

Black Men in a Southern Urban School of Education: An Analysis of Motivating Factors for Black Men as Aspirant Educators

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Abstract

This study examines a statistical outlier with respect to the number of male teachers of color. Whereas the national average of men of color as teachers is less than 2%, the average at one Historically Black College and University (HBCU) demonstrates a pipeline for teacher preparation close to 20%. The study has two components. The first asks the question: What are the factors that contribute to this percentage being higher? And, when identified, what would sustain these factors in such a way as to create a model for replication? Part two of the study was funded by the Albany State University Center for Educational Opportunity. With information gained from the first part of the study, the research will seek to answer: What are the mitigating motivational factors that would sustain the previously identified factors to enhance a healthy pipeline for male teachers of color?

Keywords: Black men, education, teaching

Exploring the Pipeline for Men of Color in Education

The academic performance of the K-12 student is a function of the relationship between two parties—the teacher and the student (Sparks, 2019). The relationship between student and teacher can have either a positive or negative impact on the achievement of K-12 students (Egalite, 2015). Even two decades later, the seminal study (Sanders & Rivers, 1996) about the three years of sustained negative impact on learning at the hands of an ineffective teacher is all too familiar. Additional research points to students' performance being tied to teachers with whom they have a cultural connection (Egalite & Kisida, 2017). With both gender and cultural connections, students identify with the instructor in a way that enhances the entire learning experience (Handford, 2017).

Macro Implications: The Role of Men of Color as Teachers in American Equity

With the juxtaposition of this research against the backdrop of disproportionality in the classroom-to-prison pipeline, a social consciousness question arises: Where is the pursuit of men of color in school settings to promote equity? Does this pursuit constitute a root cause disruptor to the distressing trajectory called the classroom-to-prison pipeline? When identified, will the motivating factors for aspirant male teachers of color serve as indirect mitigating variables for K-12 male students of color who might otherwise -- under the weight of the inertia of Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 2012) -- exit from mainstream America into the penal system? (At present, the classroom-to-prison pipeline rate is 33% percent for Black youth and 23% for Hispanics (PEW Research Center, 2017). Yet male teachers of color hold fewer than 2% of all K-12 teaching positions in our nation's classrooms – settings where minority students have been the majority since 2014. How much does the absence of male teachers of color affect the loss of achievement among Black and Latino boys?

Wright (2015) states that classroom discipline is cut in half with teachers of color. Given this knowledge, is the lack of male teachers of color contributing to inequity in classrooms across America? Other research tells us that men of color – i.e., Black and Brown boys -- are more likely than other boys to be suspended in excess of ten days, to drop out of school, and to face incarceration (Nowicki, 2018). Are male teachers of color the lynchpin to equity and appropriate behavior for young men of color in their relationships with mainstream American life? This study seeks to capture, at the granular level, the motivational factors for developing male teachers of color within the setting of an Historically Black College or University (HBCU) as an incubator for gathering data.

If so much hinges on the relationship of a student to his teacher, then it is critical to study the less than 2% of the teaching force in the United States made up of men of color. It is even more critical to study pipeline outliers into this 2%. Accordingly, this study takes place within an HBCU where nearly 20% of its total student population of future teachers are men of color. Study data was collected and analyzed during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

Significance of the Study

This study matters because it investigates the motivating factors of young men of color identified within an institution of higher learning that prepares teachers. This institution, an HBCU, is a statistical outlier, in that the percentage of teachers in the pipeline are higher than percentage of actual male teachers of color in the pipeline. This study may be reviewed for the purpose of generalizability to the larger population. If the factors identified are used to increase the men of color teaching population, then the chain of events subsequently identified in the research would leverage a significant factor in decreasing the classroom-to-prison pipeline for our nation's Black and Brown boys. Dropout rates would decrease, and disproportionality gaps

in 10-day suspensions would be reduced, because male students in K-12 classrooms could more readily identify with their teachers by culture and gender. In short, these findings in this study could be the catalyst for the changes we need to offer the greatest impetus in honest social mobility and justice.

Review of the Literature

According to 2018 data from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), there are teacher shortages in key areas throughout the United States. In particular, special education and science, technology, education, and math (STEM) fields are especially in need of teachers. The NCTQ goes on to report that because there is no national labor market for teachers – data sets reflect only local data and local labor markets—pockets of shortages are not evenly distributed. However, specific pockets and areas of shortages are reported categorically using the local information funneled to a national database. The U. S. Department of Education regularly publishes Teacher Shortage Areas (TSAs) by subject matter, school year, state, and discipline. Another source of data on teacher supply and demand is the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Even as early as 2013, NCES reported solutions to teacher shortages in impoverished areas, such as alternative teaching resources like Teach for America and the Teaching Fellows programs. The NCES further reported that whereas shortages were being addressed, performance levels were depressed because of the demands of training as a stressor in attaining alternative certification while teaching fulltime.

