

The Current and Dire State of African American Male Crime and Education in the Central Southwest: Are Mentoring Constellations a Promising Strategy?

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This article focuses on the state of African American males in the Central Southwestern region of the United States (Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), regarding population distribution, education, and incarceration rates. The authors propose mentoring as one potential intervention to address the generally negative educational and correctional trends for African American males. Using a social/cultural capital framework, the authors examine current mentoring theories and present models of programs that regional and national media profile. With this compendium of information, community-based organizations and individuals alike can chart a course of action to help address the dire state of educational achievement among African American males.

Scholars have considered the status of the African American male in recent years, relating terms such as “crisis,” “disappearing,” and “vanishing” to characterize his educational experience (Blake & Darling, 1994; Harper, 2006; Sáenz, Ponjuan, Heilig, Reddick, Fries-Britt, & Hall, 2008). Social commentators, such as Illinois Tea Party candidate Al Reynolds—recently remarked that Black men are more interested in drugs than education (Kacich, 2010)—often focus on perceived maladaptive behaviors of African American males in society. Usually, society gives little regard to structural and historic factors that work to inhibit success in reaching educational outcomes (Willie & Reddick, 2010). The adage “when America catches a cold, Black America catches the flu” (see Harris, 2011, para. 2) seems apt when one reviews outcomes for African Americans (especially African American males) with respect to incarceration rates and educational outcomes. These outcomes necessitate informing policymakers and practitioners of these disparities and aggressively addressing the reverse of these trends. Of particular importance is the educational system’s failure to address the

inadequate school outcomes for African American males. In the words of the Task Force on the Education of Maryland's African American Males, "there [has] been a fundamental failure on behalf of our African American male students and a persistent bias against them" (2006, p. vii).

As researchers based in the state of Texas, the authors chose to examine data concerning educational and correctional outcomes for African American males in the Central Southwest¹ states (e.g., Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas). This grouping is apt because of the historic academic and athletic linkages (most of the states are connected to Texas as current or former members of the Southwest Conference [SWC] and/or Big 12 Conference) and in the case of proximity, New Mexico (Big12sports.com, 2011; Blair, 1999). All of the states in our analysis feature major to mid-sized metropolitan areas (i.e., Little Rock, Denver, Wichita, Kansas City, Omaha, Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio) and rural areas as well. The percentage of African Americans among selected states ranges from 15.5% in Arkansas to 2.1% in New Mexico. By examining the state of African American youth in educational and correctional contexts in the region, the authors are able to conduct analyses across a spread of demographics, covering nearly a quarter (23.3%) of the African American population in the United States (Bowman, 2010).

The information in this article seeks to situate the status of African Americans and African American males through analysis of recent data and the literature on educational outcomes and incarceration. These data are a report card, of sorts, for K-12 schools and institutions of higher education in the U.S. What follows is an elucidation of how African American males are faring in the Central Southwest Region. The authors conclude by discussing mentoring interventions as an organizational and individual strategy to address historic educational deficits among African American males and their overrepresentation in the penal system. First, a theoretical concept is presented to serve as a platform for understanding the data presented in this article.

Bolstering Social and Cultural Capital

Considering the plethora of issues facing Black youth in the U.S. correctional and education systems, this article offers a conceptual framework of social capital to undergird one particular strategy to address these deficits— mentoring interventions. One of the core concepts in understanding the challenges confronting Black youth emerges from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1986), who defines social capital as "actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition," further noting that social capital "provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (p. 248).

Two key concepts are evident from Bourdieu's definition: one, the significance of access to networks, and two, how membership in said networks provides access to credentials and credit. Significantly, youth who are denied access to networks of positive influence and accrue little in the manner of credentials are unlikely to emerge from their challenging home and community contexts. Bourdieu (1986) additionally introduces another form of capital, cultural capital, which he defines as forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which provide him or her a higher status in society. The primary resource for accumulating cultural capital is a child's parents, who pass along attitudes and knowledge that will assist the

child in succeeding in the educational system (Horvat, McNamara, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 1987).

If parents are absent or consumed with other responsibilities, or simply have little knowledge of what strategies and beliefs are necessary to succeed in educational settings, the child is at a significant disadvantage compared to peers with this benefit (Heilig, 2011). It should be noted, that alternate forms of capital potentially derive from families with limited education and socioeconomic status – familial support, networks of caring adults, and the like (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, & Platt, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Even in such situations, additional opportunities to obtain social capital can only enhance what youths bring from home. Bearing these notions in mind, the authors present a population overview that serve to contextualize the status of Black males presented in this article.

