vulnerable to negative peer influence (Ogbu, 2003).

Cultural Identity

It is critical that young African Americans are knowledgeable about their history. When young people are aware of the achievements of their ancestors, they will be intrinsically motivated to achieve. History will provide them with accomplished role models whom they can emulate. “Our humanity is defined and distinguished by the

development of knowledge and particularly self-knowledge, therefore it is critically necessary for each generation to learn who and what they are” (Akbar, 1998, p. 1). For African Americans, this ability to know and love thyself is a difficult task.

350 years of slavery deprived African Americans of their cultural identity. Their land, history, and birth names were stripped from them. Slaves were flogged, raped, and dehumanized by their masters so they would be easier to control. For young African Americans today, it becomes difficult for them to obtain a positive cultural identity because their history is filled with pain and shame. In order to help young African American students achieve in the classroom, they must be able to connect with the pride and inner strength that is derived from the affirmation of their cultural identity.

Adolescence is a time of physical and emotional change for young people. They are constantly experimenting with new identities in order to discover who they are. The need to discover a self-identity drives the individual to discover their purpose. “Human beings must have a sense of who they are in order for them to demand their acceptance in the human community” (Akbar, 1998, p. 3-4). “It is not accidental that the changing of names of Africans who were made into slaves was an initial step in the miseducation process” (Akbar, 1990, p. 4). “People can only belong to themselves if their identity is an outgrowth of their history, their culture, their reality and their survival needs” (Akbar, 1990, p. 4). Students must be taught that they are valuable and can achieve. Educating African American children about their history and providing them with role models throughout history who exude strength, intelligence, and artistic aptitude can assist this process. Also, the education must fit the needs of the population. Students must be taught how to survive in their current environments, so that they can reach their full potential.

“This educational system was never established to provide a true education for anyone but Americans of European descent who were intended to remain the holders and developers of this society” (Akbar, 1990, p. 4). It is important for young African Americans to learn about their culture in school. They must be shown positive images of their culture in order to develop a sense of cultural pride that will encourage them to succeed. If young African Americans are inundated with stereotypical images fostered by racism and prejudice, they will perceive themselves as inferior and unworthy of a quality education. Such views will ultimately create an underachieving disposition that will negatively impact their overall quality of life. Dr. Carter G. Woodson stated that:

The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples... No systematic effort toward change is possible, for, taught the same economics, history, literature and religion, which have established the present code of morals. The Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. (p. 5)

Search for Self

Identity confusion and a search for one's cultural identity are issues that many young African Americans encounter during adolescence. Barack Obama (Barkley, 2005) stated that:

Then, when I was in high school, I fell into all the stereotypes. I was trying to figure out what it means to be a black man. *My father was not in the house*, which is true for a lot of young men, so I didn't have some in the house saying, 'Ah, that's not what I am talking about.' I'm playing basketball, I'm getting high, and

I'm not taking my work seriously at all. And part of it was because that was what everybody else was doing. If you acted like you were too serious about it, folks would think you were a punk. (p. 23)

Many of today's young African Americans can identify with this mind set. This type of thinking serves to miseducate African Americans and distort the accomplishments and greatness of their legacy. He (Barkley, 2005) further mentions that:

That's a big part of the reason it is so important to have black teachers, especially black male teachers. I'm not saying exclusively, but in many situations you need someone to call you on your stuff and say exactly what I've been talking about, that it's not 'acting white' to read a book. This whole attitude of anti-intellectualism in our communities is one of the most damaging things that we can do to our young people. No other culture I'm aware of does this: tell you it is to your advantage not to be smart. It doesn't make any sense. (p. 24)

Senator Obama discussed how young African Americans become so consumed with athletics and the prospects of becoming an professional athlete, they often times overlook other opportunities at their disposal within the realm of academia. He (Barkley, 2005) related this phenomenon to his own personal development:

And in some of our schools, low expectations can be reinforced in cases where teachers set low expectations. I think it's critical to get kids to understand what is important. When I think about all the hours I spent playing ball! At a certain point it should have been clear to me, 'The likelihood of you playing in the NBA is not high and, uh, so why don't you spend a little of that time studying Spanish or physics?' (p. 24)

It is important that we acknowledge our children when they accomplish their goals. However, for African American children, low academic expectations do not inspire them to achieve in the long-term. Students must have realistic and competitive goals to reach towards in order to maintain their achievement motivation. “Sometimes I go to an eighth-grade graduation and there’s all that pomp and circumstance and gowns and flowers. It’s just eighth grade, people. Just give them a handshake. Congratulations. Now get your butt in the library (Newsweek, p. 29, July 16, 2007, Volume CL, No. 3)

The social climate for young African American adolescents is currently at a volatile state. The potential for violence in inner city schools is an everyday possibility. In some cases, young men and women who are frustrated with their family, economic, and environmental situations are expressing their anger and frustration through violence. The emotional volatility and turbulence of puberty make it that much harder for young people to negotiate conflict when emotions run high. Senator Obama agreed with the high potential for violence amongst young African Americans and the obstacles they face. “You didn’t worry about somebody pulling out a gun in the middle of an argument. I mean, that is just not something you were thinking about. What I went through is nothing compared to the kinds of pressures that young African American men, in particular, but also you African American women are under right now” (Barkley, 2005, p. 27).

Society and Education

A student’s academic success is not totally dependent on their race, economic class, zip code, parent’s level of education, or how much money they have in the bank. Although numerous inner city schools are failing to meet testing standards, regents competencies and drop out rates continue to rise, President Clinton offered a different

picture. He believed that all schools could win by finding schools that are successful and then use them as models. President Clinton (Barkley, 2005) discussed a predominately African American inner city school that was thriving despite IQ or economic barriers:

I'll give you this example. Less than a mile from here there's a New York City public school called Frederick Douglass Academy. It's nearly one hundred percent black. It's a public school-choice school, that is. You have to ask to go there, but there's no screening for income, IQ, nothing. The only thing you have to do is agree to abide by the uniform policy, and the parents have to agree to show up when they're asked. And that's it. When I went there two years ago, about ninety-eight percent of the kids graduated. Over ninety percent went on to some form of higher education. And their test scores were above the New York State average. These are poor black kids in New York City. They've been sponsored by *The Gap* and *HBO*. There's a store in the school that sells uniforms, and the kids get to work in the store and earn money. Their families can buy the clothes that their kids need at cost. For the rest of the family, they can buy sweaters and stuff like that. You can go in tomorrow and it's spic-and-span-clean. We wouldn't have to announce that Charles Barkley and Bill Clinton are showing up. We just show up at the front door, we could sit down on the floor and eat breakfast. They've created a culture. Now, how come within three miles of this there are other schools that aren't good? That's the question that we have to answer. (p. 71)

President Clinton (Barkley, 2005) provided another example of how inner city students can thrive academically when the school environment is created and geared toward student success. He said:

There was a junior high school in Washington, D.C.—Thomas Jefferson Junior High School—that opened when Ulysses Grant was president. It was ninety-six percent African American. They had a woman from south Louisiana as principal, African American woman. She was six feet tall. They had all these retired black professionals from the Gold Coast it's called—the long time affluent black neighborhood in northwest Washington—come in and teach. And that school sent a team to the national junior high school mathematics final. Three out of four years in the mid-1980s, they were one of the four best schools in the whole country... the point I want to make is that we have to learn how to replicate excellence if we want the schools to work. (p. 72)

These schools are living examples of what African American students can accomplish in a positive setting where expectations are high for both students and teachers. President Clinton reiterated that “Remember: There’s no screening for IQ. There’s no screening for income. There’s no screening for anything. They created a culture that people wanted to be apart of.

He discussed an inner city school in Chicago that was defying the odds. He stated that every week 150 mothers and 75 fathers would show up to help in this particular school. Parental involvement fostered an environment where students were able to get the support they needed and the community worked together to make sure the students got the education they deserved. “They had a zero dropout rate. They were the happiest kids I

ever saw. Those kids that have miserable situations at home felt they were safe in school. They felt like they were important; they felt like they could be somebody” (Barkley, 2004, p. 73–74).

Children must believe they can achieve. Once they realize that they are talented and that supports are in place to insure their success they will be motivated to set high goals for themselves. Their environment and the people around them will reflect the positivity inherent within in their own beliefs about themselves. In summary, I would like to end with a quote from President Bill Clinton (Barkley, 2005). He stated:

Let me just say one thing. When you and I die, there will be social problems in America, in our world. If you’ve got bad government policy and a weak economy, and nobody’s helping people get a job and the schools aren’t good, I think you ought to think, if nothing goes the way you think it should, what can you say about why you turned out the way you did?

