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Summer Research Proposal –
Education Policy Impact: Perceptions of High School Educators

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Education Policy Impact: Perceptions of High School Educators

Introduction

Educators' perceptions and beliefs influences the treatment of race, which when compounded by the historic nature of gender, yields experiences in a school culture of marginalization, which hampers academic performance, and alters significantly the ability of African American male students to persist, and creates the need for an assessment of education policies.

Problem Statement/Definition

Many educators and academicians raise concern that the nation is facing a crisis with regard to Black boys (Hefner, 2004; Smith, 2005). Black males have consistently struggled in the US educational system. The achievement and persistence gaps between Black and white students have been long lasting. But, increasing gaps within race groups are also causing alarm. Concluding her review of the data, Rosa Smith observed that Black siblings who were reared in the same home and communities have significantly different educational outcomes (Holzman, 2004). As a result, she raised a potent question which begs for a response: "What is it about our education environments, policies, and systems that produce this dramatic Black student gender gap (p. 3)?"

Research Question

If it can be said that schools have contributed and continue to support academic, social and economic marginalization of particular students, namely Black boys, what factors give rise to this? Lipman (2003) argued that education policy in US schools function to produce inequality and marginalization, and in doing so, reinforces patterns of racial domination. Thus, in an effort to answer the question that Smith asks, this research will identify school policies that affect Black males at the secondary level. The central questions are:

1. Do educators perceive a particular policy or practice as detrimental to Black male high school graduation?
2. Is there a relationship between educators' racial identity and educators' perception of policy effectiveness?

Significance

This research is necessary because although there is much investigation into the negative educational outcomes of African American students and increasing attention paid to Black males, there is little inquiry into policies that produce or facilitate these outcomes. Policies are important considerations because they involve the values and processes through which a system takes action to address a situation, to include expressed intentions and consistent practices, both direct and indirect, or active and non-active (Fowler, 2000). Educational policies while focused on schools and those within the confines of the school facility reflect social values. Further, this research will contribute in the broader sense to the works on educational equity in the US. As some scholars warn, there are deep and widespread consequences to continued failure to educate males, Black Males in particular, as effectively and efficiently as their counterparts (Holzman, 2004; Mortenson, 1999). Therefore this research is important because if society truly cares about the equality of genders and races, we must attend to the educational disparity observable between Black males and other groups, because the social cost of disenfranchised Black males is simply unbearable.

Literature Review

Race, class, and political mobilization are intertwined with school quality and the ability to resist hegemonic policies (Lipman, 2003). Teachers can help redress unequal societal relationships by creating alternative experiences in classrooms that disrupt, rather than reflect inequities (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Unfortunately, far too many educators operate in and are rewarded by a system wherein the goal is to transform students into people much like themselves, and so they are viewed by students who hold differing worldviews as inculcators and assimilationists who devalue the students' ways of seeing and knowing the world (Trusty, 1996).

History and Background

Since the early 1500s white European traders brought millions of enslaved people from the *dark* Continent of Africa to the New World of the west. The Virginia Slave Code of 1705, which defined those eligible for enslavement as “black” and those who would be free as “white,” used crude measures for distinguishing people. Since its beginning the United States has been a nation structured toward dominance along two lines: race and gender. And, as Patterson (1995) noted, Black males have consistently been the most demeaned by US social organization. Because of past discrimination and the way that history of discrimination has had economic impact on Blacks, Wilson (1987) argues that African Americans are the truly disadvantaged. He further asserts that Blacks, especially young males are dropping out of the workforce in significant numbers, and that this unfavorable trend has been happening since the end of World War II. The statistics on Black male joblessness are outrageous and recently a report by the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) stated that “nearly 53,000 Hispanic and black young adults in New England are disconnected – jobless and not in school (Fogg & Harrington, 2004, p. 24).”

