1995

The motivation of the successful African-American adolescent male

LaVonne M. Spires
University of Northern Iowa

The motivation of the successful African-American adolescent male

Abstract

This review of the literature looks at the motivating factors for the academic success and failure for the African American adolescent male. The questions which are addressed in this review are: 1. Are there multiple levels of self-esteem? 2. Is there a correlation between ·self-esteem and motivation for academic achievement? 3. What effect does the school and its environment have on academic success? 4. What impact does the African American family have on the success of young adolescent males? Suggestions based on the findings are that as middle schools restructure they will need to focus on the academic and social needs of the African American adolescent male and all children of color. New strategies must be developed to raise academic self-esteem, cultural pride, and to provide a greater sense of school membership through parent/community involvement. When looking at the needs of the African American adolescent male or any student at risk, the restructured middle school must focus on the development and implementation of the following programs: African American male mentoring; the recruitment of "look like me" educators; celebration of diversity in the classroom; relevant curriculum with alternative assessment; staff development; parent/teacher communication network; and the community as a partner in education.

The Motivation of the Successful African American Adolescent Male

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Division of Middle School/Junior High School Education

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

University of Northern Iowa

By

LaVonne M. Spires

July 1995

This review of the literature by: LaVonne M. Spires

Titled: The Motivation of the Successful African American Adolescent Male

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Donna Schumacher

August 2, 1995 — **Date Approved**

Graduate Faculty Reader

Marvin Heller

August 7, 1995 — **Date Approved**

Graduate Faculty Reader

Peggy Ishler

August 18, 1995 — **Date Approved**

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Abstract

This review of the literature looks at the motivating factors for the academic success and failure for the African American adolescent male. The questions which are addressed in this review are:

1. Are there multiple levels of self-esteem?
2. Is there a correlation between self-esteem and motivation for academic achievement?
3. What effect does the school and its environment have on academic success?
4. What impact does the African American family have on the success of young adolescent males?

Suggestions based on the findings are that as middle schools restructure they will need to focus on the academic and social needs of the African American adolescent male and all children of color. New strategies must be developed to raise academic self-esteem, cultural pride, and to provide a greater sense of school membership through parent/community involvement.

When looking at the needs of the African American adolescent male or any student at risk, the restructured middle school must focus on the development and implementation of the following programs: African American male mentoring; the recruitment of "look like me" educators; celebration of diversity in the classroom; relevant curriculum with alternative assessment; staff development; parent/teacher communication network; and the community as a partner in education.

Table of Contents

The Motivation of the Successful African American Adolescent Male

James Weldon Johnson wrote in a poem segment this description of the African American people "We're a special people. We're the best and the brightest our ancestors ever produced!" (cited in Kimbro, 1993, p. 1). However, recent news reports, published studies, standardized tests results, and census statistics on education and crime would have the American people believe that this pronouncement is delusion. National statistics indicate:

> There are more African American men in jail than in college (one fifth of these are talented and gifted).
>
> There is a disproportionate number of African American men on death row.
>
> African Americans comprise 17% of the nation's school population but yet they are 41% of the special education placement.
>
> African American males are suspended from school more often than their White counterparts and for longer periods of time.
>
> A large number of Black boys are from single parent homes, headed by a matriarch guardian, older sister, aunt or grandmother. (Wright, 1992)

Often cited as the "endangered specie," (Wright, 1992; Scales, 1992; Garibaldi, 1992) the successful African American male and the future of a culture are at best tenuous.

Changing demographics put not only the future of a culture at-risk, but a nation as well. By the year 2000, approximately one-half

of the nation's school age children will be children of color (Banks, 1991). Unless dramatic inroads in the education of these children evolves, these students will be unable to meet the educational and technological skill demands of the jobs of the future. American employers will look to a global market to fill these jobs, thus creating more unemployment for the already underemployed African American and an even wider gulf between the haves and the have nots.

Purpose

For the young adolescent African American male, a lack of school membership, a loss of locus of control and absentee family involvement are strong determinate factors in poor academic achievement. This graduate review and analysis of the literature focuses on the motivation of the successful young adolescent African American male and how the educational system might be restructured to insure his success.

Questions to be addressed through the course of this review of the literature are:

1. Are there multiple levels of self-esteem?
2. Is there a correlation between self-esteem and the motivation which leads to academic achievement?
3. How does the school and its environment influence academic success?
4. What impact does the African American family have on the success of its young adolescent males?

Methodology

The descriptors African American/Black male, adolescent, motivation, self-esteem, African American educators/parents and school membership were used as search terms to locate pertinent *ERIC* documents. The library at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the professional media center at the Council Bluffs Community Schools' Educational Services Center were used extensively. Additional source material was obtained through observations of and conversations with African American teachers, parents, and students. These observations and conversations were a major element of the investigation of this topic.

Definitions

In order to provide a clear means for communication, the following terms are defined to establish a common meaning.

