

The problems resulting from this situation are not only undermining the stability of the black family but are imposing enormous social costs on the nation as a whole.

When father-absence, poverty and the social milieu of the deprived neighborhood are added to the well known effects of underage mothers and inadequate pre- and postnatal care on the academic and social potential of children, a picture emerges of an extremely troubling future for black males and females and for those who would depend upon them for economic and political security.

The picture becomes even more complicated if we include the staffing patterns of public schools, which tend to limit the potential for a black male student to interact positively with a black male role model – especially at the elementary level. Role models are most significant during childhood development. Yet, we find that black male role models are often absent from homes and schools either because a high number of black families are headed by females or because there are not sufficient black males heading our schools or teaching in them.

Working against the resolution of this problem is the fact that educators themselves remain uninformed of the gravity of the status of the education of black males, the causative factors, and, to some extent, the research on this topic. Lastly, there is a need for more empirical research, and wider publication and dissemination of present knowledge. Both blacks and whites have insufficient data about the plight of the black male and how to improve his status.

Issues of Knowledge

If we begin with the notion that intelligence is “an innate ability to learn or to understand or to deal with new or trying situations,” then one must be given the *opportunity to experience* “new or trying situations” before one can learn or acquire knowledge. While educational achievement may be measured by testing the depth and breadth of one’s learning, the measurement of one’s intellectual capacity, one’s innate intelligence, can only be defined in terms of what one has learned from what one has been given an *opportunity to learn* – learning or the acquisition of knowledge – that sum of experiences that can be observed and measured – begins with infancy and continues throughout life. If opportunities for learning and enriching experiences appropriate to one’s age and level of maturation are not provided by one’s family, community, school, or society, then one’s chances of acquiring the experiences necessary for achievement are limited.

Knowledge can be seen as the accumulation of successful learning experiences. These experiences begin in the home while the child is still in infancy. Knowledge is expanded by contacts with knowledgeable, significant others whom the child may take as models, and with exemplary occupational and peer groups which the child may adopt as “references” as he attempts to negotiate the labyrinth of learning. The absence of male role models begins for deprived black males with the absence of the father in over one-half of their homes. It is continued by school staffing patterns that largely rule out adult male role models until the child reaches the secondary school level. For the black male, the situation is exacerbated by the paucity of black male teachers, administrators and authority figures at all levels of education. The discrimination faced by adult black males is visited upon young black males. The cumulative effect of the hiring and firing patterns in our schools is to deprive young black males of opportunities to increase their store of knowledge through interaction with caring and concerned adults of their own race and gender. The low academic achievement of black males can, in part, be attributed to a continuing pattern of discrimination. The “. . . source of black-white differentials in achievement,” argue Hauser and Featherman (1974), “. . . is not primarily the greater prevalence of impoverished originals among blacks, but the cumulative effects of discrimination by race at every stage of a man’s life.”

According to Gary (1981), females account for over 80 percent of all teachers at the elementary level; and about 10 percent of this number are black. Less than two percent of the male elementary teachers are black. Of the approximately 54 percent male participation rate at the secondary level, black males account for an estimated three percent. When teacher aides are considered, the male/female and black male/female imbalances are even sharper. Over 95 percent of all teacher aides are female, with black females representing