

The Effects of Positive Role Modeling in the Lives of African-American Young Men

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Introduction

Obama vs. Curtis- Black on Both Sides?

Objectives

- ✦ Insight into the role positive mentoring plays in the construction of the African-American male identity
- ✦ Discuss key factors African American males identified as important to positive identity and resiliency, including knowing that they matter
- ✦ Discuss the influence of mentoring on future aspirations, career choices, and development of “future self.”

What we did and why ...

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- N=25
- In-person - 100%
- Average Age - 19 (25 - 15)
- Education:
 - In HS / GED-88% In College-8% Other-4%
- Relationship Status - single
- Two with children

"I knew I was a man when .."

- N=21
- Telephone - 47% In-person - 53%
- Average Age - 48 (74 - 31)
- Education:
 - HS-20% BA-20% Masters-40% Doc.-20%
- Relationship Status
 - Married-73% Divorced-27%
- Average # Children - 3
 - 1-20% 2-27% 3-33% 4-20%
- Employed-93% Unemployed-7%
- Ever arrested No-67% Yes-33%
- Mother's Education
 - <HS-20% HS-53% AS-7% BA-13% M-7%
- Father's Education
 - <HS-33% HS-27% BA-20% Dr.-7% IDK-13%

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Qualitative first-person interviews were conducted based on twenty-four questions that included:

- * What man do you feel comfortable talking to?
- * Whom do you talk to when you are having trouble?
- * What does the ideal man look like to you?
- * What does the ideal father look like for you?
- * What makes a man a man in your opinion?

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Answers to these questions revealed the following information:

- ✦ Of the 25 young men interviewed, one was in foster-care at the time of the interview.
- ✦ Of the 25 young men interviewed, one lived with his father at the time of the interview.
- ✦ Six young men identified a positive relationship with their father.
- ✦ Fourteen young men identified either a negative relationship or no relationship with their father.
- ✦ Five of the interviewees' fathers are deceased.

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Despite daunting numbers of young men identifying a positive relationship with their fathers:

- *Eighteen of the twenty-five young men identified a positive role modeling relationship in their lives albeit formal, informal or both.

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- ✦ Our young men need us. They need strong men to show them how to be men.
- ✦ They want to go to college but they have no clear ideas of getting there.
- ✦ Do not discount the time you spend with a young man. It is not the time YOU think is pivotal. It is the informal time you spend with a young man that matters.
- ✦ It's not enough to tell our young men that they matter. We must show them that they matter by giving them responsibilities and holding them accountable.
- ✦ Our young men require validation, they need to be needed. Many of us feel that they are disrespectful. They feel disrespected. But they are unaware of respect for themselves.
- ✦ Positive role modeling relationships and exposure create schemas of manhood and fatherhood.

“I knew I was a man when ..”

is a first person research project, is seeking (on-going study) to record and analyze first person narratives of African-American men reflecting upon their transition into manhood. The recorded narratives are transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes, such as, how African-American males define manhood, masculinity, and experience other social institutions (e.g. education, family, religion, media); how the emerged themes correlate with other demographic data; and to identify the mechanisms that shepherd African American males into manhood, and how is this transition known.

The insights, ways of knowing and experiencing by African-American males, and the relationships between them that come to the fore will inform educators, policy makers, social workers, and community activists, who are concern with the development and empowerment of African-American males.

“I knew I was a man when...” will add to the scarcity of research seeking to identify the strengths and resiliency embedded in the “lived experiences” of African-American males.

“I knew I was a man when ..”

Ten basic interview questions:

1. What was the experience or thing that happen when you realized or felt, for sure, you had become a man?
2. Did other people notice the change? Who were they?
3. How did it make you feel?
4. Who were the people (or person) that taught you how to be a man? Did they accept your new status?
5. How did your perspective change/Did you view life differently, if at all?
6. Where there any “important life lessons” that you had to learn before you could become man?
7. Any regrets: Are there things you did to prove your manhood, you wish you hadn't done?
8. What could have been done to make your transition into manhood better?
9. Who do you wish could be here now to see the man you have become? Why?
10. Is there anything else you can think of that was important to your transition into manhood?

“I knew I was a man when ..”

Emerging themes:

- * Realization of manhood happens at a point when one acts on the “weight” of responsibility.
- * Group of men that acknowledges that he is somehow “special;” and to whom he feels accountable.
- * He taught me how to ...
- * Birth of my child

“I knew I was a man when ..”

What this all mean?

Manhood is not a function of age,
but of resolving / “stepping -up” to a crisis.

Implications

- ✦ We must empower our young men. Fire them up!
- ✦ As a practitioner, we must not discount the little things and over amplify the “big” things. When working with mentors, inform them. When mentoring a young man, be informed. Prepare them to teach the young men. Be prepared to teach.
- ✦ Prepare mentors to make meaning with the time spent with the young man. They can make meaning with this time by doing things with them to teach them the skills to become responsible young men (how do you change the oil? How do you complete simple home repairs? If I can’t afford a haircut, what can I do with my unkempt hair so I might be considered for the position?).
- ✦ Model respect for them so that they understand to actions that come with the word.

Implications

- ✦ We must encourage them by amplifying their capabilities in a genuine manner.
- ✦ We must amplify their strengths. Use their strengths to identify their interests.
- ✦ We must validate our young men. Take the time to talk to them. Ask them questions and listen to them.

Discussion

What are some ways that you (or your institution/ organizations) assist in the “weight” transfer to aid African-American males in their transition into manhood?

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<http://www.afrocentric.info/Baobab>

Thank you!!

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