African American/Blacks - - Interchangeable terms

Acting White/White boy - - Street terms used as put downs to any Black who is academically successful

External Motivation - - External forces which provide an incentive

Fictive Kinship - - A term for non-related extended family

Global Self-Esteem - - A internal view of one's self as a person

Intrinsic Motivation - - An internal drive to succeed at a task

Making It - - A street term which denotes success

PSSM - - A psychological sense of school membership

School Membership - - A student's sense of belonging in a school community

Self Efficacy - - A sense of predicting one's future with a measure of success

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Educational achievements made possible by 20 years worth of civil rights legislation, trends and statistics verify an ever growing African American middle class. However, these same statistics point to an economic chasm being created between the middle and lower class because of the academic failure of the African American male. Are poor self-esteem and a simple lack of motivation the principle reasons for this failure? This particular question led to the notion that there might be multiple levels of self-esteem and that there might be external motivation factors affecting a person's academic performance. External motivation factors such as poverty, parent non-involvement, a loss of school membership, teacher attitude, classroom management, and college preparation were investigated to determine their impact on the academic growth of the African American adolescent male.

How has the current trend, middle school restructuring, impacted the external motivation of the African American adolescent male? As a current trend in education, school restructuring is only at

the beginning stages of addressing the academic needs of the African American adolescent male. According to the middle school philosophy, the primary goal of today's middle school is to not only prepare the student population for high school but to meet the educational, social, and technological needs of the student. For children of color, who will comprise a large percentage of the 21st Century work force, these needs will include competing successfully in the world's job market.

The restructuring of the middle schools must include an assessment of current curricula, strategies, teacher education programs, and attitudes. The restructuring process will need to design and implement programs which provide African American male role models, shared curriculum and decision making and mentoring programs designed to meet the needs of students, parents and teachers to elevate academic achievement for the African American male (Wright, 1992; Beane, 1991; Hare & Hare, 1991).

Are There Multiple Levels of Self-Esteem?

The dictionary definition of motivation is: anything which provides an incentive; to move to action. Self-esteem and motivation have been linked as significant factors related to academic performance (Jordan, 1981). An issue debated frequently in the education community, however, is that of self-esteem/self concept and its impact as a motivator. Many educators believe that social and academic success are tandem with a student merely feeling good about him/herself. This, however, for the African American male is not a truism. Many African American adolescent males have been found to make a poor academic showing in spite of having a positive

global self image (Jordan, 1981; Marchant, 1990; Madhere, 1991; Beane, 1991). This was especially in evidence in a study conducted by Marchant (1990), in which forty-seven African American urban students were given the vocabulary, reading and math sub test of the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills.* While these students performed below the academic national norm, they did maintain a high level of global self worth.

Self-esteem as a success motivator for the African American adolescent male has three distinct components: global, academic and cultural (Hare & Hare 1991; Madhere, 1991). Educators agree that each component is equally important to success and is affected by extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors.

Using Harter's *Five Components of Intrinsic Motivation,* Marchant's analysis noted that the African American adolescent's academic performance was perhaps based on an intrinsic measure of curiosity in specific situations, i.e. math, physical education, the arts (Marchant, 1990; Beane, 1991). As with other children, the African American male has a growing interest in learning when he begins his formal education. This excitement about learning begins to ebb by fourth grade. This decline may be attributed to the placement of these children due to standardized testing and Eurocentric cultural beliefs and standards (Hillard, 1976; Marchant, 1990). Marchant (1990) terms this limited Eurocentric measurement as "public intellectual domain."

Cultural measures of success

The African American adolescent male finds his own culture in direct conflict with academic and socially acceptable standards of the

Eurocentric culture. The adolescent male is "compelled to learn to see the world through what W. E. B. DuBois called 'dual lenses' -- one Black, the other White" (Hare & Hare, 1985, p. 8). While the Eurocentric society places great emphasis on the success of the individual, African American traditional values and socialization are deeply rooted in the group. African American students have the following tendencies: they view things in their environment in its entirety rather than in isolated parts; they prefer intuitive reasoning; they place importance on approximate concepts of space, number and time rather than aim at exactness or accuracy; and they rely on nonverbal as well as verbal communication (Shade, 1982). A sense of loyalty to the culture may very well be the academic downfall of many African American male students.

This same sense of loyalty to the sub-culture of the "fellas" or "homies" may destroy the gifted African American adolescent male. Often teased or "dogged" for being academically successful, many talented students give up or dumb down for acceptance. Instructors and parents must be aware of and guard against the ostracizing of academically successful "White boy" males. Ascher (1991) states that parents and the community must revisit cultural values which foster success. Some of the success values are: strict attendance, assistance with schoolwork, development of nonviolent conflict resolution skills, and the promotion of responsible sexual norms.

If the African American adolescent's environment is one which fosters positive academic success opportunities and "success identity," then the student will succeed. The Hare Plan to Overhaul the Public Schools and Educate Every Black Man, Woman and Child,

(*Hare Plan*), states that the African American adolescent male will achieve academically when he is given the skill tools needed to succeed. The *Hare Plan* states that once these tools are in place, educators and parents must encourage and demand that students do their best. Based on the construct that it is easier to teach a child to read and study than it is to improve self-esteem, Hare and Hare believe that an elevated performance in school will elevate student's academic and individual self-esteem (Hare & Hare, 1991).