Miseducation of the Young African American

The educational system, which young African Americans are apart of, is a reflection of society as a whole. The racism and fear persistent throughout our culture created our current educational system. The prime example of this fear is the system of slavery that deprive African Americans of their God given rights for more than three centuries. Today’s educational system in some respects reflects the hypocritical nature of America’s racist past (Shabazz, 1989):

... And a skillfully designed program of miseducation that goes right along with the American system of exploitation and oppression. If the entire American population were properly educated—by properly educated, I mean give a true

picture or history and contributions of the black man—I think many people would be less racist in their feelings. They would have more respect for the black man as a human being. Knowing what the black man's contributions to science and civilization have been in the past, the white man's feelings of superiority would be at least partially negated. Also, the feeling of inferiority that the black man has would be replaced by a balanced knowledge of himself. He'd feel more like human being. He'd function more like a human being, in a society of human beings. So it takes education to eliminate it. And just because you have colleges and universities, doesn't mean you have education. The colleges and universities, doesn't mean you have education. The colleges and universities in the American educational system are skillfully used to miseducate. (p. 196)

In order for young African American men to be able to succeed in school or life, they must have self-pride. Years of inhumane treatment against African American and misperceptions and stereotypes about African American, leave young African American with a history that devalues them as human beings. It is so important that African Americans know their true history and the vast contributions that African Americans have made to the field of economics, science, technology, and politics. Malcolm X believed that when a man knows himself, he understands his value or self worth and can function as a human being. He stated that although Jews and African Americans have been oppressed throughout history, the African American's man's pride and in essence his humanity did not remain intact (Shabazz, 1989):

The biggest difference between the parallel oppression of the Jew and the Negro is that the Jew never lost his pride. He never ceased to be a man. He knew that he

had made a significant contribution to the world, and his sense of his own value gave him the courage to fight back. It enabled him to act and think independently, unlike our people and our leaders. (p. 198)

The Legacy of African Americans

African Americans are the byproducts of a rich culture that is filled with accomplishments. African Americans have made great contributions to civilization throughout history. Young African Americans must know their history. Their history will provide them with a compass to discover what they have the potential to be. “They must know of the Nubian architects of the Great Pyramids to the nameless African explorers and preceded Columbus to the American continent by several centuries and initiated a cultural exchange whose monuments still stand” (Akbar, 1990, p. 8). In order to maintain competence, it is necessary that each generation know about its history, which assures them they *do* have the ability to achieve. Without this self-affirming information young people do not manifest their power for accomplishment (Akbar, 1998).

When young African Americans are taught their history they will no longer lower their heads in shame when they are taught about the history of slavery in school. Along with their slave history, they will be knowledgeable about the kings and queens of African who were honored and revered. They will possess a pride within themselves that will inspire them to be the best they can be academically, financially, and spiritually.

Akbar (1990) stated:

The young must be taught that they have a legacy of greatness and accomplishment that they are required to continue. It is the images of greatness, which resemble them, which serve to inspire young people to become the great

scientists, scholars and artists, which continue to fearlessly explore the world and develop new ideas and concepts, which advance themselves and the rest of humanity. All young people are similarly competent and capable, but such competence will never be expressed until they are shown that they have a legacy of such competence. (p. 8)

Young African Americans have been poisoned by a psychology that insists upon their inferiority. Young African Americans see images of themselves as a drug dealer, drug addict, or felon. All these labels are deemed unacceptable within society. The young African American begins to incorporate this psychology of wretchedness into his/her self-concept. Dr. Woodson (Akbar, 1998) observed that:

It was well understood that if by teaching of the history the white man could be further assured of his superiority and the Negro could be made to feel that he had always been a failure and that the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary the freedman, then, would still be a slave. (p. 10)

In order for young African Americans to be instilled with a sense of pride they must be given role models who exemplify what they too can achieve if they believe in themselves. Akbar (1998) stated that African American children should be taught the greatness of their history so they can aspire to be to continue on their legacy with pride and esteem:

We should study detailed stories of the Ashanti people of Ghana who resisted their colonization and tricked the British when they sought to steal their Royal Ornament and symbols of power. The stories of the many slaves who resisted their enslavement must be told. The victory of Cinque on the *Amistad* and the

struggles of Nat Turner and Denmark Vessey must be celebrated as a means of transmitting immunity to oppression. The escape of Frederick Douglas, the work of Harriette Tubman and the many others that gave their lives in the cause of abolition should be told to every African-American child. The challenges brought by Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson and many others who defiantly resisted the perpetuation of European-American control over African American life should be the catechism of each generation of young people. (p. 11)

The Personal Self

Young African Americans need to be cognizant of what their special gifts and unique talents are so that they can accomplish their larger goals (Akbar, 1990). “There are gifts of physical strength, artistic talents, and intellectual capabilities that all represent qualities of our personal self that are important to understand” (Akbar, 1990, p. 26). “Many people fail to develop their gifts for social interaction because they have been miseducated to believe that they are ‘ugly,’ too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short. In case of African Americans, there is the oppressive miseducation that makes us reject our talents and our selves because we don’t look or act Caucasian enough” (Akbar, 1990, p. 26).

Society bombards African American children with images of whiteness. African American children are socialized to adopt white social values and reject African American images and values reflective of their own culture. Akbar (1998) observed that:

For African children, Barbie dolls, GI Joe and fairy tales should look like them. We should encourage our children to play at nurturing by cuddling little babies

that look like them. Rocket scientists on video games should represent them as well as other members of the human family, but they need to see significant characters of good and genius that look like them. These barriers to our self-acceptance result in us rejecting ourselves ways that prevent us from appreciating the unique and special gifts that we all have in our personal self. An effective education should serve to make us feel good about ourselves. (p. 31)

Pride

Europeans through history have realized the importance of knowing their history and the greatness from which they come from. They have taught their children to be proud of their heritage and have highlighted the accomplishments of individuals who look just like them. By doing so, they have consciously created a nation of individuals who recognize their self-worth and special place in the world. “How many are aware of the infinite number of separate memories of the greatness of our national fatherland in all fields of cultural and artistic life, whose total result is to inspire them with just pride at being members of a nation so blessed?” (Nietzsche, 1900, p. 8).

Throughout history, Europeans have promoted the greatness and significance of their culture. For example, the French, a very proud people, put extreme emphasis on their contributions to different aspects of culture and civilization. “The fact is that the young Frenchman is not brought up to be objective, but it is instilled with the most subjective conceivable view, in so far as the importance of the political or cultural greatness of his fatherland is concerned” (Nietzsche, 1900, p. 8). It was believed that the function of education was to constantly remind the people of the values, which made them great (Nietzsche, 1924):

For only those who through school upbringing learn to know the cultural, economic, but above all the political, greatness of their own fatherland can and will achieve the inner pride and the privilege of being a member of such a people. And I can fight only for something that I love, love only what I respect and respect only what I at least know.” (p. 9)

Race, Culture, and Education

One cannot emphasize enough the devastating role slavery played in the history of African Americans in American. The negative effects of slavery are still felt today in the African American community. African Americans constantly rely on differences in order to engender feelings of prejudice towards one another. This trend is evident in the killing of African Americans by other African Americans who are apart of different gangs. During slavery, the slave master would accentuate the differences amongst the slaves in order to keep the slaves separate and fighting against one another. For example, he would provide lighter skinned slaves with better food and clothing, which led darker skinned slaves to separate from them (Akbar, 1996). In some ways, the chains of slavery still bind African Americans today. Lynn (2006) reported that:

Moreover, research on African Americans that fail to take into account the impact of African Americans’ history as a people forcibly ripped away from their native homeland and forced to endure centuries of socially sanctioned torture not only does an injustice to African Americans, but it also does an injustice to our society. How can we engage in serious debate about social change when we blame the victims of some of the most egregious crimes committed against humanity anywhere in the world? How can we think deeply about the roles of schools in the

process of social transformation when we exempt schools from their own responsibility for creating more inclusive environments and supporting broader progressive change efforts? When our most progressive African American leader in the nation contend that African American children do not perform well in school because they are afraid acting of “acting white,” we know we have a problem that runs deeper than lower test scores. (p. 119)

The American social system seems to be an endless cycle that perpetuates the inferiority of the African American. The racist practices devised during slavery to weaken African Americans socially, economically, and politically seem to have had an everlasting effect. Although African Americans are no longer slaves, over three centuries of injustice have made the playing unbalanced for African Americans academically, economically, and politically relative to their white counterparts. Carter G. Woodson (1933) stated that:

Taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religions, which have established the present code of morals, the Negro’s mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore is easily solved. When you control a man’s thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions... he will find his ‘proper place’ and stay in it. (p. 223)

