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Introduction

Over 50 years after Brown vs. Board of Education, the American educational system is fraught with separate and unequal opportunities for historically underrepresented and underserved populations. However, unlike the 1950s when race was the single most important predictor of educational disparities, most contemporary scholars agree that it is a convergence of multiple factors that shapes the circumstances in which America's neediest students exist. For example, in 2005 (the most recent year in which data are available), women represented the majority of college entrants at 2- and 4-year institutions. Yet, African American women represented a smaller proportion of the total population of female collegians (U.S. Department of Education 2006).

In similar fashion, national statistics on the enrollment of men suggest important nuances. For instance, of 14.3 million undergraduates enrolled in America's college and universities, men represented approximately 42% of the total student population. However, African American men represented less than 4% of the total student population—one of the smallest subgroups based on race/ethnicity and gender. Moreover, the gap between Black women and Black men is the lowest male-to-female ratio among all racial/ethnic subgroups (Cuyjet and Associates 2006).

Another layer of complexity obfuscates the relationship between gender and race when urbanicity is added to the equation. Urbanicity is often used to describe the location of an individual's school (Ingels et al. 1990); it reflects the school's metropolitan status. In most studies, urbanicity is measured using one of 3 categories: urban, suburban, and rural. Urban schools are generally defined as schools located in major cities, urban fringes (Polite and Davis 1999) or metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) (U. S. Census Bureau 2000). Urbanicity has been used in prior achievement studies and the weight of evidence suggests that urban settings tend to be highly populated by minorities, less well funded, and characterized by high unemployment rates, gangs, and crime (Aaronson 1997 1993; Gold 2007) which research has shown to be associated with lower achievement. For instance, Williams, Davis, Saunders, and Williams (2002) studied 231 African American 9th graders in an urban setting to estimate the impact of contextual factors on academic performance as measured by intent to complete school and grade point average. They found that perceptions of neighborhood deterioration and the number of relatives completing high school positively predict academic outcomes.

However, no studies were readily uncovered that measured the simultaneous impact of gender, race,

and urbanicity on achievement-related outcomes for Black male youth. Taking this confluence of factors into account may illustrate even more dramatic educational disparities as urban Black males are significantly more likely to attend high schools that are majority minority (i.e., predominantly Black); enroll large numbers of students on free- or reduced lunch; and employ a greater proportion of teachers on provisional licenses, the majority of whom teach outside of the subject in which they earned a college degree (Case and Katz 1991; Spicker, Southern, and Davis 1987).

Black males face other unique challenges that may compromise their success in school. Black male youth are often described using disparaging terms such as dysfunctional, lazy, uneducable, or dangerous (Gibbs 1988; Majors and Billson 1992; Mincy 1994; Parham and McDavis 1987). These terms reinforce negative stereotypes (Bailey and Moore 2004) and perpetuate the "invisibility" of Black men (Ellison 1952). Often such stereotypes shape the perceptions and expectations of principals and teachers. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that some Black men internalize such negative beliefs which, in turn, become "self-threatening" and work to compromise his success (Steele 1997). Finally, while Black male youth are underrepresented in honors courses and college, they are overrepresented in special education classrooms (Kunjufu 1986; Rawls 2006); among those suspended (Lane 2006) or expelled (Meier, Stewart, and England 1998) from school; and in prison. Indeed, reports suggest that Black men in their early 30s are nearly two times more likely to have been incarcerated than to earn a bachelor's degree (Western, Schiraldi, and Ziedenberg 2003)!

Taken together, these factors coalesce and provide a profile of individuals whose educational and social fate is in jeopardy. While the weight of evidence provides clear and compelling information about the condition of education for Black males in urban settings, much less is known about the underlying causal mechanism and factors that inhibit or facilitate their success in school. One possible factor that has received relatively little attention is the impact of teacher expectations.