Cultural self-esteem

Cultural self-esteem for many adolescent African American males is a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. This negative image, which has been perpetuated through the media, racism, gang activity, unemployment, poverty and single female parents, is unfortunately attached to every Black male child/adolescent. Hare and Hare (1985) state that: "Black boys are the victims of a broken patriarchy" (p. 90). Cultural self-esteem for African American children will soar with "success identity" (Hare & Hare, 1991). The African American adolescent male needs Black success models. He needs success models, not from the sports page, but from the community. School districts nationwide must infuse multicultural studies which break the negative stereotypical myth of the African American male. Positive "look like me" mentors must also be in place to break the myth of the self-fulfilling prophecy and raise academic self-esteem (Ascher, 1991; Garibaldi, 1992; Wright, 1992).

The African American adolescent male's self-esteem will be elevated by the infusion of African American literature, history, and heroes in education. Beane (1991) states that young people need to

see their culture as valuable. The African American adolescent can and will benefit from a school curriculum steeped in "common culture." "Common culture" as defined by Ravitch, is a culture which elevates African American political and social writers such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and James Weldon Johnson as well as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Henry David Thoreau to hero status (Ravitch, 1991).

Self-efficacy and locus of control

Many children and parents believe that they have no control over educational outcomes and discard the idea that education is a means of opportunity (Marchant, 1990). When African American adolescent males are empowered to make choices about their education, they are more likely to remain actively involved in school.

"Locus of control" considered by psychologists to be intrinsic in nature, is heavily influenced by external forces according to Black psychologists. External forces such as parent, peer, teacher, and unfortunately racist societal attitudes play a decisive part in the future of the adolescent African American male (Hare & Hare, 1985). Too often, adolescent male students adopt a "why try" attitude when they believe that no one believes that they can succeed. The old adage "you get what you expect" was reinforced in the Garibaldi study in which African American students, their parents, and teachers in the "at risk" New Orleans school system completed a pre-graduation survey.

Despite a high dropout rate, poor academic showings, and contradictory to their public image, these students were interested in school and did intend to complete their high school education. Of

the 2250 students surveyed, 95% stated that they expected to graduate. In a similar survey given to parents, 8 out of every 10 shared their student's assessment and perceptions of the future. When surveyed, their teachers, however, did not share their students' confidence. When asked if they believed that their African American male students would go on to college, 6 out of 10 responded negatively. Garibaldi (1992) stated that this was extremely alarming because 60% of the teachers sampled taught elementary, 70% of them had more than 10 years experience, and 65% of them were Black. Garibaldi warns educators to be alert to expected social and academic problems traditionally tagged to African American males and fostered by the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Many African American adolescent males mentally and physically dropout when they feel as if they are not being challenged and have no voice in what is being taught (Garibaldi, 1992; Marchant, 1990). Marchant's analysis of Harter's Five Components of Intrinsic Motivation, pointed to the value of challenge and locus of control. It was found that students who preferred a challenge had a more positive perception of their academic ability and positive feelings about school learning. It was also found that students who tested well and had a sense of academic self-worth desired a voice in their school.

The issue of student voice and decision making have been long debated. The Marchant study replicated findings that too often Black students rely on teacher generated criteria for success. Marchant (1990) and Hare and Hare (1991) concur that there is a need to promote self responsibility. Given the pressing concerns of

education over the achievement motivation and performance of minority students, there seems to be a need to encourage and promote self responsibility. Self responsibility is linked with internal locus of expectancies for individuals who perceive themselves as victims of poverty and other socioeconomic circumstances (Marchant, 1990).

Marchant's recommendations are that schools must promote and present: (a) obtainable goals; (b) self directed learning; (c) a challenge; (d) self-evaluation experiences; and (e) make learning relevant to the community and culture. "If we want students to value education, they must be shown that they can succeed at education" (Marchant, 1990, p. 26).

While the restoration of locus of control, skill tools, and self responsibility provide structural supports for building motivation, creating a sense of school membership is equally important. The mental and physical withdrawal from school by the African American adolescent male is often in evidence when he feels as if he is a victim of racism, has no sense of school membership, or has no personal involvement with the curriculum being taught or his teachers. While many state education departments do not acknowledge middle level dropouts, many African American adolescents do dropout through chronic absenteeism, suspension and expulsion at the middle level.

What Effect Does School and Its Environment have on Success?

Racism and the school

"Racism is a developed set of attitudes that includes antagonism based on the supposed superiority of one group or supposed inferiority of another group, premised solely on skin color

or race" (Beswick, 1990, p. 1). Racism, which is based on fear (Hare & Hare, 1991), has two distinct formats: blatant (jokes or racial slurs) and institutional/cultural (which is firmly entrenched and much more subtle). Whether blatant or institutional, racism can and does have a negative effect on the self-esteem and learning for African American children.

Based on the frequency reported by states and school districts, hate crimes and incidents of racism are on the rise (Beswick, 1990). To combat this alarming trend, the Lane County, Oregon, school district has adopted a community designed program which has declared war on racism. The concept, borrowed and modified from the Nuclear Free Zone, begins with the presentation and reading of a pledge which states: "We will not make statements or symbols indicating racial prejudice. Freedom of speech does not extend to hurting others. Racism will not be tolerated and action will be taken to ensure this" (Beswick, 1990, p. 3).

