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Factors Affecting the Educational Attainment of African-American Males: An Observational Analysis

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FACTORS AFFECTING THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN
MALES: AN OBSERVATIONAL ANALYSIS

by

Chauncey Williams

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 1996

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FACTORS AFFECTING THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN
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Western Michigan University, 1996

African-American males participation in higher education has declined due to low academic achievement. The research suggests that this low achievement is caused by racism, academic preparation, self-esteem, teacher expectation, and goals. Although I agree with most of the research, I have concluded that along with teacher's expectations, four other factors greatly impact academic achievement. These other four factors are (1) school demographics, (2) curriculum, (3) parental involvement, and (4) peer pressure. These factors were observed through casual conversations with African-American male high school students in a large midwestern area. The observational analysis suggests that improvement in these areas will help to increase academic success.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those people who helped contribute encouragement for me to complete this thesis. I would like to thank my family. First, my wife Toyura, my parents Mr. and Mrs. Ruben Williams Sr., and my brother Ruben Jr., and my sister Anjalon Williams. Thanks for all the support.

Second, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Doug Davidson, Dr. Jim Peterson, and Dr. Leroi Ray. Thanks for the guidance and support.

Chauncey Williams

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

African-American males are underachieving in school. According to a 1990 study by the Children's Defense Fund, an African-American male child has less than a 1 in 4000 chance of receiving a Ph.D. in mathematics, engineering, or the physical sciences. In addition, an African-American male child has a 1 in 372 chance of becoming a lawyer; a 1 in 684 chance of becoming a physician; and a 1 in 2,700 chance of becoming a dentist (Thomas Report, 1991). In sharp contrast, an African-American male child has a 1 in 24 chance of being imprisoned while in his 20's. Furthermore, he has greater than 1 in 3 chance of being unemployed as a teenager (Thomas Report, 1991).

These statistics indicate that African-American males have a higher chance of being unemployed and incarcerated than pursuing higher education and professional degrees. This shortage of African-American males pursuing higher education will impact the future of all African-American people. African-American males will continue to lag behind in educational opportunities and become nonexistent in the very institutions that shape policies and procedures for the public at large. These institutions are colleges, medical schools, law schools, and graduate schools.

The American Council on Education reported in 1987 that African-American male enrollment in higher education has steadily de-

clined since 1976. Meanwhile, enrollments were increasing for Whites, African-American women, and members of other minority groups. 1986 data from the Department of Education indicates that there were 200,000 more African-American women enrolled in institutions of higher education than men (Irvine, 1990). This data has serious implications for the future of African-American men as they get older. It implies that African-American men will have less economic and educational opportunities than their White counterparts and African-American women.

African-American male enrollment in higher education has been declining for numerous reasons. Some experts say the decline is caused by the steady rise of tuition rates, combined with the shift in Federal aid from grants to loans. On the other hand, Christopher Edley (1989), the former chief executive of the United Negro College Fund, stated that African-American families have traditionally pushed their daughters to go to college to increase their career opportunities. Whereas, African-American sons were traditionally encouraged to enlist in the military or take jobs that did not require a college degree (Edley, 1989).

Furthermore, Niara Sudarkasa (1991), president of Lincoln University, states that the decline of African-American males in college must be seen in the context of economics. She states that parents are feeling the economic burden of sending students to college because federal grants to minority students have been cut. Furthermore, many privately owned trade schools promised but did not deliv-

er quick job placements and salaries for students who enrolled in their programs (Sudarkasa, 1991).

Economics alone is not the primary factor for the decline in African-American males pursuing higher education. Social problems in the family and schools create an atmosphere that serves as a barrier for African-American males at an earlier age than young African-American females (Daniels, 1989). Frauenhofer (1989) stated that African-American male children are more likely than White male children to be punished for similar incidents and to be placed in classes for children with learning disabilities.

The National Coalition of Advocates for Students (1989) issued a study which revealed that African-American male students were most at risk for disciplinary action. For example, the more African-American males were involved in dysfunctional and presumed negative activities, the more likely they were to be removed from the classroom. Being removed from the classroom may prevent these young African-American males from being allowed by their teachers to participate in museums visits, student council, and other extracurricular activities. As a result, these students are less involved in educational activities that occur outside of the classroom. This reduced non-academic involvement may decrease their interest in pursuing higher education.