Population Overview

In 2008, nearly one in six U.S. residents were Latina/o (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). By the year 2050, Latina/os will represent almost 29% of the nation’s populace (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Despite the fact that African Americans are no longer the largest minority group, they have still increased in number. Although African American population expansion has been slower over the last decade, the percentage representation of this group grew by more than 4 million between 2000 and 2010— comprising 12.3% and 12.9% of the U.S. population, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In terms of total numbers, at 2.9 million and growing, Texas has the third largest population of African Americans in the United States, trailing only Florida and New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Table 1.
Percentage distribution of the resident population, by race/ethnicity, nation, region, and state: 2010 Census

Nation, Region and States	White	Black	Latina/o	Asian American	Native American
United States	72.4	12.6	16.3	4.8	0.9
Central Southwest	77.0	9.9	0.1	2.9	1.7
Kansas	72.2	5.9	10.5	2.4	1.0
Missouri	70.4	11.6	3.5	1.6	0.5
Nebraska	81.3	4.5	9.2	1.8	1.0
Arkansas	68.4	15.4	6.4	1.2	0.8
Oklahoma	72.4	7.4	8.9	1.7	8.6
Texas	74.8	11.8	37.6	3.8	0.7
Colorado	83.8	4.0	20.7	2.8	1.1
New Mexico	82.8	2.1	46.3	1.4	9.4

SOURCE: U.S. Census (2010).

Nationally, students of color constituted a majority of the population in public schools in 11 states by 2008 (Southern Education Foundation, 2010). Six of these states were in the South and five, including Hawaii, were in the West. Nine of the ten states in the continental U.S. were at or near the nation’s southern border. Latina/os represented almost nine out of every 10 non-

White students in the West. African Americans are no longer the largest non-White student group in any of the Central Southwest states.

In 2007, minorities represented about 52% of school-aged children in the Central Southwest region (See Table 2). African Americans ranged from two percent of school-aged children in New Mexico to 22% in Arkansas.

Table 2.

Number and percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary students, by region, state, and race/ethnicity: 2007–08

Nation, and States	Region	Total Enrollment	White	Black	Latina/o	Asian American	Native American
United States		48,397,895	55.8	17.0	21.2	4.8	1.2
Central Southwest		8,596,395	48.5	13.2	33.1	2.8	2.4
Kansas		463,890	73.2	8.9	13.5	2.6	1.7
Missouri		917,188	76.1	17.9	3.7	1.8	0.4
Nebraska		291,244	75.4	8.0	12.9	2.0	1.7
Arkansas		479,016	67.0	22.6	8.1	1.5	0.7
Oklahoma		642,065	58.1	10.8	10.0	1.9	19.2
Texas		4,673,455	34.8	14.3	47.2	3.4	0.3
Colorado		801,867	61.5	6.0	27.9	3.4	1.2
New Mexico		327,670	29.5	2.6	55.6	1.4	10.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey,” 2007–08.

One of the most pressing problems in the United States (and the Central Southwest) is improving student academic performance within the nation’s burgeoning minority student population (Rumberger & Arellano-Anguiano, 2004). African American students comprise a large sector of students experiencing low school performance. Many of these youth enter high school with uneven or even irregular instruction (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). As a result, the next section will discuss educational outcomes for African Americans, both nationally and in the region.

Education

African Americans have endured arduous experiences within the U.S. A history of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation created separate and unequal schools for successive generations of African American students (Anderson, 1988; Shabazz, 2004; Heilig, Reddick, Hamilton & Dietz, 2011). This has fostered the proverbial school-to-prison pipeline whereby schools socialize a large cadre of African American males (and other minorities) toward prison (Cole & Heilig, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003). Despite the active struggle of African Americans for civil rights via litigation, state and federal legislation, and local activism throughout the 20th century—a legacy of severely under-resourced schools and over-representation in prison populations remains (Walker, 1996). Although conditions have improved, continued isolation in inner cities and rural localities has resulted in unrelenting segregation and inequitable provision of vital educational resources (Noguera, 2008; Orfield & Lee, 2005). In the modern era, African American children are undereducated. This lowered educational attainment tracks closely with residential

segregation, family wealth or poverty, and the historic unequal funding of schools by race and ethnicity (Orfield & Ashkinaze, 1991). Therefore, the efforts of African Americans to obtain high quality education for their children in a structurally discriminatory system are greatly challenged. The withering effects of discrimination have, in large part, contributed to the overrepresentation of African Americans in the U.S. criminal justice system (Anderson, 1988).