Beswick developed a 10 point program to help school districts deal with racism quickly and effectively. Beswick recommends that classroom teachers and administrators can eliminate racism by: (a) articulating a clear statement of expectations regarding racism; (b) establishing and enforcing a series of consequences for violations of those expectations; (c) responding to racial incidents quickly and fairly by gathering adequate evidence (correction should be remediated by gathering adequate evidence); (d) discouraging students from congregating on the school grounds according to race; (e) designing seating assignments with a priority on integration; (f) relying on peer counseling whenever possible; (g) seeking advice

and support from parent and student advisory boards; (h) enlisting the help and advice of key minority leaders in the community for teacher workshops, assemblies, and arbitration of racial incidents when appropriate; (i) rewarding those who strive to reduce racism in their schools and classrooms; and (j) hiring and assigning an appropriate balance of minority faculty and staff to act as role-models and provide an adequate base of authority for policies and discipline (Beswick, 1990, p. 4).

Even in the most humanistic environments, African American adolescent males may find themselves being discriminated against. Instructors may unwittingly foster racism in the classroom in a number of ways. The creation of a "glass ceiling" with lower expectations is a prime example. Forty percent of the students surveyed by Garibaldi (1992) stated that they believed that they were not being challenged and that their instructors did not have high expectations. The Marchant (1990) study concurred stating that African American males believe that they need to be pushed harder in the classroom.

The role of the teacher, as an advocate, is critical. Educators are encouraged to create challenging and student-centered classrooms with authentic participation and collaborative action (Garibaldi, 1992; Beane, 1991). Classroom instructors are encouraged to incorporate a variety of ethnic and self awareness activities such as role playing and good decision making to build self-esteem and cultural awareness (Beswick, 1990). African American male guest speakers, mentors and classroom materials which show the African American male in a positive light will break the myth of the

stereotypical self fulfilling prophecy (Garibaldi, 1992; Beane, 1991).

African American adolescent males advance academically when they are empowered. Students who are a part of the topic and literature selection process become self motivated readers (Willis, 1993). This process promotes self-esteem but also fosters an appreciation for diversity, thus creating a sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging

Students must see themselves as a part of the group with purpose and power (Beane, 1991). "I hate this town. I hate this school, the kids don't like me, and the teachers are a bunch of racists!" (African American male student, 1993) This "at risk" adolescent student, unfortunately, meets the profile of a potential drop out. While the dropout rate for African American youth is on the decline, a growing number of Black students from low and middle income families believe they have nothing in common with the school environment (Powell, 1991; Goodenow, 1992).

The dropout typically falls into one or all of three patterns: academic underachiever, students with social problems, and students with emotional problems. Nelson (1985) states that a characteristic of a dropout is a feeling of not sharing a sense of "belonging" to the high school as a whole. For the African American adolescent male, like all preadolescents, social self-esteem is paramount to academic self. Frequently, many African American adolescent males mentally and physically dropout of school as early as fourth grade because they believe that they do not belong in the school community (Madhere, 1991; Goodenow, 1992).

In a study conducted by Madhere, 320 African American

students in the Washington, D.C. area, grades 5-8 were administered the *Coppersmith Self-Esteem Inventory.* Study findings indicated that the social, familial, personal, and academic sub groups of self-esteem fluctuate. While academic self-esteem peaks at fifth grade, social self-esteem continues to take on more and more importance as youngsters get older (Madhere, 1991). Madhere goes on to state that there is a "simultaneous drop in all the indicators in grade seven, however, especially in the case of boys. This is the level at which boys need to retain the attention of educators and an affective support system seems most needed. The surfacing of new evidence affirms that the dropout problem really explodes in the junior high. Madhere states that a strong support system fosters a sense of belonging (Madhere, 1991).

Goodenow (1992) believes that membership or a sense of belonging and socio-emotional support is crucial. The construct of Goodenow's study is that school motivation is embedded in the society of the school. The feeling of isolation leads the student to a gradual disengagement from school and to the final step of dropping out.

The Goodenow study (1992) states that Hispanic and African American females were the largest group affected by the absence of school membership. Hispanic males are the second most affected. African American males are equally affected but use a wide range of defense mechanisms as cover devices. Goodenow strongly advises the development and implementation of programs which promote school belonging, a feeling that classmates are supportive friends, and, most importantly, a sense that their teachers are there for them.

Arhar (1992) parallels the Goodenow construct by stating that there are three main reasons students drop out of school: (a) lack of academic success; (b) lack of positive relationships in the school; (c) student perceptions that the program of the school is not relevant to their future endeavors (Arhar, 1992).

Social bonding fosters a sense of belonging by developing attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. Arhar believes that the "teaming" approach will promote social bonding. "Teaming" effectively promotes "the small community of learning" as prescribed by *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Arhar goes on to state that multi-year teaming promotes a link and continuity for students to care about school and the future.

Advisor-advisee and mentoring programs create a strong connection between, not only students but adults as well. "When middle school students believe adults care about them, they are more inclined to want to participate in school activities and to conform to standards for achievement and behavior established by the school" (Arhar, 1992, p. 13).

African American students who are involved with their school, stay in school. Students interviewed by Jeffries (1993) stated that:

> "The Black students need to be more involved in student council activities so that they would have a voice and participate in some of the decisions that go on in the school." --- Whitney
>
> "I was very interested in sports during high school and I still run track now that I'm in college. We had this one group called Cultural Connections, and it was a good thing because

it increased cultural awareness." --- Ursula

Jeffries (1993) states that some African American students throw themselves into school functions without question. They are actively involved in everything, while others find fault with themselves, their families and the system in general.