When African Americans are taught about the exploits of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and their culture is mentioned only in reference to slavery it gives young African Americans a crystal clear picture of their place and value in society. The fact the African American history is only taught one month out of the year in public schools reiterates this fact (Lynn, 2006):

More important, education and schooling in American continued the de-Africanization or acculturation process because it forced Africans and others who were not of European descent to ignore their culture and their history and to accept Euro-American culture and their history and to accept Euro-American culture as their own. (p. 118)

Lynn (2006) concluded that African American achievement in the classroom could not be fully realized until the racism inherent within the educational system is confronted:

Nevertheless, there is an even greater need for research and theory that analyzes, frames and exposes both the historical underpinnings and current manifestations of racist thought and practice in American society. Studies that call for classroom-based solutions without recognizing that there is a fundamental need for social and economic racial reform in the greater society may actually further the problems that African Americans face because they provide a false sense of hope about the impact that small incremental changes can have on that larger society. (p. 118)

Gifted Students of Color

It is important that schools take into account the race, gender, and socioeconomic needs of their students. Educational systems must assess the student's cultural, social and psychological needs as they pertain to achievement motivation. Educators must consider these factors in order to reverse the adverse effects of racism and discrimination, which impact the student's motivation to achieve academically (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). "When focusing on the cultural needs and issues of students of color, it is essential that

educational professionals address both negative thinking and cultural diversity” (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005, p. 169).

A teacher may see an unmotivated student and assume that s/he does not care. However, in the right setting, this student’s untapped potential could be brought to the forefront. Teachers must consider all aspects of a student’s background when selecting him/her for an advanced, regents or special education curriculum. Again, culture is an important factor that must enter into the equation when creating an academic curriculum for students of color. “It is critical that educators are exposed to culturally relevant teaching practices and that they learn how students’ culture interact, both positively and negatively, with school systems in general education in particular” (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005, p. 169). “These beliefs, values, traditions, and so forth serve as the lenses through which students of color view themselves and others. It determines, in large measure, how students interact with and engage other groups outside their own identified groups” (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005, p. 169).

Peer Pressure

Negative peer pressure has a great influence in the school experiences and academic success for students of color. “Typically, African American and Latino students are more likely to be teased by their peer groups as acting white when they do well academically” (Corwin, 2001; Fordham, 1988; Suskind, 1998, p. 173). Students of color may begin to believe that academic success is incongruent with their perception of “blackness”. As a result, “students of color may disengage psychologically, socially, and emotionally from school achievement to maintain their perceived cultural identity (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005, p. 173).

Minority students are acutely aware of the status difference between themselves and the majority group. They, too, understand that their minority status is a part of who they are and affects them socially, psychologically, and economically. Oppressed minorities are angry at their current state of affairs, which have been created by the racist and discriminatory practices enacted by the dominant group. As a result, the minority group blames the majority for their pain and suffering. Ogbu (1978) believed that under these circumstances:

Involuntary minorities respond collectively as a group and they also respond as individuals in ways that reinforce their separate existence and collective identity. Furthermore, their response often makes the oppositional collective identity vis-à-vis their perceptions of the collective identity of the dominant group. That is, their very attempts to solve their status problem lead them to develop a new sense of who they are, that is in opposition to their understanding of who the dominant group members are. (p. 5)

Incorporating Multiculturalism

“Students’ heritage and unique learning styles must be considered not only relative to pedagogy, but also relative to curriculum” (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005, p. 173). Ford (1996) reported that gifted underachieving students were doing poor academically because they could not relate to what was being taught. As a result, these students were bored and disinterested with the curriculum. According to Ford (1996):

Many of these students made comments such as “I would be more interested in school if I were learning about my culture,” “School is more interesting when we learn about African Americans and what they have done for this nation,” and “I

like being in school more when we talk about my heritage.” It was concluded that underachievement among gifted students of color was highly associated with culturally irrelevant and unresponsive curriculum. (p. 174)

Multicultural education will provide students with opportunities to learn about their history, which is directly connected to the school curriculum. These opportunities will make learning relevant to all students and will instill students of color with a positive cultural identity (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005). For example, students might be taught about Caesar Chavez and then have to answer questions about him on a test (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005).

Stereotypes and Perceptions

“It is likely that the aforementioned depictions of African American males can negatively impact the perceived ability and subsequent behavior of African American males and impede their pursuit of the ‘American Dream’” (Jackson & Moore, 2006, p. 201). The literature stated that “African Americans are more likely than any other group to be suspended or expelled from school, to be underrepresented in gifted education programs or advanced placement courses, to underachieve or disengage academically, and to experience the most challenges in higher education settings as both students and professionals” (Jackson & Moore, 2006, p. 201). Education, to a large extent will determine the ability of African American males to advance socially and their quality of life will be impacted as a result of their educational attainment (Jackson & Moore, 2006).

Endangered species

Researchers “hypothesize that that low levels of education and high rates of joblessness and incarceration will ultimately lead to the extinction of African American

males” (Lancer, 2002, p. 1). “The lower academic performance Black males is thus related to their limited perceptions of life opportunities as a result of a longstanding subordinate status in America” (Lancer, 2002, p. 1).

Some African American males perceive the pursuit of the “American Dream” a fantasy, which is inaccessible to them because of the color of their skin. Black parents today may have experienced unequal access to better jobs. As a result, African American students may not believe their parents when they talk about the importance of doing well in school and how it relates to earning a “good” living in the future. “African American males may therefore hold high educational goals, but deep down, are not convinced that school perseverance will pay off” (Lancer, 2002, p. 1).

Research studies reveal that low-achieving urban African Americans perceive professional sports as their ticket to success. Combined with low success rates, however, such pursuits do not normally promote academic excellence. “And the possibility for experiencing failure upon entering the professional work force can lead to illegal avenues for attaining success that further perpetuate the African American male extinction phenomenon” (Lancer, 2002, p. 1).

Factors that Influence Achievement Motivation

Bateman and Kennedy (1997) found that a student’s educational plans or aspirations play a pivotal role in actual attainment. As noted by Schmidt and Hossler (1990), “in a 9-year longitudinal study, plans made during ninth-grade are stable across a student’s high school career” (Bateman and Kennedy, 1997, p. 229). In America (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997), African Americans are more likely to experience incarceration, violence, poverty, premature death, and have their lives negatively

impacted in some form by drugs. For many of these youth, education offers the most realistic possibility of escape from the negative factors associated with their background. Unfortunately, school failure rates for male adolescent African Americans continue to rise (Slater, 1994).

Parenting

“Hossler and Stage’s research indicate that parental encouragement and parent’s level of education are the most powerful predictors of educational plans” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 237). Carpenter and Fleishman (1987) found that a parent’s level of education along with the expectations they have for their child greatly influence whether or not s/he will pursue postsecondary education. “Further, research examining the development of educational plans among a group of ninth graders indicates that parental encouragement is the most powerful indicator” (Hossler & Stage, 1992; Stage & Hossler, 1989). For students in at-risk situations Wiseman (1968) stated that:

Factors in the home environment are overwhelmingly more important than those of the neighborhood or school. Of these home influences, factors of maternal care and paternal attitude to education, to school, and to books, are of greater significance than social class and occupational level. (p. 227)

“For male African Americans from single parent families, the decision-making process appears to revolve around two factors, parental encouragement and school grades, with grades being the most important” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 243). Swanson (1991) noted that educational institutions could not fulfill the role of parents. For African American students, it is critical that parents are involved in the educational process and the academic development of their children.

“Ogbu (2003) repeatedly characterized as dismal the level of black parental involvement in the education of their children. Economic pressures—the need of some black parents to work long hours to earn an adequate income account for some of the problems, but in Ogbu’s view not all of it” (p.132). Ogbu (2003) perceived that Black parents thought teachers were obligated to educate their children and teachers were solely responsibly for their child’s academic performance. It is the responsibility of the Black community to educate its children. It is unrealistic for Black parents to expect teachers to raise their children. Black parents are in the best position to instill their children with the high moral, ethical, and academic standards necessary for them to be successful in school and life.

Negativism and Defeatism

Ogbu (1978) argued that:

... the racial legacy of involuntary minorities has left them with a ‘negative model folk success’ and a pessimistic view of the labor market as a racially stratified ‘job ceiling’. Moreover, these negative defeatist attitudes are passed on to their youth who develop an ‘oppositional culture’ of what he calls ‘secondary cultural practices’. These new secondary cultural practices are often rooted in urban ‘street’ and hip hop culture’. According to Ogbu these secondary cultural practices are the real problem. He sees the hybrid street/hip hop culture as an unproductive, negative model of achievement for African American youth. Too many African American youth romanticize street culture adopt a zero sum logic of success. Achieving school success is equated with ‘acting white’, thus selling out one’s racial/cultural heritage. (p. 112)

Conforming to school rules and doing mental work is equated with selling-out. In effect, African American youth see their culture as superior and mainstream culture as inferior. By resisting white culture and white ideals, African American youths are attempting to empower themselves. However, by devaluing the importance of education and the role it plays in the attainment of economic stability, they are in fact doing the opposite (Foley, 2005). “School success is seen as too ‘white’ by African American students. This self defeating practice is not an inherent cultural trait” (Foley, 2005, p. 648).