Therefore, the future African-American community will suffer because of the lack of males who are in the position to take advantage of jobs and leadership roles. Many males are uneducated and

unemployed. Increasing the percentage of African-American males in college may reduce the current negative trend of unemployment and little education (Sudarkasa, 1991). According to Joyce Ladner (1991), sociology professor at Howard University, many African-American women feel the immediate effects of the educational gender gap. For example, some professional African-American women are unable to find college-educated mates. This leaves some of the best and brightest African-American women to remain unmarried or marry outside of the race (Ladner, 1991).

The more education African-American males receive, the more economic opportunities exist. According to Steve Smith (1992), college educated individuals make four times as much in a life time than high school graduates. More African-American male college graduates may help to solve the economic problem of the lack of money or inability to create job opportunities in the African-American community.

Purpose of the Study

This thesis is going to address issues related to African-American male's lack of academic achievement and pursuit of higher education. Very little research has focused on African-American male students who are underachieving in school. There are five areas I observed through casual conversation with African-American males that influenced why they experience low academic achievement: (1) School demographics; (2) Organizational changes in curriculum; (3) Teacher

expectations; (4) Parental involvement; and (5) Peer pressure.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although retention and attrition studies on African-American students have been a subject of research in higher education, findings on African-American males are far from clear, consistent, or generalizable. While there are several reasons for not pursuing higher education in general, consensus in the literature indicate racism, academic preparation, self-esteem, teacher expectations, and goals are related to attainment of higher education for African-American males.

Racism

Since educational opportunities are limited by socioeconomic status, many children from poor families perform at lower levels academically than children from affluent families (Ogbu, 1988). In America, there is a disproportionate number of African-Americans that come from poor family backgrounds when compared to Whites. However, Ogbu (1988) notes that differences in academic achievement between African-Americans and Whites remain even when the children are from similar economic and social backgrounds. These findings lead some people to believe that African-Americans are genetically inferior to Whites. There are several reasons why this myth of African-American inferiority is not true. First, the early studies that

were conducted on academic achievement only examined a small number of African-Americans. Findings from these studies were then transferred from the small minority to the whole race in general (Ogbu, 1988). James Jackson (1987) points out that such studies lead to simplistic analyses which homogenizes African-Americans and tend to view racial differences as social and psychological deficits. Thus, some people may believe that African-American skin color (blackness) is the main reason for the deficit because of previous stereotypes centered around skin color.

Second, many studies fail to recognize that the life experiences of African-Americans are different than Whites. It has often been difficult for African-American youth to acquire a postsecondary education (McAdoo, 1988; Ogbu, 1981). Several psychological and interpersonal factors can influence whether or not a student is successful in higher education. For example some of the coping strategies African-American males utilize within poor urban communities can have a negative influence on their success in education. According to Ogbu (1981) acting invincible, hustling, pimping, and joning (telling jokes about someone's family members or close friends) are all examples of successful street survival strategies. These strategies may be the very characteristics that interfere with their ability to take advantage of the opportunities within school systems (McAdoo, 1988). For example, African-American males often are unable to use their street survival strategies with their teachers (McAdoo, 1988). A young African-American male who alters his clothes,

wears his hat cocked to the side of his head, and uses body language to express himself may be looked upon as a trouble maker by the educational system. Consequently this young male may begin to experience cultural discontinuity between his home environment and the school system (Ogbu, 1981; 1987). The lack of positive feedback from his teachers and other educational staff may further decrease the young males interest in academics.

Other research show that due to racism African-Americans are perceived to be less intelligent than Whites. Jeannie Oakes (1990) states that during elementary grades African-American and Hispanic students are more likely than their White peers to be placed in low-track classes. These students are usually placed in below average math and science courses during the second or third grade. Therefore, early in African-American students educational experience, they are perceived as less able to compete intellectually. It leads to students being taught material at a slower pace early in their academic careers which stifles the desire to learn. This restricts learning opportunities because new material may never be introduced to students until secondary school.

Academic Preparation

Furthermore, educational institutions contribute to the difficulties that African-Americans encounter when they attempt academic mobility. Many schools have been labeling African-American children as having learning disabilities and then the educational

system tries to channel them to special education which prepares them for inferior occupations (Ogbu, 1988). These occupations tend to be unskilled labor such as janitors, construction workers, or factory workers. Also, many African-American male students are only given opportunities for academic mobility if they are placed in special programs versus everyday interactions in school (Ogbu, 1988). The criteria which is used to accept students into these programs tend to be the same as the students who are already successful in school. For example, the students who are invited into these programs tend to have high grade point averages, are well liked by teachers, and are involved in many school activities. In most schools this is the top 5% of the student body. These programs are limited in the number of students that can participate. The numbers usually range between 10 to 15 students. Thus, this leaves large numbers of African-American males unable to participate in these types of opportunities.