> "While I was in middle school, I ran track played volleyball, and that's about it. I wasn't really involved in high school and I don't think that even if I had been that I would have stayed in school."
> --- Evelyn
> "As far as schools go, there is nothing for Blacks to participate in. There are things just for honor roll and A (and) B students, but you know you're not gonna get it for racial reasons" --- Robert (Jeffries, 1993).

Students often make the conscious choice to drop out of school. Unfortunately, this decision is helped along by the school system. "Schools should be in the business of educating, not qualifying and 'weeding out' students" (Jeffries, 1993, p. 431).

School structure and curriculum

School curriculum must be relevant for students. The African American male must be able to identify with what is being taught and with those who are teaching. Unfortunately, for a growing number of African American males, the sub-culture of the street and its music provide what is lacking in school: relativity and membership. Eurocentric curriculum, values and classrooms offer very little for the African American student. Ethnic students need to see themselves and members of their culture as a valuable part of society

to build self-esteem (Beane, 1991). African American educators point to the need for "look like me" successful African American male role models in the classroom as teachers and mentors (Biggs, 1992; Hare & Hare, 1991; Garibaldi, 1992; Richardson, 1992; Wright, 1992).

All African American male school

Increasingly, the question "What is happening to young Black males?" is being answered with controversial all Black male schools. Nationwide, a number of inner city school districts have embraced "all Black male immersion schools" as the answer. Citing that only a Black man can teach a Black boy to be a man, the Nation of Islam education model stresses the need for a curriculum steeped in African and African American history, culture, values, socialization, and taught by Black men.

Based on White male military schools, the Black male immersion schools work on self-esteem, learning style success strategies, and mentoring with a focus of the "passage movement." Similar in focus to African tribal rituals and the Jewish tradition of the Bar Mitzvah, the "passage movement" is a year long ceremony which moves a young Black male to young adulthood.

A study conducted by Wright (1992) sought a correlation between African American male role models in the classroom and the attendance, behavior, and academic success of young African American males. Based on the fact that a large number of Black boys are raised in single parent households (females) and that their teachers are female, Wright placed Black male mentors in kindergarten and first grade rooms.

Each group focused on five target areas: (a) attendance; (b) academic achievement; (c) formulation and development of dyad partnerships between two boys; (d) gentlemen's graces (esprit de corps); and (e) appropriate behavior for school life. Wright (1992) stated that students working with a Black male mentor or teacher had improved attendance, scored higher in math and reading comprehension and developed a strong "brother's keeper" philosophy.

Many educators caution against the all Black male school. Educators cite the following concerns: these schools may become dumping grounds; adolescent males will fail to develop a sense of respect for the African American female; and the implied message will be that Black males can only learn in gender-race-specific settings (Hare & Hare, 1991). Wright (1992) believes, however, that African American male youths must have strong African American males in educational settings, and as heroes, and role models.

Positive role models in non-educational settings are also an essential element for adolescent success. The parental, extended family and fictive kin family component is critical to the academic and social success of African American adolescent males. Parental support, however, is lost when they themselves feel a sense of fear, a loss of locus of control, and victims of stereotypical attitudes. Schools can create an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and shared decision making by creating, safe educational communities, committees, and workshops which restore parental locus of control.

What Impact Does the African American Family and Community Have on the Success of Young Adolescent Males?

The media's stereotype of the African American adolescent male is one of a poor, 13 year old, armed and hanging out at three o'clock in the morning planning his next driveby shooting. This scenario often includes a single female parent who is neither concerned with her child's education nor his whereabouts. While the components of poverty and single parent homes may be facts of life for a growing majority of African American children, the picture of the non-caring parent is not. In a recent survey conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation on *What Americans Expect From Public Schools?,* Black parents responded that, like their White counterparts, they wanted and expected the best for their children (Johnson Publication, 1994).

Academic failure in African American males (and also females, but apparently not as rapidly) can begin as early as fourth grade and eventually leads to these children becoming disinterested in school and for some, dropping out before they reach senior high school (Garibaldi, 1992). A student's perception of himself, his parents, and family involvement are paramount to his success. However, for the unmarried teenage mother, involvement in her child's education may be difficult, particularly when she herself is uneducated.

Single, female head of households

Educators agree that for many African American males in a single, female parent household poverty is the prime suspect for non-achievement. While single, under the age of 19, African American births are on the decline, (15-19 year olds 12.3% in 1973; 9.5% in

1983) (Statistical Abstracts of the U. S., 1993) the problems are not. Caldas (1994) states that: "(a) 60% of all teen families live in poverty (13.5% of the population); (b) a large percentage of teen mothers who do graduate do not go on to college and will earn 40% less than women who postpone child bearing" (p. 404). "The lower educational levels of mothers who began child bearing as teenagers translates into lower work force productivity and diminished wages, resulting in a weaker, less competitive economy" (Caldas, 1994, p. 404).

Children and parents in single teen households often require more prescriptive interventions than do their counterparts. Both will suffer from health problems and deficient child-rearing practices. Research indicates that teenagers are less competent than older parents and are more likely to abuse and neglect their offspring. Therefore, their children are more likely to require more foster care, child protection service, and special education services than children of older parents (Caldas, 1994).