Some studies provide evidence of the role that teachers play in the success of Black males. For instance, Grant (1985) found that teachers, on average, hold lower expectations for Black males. And, teachers' low expectations often lead to student disengagement which, in turn, lowers the teacher's expectations further—a vicious cycle downwards. His findings are corroborated by others (Ferguson 2005). Still, others provide little to no support for this conclusion. Indeed, Baron, Tom, and Cooper (1985) uncovered a study in which teachers had higher expectations of Black students compared to Whites, although this difference did not meet the threshold of statistical significance. Given these equivocal findings, more research is needed to test empirically the nature of this relationship.

The purpose of the present study was to measure the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement among urban Black males. Specifically, two research questions guided this analysis: (a) what is the level of teachers' expectations for Black men and (b) to what extent, if any, are such expectations correlated with African American males' achievement scores?

Indeed, more information is needed to understand the potentially complex interplay between teachers' perceptions and student achievement. With information on the underlying relationship, academic leaders can fashion interventions that raise student achievement and facilitate the success of Black men in urban schools.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the relationship between individuals and significant or "instrumental others" (Ceja 2006) in various contexts or systems (e.g., parents, teachers, etc.), it was necessary to find a theory that provided constructs for talking about the relationship between and within these contexts. In keeping with Kerlinger's (1986) recommendation, theory was defined as "a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon" (p. 9). Thus, I employed a theoretical framework drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory describes four types of nested systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Each system contains roles, norms, and rules that shape one's development. Taken together, the four systems represent the nested networks of interactions that reflect an individual's ecology. This ecology changes over time as an individual gets older or as certain systems (e.g., families, peers, schools) become more or less salient to the individual's development; this refers to the chronosystem which is often described as the fifth system. Bronfenbrenner's theory alludes to the way in which parental involvement, achievement in school, and personal characteristics may converge and impact one's development. That is, the model holds significant assumptions about the ways in which family-level variables (e.g., parental involvement), school-level factors (e.g., perceptions of teachers, teacher encouragement), and background traits (e.g., socioeconomic status, etc.) interact and influence individual-level outcomes such as academic achievement and can be useful in understanding this complex relationship.

Method

As part of a larger research program that centers on the experiences of African American males throughout the educational pipeline, this study adopted a ex-post facto survey design using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS:1988/2000) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NELS:88/00 consists of over 6,000 variables and includes surveys from students, teachers, parents, and administrators in a series of data collection waves. NCES launched the NELS with a clustered, stratified probability sample of 24,599 eighth-grade students from across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These students were selected to represent the national population of 8th graders. NELS:88/00 tracked individuals over time —up to 8 years after high school graduation (Curtin et al. 2002).

Sample

The analytic sample consisted of African American males (based on responses to the demographic section of the survey) whose living arrangement was described as an "urban" setting. The weighted final sample numbered 77,889.

Twenty-five (25%) percent of the sample had no plans for further education at the time of data collection. Twelve (12%) aspired to complete two or more years toward an associates degree, while 29% of the sample aspired to earn a bachelor's degree. Only 14% of the sample had fathers who had earned a college degree; 11.5% of mother's had a college degree.

Variables

The dependent variables measured student's academic achievement in math and science during the

8th grade in terms of a score on a standardized exam. Scores ranged from 0 to 100. Precedent for using these items was set in previous studies {e.g., \Rice, 1999}.

The independent variable measured students' perceptions of their teacher's expectations of them. For instance, one item was worded: In class, I feel put down by my teacher. Another item was worded, Teachers are interested in students. Response options were placed on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly agree") to 4 ("strongly disagree"). A final item asked whether one's teacher recommended work not school. Response options ranged from 1 ('yes") to 2 ("no").

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the sample and mean teachers' expectations. Next, correlation statistics were used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between teachers' expectations and African American males' achievement in high school. Finally, ordinary least squares regression was used to estimate the relationship between independent and dependent factors.

