

4-1-2008

Exploring the Gender Achievement Gap Among Minority Students

Keisha John
Trinity College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

John, Keisha, "Exploring the Gender Achievement Gap Among Minority Students". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2008.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/137>

Exploring the Gender Achievement Gap Among Minority Students

Keisha John
Ed 400 Senior Research Project
Educational Studies Program
Trinity College
December 2007

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) the achievement gap between White and Black students has narrowed over the years, but when measured in 2005, the high school completion rate for Blacks was still below that of Whites at 87 vs. 93 percent. Though the high school completion rate for Hispanic students has also increased over the past three decades, it still remained below that of White students at 63 percent in 2005 and no measurable changes in the gap between Hispanics and Whites occurred between 1971 and 2005.¹ In addition to these statistics on the racial achievement gap a statistics report released by NCES found that “women accounted for 57% of the total U.S. undergraduate enrollment in 2004. The proportion of institutions with this degree of an imbalance was higher among MSIs (minority serving institutes)² than among non-MSIs.³ There has been much research done on the achievement gap between white students and their minority peers, but more recently there has been a spark of interest in an achievement gap that has surfaced within the group minority of students. Female minority students have been outperforming their male counterparts, especially in the higher education setting, but there is evidence that the achievement gap stems back as far as middle and elementary school.

There are a number of social factors that may be contributing to the gender achievement gap amongst minority students, some of which are, peer influence, parental influence, student-teacher relationship, media and types of role models. My research project aimed to answer the following questions: *What social factors contribute towards*

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2006). *The Condition of Education 2006* (NCES 2006–071)

² MSIs are colleges and universities serving a large percentage of minority students.

³ Li, Xiaojie (2007). Characteristics of Minority Serving Institutes and Minority Undergraduates Enrolled in These Institutes. Statistical Analysis Report, NCES, November 2007

the achievement gap between male and female minority students in Hartford? How do role models affect the achievement gap? Do single-gender classes help to close the achievement gap? I analyzed the perceptions and experiences of Black and Hispanic students and their teachers in a Hartford middle school in an attempt to find out why female minority students are outperforming male minority students and more specifically how exposure to positive role models may play a role.

Significance

In a 2005 achievement gap data study on West Hartford public school students done by WHPS Senior Planner Chip Ward evidence appears that there is an achievement gap between minority (Black and Hispanic) students and White students. The study showed that Black and Hispanic students have been not been performing as well in school as their White counterparts and there have been no signs of this gap closing over the years. There also has been research done on gender gaps in achievement which show that male students are falling behind their female counterparts. While there has been research done on the gender achievement gap and the racial achievement gap separately, there has not been much research done combining the two especially on what the gender gap looks like within minority groups.

When the statistics of the racial achievement gap and the gender achievement gap are put together the male minority students are the lowest achieving group. My goal was to find out why this group of students is not performing as well as the other groups or more specifically why minority males aren't performing as well as minority females. However, much of the research done on the gender achievement gap among minority students focuses on higher levels of education, while elementary and middle school

administrators have noticed the trend in their schools as well as reported in a New York times article written by Winne Hu. In the article, “To Close Gaps, Schools Focus on Black Boys”, Hu describes an elementary school in Ossining, NY whose administrators noticed that their Black male students were performing “far worse than any other group”⁴ and targeted their black male students for extra help.

This topic has also recently caught the attention of both the CT State Department of Education and the State Education Resource Center. They have taken note of the underachievement of male minority students and as a result have put together a statewide conference entitled Addressing the Achievement of Connecticut’s Black and Hispanic/Latino Male Students, which took place this past March. Much has been done to address the racial achievement gap, but it is becoming clear that gender is also an issue that needs to be addressed as well. In doing this study I hope to provide useful insights as to how male minority students might be better motivated to perform at a higher level in school.

My thesis argues that male minority students in Hartford are not performing as well academically as their female counterparts because of a lack of positive male role models and because teacher and student expectations for their behavior are not as high. I argue that the teachers seem to excuse the behavior of the male students by calling them immature and other students also have higher expectations for female students than for male, though they feel that male and female students perform on a comparable level. I also argue that the single-gender classes are not helping to close the gender gap.