The African American male is the victim of a broken patriarchy, poverty, and racism which have put the African American male and the family structure in crisis (Hare & Hare, 1985; Richardson, 1992). "The changed family structure means that Black males miss the induction into the fullness of what it means to be a "Black male. . . . Economic conditions that kept fathers from children and wives from husbands still exist" (Biggs, 1992, p. 13). Biggs also states that the "African Diaspora" has left psycho-social scars. These scars have had a devastating effect on the African American family (Biggs, 1992).

> For urban Afro-American males, who are persistently economically marginal, routes to manhood that are sanctioned by the larger society often do not exist. Thus, the development of the underground drug economy, an emphasis on sexuality, Black on Black homicides and gang wars can become alternative expressions of the same values associated with maleness being played out in the work lives of men in the larger society (Biggs, 1992, p 13).

To counter this problem, the Hare paraparent model instructs parents, who have themselves been victims of the disappearing family, with good parenting techniques. African American adolescents will be academically successful if they have academically successful role models at home. Hare and Hares's "paraparents" (1991) also provides poorly educated parents with instruction to assist them with their academics. Paraparents work with parents on such subjects as reading, standard English, and math so that they might help their children.

The African proverb of "It takes a village to raise a child" is put into perspective when Garibaldi stresses the need for parents, schools, and communities to encourage academics as well as athletics and to encourage their sons, as well as their daughters to attend college (Garibaldi, 1992).

While a large number of young African American males are a part of these negative statistics, there is hope. The success of the African American male and the move toward economic stability is dependent upon education. Richardson states (1992) that the effects

of poverty and racism may be lessened by education and that Black leadership must use education as a tool for economic and social growth. Throughout history, the peoples of the world came to the United States for educational opportunity. Richardson writes that education was touted as the way to a better life, as a means of escaping poverty and drudgery (Richardson, 1992).

African American youth must be educated not only in the established school systems, but at home as well. African American educators agree that the role of the family and community is pivotal and essential for success. Richardson (1992) states that it is the community's responsibility to educate and that culture is the key to reclaiming our youth. Culture and cultural values must be taught by the community and begin in kindergarten (Richardson, 1992).

African American tradition and values

In the oral tradition of the African griot, the African American family tends to pass values and coping skills on to its young. These coping skills may explain the positive global self image held by African American males and females. In a study conducted by McAdoo (1991), 34 single mothers and their children ages 5-14 were asked to rank their most meaningful and favorite family proverbs. The top 4 were: ranked #1 "What goes around comes around" (85%); #2 "Blood is thicker than water" (85%); #3 "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" (79%); #4 "If you don't think anything of yourself, no one else will either" (79%). Others included "You have to be twice as good as a White person to hold even" and "The Blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" (McAdoo, 1991). Upon analysis, McAdoo stated that these proverbs promoted self-sufficiency, a strong work

ethic, self-esteem, assertiveness, and positive racial attitudes. McAdoo cautions that while the statistics for the African American community are bleak, the culture must not lose site of the positives: (a) children are highly valued in African American communities; (b) African Americans continue to value families and extended families as well as other support networks of relatives and fictive kin; (c) the majority of African American children will be properly socialized and become productive adults regardless of the type of family arrangement in which they are raised; and (d) despite the adversities African American families have faced in the past and that they face in the present, the majority of African American families maintain values that are consistent with positive child rearing (McAdoo, 1991).

When given the opportunity, adolescent African American males make the transition into strong African American men when they celebrate the African tradition of "Passage" (Hare & Hare, 1985). As African American communities revisit traditional African customs and values, this growing custom is likened to a revival where the community and its youth come together as one. "Passage," a year long study beginning at age 11, celebrates the African and African American culture through cultural education and male mentoring. The adolescent is taught respect and actually adopts an elder in the community. Adolescent boys are taught respect for Black women, girls, and their community. The community assumes the role of nurturer as the Black adolescent makes the transition from boyhood to manhood.

African American Parents and the School Environment

African American students can and do succeed when their parents are actively involved in their education. Slaughter-Defoe (1991) states that it is generally agreed that parental involvement is central to successful children's achievement. Regardless of the educational philosophy and school's racial composition, as long as there is family commitment to the educational mission of the school in which their children are enrolled, African American children can be successful school achievers. This statement was reaffirmed in a survey conducted by Jeffries (1993). For African American students who did graduate and whose parents supported and actively intervened on behalf of their educational efforts, school was a good place. The graduates attributed their success to their families' involvement. For those lacking a stable family situation and support from home to help them assimilate, school became an even more unpleasant place (Jeffries, 1993).

Often instructors question African American parental commitment. The New Orleans (Garabaldi, 1992) study revealed that teachers believed that the African American parents of male students were not interested in their children's educational progress because of their absence at parent conferences and other school functions. This parental reluctance, often times confused with non-interest, may be attributed to the negative experiences parents had as children at school (Vandegrift & Green, 1992). Many of the students' parents had memories of their own experiences in school that led them to believe that the teachers and support staff really didn't like them or Black people, or lower socio-economic people who live in subsidized

housing (Goldberg, 1990).