Though the disparity between racial groups (i.e., African Americans and Whites) regarding dropout and graduation rates has narrowed over time, notable gaps remain (Willie & Reddick, 2010). The most recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data on high school dropout rates from 2007 reveals disparities along racial lines. The national dropout rate in 2007 was at 9.8% among 16 to 24 year old males of all races. More specifically, only six percent of White males and 5.8% of Asian American males in this group were dropouts, whereas, eight percent of African American males in the 16 to 24 age cohort were dropouts, as were 24.7% of Latina/os and 21.4% of Native Americans (in the same age cohort) (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010).

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics helps to present a snapshot of high school graduation rates by race (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). Nationally, the percentage of individuals in the 18-24 year cohort completing high school diploma or greater is 89.9%. When disaggregated by race, however, there are disparities. While Asian American and Whites in the 18-24 year cohort report educational attainment of a high school diploma at 95.5% and 94.2% respectively, African Americans achieve educational attainment of high school diploma at 86.9%. Latina/os and Native Americans have lower high school completion rates at 75.5% and 82.5%, respectively (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010).

Notably, NCES dropout and graduation rates paint African American student completion with the 'rosiest hue' as research from non-governmental sources locates the graduation rates of African Americans much lower (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). For example, former U.S. Secretary of State General Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance released a study that reported a national graduation rate for African Americans at 53% (Swanson, 2008). The disparity is even larger for males when the African American graduation rate is disaggregated by gender (Heilig & Reddick, 2008). For example, Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute (2006) reported that only 48% of African American males are graduating.

College Attendance, Enrollment and Persistence

Regardless of the source of the research data on dropout and graduation, the state of African American males and the gaps between their performance and Whites and Asian Americans in U.S. K-12 schools is disconcerting. Therefore, it should follow logically that college enrollment would continue to be an issue of concern for African Americans. Even when African American males defy the odds and enroll in college, they often encounter challenges interacting in the college environment. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Black students were the least satisfied of all demographic groups (Harper, 2005). A further concern is the expanding gender gap among African American students. While the trend of increasing female enrollment in higher education has been in effect for some time, African American men are 27.2 percentage points behind African American women— compared to the 11 point gap between White men and White women (Harper, 2006). Data reveal that African American women comprise 63.1% of the African American collegiate population, while African American men comprise only 36.9% (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2008). This

trend started in the mid-1970s, where a slight gender gap existed between African American men and African American women. In the interval between 1976 and 2002, African American women experienced a 126% increase in college attendance, while African American men only saw a 51% increase during the same period (Harper, 2006). To exacerbate this phenomena, only 32.4% of African American males that enroll in college earn degrees in six years – the lowest degree completion rate among all race and gender cohorts in the U.S. (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

As mentioned previously, the state of Texas' 2.9 million African Americans comprise the third largest population of African Americans in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Despite this, longitudinal analyses using individual-level data to examine higher education enrollment in Texas (and elsewhere) by race and gender are rare in the literature. By utilizing data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), it is possible to examine recent data on the enrollment gap in higher education by gender and ethnicity for first-time and bachelors seeking freshmen in public institutions in Texas since 2000 (See Figure 3).