Ogbu (1978) also argued that “argued that resistance/academic disengagement is an adaptation/reaction to an oppressive, stigmatizing sociocultural system” (Foley, 2005, p. 648). Ogbu (1978) realized that “African American youth are also faced against institutional and cultural pressures the lay as obstacles to their academic achievement” (Foley, 2005, p. 648). Black students lack motivation because they do not believe that their hard work will lead to opportunities in a white dominated society (Schwartz, 2003). In the text, *Being a Black Man in America*, Theoloa Dubose, 45, a project administrator from Stone Mountain, Georgia said, “I’ve worked in corporate America for 20 years, and I see a lot of white males, but I don’t see a lot of black males. I see more black women than black males” (Jones, 2007, p. 22).

When asked why, she replied, “Because of prejudice. Black women, she said, are less threatening than black man” (Jones, 2007, p. 22). “About four in 10 black men said they are fearful they will lose heir jobs, nearly double the proportion of white men who said the same thing. Even more affluent, better-educated black men are far more anxious

about being fired or laid off than their white male and white female co-workers” (Jones, 2007, p. 22–23).

Ogbu (2003) then concluded that “one reason for blacks’ educational failures was a ‘kind of cultural orientation which defines academic learning in school as ‘acting white,’ and academic success as the prerogative of white Americans” (p. 129).

Self-Responsibility

Ogbu (2003) noted that black students realize that their attitudes and behaviors play a role in teacher’s expectations and disciplinary practices. Ogbu (1978) also indicated that:

... black attitudes toward education and the school system have clearly been shaped by white racism in the past. Thus, although black parents teach their children to uphold mainstream American ideals, they also teach them to be cynical, skeptical, and on guard toward White people and White-controlled institutions, including public school, as well as Black authorities in the system whom they regarded as White representatives. That cynicism is evident, for example, in the suspicion—accepted by nearly half of the black high school students interviewed—that highly educated Blacks and successful; Black professional in White establishments and institutions gave up or abandoned their culture and racial identity. (p. 153)

Connection Between Work and School

It is important for African Americans to understand the positive relationship between academic success and future job opportunities (Schwartz, 2003). Some African American students do not understand that their academic performance will negatively impact their ability to get a job in the future. For example, they did not understand that in

order to become an engineer they need to take certain math courses in high school and do well in them in order to be pursue this career (Schwartz, 2003, p. 132).

College

We suggest that interventions be developed in both the community and schools to provide support for male African Americans from single parent families to explore positive life choices after high school. Although the most appropriate location for interventions for students is the school setting, previous research indicates that teachers and counselors have little influence over the choice process (Hossler et al., 1989).

“Therefore programs must extend beyond the local schools to utilize support systems and other sectors of education, specifically colleges and universities” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 246). Furthermore, “institutions of higher education must become involved in the educational attainment and support of African American” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 246). Colleges are vital to the communities they serve and must be involved in the education of the community’s youth from the onset of the educational process (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997).

Miseducation

Edward Wilmont Blyden (1872) commented that:

All educated Negroes suffer from a kind of slavery in many ways far more subversive of the real welfare of the race than the ancient physical fetters. The slavery of the mind is far more destructive than that of the body. But such is the weakness and imperfection of human nature that many of those who bravely fought to remove the body of the negro transfer them to his mind. (p. 253)

Blyden (1872) observed that although the chains of physical slavery had been removed from the limbs of Africans, the slave mentality nonetheless persisted. He argued that mental slavery was the most destructive force to the empowerment of African Americans.

In fact he argued that it was 'slavery of the mind' which was the most invidious obstacle to the empowerment of people of African descent (Blyden, 1872). Woodson (1933) asserted that:

The education of the Negro must be carefully directed lest the race may waste time trying to do the impossible. Lead the Negro to believe this and thus control his thinking. If you thereby determine what he will think, you will not need to worry about what he will do. You will not have to tell him to go to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door he will have one cut for his special benefit. (p. 192)

Woodson (1933) noted the imperative of European society was to control the education-socialization process of Africans for the sake of conceptually incarcerating African people. He stated miseducation served to discourage African Americans and denied them knowledge of their social history. If African Americans remain disenfranchised and hopeless, they will not attempt to achieve freedom. In effect, they will believe that it is impossible (Karenga, 1997).

This crisis remains an issue to this very day. 350 years of slavery and oppression has stunted the growth of African Americans economically, socially, and academically. The effects of slavery are so vast and crippling that many African Americans are unaware of the effects of slavery on how they think and live. Awareness of the impact of slavery

and how it has controlled the thoughts and actions of African Americans will enable them to think and act consciously for their betterment (Rashid, 2005). In order for education to improve the quality of life for African Americans, it must compel them to think critically so that African Americans can begin to become engaged politically in order to transform their current state of affairs (Rashid, 2005).

“The miseducation according to Woodson derives from the failure of African people to develop an educational system that is for, by, and about Africans and their liberation” (Rashid, 2005, p. 543). He argued that in the absence of such a system is the enfeebled practice of adopting the educational forms, values, objectives, and content of others (Rashid, 2005, p. 543). He adds that the “so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples” (Rashid, 2005, p. 543). Thus, in the absence of an educational system that is culturally relevant, grounded in history, and directed towards some grand future vision for Africans (Thompson, 1995), is a miseducation system that consistently fails to serve the interest of African people both historically and presently.

By adopting the education, values, and objectives of European culture, African Americans have lost touch with their true nature and their legacy. Rashid (2005) discussed the failures of the United States public education to properly educate African Americans both before the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education decision. Rashid (2005) stated that:

... what this general trend suggests is that the American education process deeducates black students, and that this achieved with or without a state mandate

for inferior education for African youth (This process of miseducation has a ripple-effect throughout the Black community as Black professionals, intellectuals, leaders, and teachers are influential in the miseducation of the African masses. (p. 253)

Carruthers (1999) expounded that the origins of the miseducation of Africans originated during the 15th century:

The beginning of this miseducation goes back to the beginnings of the exploration of the African coast by Europeans who had been hemmed in by Arabic power for six hundred years. In 1481, when the Portuguese invaders persuaded the royal and noble families of the area to send their sons to Portugal for a European education. When these sons returned with Christian names, they began directing African society in the interest of the Portuguese. The physical slavery, which the Portuguese started, was facilitated by the mental slavery of the African leaders who had been educated by the Europeans. This model has endured for five hundred years as the most successful method by which Europeans defeat, control, exploit, and annihilate Africans. (p. 255)

A Way Out

Many young African Americans aspire to become professional athletes or entertainers. These are the images of success that they have seen on television pertaining to African Americans. Society portrays these two pursuits as particular to African Americans and their best options to escape poverty. Although some African Americans are able to succeed as athletes, actors, or musicians, these individuals represent a small percentage of African Americans in the United States. In order for the majority of

African Americans to be successful in careers that will bring them economic stability, more avenues must be available to African American on a large scale. “In the absence of a systemic imperative for African in American are, for the most part individual success, that have little or no bearing on the quality of life for the masses of African people” (Rashid, 2005, p. 544). As long as we continue to measure or success in purely individualistic terms, the African community will continue to undermine its own capacity for collective struggle and development (Rashid, 2005).

“Due to the fact that an African American middle class exists, there are some African American who are indifferent to the struggles of the masses because they have acquired their individual financial success” (Rashid, 2005, p. 544). Society has defined the ways African Americans can achieve some type of political or economic influence. As a result, this contented black middle-class are in fact miseducated to believe that they have made it, while the impoverished masses continue to suffer (Rashid, 2005).

Historical Implications

Ogbu found (1978) that:

Black American became involuntary minorities when they were enslaved by White Americans. For more than 200 years they were denied basic human rights, exploited economically, politically, socially and expressively. They were tightly controlled by White slave owners who forced them to behave like slaves. They were forbidden to behave in certain ways considered White prerogatives and were punished if they disobeyed. Punishment was sometimes extended to all slaves on the plantation, not just limited to the slave who committed the offence. This

collective punishment was important in the creation of the Black collective identity. (p. 6)

Despite, their slave history, African Americans have shown throughout history that they will not surrender. Woodson and other Afrocentrists share important values and concerns regarding African American people. “They assert that there is tremendous creativity and resilience within the black community, that deep exploration of black culture and history is essential to allowing these qualities to flourish, and that internalized psychological oppression has been just as damaging to black people as material oppression” (Levine, 2000, p. 5). The ineffectiveness of public schools to educate young black children plays an integral part in the racial inequality present in the United States (Levine, 2005).