Comer suggests creating a strong school/parent partnership to promote academic success (Comer, 1992). Comer believes that parental involvement and student success are parallel and credits his own success to his family's involvement and value of education. "It was tough to do anything but behave properly and work hard when your parents were in contact with school people like that (Miss McFelley, school principal). Mom never missed a Parent Visitation Day." (Comer, 1988, p. 109)

For many low income parents, school is a paradox of hope for the future and negative memories. With this in mind, Comer developed a school based program which first develops an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. The decentralization of the Chicago school district was the result of many minority and poor parents feeling as if they had lost their sense of empowerment in their school. The Comer model puts in place an administrative team of stake holders. Each team of stake holders includes parents, teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals. Comer uses these teams as decision makers and planners. Comer's idea, the use of parental participation, is to use people where they have an expertise and not to expose them to things that will make them feel bad (Comer, 1994).

In an interview conducted by Goldberg (1990), Comer stated that school should be an "oasis" for both students and parents (p. 41). Pigford (1993) believes that such an "oasis" can be created if parents look at their school choices carefully. Pigford encourages African American parents to observe and listen. Parents need to look

for a celebration of diversity in schools, student to student interaction, and teacher to student interaction. Parents must develop a criteria for what makes a good education.

Pigford states:

> I am convinced that there is nothing more important that schools can do for children than affirm them. The lucky children are those who are affirmed both at home and at school; the unlucky ones are affirmed neither place. It is the latter who are most often doomed to failure in school and in life (Pigford, 1993, p. 6).

Conclusion

The findings and implications for instruction are that as we restructure our schools we must do so with the African American adolescent male and all children of color in mind.

Essential to academic success are the following concepts: the need for recognition of multiple levels of self-esteem; positive academic self-esteem; locus of control; a strong sense of school membership; challenging and relevant curriculum; educational professionals who are aware and empathic to diversity; role models; and parental involvement. These components are not unique to the motivation and success of the African American adolescent male, but to all students. What is unique is that every African American male has been or will be negatively affected by all of these factors during his adolescent years. This is borne out in the disproportionate unemployment, incarceration, special education, and talented and gifted figures for the African American male.

The theory that the African American adolescent male's poor self-esteem generates poor motivation and academic failure focuses on but one level of self-esteem. While one level, global self-esteem is positive and intact, research findings suggest that educators focus on academic self-esteem to develop skills that promote academic success and self-esteem. We must provide programs, based on male mentoring and peer tutoring, which focus on strengthening academic skills in such target areas as math, problem solving, fact or opinion, the use and application of technology, infusion of the arts, reading and comprehension. Academic success for the African American adolescent male generates pride and reestablishes locus of control

and self efficacy.

Curriculum for the African American adolescent male, like his counterpart must be challenging and relevant. Educators in the Omaha School District, along with state and national leaders, have recognized the need to challenge and improve the math and science scores of the African American student population. A grant received from the National Science Foundation incorporates new teaching strategies and strong parental involvement to achieve math and science success (Hutchinson, 1995).

Many gifted African American adolescent males are rendered unsuccessful by traditional assessment methods. As we restructure our middle schools, the move toward the authentic assessment of a student's knowledge will add relevance to curriculum and present a more accurate picture of each student's abilities. Through authentic assessment and new identification criteria, a larger number of gifted African American adolescent males will be placed in talented and gifted classes; a place where they are now under-represented.

African American adolescent and preadolescent males are motivated to grow academically when they feel as if they have membership and ownership in their educational environment. Teacher awareness of cultural heritage, learning styles and the student's prior knowledge will not only promote academic achievement and pride, but validate their sense of belonging. To create a sense of cultural pride, educators must incorporate literature which includes not only the African American experience but shows the African American male in a positive light.

An appreciation for diversity in the classroom and community

may be developed through on-going teacher education courses and teacher-designed in-service programs. With a focus on practical strategies, teachers should explore their own attitudes and feelings; develop helpful hints to avoid the self-fullfilling prophecy trap; look at classroom management in a diverse setting; develop skill building techniques; incorporate advisor/advisee groups; use cooperative learning strategies to build school membership; and develop an on-going teacher/parent communication network. A sense "that my education is important to me" is created when educators share the policy, curriculum, and the decision making process with students and their parents.

The theory that only an African American man can teach an African American boy to be a man has been tested in numerous settings. African American adolescent males do respond positively to African American male mentoring. Researchers have found a marked increase in attendance, improved academic performance, and a greater sense of pride in cultural heritage when adolescent males are members of a Black male oriented educational environment. Some educators caution, however, that same-sex schools send mixed messages such as: there is no place for gender equity; respect for African American women will diminish; and that the African American adolescent is only productive when in a same-sex environment.

As school systems grow to include a larger number of children of color, the restructuring process must include a larger number of "look like me" educators in the classroom. This may be achieved by developing programs such as the "grow your own" program which

focuses on mentoring and monitoring African American adolescent males from middle school through college. Mentors in the classroom and African American males as guest speakers will not only provide role models, but foster a sense of pride and destroy the old myth that all Black men are convicts and drug dealers.

The involvement of parents and the community early on in the adolescent male's educational career is a cornerstone for his success. Programs which bring parents and grandparents into schools as volunteers, mentors, or as Hare and Hare's *paraparents*, develop support systems which help parents help themselves and their children. As site-based management becomes a part of the restructuring process, parents must become a part of the management team to share in the decision making process. Ownership and responsibility for a neighborhood school, which is child and community oriented, will foster parental locus of control and breed success for the community as well as for the students.