Moreover, many school personnel seem to also share the assumptions of racist Whites that African-Americans are less intelligent than Whites. Thus, their expectations of African-American children are lower than for Whites. This influences the types of educational opportunities African-Americans receive at school. It results in inferior education for African-Americans. Many times these educators track African-Americans into non-college curriculum courses such as foods, physical education, or woodshop. These subjects limit the ability of African-American students to go to college.

College requires college preparatory courses such as trigonometry, chemistry, and English. Few African-Americans achieve high grades in these courses. African-American male students are often railroaded away from these subjects. They are discouraged from taking those courses by their advisors. On the other hand, White students are more likely to be encouraged to take college prep courses by their advisors. Ogbu (1988) notes that African-Americans notice this limited opportunity structure and become disillusioned about the real value of schooling. This leads to a lack of perseverance in rigorous, demanding courses and school in general.

Even though high levels of socioeconomic status increase African-Americans opportunities to attend better schools, African-Americans still are perceived by educators as not as smart as Whites. These stereotypes seem to happen regardless of the socioeconomic status. In addition, Whites tend to offer very little support to programs and policies designed to promote desegregation and equal opportunity (Ketterman, 1987). Public opinion polls show less support for governmental policies that insure equal treatment (Ketterman, 1987). This leads to less funding to urban schools that African-Americans tend to attend. Certain subjects are often not offered in schools such as high level science and math courses. Old, out-of-date equipment, is often being used in the classroom. In contrast, schools that have a majority White population tend to have the better funding and better laboratory equipment, computers, etc.

Hart and Jacobi (1993) agree that some counseling staff feel

that placing minority students in classes that may be too difficult for them would counteract efforts to enhance their self-esteem. In many inner-city schools, there is no accountability for promoting high levels of student achievement. These schools tend to have high enrollments of poor and minority students. The quality of education the school provides is rarely even studied or considered (Hart & Jacobi, 1993).

According to Roberto Cruz (1986), educators, counselors, and administrators must have lower expectations of African-American and Hispanic students. Cruz (1986) explains that a high school education was okay 10 to 15 years ago. Nevertheless, statistics show graduation from college allows students to be more competitive in the job market. Also many non-White students, teachers, and parents are limited in their ability to interact and extend learning beyond the classroom. Rarely do African-American students go to the library, the museum, or zoo on a consistent basis. Thus, limiting their view on what is possible beyond class.

Edmund Lewis (1990) states that African-American students priorities are not in order. Today, many African-American students seem unaware of why education is important. Schools have turned into socializing arenas. According to Lewis (1990), most of what African-American students need to learn are in books. In order for the knowledge to be learned, African-American students must read more. This new learning will take place outside of class. African-American students need to be prepared to read more in higher educa-

tion.

Self-Esteem

The push to enhance African-American males self-esteem is being considered the ultimate solution to the problem of lack of persistence and achievement in higher education. Frisby and Tucker (1993) indicate that a popular view held by educators, psychologist, and the lay public is that the African-American child's view of self is an important factor that either causes or shapes school failure.

Other studies suggest that self-esteem does little to enhance students academic achievement. According to William Cellis III (1993), the self esteem movement that began with such high expectations in the 1980's is running aground. Many schools are praising students accomplishments so consistently that such praise has become meaningless. Artificial awards and feel good tactics have been implemented in school systems. Some teachers have applauded students simply for turning in homework. Others accept work that even students know is lacking, which can have the opposite effect on a child's self-worth (Cellis III, 1993).

Teachers, parents, and administrators have allowed expectations to be lowered. The relationship between effort and self-esteem has not been stressed. By allowing students to function at the lowest standards leads to the need for remedial studies for African-American students. Students performing at a level that allows them just get by will discover that secure employment is still difficult to obtain.

Consequently, self-esteem comes through earned achievement when given true opportunity and challenges.

Also, it has been argued by many scholars that African-American students need an Afrocentric or multicultural curriculum to increase their achievement levels. According to Porter and Washington (1989), research does not support improved racial self-esteem will effect personal self-esteem. It is rather the shifting of values of African-American students self-concepts that account for enhancement of self-esteem. As a child develops, it is the different values that he acquires which become more or less important to his self-concept that is more significant. For instance, an African-American male may place a high value on being able to recite the alphabet at one stage of his development. As he grows older, peer group acceptance may take precedence. The point is that African-American male students racial pride is a small aspect of self-esteem and fostering academic achievement. It is a self-concept which values academic ability as necessary and important which will cause African-American male students to achieve.

