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Building Self-Esteem in African American Males

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Abstract

Adolescent African-American males constitute a population at risk. Most research to date has emphasized the identification and treatment of problem behaviors within this population, and little research on positive behaviors is available. For example, multiple studies reveal a widespread lack of self-esteem. Recent efforts to improve self-esteem of African-American males include specialized programs that have achieved some success. A Building Self-Esteem model based on group activities are proposed to strengthen self-esteem and provide encouragement in order to increase confidence in self and academic ability in African-American males.

Building Self-Esteem in African American Males

The focus of building self-esteem in African American males is a significant problem worthy of study because a myriad of African American male adolescent students lack the self-esteem and self-image to perform well in school (Bernak, Chung, 2005). The goals of this research consist of a two-prong approach. The first is to increase self-esteem in African American male adolescent students who are deemed at-risk of academic failure. At-risk is defined as failing at least one class the previous year. It is also to assess whether participation in this study increases African American adolescent male students' confidence in their academic ability. The purpose of this research is to augment self-esteem in African American adolescent students in order to prevent academic failure. It is also to assess whether participation in the group sessions increases African American adolescent male students' confidence in their academic ability. The significance of the study contributes general knowledge through the examination of program designed to build African American adolescent males' self-esteem in order to support academic skills and success. In terms of professional application, this program is intended to not only serve their needs in the here and now but also throughout their high school career and lifespan. This study is significant in terms of social change because the information utilized can be crucial in helping to increase the self-esteem of African American adolescent males in a society that often marginalizes their existence (Blake & Darling, 1994).

In this paper, self-esteem is defined and research establishing the importance of self-esteem in the healthy development of males is summarized. Treatment programs developed to enhance self-esteem are described, and reasons for the limited success of

these programs is discussed. Implications for counseling are considered, as well as suggestions for needed research on which to base new and more effective programs to enhance self-esteem among African American males.

African-Americans comprise approximately 13% of the total United States population and males comprise approximately 46% of this minority group (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 200). Compared to Caucasians, African Americans have shorter life expectancies and lower levels of education with 44% being functionally illiterate (Blake & Darling, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)). Although clearly a population at risk (Blake & Darling, 2000; Lee & Bailey, 1997), African American males remain the least understood and least studied of all sex-race groups in the United States (Staples, 1986).

African American males are often the targets of negative stereotypes and prejudice and are socially devalued (Major & Crocker, 1993). Lacking a sense of hope and optimism for the future, the incidence of social and psychological disengagement and depression is greater among this minority group than among the population in general (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). Howard-Hamilton (1996), and James (1998), have linked these negative outcomes to lower levels of connectedness to their environments, decreased levels of personal mastery, and a lack of positive self-esteem (Major, 1998; Mizell, 1999).

Recent efforts to enhance self-esteem, including Afrocentric rites of passage such as incorporating Afrocentric curriculum and immersion schools (e.g. focusing on at-risk students), have had positive outcomes but only limited application to date (Hill, 1999). In part this may be due to the emphasis on enhancing the self-esteem of those who are delinquent or educationally impoverished rather than the population of adolescent

African American males as a whole (Hill, 1999). On the other hand, the lack of more

extensive success may be the result of applying a medical, illness-based model rather

than a model that is strength based. This has strong implications because it views the

problems of African American males in terms of "what is wrong" and how can it be

fixed?, which tends to be more reactive than proactive (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). This

will be looked at in greater detail in the section on the limitations of existing programs.

<div align="center">Review of the Literature</div>

The content of the review delves into the various definitions of self-esteem as its

basis in terms of African American males. The literature is divided into myriad

subheadings including Self-Esteem, Self-Esteem Beginning in Pre-School, Correlates of

Self-Esteem, Programs to Enhance Self-Esteem, Afrocentric Rites of Passage,

Educational or School-Based Programs, Limitations of Programs, and the Promotion of

Self-Esteem. These various subheads are looking at the problem statement of building

self-esteem in African American males, which is addressed in the literature.

Self-Esteem

Mizzell (1999) defined self-esteem as a global measure of an individual's self-

concept that encompasses personal judgments about one's self-worth. High levels of self-

esteem characterize people who have an internal locus of control and who are less likely

to be influenced by the views of others (Mizell, 1999). Low levels of self-esteem

characterize people who have less control of their environment and who have

experienced lower levels of satisfaction and happiness (Mizell, 1999). Individuals with

high levels of self-esteem typically are excited about new life challenges (Tatum,

Calhoun, Brown, & Ayavazian, 2000).

Self-esteem has been referred to at various times in the literature as self-concept, sense of worth, and self-worth. Hattie (1992) viewed self-esteem as the process by which individuals consider all aspects of life as important and have the confidence and fortitude to fulfill life's expectations. It reflects our ability to participate in evaluative self-enhancement that confirms or disconfirms our self-appraisals from others (Major, 1998). Self-esteem has been related other factors that influence human development, such as gender, social class, racial identity, and depression (Blake & Darling, 1994; Garibaldi, 1992; Munford, 1994).

Self-esteem is among the most widely studied concepts in the psychological sciences (Franklin & Mizell, 1995). In fact, a search of the Psychfirst database with only the key word "self-esteem" resulted in 3,441 articles on this topic in the last 20 years (Franklin & Mizell, 1995). Although only a small number of these articles addressed the concerns of African American males, it seems clear that self-esteem is an important component of healthy development and life mastery for this population, and a central mental health component that shapes the development of African American males from adolescence to adulthood (Franklin & Mizell, 1995).

Self Esteem Beginning in Pre-School

Justice, Lindsey, and Morrow (1999) studied the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem, racial preference and academic achievement in African American preschool children, and concluded that self-esteem is a significant predictor of academic achievement for African Americans beginning in preschool. The authors noted that African American children develop a sense of academic competence as early as preschool and that this sense influences their subsequent behavior and achievement in academic

settings (Justice, Lindsey, Morrow, 1999). Similarly, Spencer (1993) concluded that interventions designed to increase the self-esteem of African Americans males should start early and continue in developmentally specific and appropriate ways.

Seyfried (1998) studied factors that influenced the academic success of 113 middle-class African American fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students, including their parents and classroom teachers. He found that African American males often adopt an aloof, defiant attitude as a way of coping with perceived discrimination in the classroom (Seyfried, 1998). Teachers misinterpreted the motivation behind this behavior, viewed them as troublemakers, and spent less time with them in their academic pursuits (Seyfried, 1998). This resulted in lower grade point averages and lower self-esteem (Seyfried, 1998).

The Middle School Years

Adolescence is a period of dramatic change that often sets the stage for losses in positive feelings of self-worth (self-esteem) (Rhodes, Roffman, Reddy, and Fredriksen, 2004). The identity struggles and egocentrism of adolescence can contribute to painful emotions, and a greater emphasis on peer relations often ignites youth's concerns about their own social skills and others' sincerity and allegiances (Way, 1998). These changes appear to be particularly difficult for young adolescents, who are often coping simultaneously with the onset of puberty and the transition to an unfamiliar and possibly stressful middle school setting (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). Negative views of the self, in turn, constitute a risk factor for emotional difficulties (e.g. depression) and engage in maladaptive behaviors (e.g. delinquency) (Harter, 1999).