Results

Means and standard deviations for all variables related to African American males' perceptions of their teachers' expectations and their academic achievement (in math and science) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for all variables (weighted N = 77,889)

Variable	M	SD
Teacher recommended work not school	1.91	0.28
Teachers praise my effort	2.12	0.82
Teachers are interested in students	2.13	0.75
In class, I feel put down by my teachers	2.88	0.69
Teachers listen to what I say	2.14	0.89
Math achievement score	44.66	8.85
Science achievement score	44.35	7.59

Several important trends were observed after calculating frequency counts. Shockingly, 16% of Black

males reported that their teachers recommended work rather than school compared to less than 5% of White men and 8% of Black women.

Twenty-six percent of Black men reported that teachers were interested in them compared to 19% of White men and 23% of Black women. Similarly, 23% of Black men reported that teachers praised them for their efforts and this was virtually equal to that of Black women (22.9%). However, additional tests revealed that the sample generally agreed with these sentiments.

Another disappointing finding was uncovered in these data—20% of Black men reported feeling put down in class by their teachers while only 4% of White men and 4.8% of Black women report such feelings. Finally, among Black urban men, 18% ("strongly agree") and 57% ("agree") report that their teachers listen to what they say. Again, the latter finding was generally consistent across all racial/ethnic subgroups.

In the final analysis, I conducted bivariate correlation and regression tests to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between teacher perceptions and academic achievement, as measured in the 8th grade. Findings reveal a number of interesting trends. For instance, consistent with previous research, African American males' math achievement had a strong, positive relationship with their science achievement ($r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$). And, as expected, students who reported being "put down" by their teacher(s) in class had statistically significantly lower math ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$) and science ($r = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$) scores than their peers. Table 2 presents all correlation coefficients.

Table 2

Correlations between independent and dependent factors

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. MAS	1						
2. SAS	0.74**	1					
3. WNS	0.34	0.16	1				
4. IIS	-0.27	0.12	-0.21	1			
5. PME	-0.20	0.10*	0.15	0.35**	1		
6. PDT	0.21*	0.26*	-0.52	-0.05	-0.10**	1	
7. LWS	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.37**	0.47**	-0.12	1

Note. MAS = math achievement score. SAS = science achievement score. WNS = teacher recommended work not school. IIS = teachers interested in students. PME = teachers praise my effort. PDT = in class, put down by teachers. LWS = teachers listen to what I say.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Regression analyses reveal only one significant predictor of math and science achievement among African American males: "In class, I feel put down by my teacher" ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, the effect is greater on math achievement scores ($B = 2.15$) than science achievement scores ($B = 1.95$) for Black men in the NELS sample. Table 3 summarizes the results of the regression analysis.

Table 3

Math and science achievement scores regressed on African American males' perceptions of their teachers

	Math Achievement Score		Science Achievement Score	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	27.90	10.30	34.93	10.11
Work not school	4.79	5.22	0.56	5.12
Interest	-0.70	0.92	-0.45	0.90
Praise	1.18	0.90	1.64	0.88
Put Down	2.15*	0.84	1.95*	0.82
Listen	0.66	0.94	0.25	0.92
R	0.24		0.23	
R^2	0.06		0.05	

* $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to measure the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement among urban Black males. Specifically, two research questions guided this

analysis: (a) what is the level of teachers' expectations for Black men and (b) to what extent, if any, are such expectations correlated with African American males' achievement scores? A number of important conclusions can be drawn from this study.

First, evidence from this study suggests that teacher's have lower expectations for Black men when compared to their White male and Black female counterparts. Sixteen percent (16%) of Black men reported that their teachers recommended work rather than school. On the other hand, White men and Black women reported significantly lower rates, 4.8% and 8%, respectively. Thus, Black men were significantly more likely to have a teacher recommend work rather than school further evidence of teachers' low expectations.