While the teacher shortage data is uneven across the country, the review of the literature suggests that there are higher needs in both urban and rural areas that add to the nationally identified content shortages (Sutcher et al., 2017). Significantly, the dynamic of teacher shortages is compounded as minority populations grow, a finding first illuminated in the 2007

NCES report *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, which tracked the overall educational advancements and obstacles that minorities encounter in the U.S. Trend data on this topic was reported by NCES in 2019 as follows:

Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of U.S. school-age children who were White decreased from 62 to 51 percent and the percentage who were Black decreased from 15 to 14 percent. In contrast, the percentages of school-age children from other racial/ethnic groups increased: Hispanic children, from 16 to 25 percent; Asian children, from 3 to 5 percent; and children of two or more races, from 2 to 4 percent. The percentage of school-age American Indians/ Alaska Natives remained at 1 percent and the percentage of Pacific Islanders remained at less than 1 percent during this time.

In the same report, minority teacher data was reported:

In 2015–16, public elementary and secondary schools that had more racial/ethnic diversity in their student populations also tended to have more racial/ethnic diversity among teachers. The percentage of minority teachers was highest at schools that had 90 percent or more minority students (55 percent) and was lowest at schools that had less than 10 percent minority students (2 percent).

Geiger (2018) reports that there is less diversity among the teaching staffs than the students. Ordway (2017) published a compilation of studies showing a relationship between the achievement levels of students of color and teachers of color. Johns Hopkins University (2017) reported the work of economist Nicholas Papageorge, who found that there was a 39% decrease in the dropout rate of minority students who had one teacher of color in a school.

In summary, the review of the literature reveals shortages of teachers in both urban and rural settings, while also showing increasing numbers of minority students in urban settings. The literature further documents that minority students benefit from having minority teachers. While

the overall percentage of minority teachers is 20%, the percentage of minority male teachers is less than 2% (Whitfield, 2019).

The literature also recounts a number of initiatives to encourage and support more Black men going into teaching and remaining as teachers. A few of the efforts across the country to encourage male men of color are as follows:

- Augusta University College of Education and Athletics, Men of Color in Education. Initiative <https://jagwire.augusta.edu/augusta-university-on-a-mission-to-recruit-more-african-american-male-teachers/>
- Bowie State, Center for Research and Mentoring of Black Male Students and Teachers <https://www.jbhe.com/2019/08/bowie-state-to-launch-the-center-for-research-and-mentoring-of-black-male-students-and-teachers/ers>
- Call Me MiSTER, Clemson University. <https://www.clemson.edu/education/research/programs/callmemister/>
- Future Male Teachers Across California F2MTC, California State. <https://www.csun.edu/eisner-education/future-minority-male-teachers-of-california>
- KIPP Schools, New Jersey. <https://www.kipp.org/news/two-percent-teachers-black-men-yet-research-confirms-matter/>

Methodology of the Study

The study is the first of two IRB approved investigations. The subsequent research has been sponsored by Albany State University Center for Educational Opportunity. For this study, a survey was prepared and administered with six questions. The researchers identified 30 potential participants. Of the 30 targeted participants, nine responded to a three-part questionnaire. The first part of the instrument asked respondents why they chose the field of education. The second

part asked respondents their views on favorable aspects of the program at their designated HBCU. The third part of the study solicited information on the areas for improvement specifically related to teacher preparation within the HBCU's School of Education.

Results

The results are depicted in three graphs (Figures 1-3). As Figure 1 depicts, the highest motivating factor for participants in pursuing education as a future teacher was to help youth. The second reason given was the desire to pursue education as a field of study or as a discipline. The number one reason given for positive motivating factors was that the HBCU's Department of Curriculum & Instruction is a helping culture, like "family." The second factor was the empowerment of students by the faculty. The number one area of needed improvement, according to participants, was in providing additional resources, especially for test preparation. Communication, clinical practice, and additional exposure tied for third place as areas for improvement.

Limitations of the Study

There are three limitations in this study—one related to gender, one related to nomenclature describing race, and the third related to the match of students to the likeness of their teachers. The population of this study was men of color, including all nonwhite students in the School of Education; however, the overwhelming majority of both the men in the study and the men referenced in the researched literature are called "Black" or "African American." However, the School of Education at Clark Atlanta University hosts male students of Arab, bi-racial, and Hispanic descent, in addition to African Americans. Another limitation was that review of the literature was limited, in that the literature itself reflects simplified or reductive racial terminology—black and white. Finally, a label is evolving for the phenomena in research

that takes into account students' response to teachers with whom they have a cultural or physical likeness. Two terms found in the literature are *racial congruence* (Wright, 2015) and *demographic match* (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016), which expand and contract to include Blacks and women, respectively. Amy Jacob Egalite (2014) has conducted extensive research in this area and wrestles with changing descriptors like *own race/ethnicity teacher assignment*. These efforts further demonstrate the need for additional research in the area.