Teacher Expectations

The reason so many African-American males have not or will not seek higher education is specific, and expectation related. Howard and Hammond (1985) suggest that it is the subtle influences people exert over the behavior and self-confidence of other people that determine a person's performance. Behavior and self-confidence must

be affirmed by expectations. Schools, despite their efforts to enhance students desire for an education, continue to have disproportionate numbers of African-Americans who do not stay in the classroom to learn.

When a student is placed outside of the classroom, he is effected adversely on examinations, classroom discussions, and learning new material. Teacher expectations influence students perceptions of how well they will perform. Many times teachers, counselors, and administrators equate students performance with ability rather than inadequate effort. The inferior performance and the inferior ability are not the same thing. The performance of the student systematically decides what types of classes he will take and the expectation a teacher may have.

Rich (1993) states that teachers tend to classify as brighter those children who are quiet, clean, and show respect for the teacher. Also, teachers bring into the classroom middle class values which emphasize that people who apply themselves get ahead in life. However, some teachers exhibit a double standard whereby some students are perceived to be more valued than others based on family status. Seldom mentioned in public schools are those students who rely on family connections, wealth, power, and influence to advance or maintain an important position (Rich, 1993). Thus, teachers with high expectations for certain students interact with those students more often. In addition, teachers are more likely to grant autonomy and punish them less for rule infractions (Rich, 1993).

Teachers personal values tend to center around three main issues. Those three issues are the teachers perception of a good or bad student, can all students learn, and the amount of opportunities a student gets to learn. According to Alice Warfield (1993), students interests are driven by the classroom environments in which they are placed. Teachers provide motivation to achieve. Teacher expectations for African-American males differ compared with other gender and racial groups. According to a study by Jaqueline Irvine (1990) teachers were more likely to reevaluate White and African-American females over a course of a school year, whereas with African-American males, the first impression remained the same. Many times the impression is more negative than positive. If a student's behavior is seen to be hard to handle, a teacher will try to send a student out of class. Many African-American males are seen in this context. Thus, many are placed out of class or not asked to participate in classroom discussion while in class.

In addition, the American public schools support the ideology of democracy as the best form of government, however, schools are not organized democratically. They are usually organized bureaucratically with a hierarchical power structure (Rich, 1993). Schools want academic differentiation and social sameness. It sends two messages in a complex situation. If a school's atmosphere is based on what students wear or one's appearance, then students are going to focus more on clothing or hair styles than academics. Many times this atmosphere provides group identity which allow students to be

more involved in social awareness than academic awareness.

Ralph Ezekiel (1987) states that from childhood, African-Americans experience lines of separation drawn by Whites with hostile intent. He concludes that since Whites seldom notice themselves creating the separation, they seldom think of it. Many African-American male students have internalized that they are not expected to excel, therefore they do not. It has almost become fashionable to fail or perform at a D or C level. For instances, a number of studies (Kunjufu, 1993; Irvine, 1990) indicate large numbers of African-American males grades are at or below C or less. In addition, Ogbu (1986) stated that African-Americans devalue education because they recognize job ceilings and educational discrimination. As a result, African-American students devalue education and put less effort in school work.

Goals

Howard and Hammond (1985) explain that reference group expectancies directed at an entire group of people rather than an individual have the same effect. For instance, the African-American male student at an early age perceives that either an athlete or a musician is the only career available to them in today's society. This is because the mass media continues to perpetuate the stereotypes of an African-American male as an athlete or a rapper. Mass media continues to portray these limited opportunities (entertainment and sports) for African-American males rather than the vast range of ca-

reers that are available to all.

David Aronson (1994) states that televisions' messages work on the unconscious creating images in a person's mind not recognized until he creates a similar situation. Various forms of stereotypes persist in media. The continuing portrayal of women in terms of their sex appeal; the quick resort to violence; the division of the world into good guys and bad guys; and the over-representation of glamorous careers. The African-American community continues to get bombarded with sports and entertainment careers that are based on pleasure rather than careers that require intellectual thought. African-American males still believe they can be a basketball or football star rather than becoming an engineer or lawyer. This belief is apparent even if an African-American male is not involved in sports.

Television continues to shape and develop values within the African-American community that are not in its best interest (Kunjufu, 1993). The current list of African-American oriented television programs continue to perpetuate the stereotypes in society. Most of the programs revolve around comedy, no one is at work, and consistently conflict with values of expanding a person's thinking ability. For instance, we can look at three particular shows. The shows are the "Fresh Prince of Bel Air," "Living Single," and "Martin."