Race and Gender

Sex and gender identity are likely most central to individual self concept (Whitehead, 2002). Masculinity or more specifically, white masculinity has always involved some sense of individual autonomy, competitiveness, and mastery or competence (Harper, 2004; Staples, 1986). Some scholars put

forward that mainstream concepts of masculinity, such as the accumulation of wealth, status, and power, are often unattainable to African Americans due to the constraints of race (Franklin, 1984). Pierre, Mahalik & Woodland (2001) argue that African American males are socialized by the dominant culture in such a way that they are forced to suppress their emotions regarding social and psychological situations in which they experience a great deal of anger-hostility as a result of unfair evaluation and threat by whites. They also note that African American males are expected to operate in a nation that silences, abuses and devalues their existence. Further, they contend that in the US, African American males struggle to assert their masculinity amidst societal prejudice, economic hardship, educational limitations and even unwarranted violence. As a coping strategy to life in a racist society, many African American males focus on impression management, invoking the “Cool Pose” as an aggressive assertion of masculinity (Majors & Billson, 1992; Pierre, Mahalik & Woodland, 2001; Staples, 1982). According to Pierre, Mahalik & Woodland (2001) the objectives in the use of the cool pose stance are protection, social competence and self pride, it also moderates stressful conditions and can provide the basis for personal achievement and self-respect.

For many Black men, the adaptation of the tough guy image, the cool pose, and the hypersexual persona are central characteristics to masculine identity (Harper, 2004; Whitehead, 2002). Tough guys, according to Harper (2004), are fighters who incite fear in others and are not afraid to defend themselves. The cool pose is a combination of composure and expression oriented at appearing trendy and relaxed and is characterized by a “pimp-style” strut (Harper, 2004; Pierre, Mahalik & Woodland, 2001). Sexual activity among Black males bend toward permissiveness, begins early, occurs frequently and involves multiple partners (Staples, 1986). These personal and political stances can be considered acts of power and resistance (Staples 1986; Whitehead, 2002).

Black athletes are the epitome of Black masculinity. They exude toughness and skill on the court, field or track. And, while outside the athletic arena they are objectified as sex items. Harper stated that the media popularizes certain images of African American men, particularly the professional athlete and rappers, and portrays them as financially prosperous, surrounded by many attractive women. Despite the

fact that many Black males appropriate the admired traits of the visible public figures, few Black men actually acquire the professional status and the financial gain that defines it.

Marable (1993) charged that the weight of white history functions to frustrate the self image of Black men and disrupt their quest for liberty. “Disrupting” and “soul-killing” are the terms that Paterson (1995) used to describe the oppressive treatment of African American males throughout history. Franklin (1984) contends that the insurmountable barriers with which millions of Black males must contend prevent them from achieving masculine status as defined by the majority of Americans, and renders them socially impotent and dysfunctional. Thus, African American masculinity operates in a pervasive culture of hopelessness and many Black males rebel against whiteness and femininity (Marable, 1993; Patterson, 1995)

During the period of slavery Black males learned to behave in such a way as to please the white power structure, acknowledging, accepting and simultaneously resisting white cultural dominance over their lives (Pierre, Mahalik & Woodland, 2001). Today it seems that young Black males do more outright resisting than accepting or placating to white cultural dominance. So, if Black masculinity is characterized by a prevailing sense of despair and a tough guy image projected in a poise of coolness and marked by promiscuity, how do these roles play out in educational settings? How do schools convey social expectations to Black males? What is the interplay between the messages conveyed and the Black masculine identity? These questions merit some exploration.

Education Policy and School Marginalization

Policy, in some crude fashion, can be described as the granting of privilege to some while withholding said privilege from others. Policies then are essentially economic instruments. No matter the level or political body, policy formulation is driven by values, both personal and corporate (Fowler, 2000). Often schools are charged with supporting the public good, and to the extent that bearing up the economic system of the nation is deemed a public good, schools will replicate policies (which themselves are economic implements) to gird the economic system. Further, if as Manning Marable (1993) contends that slave owners perceived that Black males posed a potential threat to the entire system of slavery, it

stands to reason that whites would have made every effort to secure their economic position. To the degree that this is true over time, public and educational policies would allow for the credentialing of some and not others, providing a gate-keeping mechanism for access to social and economic resources. Only possible, as Lipman (2003) says, because policies function to control behavior and legitimate what is thought, said, and learned, framing even the social identities that are allowed to emerge, and the very meaning of the purpose of education.