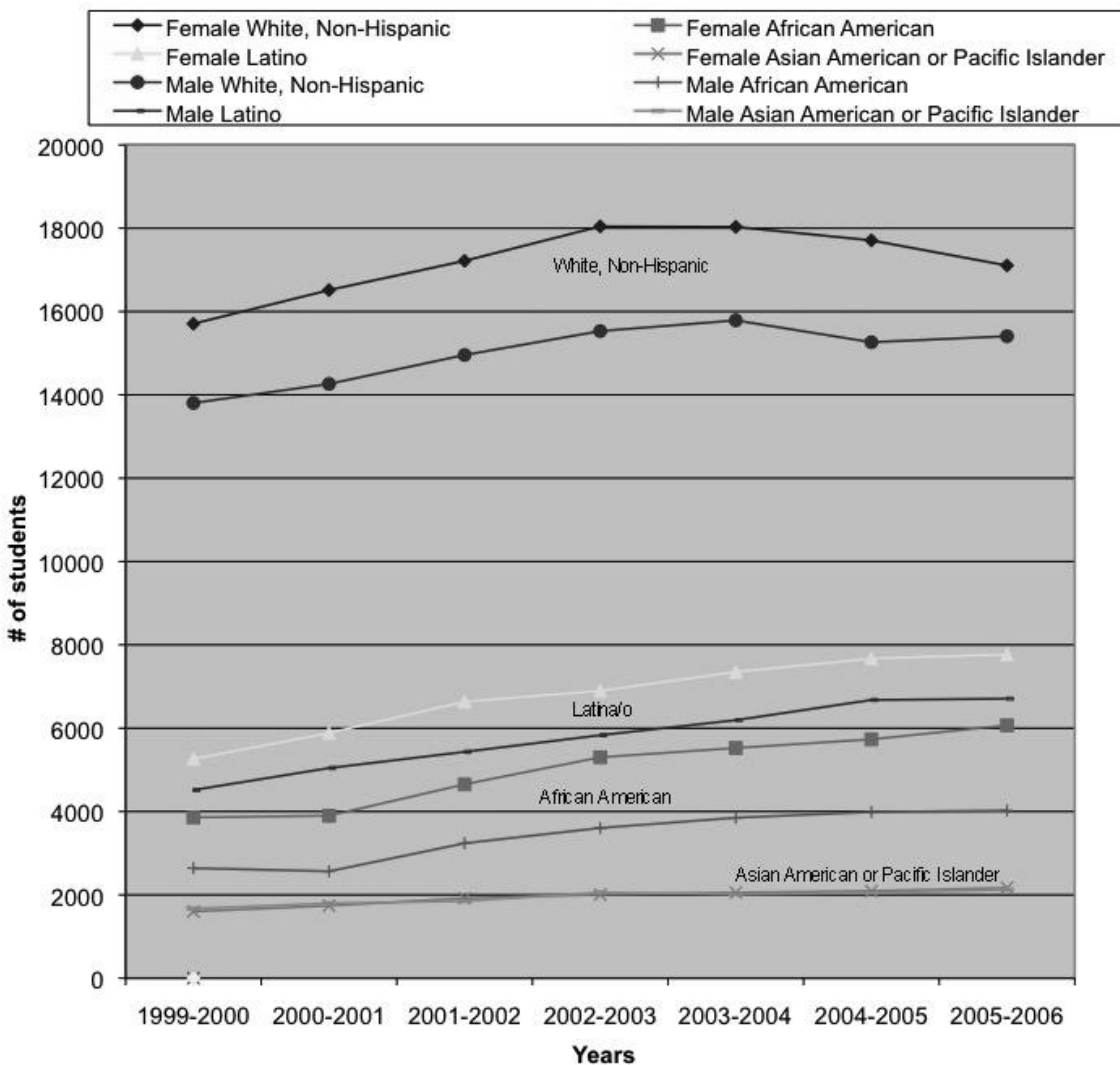


Figure 3. Texas Public University Enrollment by Race and Gender, 2000-2006

In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) adopted *Closing the Gaps by 2015: The Texas Higher Education Plan*. The goal of the Plan is to close educational gaps by race/ethnicity within Texas and between Texas and other leading states. THECB published a progress report in 2007 that stated “substantial progress” had been made in the state. Had Texas successfully closed the gaps by race/ethnicity and gender at the time of the 2007 retrospective mid-point report? Similar to the national trends noted in the last quarter of the century (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006), female enrollment outpaced male enrollment for all groups except Asian Americans—the gender gap had expanded for both Latino and African Americans. Concomitant with national data, since 2000, the gap between African American males and females exemplified the largest gender gap amongst all racial groups in Texas. Notably, overall enrollment rose for African Americans. However, African American enrollment gains occurred at smaller, less selective public universities and did not occur at The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University in College Station — the two selective public flagship educational institutions of the state (Heilig, Reddick, Hamilton & Dietz, 2011). Clearly, Texas had not closed the gaps as of the 2007 mid-point progress report. In fact, it is still an open question whether the state will make any progress in closing the gaps by gender by the 2015 target year.