Discussion

This discussion section offers the term *student/teacher identity alignment* as an encompassing term that will endure into the future as further research is conducted on teacher/pupil relationships beyond race and gender. The data reveal that future male teachers of color in this study appreciate a nurturing supportive environment. The respondents repeatedly referred to their HBCU department as having a culture like that of a family. This culture of support and advocacy appears to be an impetus for wanting replication in their own careers. That is, because someone has made a difference in their lives, they want to make a difference in someone else's life. In the research question about areas of improvement, the factors that emerged to enhance their experience in their Educator Preparation Program (EPP) at an HBCU were communication, exposure, resources, and student teaching. These key factors will serve as the sustainability targets for mitigating variables for the future research, with the goal of models for generalizability. Further analysis is needed with the larger population of non-respondents, most likely through interviews. Additional scrutiny of other departments in the School of Education should provide richer opportunities for generalization. If future research is conducted on this topic, the unifying label will be *student/teacher identity alignment*.

Future Directions

The findings of this study were submitted to The Center for Educational Opportunity at Albany State University in support of obtaining a grant. The grant was awarded and will be used for the implementation of the motivating factors identified in the study—broadly labeled as Areas for Improvement. The grant will allow the implementation of mitigating variables identified in the first study as perceived needs for continued success: additional resources as a number one priority, communication as a second priority, and exposure and clinical practice on equal footing as the third priorities. A subsequent research study has been planned to focus on these four identified foci for areas of improvement, which will serve as mitigating variables for the future study.

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Figures

Figure 1. Motivating Factors for Choosing Education as a College Major

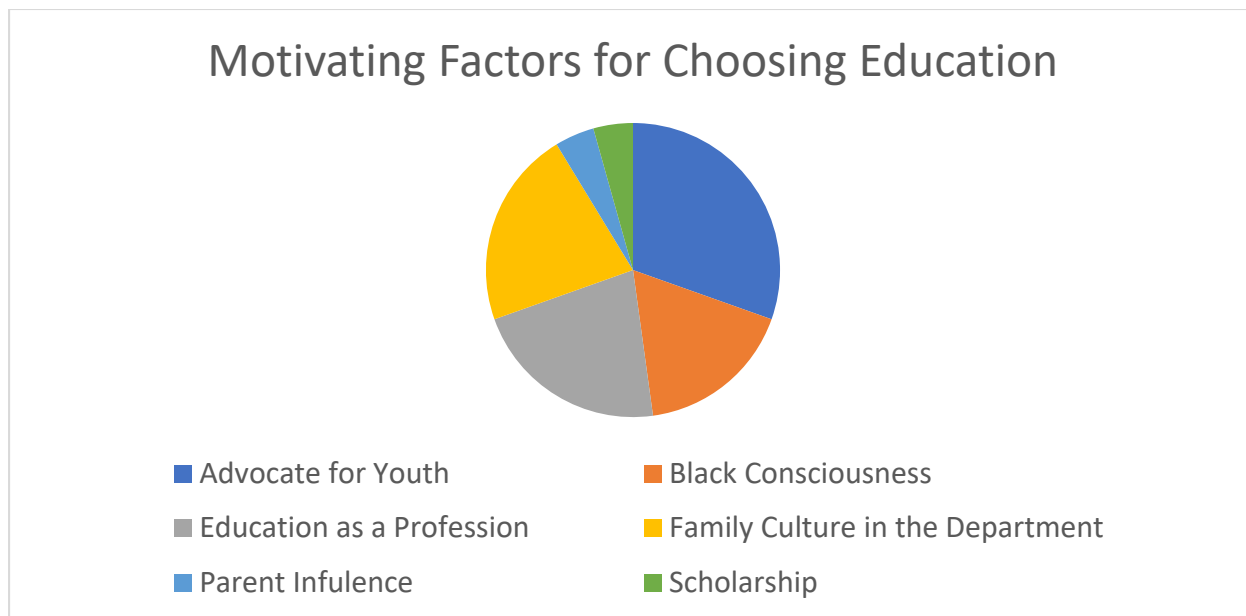


Figure 2. Positive Environmental Factors

Positive Environmental Factors

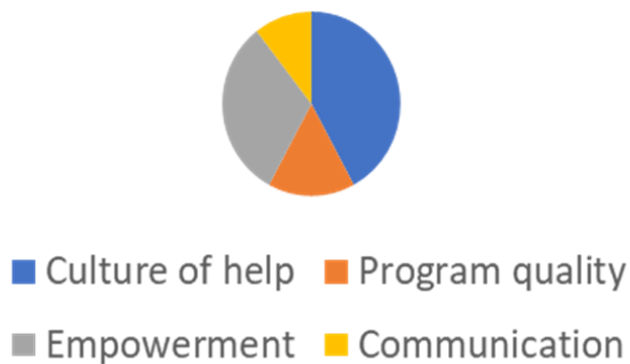


Figure 3. Areas for Improvement