Second, that 20% of Black men reported feeling put down in class by their teachers (compared to 4% of White men and 4.8% of Black women) is cause for alarm. While it is reasonably clear that this trend holds for Black men only, it is less clear just how this might occur in the classroom. To probe this finding, I informally interviewed 5 Black males who attend an urban high school. I asked them to help me unpack the meaning of this finding and the various ways in which Black men can "feel put down in class by their teachers." Interestingly, all 5 agreed with the finding readily and offered powerful illustrations:

My history teacher, Mr. Mitchell, used to call everyone by their last name…'Mr. Smith, Ms. Reed, Ms. Douglas,' he would say…everyone but me. HE called me by my first name, Darren. All my friends would coddle me and ask (laughing), 'Why does Mr. Mitchell call you Darren?' I never said a word…because I knew…I was only seconds away from 'boy' to him. [Black male aspires to attend Ivy League college]

There is no telling…I remember one day in English class we were discussing Whitman and Thoreau… then someone brought up the whole issue of Obama running for President…some of my friends said they support him, but before we could really debate, my teacher, Ms. Dennison, interrupted and said that it 'would be hard for an African American man to run this country.' But she said it in that way…you know…like she was saying something nice or something. I was so stunned…speechless…and hurt. [Black male honor roll student]

I got an 'A' in AP Chemistry once and my teacher accused me of cheating. Rather than celebrate my success, he assumed that I wasn't smart enough to get an 'A' on my own so I must have cheated. He asked other students about my performance on the exam…called my parents…it was so humiliating.
[Black male in 12th grade]

Indeed, these stories give "voice" to the often voiceless, invisible (Ellison 1952) experiences of African American males who often face "double" disadvantages or multiple burdens in schools because of their race and gender. Without attention to these issues, most projections suggest a future of pathology for Black men bordering on hopelessness (West 1993; Strayhorn 2007).

Recommendations

Given the paucity of research on how teacher's expectations affect minority student achievement and particularly urban Black males' performance, the present study attempts to make a contribution to the research literature by providing empirical support for the importance of teacher expectations. Still, more information is needed about how academic leaders (and teachers) can use such information to

improve the educational experiences of Black male youth. With this in mind, the balance of this article focuses on strategies that hold promise for increasing the achievement of Black males based on the results from this study.

1. Pre-service teachers tend to have a limited view of the structural factors that shape the educational trajectories of young people of color. Thus, faculty in teacher preparation programs would do well to offer courses that examine the way in which opportunity is structured in America (e.g., sociology of education, etc.). Topics would range from tracking to AP courses, class-based disparities to neighborhood effects, to name a few. Such courses would help teachers "see" the circumstances from which some students come. This information can be used to improve their work with students in the classroom for as Parker Palmer once said, "If you cannot see them, you cannot teach them well."

2. To fill gaps in teacher preparation curricula or to develop in-service teachers, principals might offer professional development workshops during district-wide professional development days on culturally relevant pedagogy and its use in the classroom. For instance, I recently won a grant from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to develop and administer five high-quality professional development workshops to teachers across two districts and at two schools on the important role that culturally relevant pedagogy plays in facilitating student learning and success in math, science, and language arts. Academic leaders who require more information should consult Gay's (2000) work and Howard's (2001) research.

3. Listening is an important concept. Results from this analysis suggest that Black male students who feel listened to also score higher on math and science achievement tests. Teachers are encouraged to listen to their students and building-level academic leaders are encouraged to "incentivize" such behavior among teachers. That is, academic leaders could consider this information when revising current reward structures. Exemplary teachers might be rewarded for fostering community in their classroom where each student feels respected, celebrated, and listened to.

4. Teachers, like all of us, use the dimensions of race, class, and gender to bring order to their perceptions (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1978). And without interpersonal interactions that trouble one's previously held beliefs, perceptions are crystallized into virtual realities. Thus, teachers are encouraged to examine their assumptions and beliefs about Black men. Academic leaders can play an important role in reducing, if not eliminating, stereotypes by establishing school-wide mentoring programs in which teachers are paired with students, whose background differs from their own, in service to an educationally purposeful activity.

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