Degree Attainment

The disparity in national degree attainment between African American men and African American women follows similar trends to enrollment patterns in Texas and elsewhere. In 1977, African American men earned 43.5% of all degrees awarded to African Americans, slightly less than the 56.5% earned by African American women. By 2003, the gap expanded to 34.2%: only 32.9% of degrees were earned by African American men, compared to 67.1% earned by African American women (Harper, 2005). The most recent data available reveals that among African Americans, women earned 65.9% of bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2009 (NCES, 2011). While the gap has slightly lessened, it is still a cause for concern, as the gender gap among African Americans is the greatest of any racial/ethnic group. In Texas, African American bachelor degree attainment is almost a mirror image of national trends, with women earning 66.4% of degrees earned in 2010 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2011).

More harrowing are the significant degree attainment gaps between African American males and White males at all levels. In 2003, African American males comprised 4% of associate degrees, 3.1% of bachelor’s degrees, 2.5% of master’s degrees, and two percent of doctoral degrees. In comparison, White males comprised 28.3% of associate degrees, 31.9% of bachelor’s degrees, 26% of master’s degrees, and 29.3% of doctoral degrees. At the closest interval, there is a 23.5% attainment gap between African American males and White males (master’s degrees), and at the greatest interval, a 28.8% attainment gap between African American males and White males (bachelor’s degrees). On average, at all levels, White males earn 10 times the number of degrees than African American males (Harper, 2005). In Texas today, White males earn almost seven and a half times more bachelor’s degrees compared to African American males: in 2010, White males earned 23.9% of bachelor’s degrees, while African American males earned 3.2% (THECB, 2011).

In the Central Southwest Region, the 2007 six-year higher education graduation rate for Whites was 52.9%; for Blacks, 35.4%; for Latina/os, 40%; for Asians, 54.6%; and for Native Americans, 33.7% (See Table 3). Overall, in the region, minority populations have a six-year

graduation rate of 39.3% and the White-Black six-year graduation rate gap from college and universities is 17.5 percentage points in the region states – ranging from 8.2 percentage points in New Mexico to 24.3 percentage points in Kansas. Figure 4 displays the range among Central Southwest Region states.

Table 3.

Six-Year Higher Education Graduation Rates by Region, State and Race

Nation, Region and States	White-Black Gap	White	Black	Latina/o	Asian	Native American	Minority
Nation	18.9	59.4	40.5	46.8	65.5	38.6	48.3
Central Southwest Region	17.5	52.9	35.4	40.6	54.6	33.7	39.3
Arkansas	15.4	45.6	30.2	38.5	44.8	33.3	31.7
Colorado	14.7	55.6	40.9	42.1	53.9	36.2	44.2
Kansas	24.3	55.5	31.2	40.6	49.5	29.5	36.6
Missouri	18.1	57.8	39.7	47.3	66.5	34.4	45.4
Nebraska	22.2	57.7	35.5	42.6	59.6	35	43.2
New Mexico	8.2	46.6	38.4	38.2	44.4	25.2	37.5
Oklahoma	16.9	47.8	30.9	37.7	53.9	33.8	35.1
Texas	20.3	56.4	36.1	37.5	64.2	41.9	41

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Graduate Rate Survey, National Center for Educational Statistics, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