An African American adolescent male's success will grow when he believes that he is a responsible part of a nurturing community. Neighborhood churches and businesses must be willing to support school plays; academic decathlons; math, science, and cultural fairs; and field trips as well as sporting events to raise the level of academic performance. Community based workshops, food and clothing drives, and "little brother" mentoring projects would help instill a sense of pride. The value of a student/community link is reinforced by a Department of Education report which stresses the need for student and community empowerment through volunteer programs (Rossi & Montgomery, 1994). They might help unite

students, school, parents, and community, insuring the success and future of the African American culture.

To many, these components of the "new" restructured middle school will be viewed as reverse discrimination. However, the 21st Century is but a stone's throw away and our nation cannot afford the loss of a generation of minority children. This wish list of the future is not unattainable, but it does require the cooperation and involvement of the entire village. The "new" restructured middle school lays the ground work for reversing the fatalism expressed in a statement by cultural artist Dr. Dre' "If they make it to 21, they've lived a lifetime" (Dre', 1995).

References

American Institutes for Research. (1994). Educational reforms and students at risk: A review of the current state of the art (ED-OERI Publication No. 065-000-00616-2). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Arhar, J. M. (1992). Enhancing students' feelings of school membership: What principals can do. Schools in the Middle, 1(3), 12-16.

Ascher, C. (1991). School programs for African American males. (Report No.72). (ED 334340).

Banks, J. (1991). Multicultural literacy and curriculum reform. Educational Horizons, 69.

Beane, J. (1991). Sorting out the self-esteem controversy. Educational Leadership, 49, 25-30.

Beswick, R. (1990). Racism in American schools. (ERIC Document No. ED320196 90)

Biggs, S. (1992). The plight of black males in American school separation may not be the answer. The Negro Educational Review, 43, 11-17.

Caldas, S. J. (1994). Teen pregnancy: Why it remains a serious social, economic and educational problem in the U.S. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 402-406.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century.

Washington, D.C. Carnegie Corporation

Comer, J. P. (1988). Maggie's American Dream: The life and times of a Black family. Penguin.

Comer, J. P. (1992). Educating students outside the mainstream. Education Digest, 58, 28-30.

Comer, J. P. (1994). Parents will need to own the task. Education Week, 14(5), 32.

Dre' Dr. (1995). NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw.

Garibaldi, A. M. (1992). Educating and motivating African American males to succeed. Journal of Negro Education. 61(1), 4-11.

Goldberg, M. F. (1990). Portrait of James P. Comer. Educational Leadership, 48, 40-42.

Goodenow, C. (1992). School motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging among urban adolescent students. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (pp. 1-31). San Francisco, Ca.

Hare, N., & Hare, J. (1985). Bringing the black boy to manhood: The passage. San Francisco: The Black Think Tank.

Hare, N., & Hare, J. (1991). The Hare plan to overhaul the public schools and educate every black man, woman and child. San Francisco: The Black Think Tank.

Hillard, A. G. (1976). Alternative to IQ testing: An approach to the identification of gifted minority children. California State

Department of Education. Sacramento.

Hutchinson, C. J. (1995, June 9). Omaha awaits grant to help black students. Omaha World Herald, p. 1.

Jeffries, R. B. (1993). To go or not to go: Rural African American students' perspectives about their education. Journal of Negro Education, 62, 427-431.

Jordan, T. J. (1981). Self-concepts, motivation, and academic achievement of black adolescents. Journal of Negro Education, 73, 509-517.

Kimbro, D. (1993). Who are we? Daily motivations for African-American success. New York, Fawcett Crest. p. 1.

McAdoo, H. P. (1991). Family values and outcomes for children. Journal Of Negro Education, 60, 361-365.

Madhere, S. (1991). Self-esteem of African American preadolescents: Theoretical and practical considerations. Journal of Negro Education, 60, 47-61.

Marchant, G. J. (1990). Intrinsic motivation, self perception and their effects of black urban elementary students. Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (p. 1-5) Boston, MA.

Nelson, E. (1985). Dropout Prevention. (ERIC Document No. ED 282 347).

Pigford, A.B. (1993). Advice to the parent of a black child. Educational Leadership, 50(8), 66-68.

Powell, C. T. (1991). Rap music: An education with a beat from the street. Journal of Negro Education, 60, 245-257.

Ravitch, D. (1991). A culture in common. Educational Leadership, 19(4), 8-11.

Richardson, F. C. (1992). The plight of black males in America the agony and the ecstasy. The Negro Educational Review, 1-2, 3-10.

Scales, A. M. (1992) Focus on the African American male: A response. The Negro Educational Review, 1-2, 22-27.

Shade, B. (1982). Afro-American cognitive style: A variable in school success? Review of Educational Research, 52, 219-244.

Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (1991). Parental educational choice: some African American dilemmas. Journal of Negro Education, 60, 354-359.

Staff, (1994, October). What black parents expect from public schools. Jet, pp. 14-17.

U. S. Bureau of the Census. (1993). Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1993 (113th ed.). Austin, TX: Reference Press.

Vandegrift, J. A., and Greene, A. L. (1992). Rethinking parent involvement. Educational Leadership, 50, 57-59.

Wright, W. J. (1992). The endangered black male child. Educational Leadership, 49, 14-16.