Steep declines in self-esteem, however, are neither universal nor inevitable, and a range of individual and contextual factors appears to influence both the direction and

magnitude of change (Hirsch & Dubois, 1991). Individual background variables such as gender, race, and social class have been shown to play important roles in determining trajectories of adolescent self-esteem (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002). For example, although early studies suggested that African American and ethnic minority adolescents suffered from steeper declines in self-image relative to European Americans, more recent work indicates that the self-esteem of African American adolescents is comparable to or even higher than that of European American peers (Gray-Litte & Hafdahl, 2000 and Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Some studies have found African American teenagers, for example, to have a higher opinion of themselves when the go to schools in which African Americans are a majority (Ward, 2000). Research on resonance and dissonance at the neighborhood level has indicated a self-esteem advantage for youth living in communities where they are part of the ethnic majority (Duncan, 1994).

The high school transition can be difficult for African American males, who are simultaneously coping with the challenges of adolescence, the need to establish a firm sense of identity (Erikson, 1963), and with the development of racial identity (Cross, 1978, 1991). Witherspoon and Speight (1997) studied the extent to which racial identity, self-esteem, and academic self-concept were related to academic achievement for 86 African American high school students participating in Upward Bound programs at two medium-size universities in the Midwest. They found a linear relationship between self-esteem and academic self-concept: as self-esteem increased or decreased, academic self-concept increased or decreased (Witherspoon, Speight, 1997). They concluded that self-

esteem had a greater impact on the academic self-concept of African American high school students than did family support and peer support (Witherspoon, Speight, 1997).

High levels of self-esteem are considered critical for successful African American males to combat the racial discrimination and prejudice they experience as they work towards their intended life goals (Blake & Darling, 2000). As a consequence, Lee and Bailey (1997) underscored the need for future research that illuminates the issues and factors that affect self-esteem in a positive manner. To date, most research has been correlational in nature, and thus reveals relationships rather than causal factors (Lee & Bailey, 1997).

Correlates of Self-Esteem in African American Males

Correlational studies examine relationships among demographic, psychological, and social factors, with the goal of revealing associations that can be used to predict or influence self-esteem (James, 1998). Multiple studies of self-esteem among African American males have identified factors that seem to affect, directly, the development of positive esteem (Cokley, 2000). These factors include personal sense of mastery, sense of belonging, family support, and religion (Cokley, 2000).

Mizell (1999) defined personal mastery as one's ability to feel a sense of control over and organization in his or her environment. In contrast to self-esteem, which is a global measure of an individual's ability to meet life's challenges and obstacles (Mizell, 1999). Personal mastery has been lined to positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, educational attainment, occupational status, and positive mental health (Mizell, 1999). Individuals who cope well with hardships and life disruptions are considered to have high levels of personal mastery and are considered to have attitudes that foster psychological

well being (James, 1998). Cokley (2000) correlated high levels of personal mastery with positive ethnic identity and self-esteem among the African American male population. Personal mastery also has been positively correlated with increased religious activity, parental/family support, and a sense of belonging (Witherspoon & Speight, 1997).

Sense of belonging, or mattering, refers to perceptions that one is important to others (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989). An individual's ability to feel part of his or her environment is a central component of a sense of belonging (Ancis, Bezner, Drabbis, Zambarano, & Steinhardt, 2000). Major (1998) correlated increased levels of belonging among African American males with lower levels of psychological disengagement from their environments. Blake and Darling (1994) identified sense of belonging as important to both academic success and academic self-concept for African American males. When African American males feel more connected to their environment, they are more likely to have higher levels of racial identity and higher levels of self-esteem (Munford, 1994). Thus, high levels of self-esteem allow African American males to develop a strong sense of belonging (Ancis, 2000).

An African American male's sense of belonging is affected by the proximity of his family and the level of support the family provides (Mizell, 1999). When they live in supportive family environments, they are more likely to display high levels of self-esteem and to main high levels of academic self-concept (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). Family kinship provides many basic needs, including financial support, childcare, and appropriate role models for fatherless children (Huff-Corzine, Corzine, & Moore, 1991). Though many African American families experience social isolation and economic

disadvantage, the kinship network provides its members the opportunity to maintain a high level of self-esteem (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994).

Ellison (1993) identified religion as an integral part of the African American community. The kinship network manifests itself in the rituals and expressiveness of the African American church, and many African American males have found social support and status through participation in religious services (Ellison, 1993). The social network and support found within the African American church improves self-confidence and provides examples of successful role models for young African American males (Harris, 1994). This translates to higher levels of educational and occupational attainment and higher levels of self-esteem (Graham, 1994). Unfortunately, the widespread lack of religious participation for adolescent African American males has a negative effect on their sense of personal mastery and can extend into their adult lives (Franklin & Mizzell, 1995). Programs to enhance self-esteem of young African American males may have only limited success when based in religious institutions due to this lack of participation (Franklin & Mizzell, 1995).

Programs to Enhance Self-Esteem in African American Males

The lifespan impact of self-esteem on African American males has been well documented, as have correlates of positive self-esteem (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). These correlates provide a foundation for the development of programs to enhance self-esteem, especially in young African American males (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). These programs include Afrocentric rites of passage programs and education or school-based programs designed specifically for African American males (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). Harvey and Coleman (1997) concluded that these approaches have had positive effects on

some delinquent and educationally impoverished African American males who have not received the services they needed from traditional educational and social programs.

Afrocentric Rites of Passage

Rites of passage refer to ritualized events that signify change, particularly coming of age (Hill, 1999). Hill (1999) explained how the loss of rich African traditions that comprise these rituals, which emphasize personal mastery and locus of control, has left a void in the development of African American youth, and further suggested that the institution of new rites may help promote positive development of self-esteem. Although a variety of such programs exist, one focused on males in the juvenile justice provides an example of the benefits of helping youth experience Afrocentric rites of passage (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). The program was developed by the MAAT Center for Human and Organizational Enhancement, Inc, and teaches African American adolescent males and their families, in the home setting, from an Afrocentric orientation. "MAAT" is an Egyptian word referring to living a virtuous and moral life (Karenga, 1987). The focus is on group identity, spirituality, and collectivity, using strategies that help to build character, self-esteem, and unity as a family, community, and race of people (Harvey & Coleman, 1997).

Based on the African principle of naturalism, the family is given the opportunity to define who constitutes the family (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). Sessions scheduled weekly are designed to enhance effective parental discipline, positive self-concept and self-esteem, happiness, family cooperation, and emotional strength (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). Individual sessions are scheduled for the African American male adolescent in the home and focus on developing his strengths, capabilities, attitudes, and self-esteem

(Harvey & Coleman, 1997). Interventions emphasize the interplay of community support for the individual and the individual's support of the community (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). Counseling continues until the adolescent demonstrates attitudinal and behavioral lifestyle changes (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). The rites of passage program also includes an after-school adolescent group in which African American males work together to make lifestyle changes by fostering new relationships and building positive self-esteem through the personal and cultural strengths of the group (Harvey & Coleman, 1997).