With regard to schools there are different levels of policy formation. Education policies can be created by the federal government, enacted by Congress with regulations drafted by the US Department of Education. At times federal court decisions also become policies. The same can happen at the state government level, where both state legislatures and state school departments generate policies, or state courts advance rulings that are passed down to school agencies within communities. Generally speaking, local school boards are responsible for the creation of policies that affect the schools under their jurisdiction. However, at times policies may be created at the building level by school principals and teachers. In most cases, regardless of where the education policy is created, it will be implemented at the building level by principals and teachers (Fowler, 2000).

The results of social marginalization can be seen clearly. According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States 2005, Black male school performance continues to be abysmal. [Do note that Black and African American are used to mean the same thing.] African Americans consistently have low test-scores, high drop out rates, low graduation rates, and low college entry rates. In addition, Black males have a higher rate of discipline at school (Eitle & Eitle, 2004). Further, a 2005 Schott Foundation report stated that forty-one percent of special education placements are Black and of those eighty-five percent are male, and the high school graduation rate for Black males is fewer than fifty percent across the country. Also, Black males have a high rate of school suspension (Smith, 2005). And, they represent large portions of the high school drop out rates, greater than five percent according to the Statistical Abstract (2005), compared to white males and females which are equally three percent and Black females at almost four and a half percent.

Eitle and Eitle (2004) suggest that discrimination may be institutional, coded into rules and regulations and obscured by the roles of teachers and administrators. Love (2004) argues that the perspectives of the white majority are taken, usually unquestionably, as factual and construed in terms of history, policies, rules, regulations, procedures and the like, and the result is distinctively different experiences for African American children when compared to their white counterparts. Other scholars go even farther by stating that in the late 1800s and early twentieth century, the US committed itself to universal public schooling, and throughout this period whites have made every effort to confer on non-whites inferior status because of race, which heralded the integration of the white supremacist ideology into educational policies and practices (King, Houston & Middleton, 2001). These practices may well continue, even today.

Summary

It was for the accumulation of wealth that the Europeans set out on the conquest of the New World. It was the continued production of wealth that the demarcation of race was established in early colonial times; inequality was structured into civic codes and practices, including education, for the perpetuation of wealth for the master class. Many of the structural elements embedded into society are still active today, albeit hidden. Uncovering those unequal practices of the schools is the work of this research project.

It is daunting and painful to suggest that public schools are in part responsible for the ghastly statistics that make them vulnerable to charges of ineffectiveness and attempts to cut funding. Black male's high failure and drop out rates, low high school graduation and college entry rates, and their abysmal college completion rate has a dramatic consequence to the nation. If capitalism needs an underclass, Blacks have been so historically positioned, and in the modern age, Black men continue to be even more so.

Methods/Methodology

Study Design

This quantitative study will employ a cross-sectional survey design. Surveys are intended to collect information that will describe particular characteristics of a population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The purpose of this research project is to explore educators' perceptions regarding policies that inhibit Black male promotion from one grade level to the next, as well as those that prevent high school graduation and deter college enrollment. The intent of this project is to examine if there are differences in perceptions within and across certain groups of educators with regards to the impact of educational policies on African American males.

Sample and Selection

The targeted sample population is public high school teachers and administrators who work in schools with substantial portions of African American students (approximately 35% or greater). The rationale for looking at schools with large numbers of Black adolescents center on the notion that issues which confront Black males are likely to have surfaced and generated an administrative response, whereas schools with a small African American presence are less likely to have the aforementioned and are more likely to treat a matter on an individual basis. Educators' perceptions are critical to understanding the issue of policy impact because they are the closest to the administration of practices and procedures related to them. A stratified random sample will be utilized. This will be a regional sample involving all northeastern states. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics, schools will be selected with sufficient numbers of African Americans. Once schools within a state have been identified, schools will be randomly selected based on the alphabetized listing of all eligible schools in the northeast. Educators will be randomly selected using an alphabetical listing of educators within the school.

Instrument

The survey instrument is a self-designed questionnaire that will collect demographic information on the respondent and the school. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) state that survey methods best provide

encouragement to answer questions of a sensitive nature and allow for standardization of responses. Given that race and gender issues tend to be emotionally charged, the survey design is the ideal model for this study. Fraenkel and Wallen also say that the response rate with this type of study is poor. Because of the sensitive nature of this topic a substantial nonresponse rate is anticipated. To address this issue, 650 respondents will be targeted and a reminder follow up will be distributed. A thirty percent response rate threshold is expected, which is a projected yield of 250 responses.