Woodson (1933) contended that even African Americans who attended college were socialized to accept their inferiority simply because they were black. “This educational process depresses and crushes... the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples” (Woodson, 1933, p. 161). One effective means of accomplishing this socialization was “curricula, which focused almost entirely on European culture and history, and minimized or ignored African and African American contributions to civilization” (Levine, 2000, p. 6).

Negative Social Messages

Optimism is not shared equally by all black men. In the text, *Being a Black Man in America*, by Edward P. Jones, it stated that “about one in six black men has largely given up, expressing consistently pessimistic views about his life and what the future

holds for him, and for black people generally” (Jones, 2007, p. 26). Sociologist and social psychologists say black men’s poor self-image may arise from several factors. Movies, music, television and the news media are full of unflattering images of black men (Jones, 2007). One man stated, “I can’t remember the last time I heard a good word about black men. If we’re out in public and see young blacks—the way they talk or act, we always discuss that lack of respect... I can’t remember the last time we said anything positive about black men as whole. It’s always about isolated individuals. But, as a group no” (Jones, 2007, p. 23)

Bombarded with these images day in and day out, it is critical that young African Americans are exposed to their culture and history so they realize that individuals who looked just like them have made great contributions to both society and civilization.

Carl Bell (Jones, 2007), president and chief executive of the Community mental Health Council, located on Chicago’s south and west sides stated:

We got this outside system putting this lens on black people, especially black men, that says ‘toxic demon,’ and this demon lens is transmitted to the general public. You get black people buying into it, and black people saying we have no strengths, no redeeming qualities. (21)

Social Impact

In the text, *Being a Black man in America*, the author interviewed a 27 year old black man named Rashaunn Ferguson. As a boy Rashaunn remembered that his father told him that he was black and a boy and those were two things he would always have against him. The author (Jones, 2007) goes on to detail how a seed was planted in Rashaunn that would haunt him throughout his life:

Ferguson understands now that his father, an employee of the Santa Clara County transit system, was merely trying to prepare him for a harsh world. But in his young mind, his father's message was confusing—and a little disabling. 'It kind of brings you down,' he said. 'I know it is supposed to make you strive harder. But when you hear that over and over, it makes you believe you are not supposed to succeed. (p. 10)

His (Jones, 2007) life continue to spiral downward as he believed that he was destined to suffer:

After being left back in the third grade, Ferguson said, he lost confidence. As he continued to struggle in school, he worried about failing, as he had been taught so many black men do. Ultimately, he stopped trying, dropped out of school, fathered a son, now 7, and fell into crime. First, it was a few stolen cars. After a while, he sold crack cocaine, eventually serving a four-month jail term after authorities confiscated more than three grams of the drug from an apartment he shared with his girlfriend. Now, Ferguson is struggling to find stability, earning \$10 an hour working for a sign company in one of the nation's most expensive areas. (p. 10)

At the end of the interview, Rashaunn stated, "I can't help but think about the white kids I know. They were raised o think they are going to succeed and be better than everyone" (Jones, 2007, p. 10).

It seems like black men are born with two strikes against them. Blacks are more likely to be left back in school, score poorly on standardized tests, be assigned to special education classes, or suspended from school. This labeling process ultimately eradicates

the achievement motivation for this population, which may eventually lead African American males to give up on school entirely (Jones, 2007). “Of those who do not graduate, nearly three-quarters of black men in their 20s are jobless or incarcerated, an unemployment rate much higher than that of similarly situated white and Hispanic youths, according to a report from the Urban Institute” (Jones, 2007, p. 9).

Most black men are not optimistic about the future. According to the Washington Post-Kaiser-Harvard Poll, “about one in six black have largely given up, expressing consistently pessimistic views about life and what the future holds for him and for black people generally” (Jones, 2007, p. 26). In many ways, self-defeatism and negative thinking are responsible for the academic, economic, and political irrelevance of African Americans in the United States.

Method

At the first meeting, the group participants decided on the name of the group. The group implemented activities based on the *Improve Positive Adolescent Life Skills and Prevent Risky Behaviors and Situation* model (D’Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971). The group consisted of 16 African American students.

The group was conducted on a weekly basis during a class known as High School Experience for five sessions. Each session will last 35 minutes. Each session focused on specific topics:

Session 1: Group Introduction

- Pre-group survey

Session 2: Group Influence and the Power of Peer Pressure

- Popularity

- Culture
- Media
- Rap Music
- Environment

Session 3: Education

- How will it impact my future?
- Do I care whether I succeed academically or not?

Session 4: Group togetherness

- Utilizing one another for support
- Team building activity

Session 5: Urban Youth Empowerment

- Post survey
- Group Evaluation
- Validating the group members on their participation
- Providing group members with information about other after school and recreational programs

The participants of this study were 16 African American students who are in the ninth grade and currently enrolled at an urban high school in a medium sized city in the northeast United States. They were each between the ages of 14-16 years old and more than 50% lived in a single parent household where the father was absent.

The 12 students were pre-selected by the school counselor and ninth grade school administrator. These students were selected because they were doing poorly in school and

each had at least one teacher referral for unruly behavior (skipping classes, fighting, cursing, etc.).

Evaluation

Pre-/post-surveys are attached. The student researcher modeled his surveys after *Salvaging Sisterhood*, by Julia Taylor (2005). My questions pertain to the experiences of young African American males and covers issues such as academic achievement, achievement motivation, career-planning, and cultural identity. The researcher developed these questions based on information he gathered from students who attended a high school in an urban area in western, New York. The researcher taped students and obtained signed consent forms from their parents. During the taped sessions, the researcher discovered themes that centered on issues such as community violence, gangs, drug use, and lack of staff support.

The researcher compiled the information from the taped sessions and developed questions for the pre and post-tests that dealt with the themes mentioned above. The researcher attempted to locate an instrument that measured achievement motivation in African American students. Unfortunately, he was unable to locate an instrument that measured achievement motivation in African American students. The researcher found this fact to be problematic. More research should be done to discover what motivates African American students to achieve academically. The researcher used his field experience and taped sessions to create an instrument, which he believed, could measure and identify factors that influence achievement motivation amongst African American students.

Results

Achievement Motivation in a Group of Young AA Students

	Pre-test			Change
	Yes	No	?	
1. Motivation	16	0	0	+16
2. School Violence	2	13	1	-11
3. Course Topics	8	6	2	+2
4. Learned Information	9	4	2	+6
5. Job Opportunities	9	3	5	+5
6. Gangs	0	15	1	-15
7. Punctuality	15	0	1	+15
8. Depression	3	14	0	-12
9. Drug use	6	10	0	-4
10. Community Violence	7	8	1	-1
11. Weapons	2	13	1	-11
12. Weapons/School	0	16	0	-16
13. Staff relationships	6	4	6	+2
14. Cultural Pride	10	3	3	+7
15. Cultural Awareness	8	6	2	+2
16. Career	9	5	2	+4
17. Self-Perception	2	13	1	-11

What is the most important thing in your life?*Pre-Test*

Family	Money	Popularity	Grades	Others
13 (.65)	4 (.20)	1 (.05)	2 (.10)	

Pre-test

I found that all 16 students were motivated to succeed academically. I found that 2 out of 16 believed that school violence affected their ability to do well in school. I found that 8 out of 16 students thought that the topics they covered in school centered on their culture. I found that 9 out of 16 students thought they could see what they learn in school in their everyday life. I found that 9 out of 16 thought that education will help them get a job in the future. I found that 0 out of 16 students wanted join a gang. I found that 15 out of 16 students believed that it was important to get to their classes on time. I

found that 2 out of 16 students experienced depression. I found that 6 out of 16 students had experimented with drugs. I found that 7 out of 16 students knew someone who had been murdered in the past two years. I found that 2 out of 16 students had shot a gun recently.

I found that 0 out of 16 students had brought a weapon to school before. I found that 6 out 16 students perceived that school faculty cared about them and how well they do in school. I found that 10 out 16 students stated that what they learn in school makes them proud to be African American or Latino. I found that 8 out 16 students stated that what they learn in school helps them to learn more about themselves and their culture. I found that 9 out 16 students stated that faculty regularly talked to them about their career options or postsecondary education. I found that 2 out of 16 students believe that because they are a minority the media has convinced them that they will be unsuccessful in the future.