Education or School-Based Programs

While the rites of passage program focuses on African American males in the juvenile justice system, other programs have been designed to address the needs of African Americans in educational settings. Sanders and Reed (1995) highlighted the establishment of African American male immersion schools designed to address specific problems of educationally at-risk students. These schools differ from traditional schools in that they provide a curriculum designed to address the unique needs of African American males and to increase self-pride and self-esteem (Sanders & Reed, 1995).

Immersion schools have seven distinct characteristics: (a) a male mentoring program, (b) the incorporation of "Rites of Passage" activities, (c) the provision of tutorial assistance, (d) the implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum in addition to the prescribed curriculum, (e) the incorporation of a "families" concept, (f) a strong emphasis on student management and family intervention, and (g) special requirements for teachers assigned to the school (Sanders & Reed, 1995). Immersion schools have implemented different activities to develop intellectual achievement, self-awareness, self-respect, and self-esteem among African American males (Sanders & Reed, 1995).

The need to cultivate young African American scholars is not limited to entire schools but has also been addressed through specific school programs (Midgette, Franklin, Walker, & Andrews, 1998). Partners in Reading Opportunities: Mentors Inviting Successful Education (Project P.R.O.M.I.S.E.) is an elementary school reading and mentoring program in an urban, southeastern community in the United States designed to address the problem of academic achievement, search for identity, and role identification for African American boys (Midgette, Franklin, Walker, & Andrews, 1998). Intervention strategies are designed to address the basic competency skills that typical successful students have developed: academic and survival skills, positive self-concept and self-esteem, communication and interpersonal skills, coping ability, and control over decisions, behavior and their future (Midgette, Franklin, Walker, & Andrews, 1998). These strategies include intensive staff development, peer mediation, after-school tutorials, parent-community relationships, and field trips to a historically Black university campus (Midgette, Franklin, Walker, & Andrews, 1998).

Limitations of Existing Programs

Both rites of passage and school-based have had positive effects on some delinquent and educationally-impoverished African American males who have not received the services they needed from traditional educational and social programs (Harvey & Coleman, 1997), however, many more remain in need of help. One weakness of existing programs is that they view the problems of African American youth from an illness perspective (i.e. what is "wrong" and how can it be fixed?) and as a consequence tend to be reactive as opposed to proactive (Harvey & Coleman, 1997). From a counseling perspective, another weakness is the basis of these programs in education and

juvenile justice, settings in which counselors play a subordinate role (Harvey & Coleman, 1997).

In contrast, using emerging strengths-based approaches such as wellness, individuals are not pathologized but rather evaluated in relation to the skills required to maintain themselves in their environment (Herr & Niles, 2001). Such approaches are easily implemented in traditional settings in which African American males are found, including public schools and colleges as well as business and industry (Herr & Niles, 2001). The emphasis in wellness includes prevention, development over the lifespan, and optimization of behavior, thus providing a philosophy consistent with that of counselors (Cross, Nicholas, Gobble, & Frank, 1992).

Wellness and African American Males

The connection between wellness and self-esteem is an important link for counselors who work with African American males in settings that traditionally have been problematic and difficult (Cokley, 2000). Using the wellness paradigm to view problems from a strength based approach, counselors may gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the reasons for the lack of commitment for African American males in the educational setting and in the counseling process (Cokley, 2000). This increase in awareness can foster a better relationship between African American males and counselors (Cokley, 2000). Conceptualization of African American males from a wellness perspective can be used to empower them and can be a valuable resource in the implementation of strategies designed to deal more effectively with social alienation, depression, discrimination, and racism (Evans, 1999, Lee, 1997).

Bradley (2001) advocated the use of proactive, developmental interventions to meet the unique needs of ethnic minority students. She encouraged counselors to increase their awareness of the unique societal and educational challenges African American males face and to develop programs designed to address issues of racism, self-esteem, and coping (Bradley, 2001). One strength of the wellness paradigm is that it promotes a focus on the specific needs of each individual and does not erroneously assume that all African American males have the same needs (Bradley, 2001).

Reglin (1994) concluded that a blueprint for action to promote academic and personal success for African American males should include programs designed to build self-esteem and to address the importance of cultural factors in their lives (Reglin, 1994). He believed that educators in ways that are both controlling and that lower their expectations for academic success (Reglin, 1994). Further, he encouraged counselors to help educators and school systems change this paradigm by advocating for a restructuring of the school curriculum to meet the developmental challenges faced by African American students (Reglin, 1994).

Further research is needed to develop a better understanding of self-esteem and its connection to wellness in the African American male population (Blake & Darling, 1994). Outcome research on the connection between wellness and self-esteem can provide insights into the holistic effects of self-esteem on other aspects of functioning in this population (Blake & Darling, 1994). Research on differences in self-esteem and wellness within the African American male population and between these individuals and other populations can inform counseling practice and promote the development of effective interventions (Blake & Darling, 1994). Most importantly, the development of a

knowledge base of positive behaviors can do much to help eliminate negative,

stereotypical views of this minority within a population (Blake & Darling, 1994). This

information can be crucial in helping to increase the self-esteem and wellness of African

American males in a society that often marginalizes their existence (Blake & Darling,

1994).

Promotion of Self-Esteem

The promotion of self-esteem remains a major focus of school-based intervention

programs designed to improve children's academic performance and behavior. Empirical

data suggest that academic self-efficacy rather than self-esteem is the critical factor for

school success (Major, 1998), but few studies have examined self-efficacy and self-

esteem with an African-American population (Major, 1998). Findings suggest that

strategies that build a student's belief in the importance of education may do more to

increase academic self-efficacy among African-American youths than would a focus on

self-esteem (Johnson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, T. Williams, and J.H. Williams, 2005).

Despite gains in high school completion rates, African-American youths continue

to have high dropout rates in the inner cities (Garibaldi, 1992; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Although there are numerous approaches to dropout prevention, improvement of self-

esteem remains a major part of interventions to help students complete school (Hewitt,

1998; Joseph, 1992). Evaluations of programs trying to build self-esteem to improve

school performance indicate a disconnect between feeling good about oneself and

academic achievement (Aeby, Manning, Thyer, & Carpenter-Aeby, 1999). Several

studies have documented a much stronger relationship between academic self-efficacy

and school performance (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli; Bong, 1999).

Emerging research indicates that there is a much stronger relationship between academic self-efficacy and school performance among African-American students (Davis, Johnson, Miller-Cribbes, & Saunders, 2002). There is a notable lack of discussion about the evidence base for commonly used interventions, such as self-esteem programs with ethnic minority populations (Joseph, 1992).