These shows continue to introduce young African-American stars as people who need special treatment or a family to make it in life. The African-American females all tend to have jobs which are either

business oriented or where one needs higher education to obtain. For instance, the characters of "Living Single" show three independent women who have jobs such as owner of a business, a lawyer, and a publicist. On the other hand, the African-American male is consistently unemployed, does not enjoy school, and willing to work jobs that require little training or skills. For example, "Martin" continues to obtain jobs by joking his way into them. His friend Tommy does not have a job; Cole is a maintenance man; and the character Brother man has no clear job.

Society has created an arena where African-Americans are convinced that they do not count because they are economically disadvantaged. African-American students do not participate in the American dream. African-American students must understand that whatever an individual projects or invents is that person. There is an identity problem in American society. Whites have given lip service to equality. The walls of opportunity continue to operate according to policies that are based on situations which took place at a particular place in time. In the past, African-Americans as a race continued to be labeled as less than Whites. Thirty years after the Civil Rights movement, this still exist. The reason is simple. Even though the situation has changed, the policies remained the same. For example, racism and sexism are embedded in organizational structures, norms of evaluation, networks of communication, language, forms of power, and definitions of legitimacy that shape institutional practices.

Many Americans express fear of young African-American males that exceeds any rational basis because of the media. This fear is perpetuated again by expectations of African-American males. The fear is usually centered around gang activity. For example, if there are more than two African-American males together, it is common to associate them as being part of a gang and they are up to no good. Police brutality still exist against African-American males in 1996. The standards people abide by can be and are based on fantasies created by a particular person's point of view. For instance, on television, in comic books, and in the movies, popular culture represents fantasies created by a person, and one must be aware that these are fantasies that have nothing to do with reality.

Summary

The literature reveals little about African-American males in their studies. In most of the ethnic studies in the literature, they are concerned more about African-Americans as a whole than the particular experiences of male and female. It is clear that African-Americans are having a difficult time applying themselves in the current educational institution. The information presented identifies areas for further research to examine the African-American male as a whole. The expectancy level for African-American male achievement seems to warrant the idea that African-American males are unable to do the work, so do not challenge them.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

To explore some observations made in the preceding Literature Review, I conducted an informal, study of young African-American males in an urban midwestern high school. Using this type of methodology, allowed me to interact with the students without any disruption from their normal behaviors. I felt this method allowed students to talk with me honestly about their aspirations without them feeling they were being tested.

My work experience as an advisor who recruited students to go to college enabled me to form a trusting relationship with the students. I was able to work freely in the school because I was an advisor within the school for five years and attended the same school seven years earlier. Through interactions with the students, I observed the lack of interest among African-American male students to pursue postsecondary education. What follows is a description of the site selected for the study, a profile of the sample, and a summary of the topics introduced for discussion.

Site

The site selected for this study was a large high school in an urban area in the midwest. The site was chosen because of the accessibility and my familiarity with the staff and location. The demo-

graphic profile of the students at this site is typical of a student population with a large African-American male representation with a broad range of academic abilities. Students were observed in classes, hallways, social events, library, and at lunch time. A normal school day was 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Sample

Approximately 100 African-American male students participated. I came in contact with these students through casual conversation and observation of their behavior throughout a typical academic calendar year, September-June. The students ranged from 9th-12th grade.

Process

I used a pen and a notepad and observed basic behaviors of students during a typical school day, exam time, and normal interactions among peers, teachers, and administrators. I positioned myself as a guest in academic classes such as math, English, and science. While in these classes, I observed interactions between students, peers, administrators, and teachers.

The note pad was brought to the school two days a week. The dates were from September 1991-June 1994. I observed the interactions of the African-American male students and noted any changes in attitude as they interacted with counselors, teachers, peers, or administrators. This assessment was followed up with discussions with students, teachers, administrators, and peers about their atti-

tude about school and how it was preparing them academically for postsecondary education.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following framework for explaining the lack of educational achievement is derived from Ogbu's (1981) school ethnography studies. These studies illustrate the linkage between schooling and the corporate economy. Ogbu (1981) explains that many schools function in order to assist students to acquire skills to gain jobs as adults. However, African-American students face different experiences in the school system that do not necessarily link education directly with job success. Ogbu explains that, historically, African-Americans have not been permitted to compete freely within the job market even when they had the educational qualifications and ability. This difference affects the perceptions of schooling in relation to their economic and social realities. Education attainment is not seen as a chance for economic self-betterment for African-Americans because many family members, neighbors, and relatives still seem to struggle to be successful after obtaining appropriate schooling. For instance, African-Americans who have degrees may still get paid less than their White counterparts who have the same educational and occupational backgrounds.