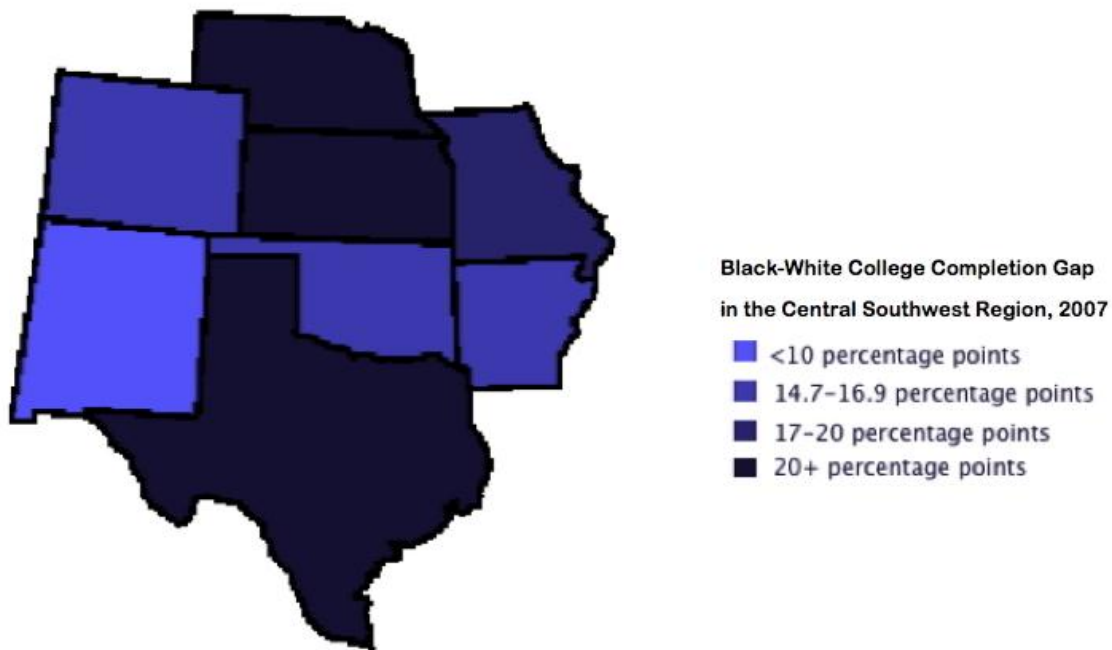


Figure 4. *Black-White College Completion Gap in Central Southwest Region States*
 Source: The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2009

This overview of educational outcomes for African Americans from high school to college provides a context for understanding the inequities and shortcomings in K-12 and higher education, especially for African American males. If African American male participation in education declines due to dropout rates and depressed participation in higher education, one may question where these young men finish. The following section will explore the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon, and situate the funneling of large populations of African Americans into the U.S. correctional system.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

This section briefly presents data describing how the confluence of low academic achievement and discriminatory disciplinary processes directs males of color from schools to the judicial system, where they suffer deleterious outcomes. Such outcomes are particularly worrisome for African American youth, who are greatly overrepresented in the data describing U.S. incarceration rates (Davis & Sorensen, 2010; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2009). This suggests that schools and current adjudication processes disparately impact African American males. Wald and Losen (2003) described the tragic relationship between schools and prisons for many African American youth:

A related educational trend that is proving to be particularly problematic for minority students involves school discipline. Since the early 1990's, many school districts have replaced a system of graduated sanctions with a "zero tolerance" approach to wrongdoing.... Minorities are heavily overrepresented among those most harshly sanctioned in schools.... In recent years, several new terms have gained currency in public discourse to describe the cumulative impact of these inequalities and policy shifts: "the prison track," and the "school-to-prison pipeline." These phrases refer to a journey through school that is increasingly punitive and isolating for its travelers—many of whom will be placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, held back in grade, and banished to alternative, "outplacements" before finally dropping or getting "pushed out" of school altogether. (p. 2-3)

Low academic achievement is linked to youth crime, and academic issues often bring about behavioral problems that result in the removal of students from classroom instruction (Gregory, Skilba, & Noguera, 2010; Maguin, & Loeber, 1996; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). These removals perpetuate a cycle of failure whereby students lose access to educational and social development opportunities, fall further behind and become even greater behavioral concerns when they re-enter school (Costenbader & Markson, 1998, Fenning & Rose, 2007; Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003).

This 'push-out' of children from schools strongly correlates with higher dropout rates and increased involvement with juvenile court and the correction system (Leone, Christle, Nelson, Skiba, Frey, & Kristine, 2003). This failure of the educational system inflicts significant damage on the well-being and self-esteem of young African American males, as urban scholar Dr. Robert L. Green (1991) noted:

Black males as early as the fourth grade begin to show symptoms of the *failure syndrome*. It is by this time they have become cognizant of the lack of investment on the part of the school and the teachers in their learning process. Already at this early age these young Black boys have also become aware of the broader societal expectations for African American males. They know that society expects Black males to be good athletes

but not good students, to be actively engaged in drugs and other criminal activities, to be, in general, failures. An overwhelming body of research shows that what society, and teachers, expects often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. (pp. 3-4)

We posit, therefore, that a significant proportion of African American males in the criminal justice system are there as a direct result of inadequate and injurious educational experiences; indeed, the failure of the U.S. educational system. Considering their harmful experiences in the process of schooling, it is not surprising that African Americans, especially males, are more likely to be imprisoned in the U.S. (See Figure 5).