To address *validity*, three or four educators or former educators who worked in settings with substantive minority populations will assess the content validity of the questionnaire. Fraenkel and Wallen call this expert judgment. To explore the issue of *reliability*, the instrument will be piloted with a group of ten to twenty educators. Fraenkel and Wallen refer to this as observer agreement.

Data Collection Procedures

The research instrument will be copied and mailed to 650 educators across all northeastern states. It is expected that 50 schools will be identified, to include ten teachers and three administrators in each school. The packet mailed to each school will include a letter explaining the study, three survey instruments, three consent forms, and three return-addressed, stamped envelopes. Respondents will be asked to complete and return the survey as soon as possible. Also, two reminder notices will be mailed. Surveys will be catalogued in the order in which they are received.

Data Analysis

Once returned surveys are received, data will be compiled into SPSS software for analysis by the researcher. Because this study will attempt to describe certain relationships and make inferences about particular perceptions of educators, both correlation and chi square analysis will be utilized.

Resources and Budget

This project will be supported in part by a \$500 grant from the Education department of the University of New Hampshire. The resources necessary to carry out this project are: a copy card for the copying of materials such as the release letter and the survey instrument, envelopes, postage stamps, post cards, access to the NCES database, access to a UNH lab computer whereon the SPSS program is loaded, and room and board accommodations during the summer. It is necessary to have lodging and meals during the summer at the university because this provides the only means to complete the analysis portion of the project, as it affords access to a computer system with the applicable software and to the faculty research supervisor who will provide guidance and direction with the statistical manipulations, analysis and interpretation of the data.

<u>Item/Description</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Price/Cost</u>	<u>Location</u>
Copying/Printing –			
Release Letter	650shts @ \$.10ea	\$65.00	MUB Copy
Survey Instrument	650shts @ \$.10x4ea	\$250.00	MUB Copy
Post Card Printing	325shts @ \$.10ea	\$32.50	MUB Copy
Envelopes – Mail (size 10)	2bxs o/500@\$26.98	\$53.96	Staples
Envelopes – Insert (size 9)	2bxs o/500@\$17.98	\$35.96	Staples
Post Cards	4bxs o/100@\$12.98	\$51.92	Staples
Labels (letter mailing)	3pks o/250@12.99	\$38.97	Staples
Postage Stamps (regular)	65bks o/20@\$8.40	\$546.00	US Postal Service
Postage Stamps (post card)	65bks o/20@\$4.40	\$286.00	US Postal Service

Summer Housing/Room	1 rm f/8wks@\$20 p/d	\$1120.00	UNH Housing
Summer Meals/Board	3 meals p/d @ \$15	\$840.00	UNH Dining

Timeline

Because I will be study abroad during the fall semester of 2008, I have, under the guidance of my faculty mentor, designed the project to commence upon my return from Madrid, Spain. To satisfy the McNair requirement of two consecutive semesters of research, this project will occur during the winter/spring and summer semesters of 2009. Data will be collected during the winter/spring period with the cataloguing and data analysis occurring during the summer period.

February 2009 – Early	Secure IRB approval
February – Mid	Identify schools using NCES data
February – Late	Stratified random selection of schools
March – Early	Stratified random selection of educators
March 10	Assemble mailing packets (letter, questionnaire, release, envelope)
March 24	Mail survey packets
April 7	Mail first reminder post cards
April – late	Mail second reminder notice
May	Receive returned surveys
June	Catalogue and compile data into SPSS
July	Run statistical calculations and analyze survey data
August – early	Draft and submit research article

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Appendix

BLACK MALE PERSISTENCE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

For the purpose of this survey, the terms Black and African American, despite their traditional meanings, are used interchangeably and refers to all persons of African ancestry.

Policy is defined as those written rules and regulations enacted by the federal government, the state, the local school district, and your school.

Persistence is defined as normal progress 1) passing from grade to grade in high school, 2) graduating from high school with the same class the student entered, and 3) entering into post-secondary education.