It is believed that education continues to shape the ideas and beliefs of individuals to maintain the status quo. The status quo for academic achievement in minority high schools is assumed to

be low and inferior to non-minority schools. Also, educational assumptions allow many individuals to have little concern for why so many African-American males remain in the social conditions mentioned in the introduction section of this thesis.

Observations

Based on my observations and responsibilities over the past ten years as a student and an academic advisor, I have noticed the following demographic changes in this urban high school. These changes have affected the social structure of the school and African-American male academic achievement. The percentage of African-American youth attending the high school has increased substantially. The racial makeup of the school has changed from approximately 40% African-American to almost 80% African-American over a ten year period.

Moreover, the school's overall population has decreased and the number of teachers in the school has declined as a result of the decline in population. The most significant factor of this decline is the reduced number of counselors. The reason is because counselors effect which classes students choose to take throughout their high school careers. Rarely did I see African-American males seek out assistance for future careers or academic preparation for college.

Next, the classroom sizes have increased due to more students being placed in remedial subjects and having fewer subjects and tea-

chers to choose from. The counselors placed fewer minority students especially, African-American males, in classes that promote college preparation. The class size for students averaged around 30 per class. The teacher burnout level seemed to also increase over this period. I have noticed a small number of teachers willing to assist students after school or being the chairperson of committees such as French club, Spanish, Dance, Pep band or intramural sports.

These social structural changes do effect the African-American male retention in the school. First, the decline in after school programs does not allow the African-American male student to have an outlet to be active beyond sitting in the classroom. This does not say it will not effect African-American females but males are, in general, more active in physical types of activities such as athletics, band, karate clubs, ROTC, etc.. Second, studies indicate that teachers have had higher expectations for female students (Kunjufu, 1993; Irvine, 1990). I have noticed that teachers call upon the female students more in class, and give them greater feedback on their responses. It also seems that teachers valued females more in classroom discussions. The African-American female's attention span seemed to be greater and they were less likely to disturb the teacher in the classroom. In addition, the high school has a large female teacher population. I believe this effects the way teachers interacted with most of the African-American male students in class. It seems that a higher proportion of males were put into detention and in-house suspension than females. Leaving many African-American males

not in class to learn.

Despite an increased awareness about increasing students basic reading and math skills, the school promotes very few activities that promote these initiatives. The school uses very few resources. First, there are no more after school clubs, no scheduled pep rallies, no tutoring, and intramural sports. Participation in extracurricular activities is almost nonexistent. Second, the library has not updated its reference material over the ten year period. The encyclopedias are old and college guides are not even current. African-American male students were not encouraged to use the library. Therefore, many did not use it. Also, the library has a policy that students can not use the facility after school because it closes when the school closes at 3:00 p.m. Thereby, leaving many students unable to use the facility after school for homework.

In ten years, the curriculum in the school has moved from a well rounded high school education of a 180 credits to a specific area of concentration totaling 225 credits. There are limited opportunities to develop skills that students are lacking under this new system. For instance, students have a choice of one general college prep curriculum or five different skill training or business application curriculums. The latter programs allow students to obtain more credit and be away from school more. I observed many African-American males have chosen this route. They do not complete a college prep curriculum because they are allowed to drift through a general high school curriculum taking the easy courses and doing

hands on job training programs. These programs lead to very few job opportunities because they are structured as alternative credits for high school graduation requirements rather than as job preparation.

In addition to the 225 credits, every student must pass minimal exit competency tests. The tests are in the areas of math, reading, and life skills. If a student does not pass a minimal exit competency test, the student has three options. First, a student will be placed in courses designed to re-teach skills; second, a student will be provided other opportunities to retake the test; third the student will be encouraged to participate in special programs to reinforce the necessary skills. Also, many were unaware of college entrance exam test (ACT or SAT) because they were rarely announced in class or during counseling sessions.

These policies have a negative effect on African-American males because more seem to be pushed through the system which requires them not to acquire the skills to graduate and go to college. If a student passes all of his courses and receives 225 credits, he still may not graduate if he doesn't pass the competency exams. I have noticed a large number of African-American male students who must take courses such as consumer math, algebra essentials for three years before they are able to advance to a college prep class such as geometry. The same is true for English. Many have to take a reading course for almost 2 years or repeat freshman English, before they are ready for the competency exam. These courses effect students' academic achievement because these subjects are considered require-

ments before one takes the competency exam.