The theoretical basis for the belief that enhancing self-esteem will enhance school performance is that individuals seek to maximize their self-image (Kaplan, 1986). Kaplan (1986) indicted a student must either achieve success (that is, graduate) or reject conventional success and seek to enhance self-image through deviant means (that is delinquency, dropping out of school, and so forth). Therefore, many programs have sought to address academic failure by improving positive self-regard (Adler, 1992). Such self-esteem interventions have the widespread support of educators and the public, and a plethora of materials, task forces, and curricula focusing on self-worth exist (Adler, 1992).

The focus of the educational system on self-worth is inconsistent with the bulk of etiological and evaluation research, particularly with African American youths (Strusinksi, 1997). An evaluation of the I Have a Dream program, which primarily served African American youths, found that the self-esteem of participants improved, but the academic and attendance measures did not (Strusinski, 1997). Another program found reduced dropout rates, but no significant improvement in self-esteem (Aeby, 1999). Although academic success might be theoretically linked to self-esteem, there is data lacking to show that improving self-esteem improves academic performance (Aeby, 1999).

The focus on the connection between self-worth and school success also seems inconsistent with the perception of students (Gerdes & Benson). A study of inner-city children (predominantly African American) found that they identified student behavior or safety as barriers to success in school, but not self-esteem (Gerdes & Benson, 1995). Among African American youths, earlier studies noted weak or negative associations between self-esteem (most notably racial self-esteem) and academic success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Joseph, 1992). The negative association between self-esteem and academic success was attributed to rejecting the need to "act white" to succeed (Witherspoon, 1997). More recent work failed to find this negative association (Stoltzfus & Harpalani , 2001). Recent work suggest that academic self-esteem is key to academic success among African American students (Davis, Witherspoon, 2002).

The concept of self-efficacy as articulated by Bandura (1997) refers to a person's beliefs in the ability to organize and execute a course of action required to achieve a goal. If there is personal goal setting or time monitoring (Zimmerman, 2006) students are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (for example, delinquency, and substance abuse) that negatively affect school success while controlling for general self-esteem (Chung & Elias, 1996). Both motivation research and self-efficacy research have found that self-efficacy or achievement motivation appears domain specific (Chung & Elias, 1996). In other words, a youth who has sports self-efficacy may have low academic self-efficacy (Chung & Elias, 1996).

In studies that report a positive association between self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (or school performance) the amount of variance explained by self-esteem was not large (Smith, Walker, Fields, Brookins, & Seavy, 1999). Two studies that

measured global and racial self-esteem and self-efficacy among African American youths found that only academic self-efficacy among African American youth found that only academic displayed a strong relationship with achievement and high school graduation, (Davis, 2002).

Bandura (1997) and Wigfield and Eccles (2000) noted that direct experience is a prime contributor to self-efficacy or achievement issues. Applied to academic self-efficacy, this suggests that earlier negative academic performance is likely to lessen student' belief in their ability to achieve academically (Bandura, 1997).

Another factor noted in self-efficacy research is the fact that adults who provide encouragement and serve as a role models may increase self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). There is insufficient research to understand whether such efforts to increase encouragement or models of success play a significant role in academic self-efficacy among African American students (Zimmerman, 2000).

Bandura (1997) noted that a sense of power and control over one's environment affects a person's self-efficacy. This sense of power may be negatively affected by risk factors at the home, school, and community levels (Bandura, 1997). In one study children reported external factors such as safety and other students' behavior problems as the major barriers to school and other student's behavior problems as the major barriers to school success (Gerdes & Benson, 1995). Studies have found that lower academic self-efficacy is associated with lower social competence and more negative life events (Chung & Elias, 1996). It is possible that successful interventions in this area might improve student's academic self-efficacy by increasing a sense of personal power and control

(Chung & Elias, 1996). There is insufficient research, however, to suggest how strongly such external factors influence academic self-efficacy (Chung & Elias, 1996).

Many approaches to improving school retention focus on staying in school to achieve future benefits (Kazis, 1993). Recent studies indicate that African American youths have career goals and value education to that of other students (Reid, 2001). Not all students may have equal ability to perceive the link between education and later goals. Ogbu (1988) suggested that education must be connected to future goals through a "status mobility system" that helps students understand how to move from school to later opportunities. It is not known how strongly beliefs about intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are associated with academic self-efficacy in African-American youths (1988).

The research on academic self-efficacy among African-American students is scant. On the basis of the literature, it can be hypothesized that associations between self-esteem and academic self-efficacy, if present, would be small.

Participants in a program to raise the academic achievement of at-risk elementary school students in the Newark (New Jersey) School District by raising their self-esteem showed both increased self-esteem and achievement gains (Walker, 2000). The program included both individual and group counseling sessions, parent participation, and the use of the Toward Affective Development (TAD) system and the Pumsey series (Walker, 2000). Two hundred seventy at-risk students were randomly assigned to a treatment group and 183 were assigned to a control group that received no treatment. More than three-fourths of the students in both groups were black (Walker, 2000). The groups were compared using the following pre- and posttest measures: (1) the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory; (2) attendance; (3) the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS); (4)

parent participation; and (5) participation in counseling sessions (Walker, 2000). The following highlights are discussed: (1) social experiences with peers seemed to have more of an effect on self-esteem than either home or school experiences: (2) academic self-concept was significantly associated with classroom performance for Blacks and males; (3) while the program did have a significant impact on raising overall self-esteem, it did not have a significant impact on academic self-concept; and (4) the high absence rates of older students indicate the need for longer, more intensive intervention with this group (Walker, 2000).

In the article, *Internal/External Locus of Control, Self-Esteem, and Parental Verbal Interaction of At-Risk Black Male Adolescents,* the relationship between locus of control, self-esteem and parental verbal interaction for at-risk black male adolescents in the United States is investigated (Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs, 1994). Forty-two black male students aged 11 to 16 years, in grades 6, 7, and 8, who had been identified as being at risk by their teachers served as subjects in this study (Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs, 1994). They were from a rural community, and most had a low socioeconomic status. Most lived in a one-parent home or with a guardian (Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs, 1994). Teachers used a set of eight characteristics, along with the student's family status, to identify at-risk students for the Positive Impact Program for at-risk black males (Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs, 1994). The eight characteristics were low self-esteem, lack of motivation, poor academic record, chronic disciplinary problems, poor school attendance, poor hygiene and personal-care habits, poor social skills, and disrespect for authority (Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs, 1994). Collectively, these relationships provide greater insight into the understanding of these at-risk black male adolescents (Enger, Howerton,

and Cobbs, 1994). Apparently, the at-risk black male adolescents who assume more responsibility for what happens in their lives tend to feel better about them (Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs, 1994).

A moderate positive relationship found between self-esteem and parental verbal interaction was consistent with a previous finding for White high school students (Enger, Howerton, and Cobb, 1994). A moderate negative relationship found between locus of control and self-esteem differed from a previous finding of no significant relationship for Black elementary children. A weak, yet significant, negative relationship was found between locus of control and parental verbal interaction (Enger, Howerton, and Cobb, 1994).