When asked what is the most important thing in their life: 65% reported that family was the most important; 20% reported that money was the most important; 5% reported that popularity was the most important; and 10% reported that their grades were the most important.

		Post-test		
	Yes	No	?	Change
1. Motivation	14	1	0	+13
2. School Violence	6	9	0	-3
3. Course Topics	6	6	3	0
4. Learned Information	14	0	1	+14
5. Job Opportunities	9	2	4	+7
6. Gangs	0	15	0	-15
7. Punctuality	14	0	1	+14
8. Depression	0	14	1	-14
9. Drug use	3	12	0	-9
10. Community Violence	7	8	0	-1

11. Weapons	0	15	0	-15
12. Weapons/School	0	15	0	-15
13. Staff relationships	6	1	8	+5
14. Cultural Pride	9	3	3	+6
15. Cultural Awareness	8	6	1	+2
16. Career	11	3	1	+8
17. Self-Perception	1	13	1	-12

What is the most important thing in your life?

Post-Test

Family	Money	Popularity	Grades	?
13 (.65)	2 (.10)	0	3 (.15)	2 (.10)

Post-test

During the post-test, one of the students from the first group was no longer in the class. Therefore, 15 students completed the post-test. I found that 14 out of 15 students were motivated to succeed academically. I found that 6 out of 15 believed that school violence affected their ability to do well in school. I found that 6 out of 15 students thought that the topics they covered in school centered on their culture. I found that 14 out of 15 students thought they could use what they learn in school in their everyday life. I found that 9 out of 15 thought that education would help them get a job in the future. I found that 0 out of 15 students wanted join a gang. I found that 14 out of 15 students believed that it was important to get to their classes on time. I found that 0 out of 15 students experienced depression.

I found that 3 out of 15 students had experimented with drugs. I found that 7 out of 15 students knew someone who had been murdered in the past two years. I found that 0 out of 15 students had shot a gun recently. I found that 0 out of 15 students had brought a weapon to school before. I found that 6 out 15 students perceived that school faculty

cared about them and how well they do in school. I found that 9 out of 15 students stated that what they learn in school makes them proud to be African American or Latino. I found that 8 out of 15 students stated that what they learn in school helps them to learn more about themselves and their culture. I found that 11 out of 15 students stated that faculty regularly talked to them about their career options or postsecondary education. I found that 1 out of 15 students believe that because they are a minority the media has convinced them that they will be unsuccessful in the future.

When asked what is the most important thing in their life: 65% reported that family was the most important; 10% reported that money was the most important; 15% reported that their grades were the most important; and 10% reported that they did not know what the most important thing in their life was.

Discussion

Data Analysis

On both the pre and post-test a majority of the students stated that they were motivated to achieve academically. My results were contrary to some of the literature that stated that blacks possess an oppositional defiant identity that did not value education (Ogbu, 1986). On the post-test more students stated that school violence affected their ability to do well in school (Noguera, 2003). When the pre-test was conducted, it was earlier in the year and there was not as much violence within the school. By the last group more fights had occurred in the school and prominent figures in the urban community where the research was conducted had been murdered. On the post-test more students indicated that what they learned in school could be used in their daily life. I believe this was a result of the topics covered in group, which deal with racism, hip-hop, self-concept

and other topics the students could relate to. On both tests all the students indicated that they would not join a gang. This was surprising because a large number of students in the school are either blood or crypts and were their “colors” or tag their “set’s” name in the hallways on a daily basis. It would be my assumption that negative peer influence would have an effect on at least some of the students in the group. On both tests a majority of the students indicated it was important to be on time for class. Throughout the five weeks I conducted group, not one student was late to a session.

On the pre-test some students indicated that they experienced depression whereas on the post-test no indicated they experienced depression. My perception is that in minority communities depression or mental illness are a sign of weakness or “being crazy” and some students may not have been completely honest (Ogbu & Margold, 1986). On both tests a majority of the students stated that they had never brought a weapon to school. Although some students are consciously aware of school violence they do not feel the need to protect themselves with weapons (Noguera, 2003). Also, a majority of the student’s on both tests indicated they had not shot a gun recently. In individual sessions some students have confessed that they have access to guns and have used them and I wanted poll the group to see if this was a common occurrence for the students in this community.

On the post-test it was troublesome that 8 students reported they were not certain whether school faculty actually cared about them. This worries me because students should feel that the faculty does care about them and wants them to succeed (Ogbu, 2003). Gangs are often successful because they pretend to provide the caring some students are missing in the home or in school. On both tests a majority of the students

indicated that although they were a minority, they could still be successful in the life. The delta for this question improved by one on the post-test.

I believe that 65% of the students stated that family was the most important thing in their life on both the pre and post-test because these students may not have any other support network in place. In minority culture, children are taught to keep their issues inside the family and to not seek outsiders for support (Kambon, 1998). Also, the theme of death was discussed throughout group. Some students believed that they could be killed any moment (Suskind, 1998). Therefore, it is my assumption that these students valued their relationships with their family even more because they know from experience how fragile and uncertain life can be.

Retrospect

The literature accurately described the complexities young African American face as people of color in the United States. W.E.B. Dubois (1903) talked about the paradox and complexity of being black in America. He coined this dilemma “two-ness”. The African American is both American and black. S/he is supposed to aspire to the ideal that all men are created equal and the right to the pursuit of happiness. This is inherent in his/her status as an American. But s/he is also black. S/he is different from his/her white counterparts and this difference becomes the basis for his/her perceived inferiority. It is difficult to aspire to maximize your intelligence, talents and abilities when you have a black face. The color of your skin has declared you as inferior and incapable (Dubois, 1903). No matter how fallacious these ideas, when the majority reinforces them, they begin to become real in the mind of the African American.

W.E.B. Dubois wrote about “two-ness” in 1903, but it is just as real today as it was in 1903 when he wrote *The Souls of Black folks*. African Americans are also taught these European ideals of greatness and superiority, thus devaluing the heritage and culture of African Americans. If African Americans are to aspire to be great, they aspire to white ideals of greatness thus, reinforcing a sense of shame within the African American (Watkins, 2001).

The literature found that African Americans must be taught about their ancestors and the greatness of their legacy. Knowledge of their history will instill them with the pride necessary to overcome the racism and discrimination present within America (Akbar, 1998). It is important for African American students to know that their history is filled with examples of men and women who have made great contributions artistically, scientifically, and technologically throughout modern history (Akbar, 1996). In order for young African Americans to have a positive self-concept, they must have a cultural identity that reflects the greatness of their African legacy.

Group 1

In my first group, I presented the students with four African Americans who are often shown on television. I had the students discuss each individual and whether they considered this person to be a role model. I learned that the students respected those individuals who were intelligent and wealthy. They also gravitated towards individuals who used their position in society to help others. They did want to model themselves after individuals who broke the law or who they considered unethical (Mickelson, 1990). In one particular instance, the individual was once rich and famous, but because he had

committed some crimes in the past, the group decided that this was not someone they wanted to model him or herself after.

The results indicated that the group was proud of their African American culture and did not identify with negative stereotypes of African Americans. The literature concluded that young African Americans considered negative social images of black culture that are portrayed in gangster rap and are typically violent as representative of “black culture” (Noguera, 2003).

Group 2

In the second group, we discussed the influence of the media on the characterization and socialization of African Americans. We used hip-hop as an example of how the media tried to project a certain image of black people to the masses. We watched a rap video that was filled with numerous images from alcohol, partying, a car crash, an ambulance, and lyrics about the artist's time in prison (Noguera, 2003). The students mostly identified with the idea of survival. Although the actors in the video were partying and celebrating with alcohol, the group determined, based upon the artist's narration that he could have been dead, but he is still alive. The group believed that because he was still alive, it was okay for him to celebrate his life.

Throughout the group, I learned that death and survival were themes that were prominent for these young students. Some of these students live in neighborhoods where the sound or sight of gunfire is a common experience. Some of them know someone close to them who has recently died. When they saw the video they saw a man who could have died, but overcame incredible odds and adversity to continue his rap career (Graham & Hudley, 2005). The results indicated that the group believed that they could overcome the

racist institutions present in American society. The group related to the theme of overcoming obstacles in order to become successful. The literature also presented examples of how African Americans have been able to triumph despite the adversity they face as minorities and the wrongs they have suffered throughout history (Corwin, 2001).

Group 3

In the third group, we discussed how the students perceive themselves as minorities and how they believe they are perceived by society. I had the students work in groups and create collages using pictures from magazines. They cut out pictures, which they believed represented their culture. Some of the students cut out pictures of sports figures, which represented their dream of becoming a professional athlete. Some focused on the capitalism and consumerism in black culture in which black people are preoccupied with the acquisition of jewelry and large amounts of money. One image in particular was of a black father who was sleeping while his baby was crying (Barkley, 2005).