EDUCATOR DEMOGRAPHICS

1. I am a: teacher administrator
2. My gender is: Female Male
3. My age is within the following range:
 22-27 yrs 28-35 yrs 36-45 yrs 46-55 yrs 56 or more yrs
4. I have been an educator for:
 1-3 yrs 4-7 yrs 8-15 yrs 16-25 yrs more than 25 yrs
5. I have been in my current position for:
 1-3 yrs 4-7 yrs 8-15 yrs 16-25 yrs more than 25 yrs
6. I self identify as:
 White Black/African American Asian Native American
 Hispanic Pacific Islander or Alaskan Native
7. The percentage range of the Black/African American students in my class(es) is:
(teachers only)
 1%–20% 21%–40% 41%–60% 61%–80% 81%–100%

QUESTIONS

Please check one response for each question item.

8. Academically speaking, I would say that Black males at my school are doing:
 Extremely well Acceptable Not so well Quite poorly
9. I am satisfied with the graduation rate of Black males at my school:
 Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree

10. My concern for academic progress of Black males at my school is:
- Significant Large Moderate Small
11. I am satisfied with the rate at which Black male students in my school graduate and enroll in post-secondary institutions:
- Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree
12. I think that in general Black males fare well at this school primarily because of:
(check all that apply)
- Administrative policies that address their needs Classroom practices which value them
 Other _____
- N/A – Black males are not doing well at my school
13. It is my opinion that Black males do not fare well at this school as demonstrated by their:
(check all that apply)
- Grades/GPA Standardized test scores Dropout rates Lower ability track
 Persistence rate to the next grade level N/A – Black males are doing well generally speaking
 Other _____
14. In my opinion, Black males at my school are:
- Promoted from one grade level to the next at the same rate as other students
 Retained within grade level more often than other students
15. When compared to other students at my school, Black males seem:
- Less likely to drop out Equally likely to drop out More likely to drop out
16. There is not a racial gap of learning between males in general (regardless of race) and other students at my school:
- Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree
17. The issue of Black male performance in my school is best addressed through implementing policy:
- Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree
18. The best approach to the issue of Black male performance in my school is through changing the actions of adults at my school:
- Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree
19. We do not need any new policies regarding Black male performance at my school:
- Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree

20. Listed below are several policies. In the second column, circle "Yes" if you have this policy in your school or circle "No" if you do not. In the third column, for each policy circled "Yes," circle your perception as to the impact of this policy in aiding Black males' persistence through school (grade to grade and high school to college):
 1-Extremely Well; 2-Acceptable; 3-No Impact; 4-Not So Well; 5-Quite Poorly.

Policy	School Has such a policy		The impact of this policy on Black male persistence in high school				
	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
A. Athletic/extra curricular participation	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
B. Attendance	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
C. Discipline	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
D. Dress/attire	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
E. Drop out	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
F. Graduation	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
G. Promotion	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
H. Retention	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
I. Tracking/ability grouping	YES		1	2	3	4	5
	NO						
J. List other policy not stated above that impacts Black male persistence.			1	2	3	4	5

21. I believe that the following policy or policies (as identified in question 20) are targeted at improving the education of Black males at my school: *(circle all that apply)*

A B C D E F G H I J

22. From my perspective, the following policy or policies (as identified in question 20) have a more harmful impact on Black male persistence than on the persistence of other students at my school: *(circle all that apply)*

A B C D E F G H I J

23. From my viewpoint, the following policy or policies (as identified in question 20) have a more favorable impact on Black male persistence than on the persistence of other students at my school: *(circle all that apply)*

A B C D E F G H I J

24. To improve Black male performance at this school, I think the following should be done:

25. I think the "all Black male school/academy" is a good approach to the issues of Black male persistence:

Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree

26. Gender separate classrooms is one policy strategy that should be adopted to improve Black male persistence:

Strongly agree agree disagree Strongly disagree

SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

Please check one response for each question item.

27. The setting in which this school is located is considered:

Urban/large city Suburban/medium city Rural/town

28. The size of the student population of this school can be classified as:

Small (>1000) Medium (1000-2500) Large (<2500)

29. I would classify the community in which this school operates as:

Low-income Middle-income High-income

End of Survey

Thank You