The report, A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) drew wide public attention to schools and student who were deemed "at risk." Many actions and conditions place adolescents at risk (Kazdin, 1993), and some groups of adolescents are considered more at risk than others (Cobbs & Mc Callum, 1992).

One factor linked to academic achievement of at-risk students is locus of control, "a generalized expectancy pertaining to the connection between personal characteristics and/or actions and experienced outcomes" (Lefcourt, 1991). There have been mixed results in research on whether a relationship exists between self-esteem and academic performance (Gaspard & Burnett, 1991). For samples of young Black males, Demo and Parker (1987) and Mboya (1986) reported no significant relationships between self-esteem and school achievement, whereas Enger, Howerton, and Cobbs (1992) reported positive relationships for these two factors. Another potential risk factor may be the quality of parental verbal interaction. Blake (1991) developed an instrument to measure

this variable; as yet, however, no studies have reported on the relationship between parental verbal interaction and academic achievement. Few studies have investigated the relationships among all three of these variables (Holliday, 1985). In a study of 44 Black children, Holliday (1985) found no significant relationship (r=.03) between locus of control and self-esteem. Although no studies have reported the relationship between locus of control and scores on the parental verbal interaction scale, Blake and Slate (1993) found self-esteem to be significantly related (r=.63) to the perceived quality of parental verbal interaction. Some scholars believe that self-esteem improves academic achievement, and some programs aimed at helping adolescents succeed in school focus on boosting their self-esteem (Covington, 1984).

Legume and Hoare (2004) conducted a study, entitled the Impact of a Career Intervention on At-Risk Middle School Students' Career Maturity levels, Academic Achievement, and Self-Esteem. The study was based on a pretest and posttest design using a control group (Legume & Hoare, 2004). Data were collected from 27 at-risk middle school students representing the experimental group and 30 at-risk middle school students making up the control group (Legume & Hoare, 2004). Modes of measurement consisted of the Crites Career Maturity Inventory (measuring attitude and competency levels), the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and grades (Legume & Hoare, 1994). Qualitative interviews were conducted with teachers of 5 randomly selected participants from the experimental group to compare self-esteem and academic achievement prior and subsequent to treatment (Legume & Hoare, 1994). Although results revealed that the sample's career maturity attitude and competency levels and academic achievement improved, such increases were not statistically significant (Legume & Hoare, 1994). The

qualitative results of this study suggest that an important component of middle school career interventions is self-esteem enhancement (Legume & Hoare, 1994).. At-risk students typically have difficulty in determining and using their personal strengths to their own advantage (Legume & Hoare, 1994).

Legume and Hoare (2004) found among the unexpected result was a statistically significant increase in self-esteem for members of the control group (p=.026). One interpretation of this finding is that the gain may have occurred because the control group students may have thought that their self-esteem was suppose to improve. To avoid embarrassing low scores, participants may have anticipated that the researchers expected the control group's level of self-esteem to improve during the posttest (Legume & Hoare, 2004). Posttest self-esteem scores for the experimental group (M=69.63, SD= 17.303) were slightly higher than at pretest (M=69.26, SD=13.011) (Legume & Hoare, 1994). With regard to academic achievement (grade point average), posttest scores (M=1.83, S=.56747) for the experimental group were slightly higher than at pretest (M=1.72, SD=.51869) (Legume & Hoare, 1994).

Puryear (1985) investigated whether program of activities designed to enhance the self-concept of middle school students would, in fact, improve self-concept. The subjects were black children and from a large urban setting. The study established a protocol, which compared a treatment group (N=35) and a control group (N=35) with respect to mean score gains between pre-test and post-test on the adapted Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (Puryear, 1985). Further, the study investigated treatment impact on student behavior as demonstrated by absences, tardiness, discipline referrals, and suspensions throughout the treatment period (Puryear, 1985).

Ross and Broh (2000) propose that academic achievement boosts self-esteem and the sense of personal control, but that only the latter influences subsequent academic achievement. Most previous research on adolescent self-concept has included self-esteem or, less commonly, the sense of personal control, but not both (Ross and Broh, 2000). They present evidence that the sense of personal control affects subsequent academic achievement, but that self-esteem does not (Ross & Broh, 2000). They examined the effects of academic achievement on self-esteem and sense of personal control (Ross & Broh, 2000). 24,599 8th grade students were evaluated concerning academic achievement, parental social support, self-esteem, locus of control, and sociodemographic characteristics (Ross & Broh, 2000). Earlier academic achievement and parental support increase self-esteem and the sense of personal control (Ross & Broh, 2000). Although the authors expected that achievement would have a larger effect on personal control and that parental support would have a larger effect on self-esteem, they found evidence for the former but not for the latter (Ross & Broh, 2000). The sense of personal control and self-esteem are highly correlated but may have different consequences for academic achievement. Ross and Broh (2000) present evidence that the apparent benefits of self-esteem for academic success among adolescents are really due to an internal locus of control. Self-esteem did not significantly improve grades or test scores (Ross & Broh, 2000). Blacks exhibited higher levels of self-esteem and higher levels of personal control. Much of the previous research on adolescent self-concept has focused more on self-esteem than on the sense of personal control (Blanchard, 1993). In the self-esteem model, adolescents who feel good about themselves do better in school than do those who have low self-worth. Proponents of this model contend that self-esteem leads to academic

success (Battle, 1981). In contrast, other schools believe that a focus on self-esteem is negatively placed (Edwards, 1995). Some scholars believe that self-esteem improves academic achievement, and some programs aimed at helping adolescents succeed in school focus on boosting self-esteem (Covington, 1984). Hersey (1984) noted, "self-esteem has replaced understanding as the goal of education." In accordance with the second view, argue that there is little compelling reason to think that simply feeling good about oneself would improved one's grades (Hersey, 1984).

Daniels (2004) presented a study focused on successful African-American adolescents and the positive psychosocial protective factors that relate to and foster their academic growth. Expanding on the dimensions suggested by previous researchers, this study specifically addressed the relationship between ethnic identity development, self-esteem, locus of control, social support, emotional distress, daily life stressors, and grade level academic achievement (Daniels, 2004). The majority of the students found school friendly yet stressful and only 40% reported having a faculty member or counselor as a mentor (Daniels, 2004). Most participants reported that they had rarely or never experienced racial discrimination, perhaps because they also reported school and community experiences in predominately African-American environments (Daniels, 2004). Future goals, money and personal commitment were the primary motivating factors and external problems were the primary discouraging factors for high school completion (Daniels, 2004).

Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) conducted research on racial comparisons of self-esteem. Early research in this area, exemplified by the doll studies of racial preference, was viewed as demonstrating that Blacks have less self-regard than Whites (Gray-Little

& Hafdahl, 2000). However, a meta-analytic synthesis of 261 comparisons, based largely on self-esteem scales and involving more than half a million respondents, revealed higher scores for black than for White adolescents (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). This analysis further revealed that the direction and magnitude of racial differences are influenced by such demographic characteristics as participant age and socioeconomic status, as well as characteristics of the measuring instruments (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). Many findings- for example, that the self-esteem advantage for Black respondents increases with age and is related to the sex composition of the sample- underscore the need for long-term longitudinal studies of self-esteem development in male and female members of both racial groups (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000).

