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Resiliency Factors in African American Female Students in Single-Gender Educational Settings

Phyllis L. Hill, PhD

Problem

There is limited research on the educational resilience of African American women. What is known about African American women and learning is known from a deficit/risk versus competence perspective. There is a gap in the research as it relates to the role of educational resiliency in the education of African American students in general and African American women who were educated in single gender environments specifically.

Purpose

The purpose of the interpretive phenomenological study was to capture and distill their shared experience of educational resilience in and outside of school.

Significance

This study provides a foundation for creating programs to assist parents, students, educators, and communities to address the academic achievement of African American female students (Evans-Winters, 2015, Watson, 2016).

Social Change Implications

By improving the educational experiences of African American women society is able to build generations of resilient scholars, engineers, doctors, and everyday women who "Lift as they climb" (Terrell, 1940).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do African American female alumnae of single-gender educational settings describe their educational experiences as they relate to resiliency?

RQ2: How do African American female alumnae describe the effects of single-gender schooling as it relates to resiliency in their lives outside of school?

Conceptual Framework

Researcher-developed conceptual framework **educational resilience of African American females** guided the study. The theories consisted of the content and the perspective or lens. The content components: gender relevant learning theory, social capital theory, and racial identity and socialization theory.

Relevant Scholarship

Competency versus deficit or risk perspective moves from viewing minorities through a negative lens to looking at those positive factors that are inhabited in the resiliency of African American female students. (Bryant, 2017; Evans-Winters, 2011; Henfield & Washington, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Noguera, pierce & Ahram, 2015).

Critical race feminism theory addresses a multipronged approach that includes the struggles that African American women face due to their double minority status (Delgado & Stafancic, 2012; Evans-Winters, 2015).

Gender-based research that utilizes brain-based research to promote educational settings that are single-gender and focus on the students' abilities based on gender differences and preferences. (Dwarte, 2014;Gurian, et al, 2009).

Racial identity and socialization focuses on the factors that increase a student's ability to positively identify and socialize based on information provided by social capital members and opportunities that promote positive racial identity and socialization (Brown, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2014; Jackson, 2017; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Social capital theory recognizes the strong contribution of support systems on the academic or educational resilience of African Americans (Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010; Gauntlet, 2011).

Procedures

The interviewer used a researcher-created protocol of 3 interview sessions per participant. Nine of the 12 interviews were phone interviews and three were email interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

Participants

Using snowball sampling, the 4 participants (ages 30 to 50) were recruited using the Walden Participant Pool, the SurveyMonkey Participant Identifier, and Facebook.

- 2 participants attended a single-gender high school,
- 2 attended a single-gender university, one of which was a PWI and the other a HBCU.

Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis of transcripts yielded an interpretive facsimile and thematic account of the participants' personal experiences of educational resilience.

Findings

The emergent conceptual framework **African American Academic Achieving Females (A4F)** consists of: racial identity and socialization theory, gender relevant education, cultural and support systems within social capital theory, competency versus deficit/risk perspective, G.R.I.T., **Cultural (Re)Appropriation Unity (C.R.U.)**, and personal spirituality.

A4F women were able to acquire high academic accolades and achievements regardless of barriers, hardships or obstacles placed in their path.

Cultural and support systems within social capital are academic, personal and spiritual relationships, communications and interactions with those from the same cultural and racial backgrounds.

Cultural (Re)Appropriation Unity (CRU) establishes the fact that the African American community has taken steps to (re)appropriate its culture and unify, empower, and "Lift as we climb" (Terrell, 1940)

G.R.I.T. is reflective of the fortitude exhibited by each of the participants to keep going in the face of adversity.

Personal spirituality each participant shared how her personal spiritual relationship with God formed and grew past church attendance into a relationship.

Interpretation

The findings allowed for an expansion of the original conceptual frameworks for the study. The A4F conceptual framework is what emerged as a result of the research that was conducted. The racial identity and socialization process was imperative in the process for the participants learning, growing and achieving at high levels. This was attributed to the examples that they were provided through their cultural and social capital networks, parents, godparents, church members, teachers, etc. in and out of the academic setting.

Limitations

This interpretive phenomenological study was limited due to small sample size and short time frame. Such a "snapshot" may not be generalizable to all African American women.

Additional questions out of the scope of the research were presented, and one participant was unable to be interviewed.

Recommendations

Future research should include the effects of an A4F education in the single-gender environments on the romantic or social relationships of these women.

Future research could explore whether the findings are consistent across different age groups and generations, as well as different geographical areas.

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