

Assessing the Career Aspirations, Family Structure and Ability to Succeed Among African-American Males

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Abstract. The purpose of the evaluation was to compare the career aspirations, family structure, and ability to succeed of African American males to other groups. Four hundred and seventy three males were surveyed at the baseline and 491 surveyed at the follow-up. The results revealed that African-Americans were more likely to aspire to be athletes than other ethnic groups. Thirty five percent of African American males reported living with their fathers compared to 68% of other ethnic groups. African American males aspired to attend college before and after the intervention. The follow-up revealed that young men stated that they had more people to look up to and the amount of exposure to the program affected whether the heroes influenced their goals.

Introduction

The outlook for success for African-American males is bleak. For instance, African-American males are at a significant risk for poorer academic performance, school absenteeism, lower graduation rates and increased violent behavior. African-American males are more likely to drop out of high school than their white counterparts (18% compared to 14%, respectively) (Urban League, 2007), and are more likely to be suspended and expelled at schools (Noguera, 2008). In fact, more African-American males view sports or music as a more promising route to upward mobility than academic pursuits (Noguera, 2008). Not only do African-American males lead the nation in homicide (as victims and perpetrators), they are also incarcerated and convicted at higher rates (Noguera, 2008). According to the 2007 “State of Black America Portrait of Black Male” report, Black males under 25 years of age are 15 times more likely to die by homicide than their white counterparts (Urban League, 2007). There are risk factors as well as protective factors associated with the academic success of African American young men. One of those protective factors is having a positive male role model. This factor was the main aim of the Real Men, Real Heroes project which provided elementary, middle, and high school African-American male students with systematic exposure and interaction with positive African American adult male role models.

Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 473 male adolescents ages 8-15 at baseline and 490 participants at the follow up. Our sample includes third, fifth, seventh and ninth grade males. The mean age for the participants in the baseline was 11 years old and the average grade was sixth. The mean age for the participants in the follow up sample was 12 and the average age was 7th. In the baseline data there were 212 African American participants (45%), 106 Caucasian (22%), 43 Asian American (9%), 32 Hispanic (7%), 19 Native American (4%) and 61 biracial (13%). The sample was very similar concerning the follow up. There were 235 African American participants (48%), 101 Caucasian (20.6%), 42 Asian American (9%), 43 Hispanic (9%), 7 Native American (1%) and 58 biracial (12%) (Four participants did not answer) (.8%). Participants were surveyed from schools in Wichita, Kansas school district USD 259.

Procedure

The Institutional Review Board at Wichita State University approved this study. The schools that participated in the study were selected with the help of the assistant superintendent of high schools. Schools with the highest percentage of African American students were selected. There were three elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. At the elementary schools and middle schools, the Behavioral Community Research and Action Team at Wichita State University administered the surveys. Intercom announcements were made for all 3rd, 5th and 7th grade male students. Surveys were administered to the students in either the classroom, auditorium, or cafeteria. The surveys were read aloud for the third-grade participants. At the high school, the guidance counselor administered the surveys. The Behavioral Community Research and Action Team returned to these same schools and repeated these survey procedures to gather the follow-up results.

Intervention

Trading cards that displayed the pictures and occupations of local heroes/role models were distributed to all elementary and middle schools in Wichita Kansas. These occupations ranged from pastors to principals to athletic directors. These same men were displayed throughout the community in television ads, bus signs, and billboards. They also attended events at the schools and within the community to provide exposure to the young men. For the high school students instead of issuing trading cards, they were provided with a weblog in which the young men were provided with the opportunity to express their views on a variety of issues including what makes someone a real man.

Measures

A survey was developed to ascertain information from the young men. The survey included 17 items in the baseline and 24 items in the follow-up. It was created by Drs. Rhonda Lewis-Moss and Jim Snyder. The survey consisted of questions concerning role models, activities that they like to participate in outside of school as well as future career and educational goals and in the follow-up how much exposed to the Real Men, Real Heroes campaign and intervention

Results

The results revealed that only 35 percent of African American young men live with their fathers while 68 percent of non African American males live with their fathers. Before and following the intervention a high percentage of African American males desired to become professional athletes (30 percent and 27.1 percent, respectively). Before and after the intervention African American males also aspired to attend college as much as any other racial group (74 percent at both times). Following the intervention an exposure variable was created to determine whether the amount of exposure that the young men received affected if they felt that the Heroes had changed their future goals and aspirations. The results showed that there was a statistical difference between the groups that received low, medium and high exposure, $\chi^2(2, N=392)=30.97, p<.001$. The results also revealed that following the intervention young men stated that they had more individuals to look up to in their community, 72 percent before the intervention and 83 percent following the intervention.

Conclusions

Taken together, it is important to understand the opinions of young people in order to design effective interventions and to determine their thoughts and perceptions about their career aspirations, lifestyles and future aspirations. Although the future academic outlook of African American males appears bleak, there are protective factors that are associated with the academic success of African-American males and positive outcomes. Interventions and programs that are developed must be tailored to fit the unique situation of young African-American males. Success is a possible outcome for African-American males. It seems that they desire success in academics as well as in their future professional careers. They just may not know how or know what to do to get there. With the assistance of effective interventions that provide mentoring and positive role models for African-American males, improvement in academic outcomes and other positive outcomes is attainable.

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[1] 2007 *State of Black America Portrait of the Black Male*. Retrieved June 14, 2008, from National Urban League. Website www.nul.org/thestateofblackamerica.html

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