Teasley and Lee (2006) investigated the impact of a community-outreach after-school academic enhancement program on self-reported levels of self-esteem in African-American male youth ages eight to eighteen (N=51). Using survey research methods, two research questions were asked: (1) Will youth with higher levels of academic achievement report higher levels of self-esteem than youth with lower levels of academic achievement? and (2) Are levels of program satisfaction related to levels of academic achievement and, therefore, levels of self-esteem in participants? (Teasley & Lee, 2006). The analyses revealed that higher GPA's are related to higher levels of school self-esteem in participants and that school self-esteem is related to member program satisfaction scores (Teasley & Lee, 2006). Findings from this study may provide new research information about levels of self-esteem in African-American male youth with similar ethnic and social experiences (Teasley & Lee, 2006). The test and measures for this came from the Hare Self-Esteem Scale (Teasley & Lee, 2006).

Method

The research design for this study derived logically from the problem statement of increasing self-esteem in African American males who are deemed at-risk of academic failure. In order investigate the problem statement, several different topics were examined in regards to self-esteem. Examining one's sense of self, family, and friends is vital to understanding self-esteem.

The sample selected for this study were at-risk seventh through ninth grade African American male students in an urban community school in western New York. The process of selecting students consisted of discussing with the principal and vice-principal to identify African American male students deemed at-risk of academic failure. At-risk is defined as failing at least one class during the previous school year. Behavioral issues consisting of being sent to the vice-principal for referrals out of class and low self-esteem as deemed by the principal and vice-principal. Students were selected by the principal and vice-principal from seventh through ninth grade because these students were identified as the crux of needing immediate assistance and because it was a population the researcher desired to work with. In conversation with the principal and vice-principal it was deemed that a sample size of five was adequate. This sample size was determined because it was deemed more attention with the goal of augmented self-esteem could be generated in a smaller sample. One of the participants dropped out of the study after two sessions.

Instrumentation

The name of the instruments used were the HARE general and area specific (school, peer, and home) self-esteem scale, The Self-liking and Self-Competence as dimensions of global self-esteem scale, and Feelings scale.

Self-esteem was measured through several scales. The first scale is entitled About Me which can be defined as Self-liking and self-competence as dimensions of global self-esteem. This is reprinted with permission from Tafarodi, R.W., & Swan, W.B., Jr. (1995). It is comprised of 20 statements and one additional statement, which the researcher added (I feel confident in my academic ability). Participants then use a scale to indicate if they strongly disagree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). Examples of these items are: "I have much potential," "I like myself," and "I have a negative attitude towards myself". The hypotheses was to measure if self-esteem increased or not and if students noted increase in confidence in terms of academic ability.

The next scale measured was the HARE general and area specific (school, peer, and home) self-esteem scale that is comprised of 17 statements in two categories, What You Would Do and Friends and one additional statement, which the researcher added (I feel confident in my academic ability). Participants then use a scale to indicate if they strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). Examples of these items are: "I could go up to someone my age and start talking to that person," " I usually keep to myself because I am not like other people my age", and "I wish I were a different kind of person because I'd have more friends". The hypotheses was to measure whether self-esteem increased or not.

Measures were taken for protection of participants' rights through utilizing

informed consent. Permission was first gained via the students' parent/guardians. Each

African American male was identified by code (A, B, C, D, E) to protect their

confidentiality. All materials (e.g. pre and post survey questionnaires, activity dittoes)

were stored in a locked file cabinet at school. All materials will be shredded upon

completion of the research. A Raw scale will be included in the Results section

Quantitative Results

        The quantitative results are based on three separate questionnaires. These include
About Me, What You Would Do, and Friends. For each table included are the item, pre-
test mean, post-test mean, and overall change. Subsequently after each table commentary
on the findings is presented.

        Legend: d= decrease in self-esteem
                 I= increase in self-esteem

Table 1. Mean self-esteem scores   About Me

Item	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Overall change
1. I have much potential.	4.75	4.75	4.75
2. I feel comfortable about myself.	4.75	4.75	4.75
3. I don't succeed at much	1.5	1.25	(.25 d)
4. I have done well in life so far	4.5	4.5	4.5
5. I perform very well at a number of things	4.75	4.75	4.75
6. It is often unpleasant for me to think about myself	1.5	1.5	1.5
7. I tend to devalue myself	2	2.25	(.25 I)
8. I focus on my strengths	4.5	4.75	(.25 I)
9. I feel worthless at times	1	1	1
10. I am a capable person	4.75	5	(.25 I)
11. I do not have much	1.25	1	(.25 d)

to be proud of			
12. I'm secure in my sense of self-worth	3.75	4.5	(.75 I)
13. I like myself	5	4.75	(.25 d)
14. I do not have enough respect for myself	2.25	1	(.25 d)
15. I am talented	5	4.75	(.25 d)
16. I feel good about who I am	5	5	5
17. I am not very competent	1.75	2.5	(.75 I)
18. I have a negative attitude towards myself	1.75	2	
19. I deal poorly with challenges	1.25	1.75	(.5 I)
20. I perform inadequately in many important situations	3.5	1.75	(1.75 d)
21. I feel confident in my ability	4.75	4.75	4.75

Comments on Findings

Of the pre and post questionnaires collected, four of the five African American males (80%) had complete data and were used in the analyses of this report. One of the students dropped out after sessions. In the About Me questionnaire, there are both consistencies and inconsistencies. Out of the 21 items, seven of the items displayed no change in self-esteem after the pre and post questionnaires. These items included number one, two, four, five, nine, sixteen, and twenty-one. Out of the 21 items, six of the items displayed a decrease in self-esteem following the pre and post questionnaires. These items included number three, six, eleven, fourteen, fifteen, and twenty. Out of the 21 items, seven of the items showed an increase in self-esteem. These items included number seven, eight, ten, twelve, thirteen, eighteen, and nineteen.

In regards to the research question at hand. That is, increasing self-esteem in African American males it appears from the data that overall self-esteem has increased as

opposed to decrease but it is a marginal change. One possible explanation for self-esteem increasing on several items as opposed to decreasing may perhaps be the participants attempting to please the researcher. Additionally, since the African American males in this study are the majority at their school this may be another factor in increased self-esteem. Ward (2000) points out that some studies have found African American teenagers, for example, to have a higher opinion of themselves when they go to schools in which African American students are the majority. Another possible explanation is that the increase in self-esteem may also have to do with the environment students live in. Research on consonance and dissonance at the neighborhood level has indicated a self-esteem advantage for youth living in communities where they are part of the ethnic majority (Duncan, 1994).   However, it can be argued that the three outcomes of no change, increase, and decrease of self-esteem are too close in proximity to derive at that notion. Next, raw data from the questionnaire What Would You Do is presented.