I confronted the group about why they chose this particular picture and they stated that society believed that black fathers were incompetent and nonexistent. The students were able to use the pictures to express some of the stereotypes ingrained within American culture about minorities, but they were also able to refute preconceived notions about their culture and derive their own (Jones, 2007).

The results indicated that although the group was acutely aware of their race and how they may be denied opportunities as a result, overall, the group did not perceive their race as obstacle to success in the future. The literature indicated that African Americans

were aware that their race automatically puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing education and job opportunities which leads to pessimism (Jones, 2007).

Group 4

During our fourth group, we played jeopardy where I quizzed the group about Black and Latino history. I was somewhat disappointed that the students were not as knowledgeable about their history as I had hoped. They were more likely to answer questions about sports and entertainment correctly, than those about medicine, politics, or science. Although, they did not get all the questions right they were able to learn about Latinos and African Americans who have made great advancements throughout society (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

The results indicated that group perceived that the education they received in school taught them about their culture. However, many members of the group did not answer the questions about African American history correctly, although we had talked about certain individuals in earlier groups. Also, each group member stated that s/he had celebrated African American History throughout their educational process (Akbar, 1998).

Group 5

We terminated group during the fifth week. I addressed the group by stating how I perceived they had grown throughout the group process and how they were able to work as a productive team. I also confronted the group about stealing from me during the fourth week. One group member stated that he had stolen from me. I commended this group member and thanked him for his honesty and integrity. I stated that I would not forget how he spoke out, although it must have been difficult for him.

The group consensus was that the experience was fun and educational. Most members stated that they learned that although they live in a white society, they have the potential to be anything they wanted to be (Taylor & Graham, 2007). One girl cried because she stated her relationship with her teacher (co-leader) was special to her. She stated that her teacher was like her mother and that this relationship helped her to remain strong. The group also stated that they did not like it when other members stole from me because they considered it to be wrong and unethical. The group also appreciated the group activities and enjoyed learning how to work cooperatively as a team. I thanked them for allowing me the opportunity to work with them and I was glad to hear that they thought the group process was productive. I reminded them that the societal perception was that minorities could not work together (Shabazz, 1989) and that American society perceived that they were violent and allowed their differences to get in the way. I stated that this group proved such stereotypes to be false and unjustified and I was proud of how they had worked together.

The results indicated that the group perceived that they would be successful in the future and were proud of their culture. However, the literature stated that African Americans have a history of being unable to work together which dates back to slavery. African Americans were generally taught by their slave masters to mistrust one another (Akbar, 1996). This practiced kept African Americans divided which made it easier for the slave masters to control them. The group was able to refute the literature as they expressed satisfaction from being able to work positively as a group.

Conclusion

Young African American students possess the eloquence, intelligence, and critical thinking skills to succeed on a high level. Based on my results, it was important for the group members to experience cultural pride and perceive their history and legacy positively (Akbar, 1996). This perception also impacted how they perceived themselves. It was also important for the group members to carry themselves with pride because of their history and how much African Americans have achieved as a people (Akbar, 1998).

Although the literature stated that young African Americans believed that they would be denied opportunities because they live in white society (Kunjufu, 1985), the group members believed that they could be anything they wanted to be and that race is not a factor; and if it is, it is only to promote the fact that they come from greatness. The group process helped group members to clarify their values, their perceptions of a positive role model, their own ideas about self-identity, and help to foster pride for their culture, thus reinforcing the development of a positive cultural identity (Akbar, 1996).

Solutions

A “here and now” approach to this issue, where teachers address student self-perceptions about their abilities and the feeling connected to them may serve to increase the students’ level of motivation. It will also present the teacher with the opportunity to confront racist ideologies while validating the student as a person and African American.

For example, White teachers can begin to confront racist ideas that pertain to black children. Instead of suspending a black student and perceiving them as angry and violent, the teacher could assess whether this perception is accurate or driven by racist ideology (Lynn, 2006). The teacher could then share his/her perceptions with the students and use it as a learning tool (Hilliard, 1989). The students could learn from this

experience too and confront the racism present not only in society, but also in the classroom (Ogbu, 1978). This will provide the student with the opportunity to refute such perceptions and share their perceptions of who they are, what they experience as African Americans, and what they want to occur in the classroom in order identify racist practices and make the learning environment more productive (Hale-Benson, 1982). It will, also, show the students that the teacher cares about him/her, which seems to be very important to young people (Ogbu, 2003).

The incorporation of minority student culture in academia may help to improve minority student motivation and achievement (Gibson, 2005). The minority student will be better able to relate to and be knowledgeable when the curriculum is centered on what they know (Gibson, 2005). It also will help the minority student to feel accepted and validated by the school culture. Valenzuela (1997) notes, “rather than building on students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage to create biculturally and bilingually competent youth in an additive fashion, schools subtract these identifications from youth to their social and academic detriment” (p. 326).

During individual counseling sessions students have referred to the fact that their teachers “don’t care about them.” This single statement often produces an immediate affect upon the student. Sometimes, they look down towards the ground when speaking and their shoulders may even slump over. It appears as if they feel defeated. It is important that students believe that their teachers care about them as students as people. When a student perceives that a teacher is “merely doing their job,” it produces a chasm between the student and teacher that negatively influences his/her achievement motivation (Ogbu, 2003).

Teachers may be better able to reach African American students if they modify their teaching styles to fit the cultural background of their students. Communalism is an important part of the African tradition. Teachers can use cooperative learning styles and place students in groups so they can interact with one another. African tradition also places an emphasis on the art of story telling and movement such as dance. Educators can bring their classrooms to life by allowing students to give oral presentations or perform in skits (Ford & Harris, 1999; Shade, 1997). “Research and theory suggest that teachers who understand and integrate the cultural needs and styles of African Americans into the curriculum promote and enhance achievement among these students” (Ford & Harris, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Shade et al., 1997).

The better a student feels about him/herself, the more likely he/she will do better in school. Students with a positive self-concept take pride in their schoolwork and believe in their ability to achieve academically (Ford, 1996). Racial identity plays a critical role in the development of a positive self-concept for African American students. “We propose here that students of color who have a low, poor, or negative racial identity are less likely to perform well academically than students of color who have a high or positive racial identity” (Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999, p. 171). Therefore, positive racial identity development is directly related to academic achievement for African American students and vice versa (Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999).

White Americans experience race differently when it pertains to academic achievement. Their skin color is considered a gateway to and not a barrier to success. In short, “racism, prejudice, and discrimination can negatively affect the extent to which students of color identify with their racial heritage; it can negatively affect their racial

identity” (Ford, 1996; Grantham & Ford, 2003, p. 172). For both White and African American students, racial identity influences the student’s motivation and level of achievement (Ford, 1996; Grantham & Ford, 2003). Milner (2003) identified three areas that can help students of color do better in school: “(a) teacher education, counselor education, and professional development; (b) counseling development; and (c) multicultural gifted curriculum” (Milner, 2003, p. 172).

Research has shown that if you group gifted African American students who share similar goals together, their chances for future success greatly improve. One of the most effective ways to help gifted students of color cope with negative peer pressure is to involve them in initiatives where they have an opportunity to learn from and interact with similar peers academically. “These positive interactions provide students of color with opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with peers on the same academic level” (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005, p. 174).

In addition to positive peer interactions, college students and adult professionals from diverse racial groups can serve as mentors and role models for students of color (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005, p. 174). Positive peer interactions, relationships with black college students, and African American mentors will provide African American students with role models who exemplify what it takes to be successful. Such collaborations also provide students of color with an encouraging support network that can positively reinforce their dreams and aspirations (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005).

Ogbu (2003) contended the community, not society, should take responsibility for the education of African American children:

While not dismissing the importance of these factors, researchers should pay more heed to ‘community factors’ such as the ways minorities interpret and respond to schooling. The most effective way to improve black performance in schools lies not in the radical transformation of American society but in the black community changing its own approach to education. (p. 130)

The education African American students’ experience is predominately Eurocentric in origin. In order to counteract the miseducation of African Americans, African-centered education will provide African Americans with a curricula and institutions that will teach them about the greatness of their African legacy and empower to think for themselves and deny the racist notions inherent in the Eurocentric system of education (Rashid, 2005). “African culture must set the foundation for changing the institutional direction of education towards one that incorporates the history and contributions of African Americans” (Carruthers, 1999, p. 276). Carruthers (1999) compelled educators to:

Engage in support research for the sake of reconstructing the history and culture of African people; and to facilitate pedagogy informed by this research, envisioned as an intergenerational discourse, with the immediate objectives of institution building and community empowerment, and with the ultimate goal of liberation. Furthermore, it is critical to create and sustain a theoretical and institutional infrastructure that will inform a process of cultural and conceptual liberation. (p. 546)

Limitations

“In closing we leave to the readers of this particular issue to ponder whether African American males have been endangered or ignored in education. Nevertheless, more research is needed to inform policy and practice to improve the conditions of education for African American males” (Jackson & Moore, 2006, p. 203). Few studies have shown how the development of educational plans differs across racial lines. In the studies, “that have addressed racial and ethnic differences in the formation of educational plans, none have addressed the role of at-risk circumstances” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 230). Finally, parental influence is critically important to educational reform for at-risk students. Hodgkinson (1993) noted the implications of parental influences on students in at-risk situations have been neglected in the research, although this is a critical area of study for education reform.