The grade point averages of many African-American males were just at or below a 2.0. However, there were two students in particular who excelled with g.p.a.'s of 3.0. Terry and Oscar. What separated these two students from the rest was their desire to want to do better in school. When I asked why they enjoyed there classes, both responded with identically. They felt learning was fun and it kept them eligible to participate in their varsity sport; Terry ran track and Oscar wrestled. In addition, when I asked other African-American male students about how they enjoyed math or science courses, the response was the same for most of them. Many felt they did not need higher level math skills or science skills. They felt they already knew how to count money so there is no need to study math and a courses such as chemistry does not effect them.

Moreover, many African-American male students felt embarrassed sitting in classrooms over and over again trying to pass a class and a competency exam. The result for many of the African-American males was usually an incentive to dropout and to attend an alternative school which would allow them to assimilate as if they are still enrolled in the regular public school.

Next, I observed parental involvement or support in school related activities. For example, James who lives with his single mother came to my office expressing his mother's desire for him to do better in school. I asked James does his mother attend any school related activities and he replied no. I made several phone calls

to his mother and she responded with great joy that I was interested in his progress but she felt she has done all she could to help him. She wanted me to be the one who followed up on his progress and to give her feedback. Therefore, she seemed to pass the responsibility onto me for her son's progress as opposed to pursuing this on her own.

As a result of this experience with James, I began to notice fewer African-American parents present at parent teacher conferences, athletic events, plays, and very few are involved in the PTA. Also, many are not part of the boosters or alumni groups who sponsor the athletic or social events such as homecoming or prom. It seems that more parents were not aware of their children's school activities. This effects African-American males because the parents who were not involved in the social activities of the school may not encourage their child to participate in school. This lack of participation causes many students not to structure their activities around school. In addition, many students were not involved in any school activities unless it was a varsity sport, such as basketball, football, or baseball.

I found there was less talk about academics and the benefits of using extra-curricular activities to help African-American male students to attend an institution of higher education. Many African-American parents were not seen unless there was a disruption in school. I observed that a lot of parents came to the school when their child had been suspended or dismissed for some disciplinary

reason only in order to get them back into school. But rarely did I see any parents come to structured events that may prevent this from happening such as parent/teacher conferences.

In the past ten years, there have been many changes in society. The peer group appears to have become more influential than parents or administrators. As a result, the peer group can affect a student's will and motivation to achieve academically. There is a tremendous amount of pressure to express the peer group's values and belief system vs. teachers and parents values and expectations. Over the past ten years, rap music has become a very powerful source of socialization for African-American male youths. Music videos and CD's dominate African-American male students' leisure time. Also, talk shows and police shows are depicting African-American male youths as uncontrollable with few prospects for stable, legitimate employment. The peer group influences many African-American male students to resist the image of a good student such as one who is prepared for class, homework finished, and ready to participate in class. Many students were active in class, but very disinterested in the subject matter.

The peer group in school consisted of friends and classmates. Many African-American male students seemed to mimic a lot of what they saw on television as their roles in school. I have noticed that more male than female students did not carry books to class or take the books home. Many were wearing clothing twice their size and were very confrontational when asked to follow directions by

teachers or administrators. The African-American male peer group has redefined studying and being smart as not cool or masculine. The male students seem to want to get attention by being disruptive in class or not saying anything while in class. For example, I worked with one student for two years named Eddie and observed how his peers influenced his behavior in school. He explained to me that he felt intimidated to speak in class because it did not reflect his image of being a class clown. He also acknowledged that he could do the work but since many teachers did not call on him in class he did not value homework. Thus, he continued to come to school unprepared to learn. Eventually, Eddie dropout because he did not pass his classes and he did not acquire many credits for several semesters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, some solutions or recommendations are offered based on the preceding analysis. While no brief statement can be all encompassing, the issues raised herein will shape the future. African-American males face the most difficulty in making the transition from high school to college. Gifted, talented African-American males are a rare and vanishing breed. More need to see themselves as productive, contributing, and nurturing role models in the future. The attitude that being intelligent is not masculine must be replaced by the mind set which believes it is great to think, reason, and dream.