Legend: d=decrease in self-esteem

        I=increase in self-esteem

Table 2 Mean Self-Esteem Scores   What Would You Do

Item	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Overall change
1. I could go up to someone my age and start talking to that person	3.75	3.25	(.5 d)
2. If a friend wanted me to do something that I don't want to do, I could tell my friend that I don't	4	4	4

want to do it			
3. If a friend wanted to give me alcohol, I could say no	4	4	4
4. If a friend wanted to give me marijuana, I could tell my friend That I didn't want any	4	3.25	(.75 d)
5. If friends did something that I didn't like, I could ask them to change what they were doing.	3.75	3	(.75 d)
6. If some of my friends are playing a game, I could ask them if I could join	4	4	4
7. If a friend wanted to give me some cocaine or crack, I could say no	4	4	4

Comments on Findings

Of the pre and post questionnaires collected, four of the five African American males (80%) had complete data and were used in the analyses of this report. One of the students dropped out after two sessions. Out of the seven items, four of the items displayed no change after the pre and post questionnaires were completed. These included item number two, three, six, and seven. Out of the seven items, three items decreased in self-esteem. These items included number one, four, and five. Finally out of the seven items, none had increased in self-esteem.

In regards to the research question at hand. That is, increasing self-esteem in African American males, it appears from the data that self-esteem has had no change or has decreased. In fact, none of the items increased in terms of self-esteem. This was rather surprising. Some possible explanations may be that students may have misinterpreted questions even though they were administered by the researcher and researcher canvassed students for understanding. Some students may be experiencing

issues in their environment that are obstacles to increasing self-esteem in terms of these

items. The last questionnaire focused on Friends.

Legend: d=decrease in self-esteem
         I= increase in self-esteem

Table 3 Mean Self-Esteem Scores   Friends

Item	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Overall change
1. I have at least as many friends as other people my age.	4	4	4
2. I am not as popular as other people my age.	2	1.75	(.25 d)
3. In the kinds of things people my age like to do, I am at least as good as most people	4	4	4
4. People my age often pick on me	2	1.25	(.75 d)

Item	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Overall Mean
5. Other people think I am a lot of fun to be with	3.75	3.5	(.25 d)
6. I usually keep to myself because I am not like other people my age	1.75	2	(.25 I)
7. Other people wish they were like me	3	3.5	(.5 I)
8. I wish I were a different kind of person because I'd have more friends	1	1	1
9. If my group of friends decided to vote for leaders I'd be elected to a high school position	3.5	3	(.5 d)
10.When things get tough, I am not a person that other people my age would turn for help	3	2.25	(.75 d)

Commentary on Findings

Of the pre and post questionnaires collected, four of the five African American males (80%) had complete data and were used in the analyses of this report. One of the students dropped out after two sessions. In the Friends questionnaire, there are both consistencies and inconsistencies. Out of the 10 items, three of the items displayed no change in self-esteem after the pre and post questionnaires. These items included number one, three, and eight. Out of the 10 items, five of the items decreased in self-esteem. Out of the 10 items, two of the items increased in terms of self-esteem.

In regards to the research question at hand. That is, increasing self-esteem in African American males, it appears from the data that self-esteem has decreased overall. One possible explanation for self-esteem decreasing may be environmental factors that the students are facing. These may be subject to much change. Another possible explanation is the notion that adolescence is a period of dramatic change that often sets the stage for losses in positive feelings of self-worth (self-esteem) (Rhodes, Roffman, Reddy, and Fredriksen, 2004). These relationships according to the items may fluctuate on a weekly or even daily basis coinciding with students' self-esteem.

Qualitative Results

The program I conducted was named Building Self-Esteem in African American male. The group was implemented to address the core objectives of the thesis, which was to increase self-esteem in African American males in order to prevent academic failure and to increase confidence in their academic ability. The group consisted of five African American males initially ranging from grades seventh through ninth. The group lasted for a total of five weeks. Pseudonyms of John, Bill, Dan, and Ken are used to denote each

participant. Week one consisted of introductions, ground rules, filling out the pre-questionnaires and an activity called Roots of Self-Esteem.

Roots of Self-Esteem was an activity designed to address and develop self-esteem. Participants were first asked to fill in the drawing of a tree. Specifically, this consisted of filling in the roots of the tree with statements or messages they received growing up. These included both positive and negative. Then, in the branches of the tree, participants were to fill in the eight lines with how the messages made them feel or how that has effected them now. In the roots of the tree, John, for example, indicated the messages he received growing up were "don't steal" and "hit someone if they hit you first". Another participant, Dan indicated in the roots of the tree that the messages he received growing up included "behave", "I'll get you". In the branches of the tree, included were "be good" and "I hate you".

Week Two focused on the Multi-Dimensional Self. That is, addressing the various aspects of self. These included self as a member of a family, self as a peer, self as a person with attributes, self as a student, and abilities. For example, Dan indicated "its cool and interesting to be a brother. Under the category self as a student Dan mentioned, "I love to learn" and had craftsman under abilities. Another participant Bill indicated that it is "fun to be educated" in terms of self as a student and "can write well" under abilities. All participants had indicated they had positive self-esteem in terms of self as a person with attributes. Specifically, these participants discussed the fact they liked or were proud of their skin color. In reference to the literature, this seems to correlate with the fact that participants attend a majority African American school and therefore do not have to downplay their race.

Week Two also focused on Strengths. That is, to identify strengths in self and others. John commented that he felt "good" when he received strength statements from peers and when giving strength statements. He also commented that "it is important to recognize our own strengths and those of others because if you don't you or your friend will never know your or his strengths". Students were asked to identify three positive strengths they observed in others. For example, Bill indicated that John is funny, intelligent, and seems like a cool guy. Bill on the other hand indicated that John is coo, one of my best friends, and is a good person. This exercise allow students to not only focus on their own self-esteem, which was the basis for the research but allowed participants to gain an augmented understanding of their peers. This aspect went above and beyond the literature in that it expanded upon more than just the self.

Week Three was based on Stress Management. That is, to identify positive coping mechanisms to deal with stress. Students were asked to come up with things in their lives that stress them and then throw their stress away in a wastebasket. This exercise is better known as the "stress basket". Bill mentioned in discussion that a similarity he heard between all participants in terms of stress was work. He indicated that stressful events "make me mad like I want to fight. I felt great because I let them go." Lastly, he mentioned that staying focused can help reduce stress."

Week Three focused on setting goals. This consisted of identifying short-range goals in order to visualize achieving those goals. In this exercise participants were posed the question, Why is it important to set goals that are realistic? John stated so that you can fulfill them. Ken mentioned that three short-term goals he had for himself were to pass the marking period, purchase new sneakers, and pass his math test. This correlated to the

objective of the thesis, which is increasing confidence in academic ability and increasing self-esteem in order to prevent academic failure.

Week Four focused on Looking at Self. It focused on visualizing self as an African American male. Participants indicated their comfortability or lack thereof of their body image using a scale to describe their feelings of each of their body parts . A score closer to five indicated that participants are very comfortable with their body image and a score closer to one indicated that they are very uncomfortable. Ken, for example, indicated he was very satisfied with his facial complexion and hair.