Ogbu’s (2003) critique of parents is a generalization, which portrays them as uninvolved and unconcerned with the academic performance of their children. Ogbu’s critique seems judgmental and inappropriate. He admitted that the parents he interviewed did care about their children’s education, but goes on to say that “they fail to supervise their homework, lobby their youth’s teachers, understand the tracking system and gate keeping counselors, or perils of hip hop street culture” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 243) He blamed parents for not being able to defeat the obstacles that their children must face. Such a critique may alienate a segment of the population that researchers have proven play an important role in the academic success of African American students (Foley, 2005).

Suggestions for Future Research

The literature talks at length about the obstacles that young African Americans face in a Eurocentric society. As a result, the attainment of an adequate education, financial stability, and economic viability are concerns for African Americans in the United States. The research goes on to explain how the current social system is inherently based on a slave system which has been put in place by the dominant class in order to seize power. The literature did not elaborate on how African Americans could attain empowerment. Instead the reasons for their lack of relevance within society were described and discussed. The literature has failed to discuss how African Americans could achieve power politically. Political power would put African Americans in positions where they could make decisions about the education system, which is currently failing to adequately serve the youth. Political power would enable African Americans to develop a plan of action to implement social change instead of research, which reiterates the current state of affairs.

Researchers should attempt to develop a political approach that would help African Americans to overcome the racism, which has denied them opportunities in the realm of academia and in the workforce. Marx (1850) believed that Marxism provided the oppressed with a revolutionary plan of action that would enable them to overthrow the ruling class. Marx stressed that true power can only be achieved in the political arena and that masses must serve their general interest and promulgate their values, beliefs, and ideas in order to become relevant and achieve power within society. Marx (1850) stated that:

Every class, which is struggling for mastery... must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest. The

rule of the dominant class is always ideologically legitimated, since the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, and the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships... the relationships which make one class the ruling one. (p. 20)

Marx (1850) described the oppressed masses as disenfranchised citizens who had no place in society. He referred to them as, “a class with radical chains, a class in civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which has universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general...” (p. 15). This description seems to fit that of African Americans presently in the United States. It is the oppression which minorities experience that bind them together and Marx believed that his ideology was practical in terms of ending the suffering of the common man. “He believed that universal suffrage would spell dissolution of the oppressive state, and the liberation of man” (p. 15).

Research should also see how mentoring affects African American students in the long term. A longitudinal study should be conducted to see if African American student actually benefit from having an African American college student or professional involved in their life during their developmental years. Researchers should see if ten years from now, student who participated in some type of experiential group where they learned about their culture or were connected with a mentor have completed college and entered the professional ranks.

The literature also stresses how community forces have a powerful effect on African American students. Violence, drugs, gangs, and single parent households are some of the barriers young African Americans must overcome. Research can look at how educational programs, which take place in the community impact African American students. For example in a city school district in the northeastern United States, there are after school program that students partake in that teach them about their heritage and provide a positive influence to counteract the negativity in the community. Research should examine how student's lives are affected when they are educated outside of the school environment. African Americans spend a lot of their time in the community and researchers should see how students benefit when their community experiences are positive instead of predominately negative.

Implications for Counseling Practice in Schools

Each student brings a variety of academic and personal experiences with them into the classroom. School counselors are in the best position to address the concerns of the student, while providing him/her with support. "According to The Education Trust, school counselors hold central positions in schools and arguably are the most equipped in these setting to focus their efforts in developing programs, strategies, and interventions that address barriers to student achievement" (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005, p. 173). In order for counseling to be effective for African American students, it must utilize both multiculturalism and social advocacy so that counseling can address the social issues that effect students beyond the classroom (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003). "School counselors can assist students of color with developing coping skills when faced with negative peer pressure or social slights.

“School counselors can assist students of color with developing coping skills when faced with negative peer pressure or social slights. School counselors may also want to develop and offer anger management and conflict resolution programs for these students” (Moore, Ford, & Ford, 2005, p. 176). African American students are more likely to achieve academically on a consistent basis when they are able to deal with academic, social, and personal obstacles in healthy and appropriate ways. Moore, Ford, & Milner (2005) concluded that:

Underachievement and low achievement among gifted students of color can be better understood and addressed when teachers, school counselors, and administrators deal first with their negative thinking related to students of color and focus on the school and non-school needs of these students. The more knowledgeable and well trained these educational professionals are, the more likely they will be to improve educational outcomes for students of color. (p. 176)

It seems clear that coping with the search and choice stages requires support from significant others, including parents, teachers, and counselors. Without such support, students must seek information and answers to life’s questions by themselves. For example, if students are interested in postsecondary education, they must receive information regarding college and university entrance requirements, financial aid, living arrangements, and cost. Counselors are in the best position to provide students with the information necessary to access postsecondary education. For African American students, it is especially important that counselors are there to guide them every step of the way and provide them with accurate information that will allow them to pursue postsecondary education (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997).

This particular population may experience barriers such as poverty, racism, and discrimination that may dissuade them from pursuing postsecondary education and the encouragement and support from a counselor may aid in keeping them focused on their goals (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997). “Such a resource is particularly important for parents who have not attended a postsecondary institution and for those who have little time to seek assistance outside the home” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 245). Unfortunately, “students with little support, or those who rely on their own resources instead of support from significant others, may find the search and choice stage difficult to navigate” (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997, p. 245).

Many African Americans are first generation college students. Their family members may not understand the college process and the student can become overwhelmed. Lack of accurate information along with frustration may lead an African American student to give up on his/her dream of attending college. It is important that counselors target these students and provide them with the support, information and proper encouragement, so they will pursue postsecondary education (Bateman & Kennedy, 1997).

Counselors can also negatively impact their students when they are self-aware and culturally sensitive. Counselors can negatively impact African American students by feeding into the racist stereotypes inherent throughout society, especially as it pertains to career choices. Jones (2007) gave an example of how a counselor attempted to dissuade an African American student from pursuing a particular career choice because he was African American:

Guidance counselors at John B. Slaughter's high school in Topeka, Kansas, laughed aloud, Slaughter said, when he told them he wanted to be an engineer. They had never heard of a black engineer, and they told Slaughter he should pursue a trade. Slaughter ignored them and graduated from Kansas State University in 1956 with a degree in electrical engineering, launching a career that took him to the helms of the national Science Foundation, the University of Maryland and Occidental College in Los Angeles. (p. 13).

Conclusion

African American students face numerous obstacles that lead to self-defeatism and a sense of low self-worth throughout their educational experiences (Jones, 2007). However, an extensive knowledge of their history will help to foster cultural pride and positively influence how they perceive themselves and their chances for success in the future (Akbar, 1998). The literature demonstrated how education played a critical role in the development of an individual's self-concept (Gibson, 2005). An educational system that promotes the culture of African Americans and is sensitive to how African Americans learn may increase their achievement motivation and chances for success throughout their lives (Ford, 1996).

The group that was conducted for five weeks at an urban high school in western, New York demonstrated how discussions about how African Americans perceive themselves in the classroom and larger society fostered self-confidence and cultural pride. The results indicated how exposure to African American history, and discussions about racism and their experiences as young people in America, enabled them to identify the inner strength that is present inside themselves. It also helped them to realize the inner

strength that was present inside their ancestors who suffered innumerable injustices throughout American history (Corwin, 2001).

For African American students, it was important that they have a positive perception of themselves, which was directly related to a future outlook that embraced success instead of failure (Gibson, 1982). The literature documented how African Americans were losing in the academic arena, which ultimately led to failure in later life (Gibson, 1995). Failure could mean incarceration, poverty, or death (Moore, 2000). The literature proposed numerous ideas, which may help to reverse such trends. It also stated how the relationship between education and cultural identity could help African Americans to realize their talents and abilities so that they would be motivated to be successful in school, the work place, and other areas of their lives (Graham & Huddle, 2005).

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