Literature Review

⁴ Hu, Winnie. To Close Gaps, Schools Focus on Black Boys. New York Times, April, 2007

In her book, Hopeful Girls, Troubled Boys: Race and Gender Disparity in Urban Education, Nancy Lopez (2003) describes the ethnographic study she conducted with Black and Hispanic Caribbean immigrant students and the gender achievement gap she found between them. Her study looked at how differing experiences with race and gender shaped the way the male and female students in her study viewed education. She found that their differing views on education were not credited to 'essential' differences between the sexes, but rather the differing views on education were created by a difference in experiences and the criminalization of urban males. Her study like mine focuses on why male minority students are falling behind and factors that affect the achievement gap. My study differentiates from Lopez's in that her study was done only with first and second generation immigrant students and my study will look at all Black and Hispanic students and will go forward with her idea of differing experiences of male and female students by focusing on role models as a causal factor of the achievement gap.

Davis and Jordan (1994), in their article "The Effects of School Context, Structure, and Experiences on African American Males in Middle and High School", also explore the underachievement of Black males in school by focusing on "the relationship of student, teacher and school characteristics" (p.572). The data for the study was drawn from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 that was administered by the National Center of Educational Statistics (p.572). Davis and Jordan found a number of factors to be related to Black male achievement in 8th and 10th grades, including: school SES, the extent to which discipline was stressed at the school, teachers' ability to motivate students, and teacher absences (p. 576). I was surprised that some of the other factors such as "the number of Black teachers at the school" (p.576), ended up not being

a significant factor in this study, which encouraged me to look at role models as a causal factor in my own study.

In the article, “Unraveling Underachievement among African American Boys from an Identification with Academics Perspective”, Osborne (1999) examines Steel’s stereotype threat model which identifies anxiety from negative stereotypes as the culprit in the underperformance of minority students. He also considers Ogbu’s cultural-ecological perspective which argues that non-immigrant minorities rebel against school learning as a value associated with European Americans, their former oppressors, and instead are encouraged turn towards other values that are opposite to European American values. Osborne also examines Majors and Billson’s “cool pose” theory which echoes Ogbu’s theory by arguing that African American students, especially boys, reject the image of a good student because it clashes with being “cool”. Osborne argues that all three of the theories support his idea that African American students, particularly boys, fail to achieve their full academic potential because of social, psychological and cultural burdens that discourage or prevent them from incorporating education into their self image.⁵ Garvey F. Lundy and Glenn Firebaugh bring up similar point in their article “Peer Relations and School Resistance: Does Oppositional Culture Apply to Race or Gender?” where they examined race and gender differences with respect to the two main components of the oppositional culture theory expressed in the Osborne article: peer relations and school resistance, and found no support for the thesis that oppositional culture accounts for race/ethnic differences in school achievement. However, they did discover that oppositional culture does appear to play a key role in explaining why male

⁵ Osborne, Jason W. (1999). Unraveling Underachievement among African American Boys from an Identification with Academics Perspective. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 68(4), 557-559

students tend to receive lower grades than female students and encouraged future researchers to be more sensitive to the gender aspect of school culture which is what I have done with my study.⁶ Both articles bring up many of the causal factors that I questioned students on in my interviews.

In the book, Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White Prudence Carter, also addresses the gender achievement gap that exists among minority students. In the chapter Between A “Soft” And A “Hard” Place: Gender, Ethnicity, and Culture in the School and at Home, Carter argues “that ethno-specific cultural behaviors embraced by these youths intersected with their gender-specific cultural behaviors to create different educational, social, and economic experiences for males and females.”⁷ In other words, the ideas that male minority students held about masculinity were one of the factors holding them back from performing at the same level as the female students. This aligns with the arguments of the Osborne and Firebaugh articles. Carter also gives quotes from her interviews with students, where the students express that they believe that female students have more “book smarts” than male students and are more serious about school. She also argues that the gender role enforced by students’ parents and community also influence how male and female students approach school. Carter’s study and findings are very similar to that of my study, but my research focused specifically on middle school students and held more of a focus on role models, though I did question the students in my study on some of the same topics.