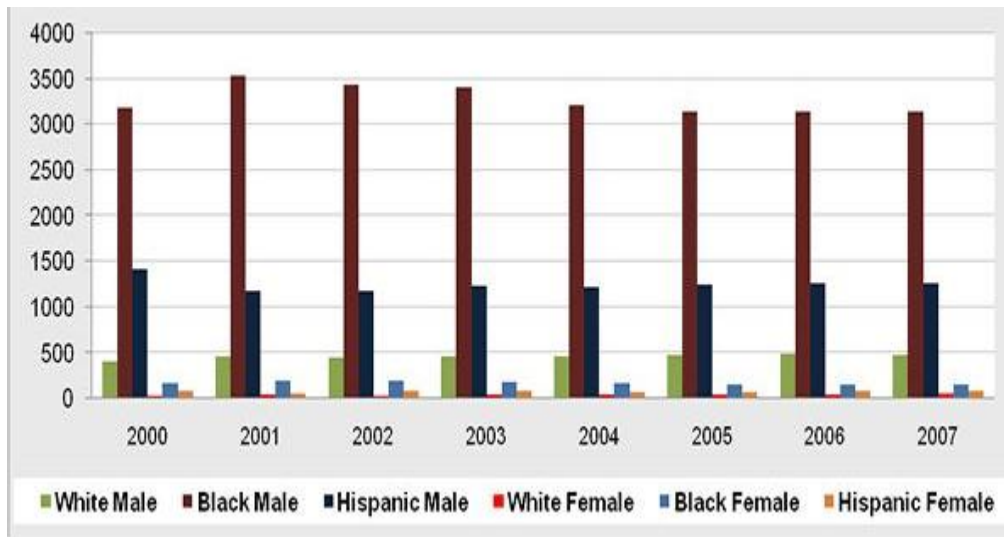


Figure 5. Imprisonment rates by race per 100,000 residents of each group
Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics

Though the incarceration of African American men is commonly discussed in media outlets such as TheRoot.com, CNN.com, and MSNBC.com, the statistics regarding young African American men in prison are truly disconcerting (Burton, 2011; CNN Justice, 2009; Ross, 2006). In the 18-29 year cohort, one in ten (10.1%) African American males are in prison. Only 1.5% of White males in the same age cohort are incarcerated, and 3.6% of Latino males (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006). In 2004, though they comprised only 14% of the young male population in the U.S., African American males were grossly overrepresented in the prison system as 40% of the population (Harrison & Beck, 2005). This percentage has dropped slightly to 35.4% in 2011 but remains at a disturbingly high level (Kyle, 2011).

A review of the data on African American males and their educational outcomes and incarceration rates provide a vivid reality of separate and unequal outcomes for African American males (as well as Latino and Native American males). Despite the varying levels of disparity, educational research has provided copious evidence of extreme disparities along racial, gender and socioeconomic lines. The time has come for conversations about aggressive and forward-thinking interventions that will close the persisting and escalating gaps in educational attainment and life outcomes, such as rethinking the way schools serve students and families in low-income communities of color, aggressively addressing school discipline policies that escalate minor offenses to criminality that have compounded to create a “cradle to prison pipeline” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2007), and inspiring and uplifting young African American males through mentorship (Miller, 2008). As a nation committed to equality, all Americans can

support a vision directed at realizing aspirational language and intentions into concrete measures. A growing body of research posits that developmentally and culturally relevant mentoring interventions may redress the failures inherent in the edu-correctional system (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009; Sutton, 2006; Utsey, Howard, & Williams, 2003). The forthcoming section considers mentoring as one potential intervention to address the inequities confronting African American male youth. The following subsection discusses how those invested in addressing the challenges confronting young African American males in the Central Southwest U.S. can act to remedy their plight.

Implications for Practice

To assist the youth experiencing pernicious educational outcomes in the Central Southwestern region, community agencies and individuals invested in increasing the life opportunities of African American males adopt strategies that provide young men with alternate pathways to accrue social (e.g., networks, relationships) and cultural capital (e.g., education, knowledge). Mentoring is an essential intervention that could prove valuable in this effort. Mentoring is the process in which a senior, experienced person (the mentor) engages with a junior, less-experienced person (the mentee, or protégé) in order to foster the psychosocial development of the junior person (Kram, 1988). The term ‘mentor’ comes from the Greek epic *The Odyssey*, in which the hero Odysseus placed his son, Telemachus, in his old friend Mentor’s care when he left for war. Activists and practitioners in the social services field note that mentoring is an essential intervention for African American males (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1999). Vance Simms, executive director of Father Matters, a national nonprofit organization focused on supporting fathers, is one such advocate, stating, “Mentoring is critical if we intend to address much of the pain, abuse, and abandonment that African American males suffer from” (as quoted in Miller, 2008, p. 1). While mentoring has become a ‘buzzword’ in business, political, and educational realms, it can serve as a tool in facilitating the success of Black males. With this in mind, we introduce two key theoretical concepts concerning mentoring— social exchange and mentoring networks.