African-American males need to perceive academic success as a

desired goal. Their definition of success appears to be immediate gratification of material and emotional desires unrelated to education. There is a need to stress the importance of small successes which can lead to large gains. Unless academic achievement is stressed and support services provided, academic standards will decline. The African-American male needs to be made aware that he is needed in the future. Many are not given the responsibility of being accountable for their own actions. Many teachers and administrators need to stress better study habits and to stop allowing the African-American males to be disruptive in class or dismissed with no solution to the anger or disruption. It has been suggested by one teacher in the school that maybe more counseling or discussions with students will inspire African-American males to learn.

Ogbu (1981) stated that African-American children and their teachers differ due to communicative backgrounds. He mentions that cultural differences do effect the response interchanges between students and teachers. This difference effects how a student is viewed in class by the teacher who may have biases already. For instance, several students would complain that they are not being treated fairly in class because they may shout out answers to questions in class but are not recognized because they spoke before the teacher completes his sentence. This seems odd to those students who believe that being first to say something in class is important. Thus, many begin to gradually say nothing in class and become labeled as disinterested.

The implications here are plain: incremental reforms will not be sufficient. Schools today are virtually unchanged from the structure of schooling that was created at the turn of the last century. This model of schooling served for an industrial America, quite effectively. This industrial model is not appropriate to the electronic information age. The unskilled and heavy industrial jobs are disappearing. The educational requirements will increase and the demographic changes require that everyone receive a quality education. The occupations of the future will be shaped by technology.

There should be a restructuring of education. This implies that tracking and ability grouping will be replaced with more appropriate responses to existing student diversity. Programs and curriculum must be designed to enhance students' understanding and tolerance of different cultures, languages, lifestyles, religions, and racial/ethnic groups. The focus of schooling should be the growth and enhancement of all students, irrespective of race, gender, social class, handicapping conditions, language spoken. An effective school strives for both quality and equity in student outcomes. In the curriculum, the lecture format should be replaced by a more personal format in developmental courses, retention efforts should continue beyond the freshman year, and cultural contexts should be emphasized.

African-American males under achievement in school needs to be seen in context of learning styles. For instance, many of today's generation of students have a shorter attention span because of tel-

evision's affect on their ability to concentrate. These students including African-American males are more visual learners now. Visual stimuli such as computers and television have captured many students pastimes. Television provides an opportunity for educators to use more resources than books and lectures. In every classroom, there should be a television which can enrich the value of learning in the classroom. As television programs from PBS, Discovery Channel, or Learning Channel are implemented into lesson plans, more students will have the visual aids they need to stay focused on the lessons and learning. In order to change the curriculum and avoid most of the public education administrative bureaucracy, I propose that department heads be targeted to change the traditional model of teaching from the lecture format and request televisions and computers which have programs such as email, the internet, and CD ROM capability as part of the classroom resources.

Train teachers to follow the new technology or quickly remove those teachers from classrooms. Since current heads of department determine which lesson plans students will learn, it is important to target them with new ideas about integrating teaching methods with the new technology.

Preparation is the essential factor for students success in college. African-American male low academic achievement has been recognized in cities across the Nation. However, proposed solutions have not been very effective. Many groups within the cities have developed programs that encourage that African-American males stu-

dents internalize the attitudes and behaviors that make them successful individuals. Education is just one requirement among others that will promote African-American male success.

Programs through the NAACP, Fraternities, Sororities, and ect., place an emphasis on rights of passage and community empowerment. These programs do work for a limited number of individuals but the vast majority of African-American males need the Public education system to restructure its efforts and support the Male Academy as an option for some African American youth underachieving in the school system. These students should be targeted in the middle school years because this is around the time many may become disinterested in school. The attractiveness of the Male Academy is its potential to target ways to provide academic success to underachieving students with discipline and lower student teacher ratios.

For the disruptive student, there needs to be more emphasis on conflict resolution and learning to walk away from peer conflict. A solution to the problem is more teachers concerned about the African-American males. Also, there needs to be an increase in the number of African-American male elementary and secondary school teachers. I believe African-American males tend to learn more from African-American men. They tend to listen more from individuals who look like them and reflect what they are to become.

In order to determine the educational impact of these recommendations, further research is needed. The research should be conducted on the following four characteristics:

1. Emphasis on testing, test preparation, and academic counseling.
2. Development of motivational techniques to keep interest in class and peer group mediation.
3. Emphasis on what to do to succeed through tutorial assistance to enhance weak and strong skills.
4. Other measures that use technology to encourage further growth and improvement of students learning styles.

Ultimately, the future of African-American males rests with the education that is provided to them. With these recommendations and quality preparation, more will achieve academic success.

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