Lastly, Week five focused on creating a Self-Esteem banner. The object of this project was to create a hands-on image of self as an African American male and increase self-awareness of others. This notion contrasts the majority of the literature in the sense it focuses on positive strengths as an African American as opposed to an illness based model. In this exercise several questions were discussed. For example, What kinds of things were shared by others with you that reinforced or confirmed your concepts of yourself? Ken indicated that "you are very talented". When the question Write about the area of the "self" that was easiest to represent in the Self-Esteem Banner was discussed, Dan mentioned that "it was easy because it's about me and I know me". It is interesting to see the self-reflection of students in this piece. Reflective writing is not aspect I found to be utilized in the literature. I think if more reflective writing was used it could give greater insight into students' lives and their views of themselves.

Participants completed a group evaluation at the end. For example, one of the statements was, "the most helpful part of this group". Ken indicated the most helpful part of this group was to stay out of trouble. Ken indicated that he learned how to set goals.

Ken's overall comment about the group was that it was a good group. Bill mentioned the most important part of this group was to let things go like stress. Bill indicated it would have been more helpful if he knew all the things that get him mad. Bill reported that something he would change is how he gets mad easy. John mentioned the first time that this group met, he felt good and happy. Finally, Dan indicated that I learned that I am more confident. Dan mentioned that something he would change is his behavior. Dan reported that he wished he could be in this program forever. Interestingly, though the comments from students indicated overall that the program was positive and increased their self-esteem though overall the questionnaires did not indicate that.

<p align="center">Discussion</p>

The results of this study suggest there are many factors involved with self-esteem. Among those discussed were self and friends. As the literature points out there are other factors involved as well such as family and environment. In terms of the raw data when it came to the self, such as in the About Me questionnaire there seemed to be an increase in self-esteem overall as opposed to the Friends and What You Would Do questionnaire. The study seems to imply that self-esteem for African American males either was maintained or decreased overall over the course of time in observing all three questionnaires.

Based on the questionnaires administered to participants and in comparison to the literature this study may provide a start for an augmented understanding of African Americans. This study focused solely on African Americans. The need for continued research is consistent with the work of Staples who stated that African Americans remain the least understood and least studied of all sex-race groups in the United States.

In the About Me questionnaire decreases in self-esteem of two items, " I don't succeed at much and I do not have much to be proud of may be symbols of lacking a sense of hope, which coincides with the research of Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, and Crocker. These researchers noted that lacking a sense of hope and optimism for the future is greater among African Americans than among the population.

The Building Self-Esteem group, which this researcher conducted is consistent with Afrocentric rites of passage and the research of Hill in that it focused solely on at-risk African American males as opposed to incorporating other racial groups. It also focused on building strengths in African American males as opposed to looking at what is wrong or how can it be fixed, which denotes the research of Harvey and Coleman.

In the Friends questionnaire, several of the findings suggest that peer approval is a vital factor of self-esteem. For example, there was a decrease in self-esteem in several items. One of these items included "Other people think I am a lot of fun to be with" and the other is "When things get tough I am not a person others would turn for help". The fact that these two items decreased in participants' self-esteem is indicative of the findings of Major. Major found that self-esteem reflects our ability to participate in evaluative self-enhancement that confirms or disconfirms our self-appraisals from others. In this case self-appraisal from others is certainly a paramount aspect.

The findings show numerous inclines, declines, and maintenance in terms of self-esteem. One possible explanation for this may be the stage of adolescence itself. It may be hard to predict self-esteem. Way's research indicated that identity struggles and egocentrism of adolescence can contribute to painful emotions, and a greater emphasis on

peer relations often ignites youth's concerns about their own social skills and others' sincerity and allegiances.

Research Limitations

A more in-depth and a more longitudinal study would be beneficial to observe trends over a greater amount of time. Again, if this were a longitudinal study more data could be gathered from a larger pool of students to gain an augmented sense of self-esteem across African American males.

Data was certainly a limitation. Of the thousands of articles on self-esteem there were only a small number of articles focused solely on African American males. This is consistent with the literature. Franklin and Mizell noted that in their search of the Psychfirst database with only the key word "self-esteem" it resulted in 3,441 articles on this topic in the last 20 years. Furthermore, Franklin and Mizell indicated that only a small number of articles addressed the concerns of African American males.

The researcher was somewhat restricted by the sample size. This study did not take into consideration other domains of self-esteem such as poverty or social class.

Implications for further research

Future research should investigate the ways in which individual and school-level differences in the rates of stress might change. Future research needs to take into account all of the different contexts that influence youth's lives. Variables such as poverty have been studied less often than race or gender but may prove to have a vital role in self-esteem.

The findings have implications for future research and intervention. The sharp decline in self-esteem in the Friends questionnaire are alarming. Additional research on

the social incongruity between adolescents and their peers is another aspect that needs to be delved into. Additional research on risk factors may aid in understanding more about African American males. For example, taking into account poverty, suspensions in school, and violence in their neighborhood environments. In research there is myriad information on self-esteem but rather scant information when it comes to African American males and self-esteem. In reference to the literature there are more comparisons between African American males and European Americans, which takes away from solely delving into the former.

More research needs to be done on African American males at an earlier age in terms of intervention. This correlates with the literature. Justice, Lindsey, and Morrow studied the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem, racial preference and academic achievement in African American preschool children, and concluded that self-esteem is a significant predictor of academic achievement for African Americans beginning in preschool. This notion denotes back to the core and objective of the thesis. That is, to increase self-esteem and confidence in academic ability.

Implications for Counseling

In conducting the research one personal bias I had was perceiving students level of self-esteem. Though there self-esteem may have been low in some areas I found through quantitative research. That is, conducting a five-week group with students that seemed have high self-esteem in terms of race. A possible explanation for that may be that their school is predominately African American and that the may not have the need to play down their race if they were in a school with less of an African American male population.

Based on the results of the findings counselors need to delve into creating a contemporary questionnaire for African Americans. Many of the questionnaires are severely outdated and biased in nature. A reassessment of this is need in the ever-changing global world we live in. If a more contemporary questionnaire were formulated it may be more pertinent and clear as to the world African American males are living in today.

One recommendation for counseling practice is to discover through dialogue with students first to gain understanding of their personal analysis on their self-esteem. Until recently, research has typically viewed or possibly made the assumption that African American males have low self-esteem due to a Eurocentric illness based model. Another recommendation for counselors is to actively have dialogue with those of different backgrounds who you may choose to do research on. Reflective writing is another piece that needs to be further researched and utilized. This may provide an augmented sense of how many so called "at-risk" students view their life and the world around them. Some may be able to write their thoughts clearer than verbalizing them. Reflective writing seemed to work well in the quantitative activities performed with participants. It also gives them some ownership to account for their own lives instead of an overused illness model that has been pervasive in diagnosing African American males to a large degree. Unfortunately some of the research can lead counselors to rely on biases ingrained in the textbooks instead of finding out for ourselves the true core of others.

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