Social Exchange Theory. Social exchange theory is a rudimentary concept developed by Homans (1958) that posited that humans engage in relationships that provide benefits (in terms of outcomes and satisfaction). Simply put, relationships that are costly but provide little or no benefits are unsustainable. Mentoring can be understood through a social exchange theoretical construct: both mentors and mentees/protégés must find mutual benefit and satisfaction for the relationship to continue. Often the benefits to mentees are well-documented and articulated, but rarely explicated for mentors. Essentially, mentors have to experience some benefit from the mentoring dynamic as well for the relationship to be enduring and ultimately, successful.

Mentoring Networks. Though mentoring is often understood (and exemplified) in one-on-one settings (termed *dyads*), recent research on mentoring suggests that a more beneficial and enduring conceptualization is that of constellation mentoring (Johnson & Ridley, 2008). In constellation mentoring, the mentee is immersed in a network of supportive mentors that provide access to social and cultural capital. This contrasts traditional notions of mentoring, where a mentee is mentored by just one person. In this new conception, the responsibilities of mentorship are distributed across several mentors, and the mentee reaps the benefit of having multiple perspectives to learn from and follow. Given the full schedules of successful individuals and their commitment to community service projects, the significance of constellation approaches

helps to remove the excessive burden from a single individual with the sole responsibility of mentoring.

Conclusion

Even this cursory survey of data on African American males and their educational outcomes provides a vivid and persisting reality of modern separate and unequal experiences. Solutions to the oft-exclaimed crisis in urban education have been and are currently being sought. The authors suggest that mentoring programs, either large-scale or one-on-one dyads (or some permutation of these forms), are a way that invested individuals and organizations might address these inequities (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Harris, 1999; Miller, 2008; Utsey, Howard, & Williams, 2003). By intervening purposefully in the lives of African American males, mentors may help youth avoid the grasp of the criminal justice system altogether (Brown, Payne, Dressner, & Green, 2010; Noguera, 2008). For those African American males already in the system, many of the mentoring interventions in the previous section are appropriate, though conditions of incarceration and terms of parole may inhibit the use of some approaches. Nevertheless, the involvement of caring, committed individuals and organizations in these young men's lives can surely augment the damaging effects of losing one's liberty (Taifa & Beane, 2009).

Along these lines, the authors recommend employing an assessment and evaluation system concurrent with any intervention that organizations choose to engage in to provide useful data. Should organizations choose to undertake mentoring initiatives similar to those detailed in this article, assessment and evaluation would ensure that an organization's efforts are directed in the most efficacious manner. To this end, the following recommendations suggest that mentoring efforts could be measured using the following quantitative methods:

- GPA improvement (from pre- to post-intervention)
- Number of mentoring hours
- Number of hits on mentoring website
- Number of mentorships created
- Increases in grade level promotion
- Increase in AP credit hours
- Increases in high school graduate rates
- Increases in applications to college
- Increases in college going rates
- Increases in college graduation rates

We also believe that qualitative measures are necessary to fully gauge program efficacy. Some of these measures could include:

- How do participants feel about continuing their education after having a mentor/participating in a program?
- How has having a mentor/participating in a program influenced participants' plans for college and the future?
- What impact has having a mentor/participating in a program had on participants' lives (self-image, self-worth, confidence)?

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- What life lessons have participants learned from having a mentor/participating in a program?

Certainly, there are numerous other metrics that could be measured to determine if the mentoring intervention has the desired impact. Reflexive metrics, such as number of hours committed to the mentoring program, and levels of participation, could also be useful for assessing a program's success. Whatever action individuals and organizations elect to engage in, we advise an investment in program evaluation to measure program outcomes. In this way, individuals and organizations will be able to gauge if mentoring interventions are promising strategies to remedy the long-standing educational and correctional challenges facing African American males in the U.S.

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ⁱ We excluded Iowa from our analysis due the paucity of African Americans in this state, comprising only 1.7% of the total population.

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