⁶ Firebaugh, Glenn, & Lundy, Garvey F. (2005). Peer Relations and School Resistance: Does Oppositional Culture Apply to Race or to Gender? *The Journal of Negro Education*, 74(3), 233-245

⁷ Carter, Prudence L. *Keepin' It Real : School Success Beyond Black and White*. Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005. p 82.

Methodology

This study used both observational and interviewing methods to gather data. I spent 22.5 hours over the course of 8 weeks conducting participant observation and I also interviewed 16 students and teachers in structured individual interviews at Meyer Ebling Middle School⁸. Meyer Ebling is a 6th – 8th grade public middle school, with a predominantly minority student population (77.6% Hispanic, 16.3% Black)⁹ in Hartford, CT which was also listed as one of the Connecticut elementary and middle Schools Not Making Adequate Yearly Progress for the 2006-07 school year¹⁰. I choose to do my research at this school, because of the lack of research on this topic among middle and elementary school students and because it was a school that already had a connection with the Educational Studies department at Trinity College, making it easier for me to gain access to the school. Upon arriving to the school for my first meeting with the Trinity liaison at the school, Ms. McArchie¹¹ and after telling her about the topic of my research she offered to help find classrooms that I would be able to do my research in and suggested that I observe their new single gender classes. It was after visiting the school for the first time and learning about the single gendered classes that I developed my third research question and decided that I would observe those classes and work the gender grouping into my research. I was introduced to 3 teachers that worked with the single gender groups that same day and made arrangements to observe three classes taught by two of the teachers.

⁸ Pseudonyms were used for the name of the school as well as the names of the classes.

⁹ Connecticut State Department of Education Strategic School Profiles by School 2006-2007
<http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/ssp/SCH0607/SCHOOL.HTM#H>

¹⁰ http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/nclb/dist_school_nclb_results/index.htm

¹¹ Pseudonyms were given to all interview participants and school administrators

I observed three 8th grade classes; a male (Morehouse) and a female (Spelman) Math class, both taught by Ms. Mott as well as a male English class (Howard) taught by Ms. Sinclair. I spent approximately 1½ hours with each class per week over the course of 2 months. I ended up spending a total of about 7½ with each class at the end of the 2 months. That 8th grade cluster was made up of 6 classes and 6 teachers; 3 male groups, 2 female groups and a mixed groups; four white female teachers, one Indian female teacher and one white male teacher.

I interviewed 10 students, 5 teachers and one school administrator all of whom signed consent forms (students had consent forms signed by their parents). All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. I interviewed 5 male and 5 female minority students in grade 8 about their attitudes towards their schooling and factors that surround those attitudes in 10 – 15 minute interviews. I interviewed all the students who returned parental consent forms to be interviewed by me, which I distributed to the students I was observing after about three weeks of conducting my participant observation. I waited before handing out the consent forms in order to give the students a chance to get used to me and develop some level of comfort with my presence. I was able to do this with the male students I interviewed, who were all from the Howard class, but the female students that I interviewed, with the exception of one student, were all students that I had not observed in class prior to the interviews. Four of the female students I interviewed were from different classes in the cluster who returned consent forms to Ms. Sinclair, who handed them out to her female students after I told her that I had not received any consent forms back from the Spelman girls. Four of the girls interviewed were in single gender classes and one was in the only mixed class in the

cluster. Through the interview questions (See Appendix A) I hoped to get an idea of how the student felt about his/her education, if he/she felt motivated in school and if he/she believed that his/her education would be beneficial to him/her. I interviewed both male and female students because I wanted to know if male and female students were being sent the same message, by their parents, teachers and peers about what they can achieve in the future.

I also interviewed 2 teachers (Ms. Mott and Ms. Sinclair, the teachers whose classes I observed) and the math coordinator in structured tape recorded group interviews to get their views on possible causes of the achievement gap. I also interviewed 3 additional teachers from the same cluster, Ms. Bernstein, Ms. Calvin, and Mr. McNeil. I interviewed Ms. Mott and Ms. Sinclair first, because I had been conducting my participant observation in their classrooms and was easier to schedule time to interview them. I was able to set up interviews with the other teachers in the cluster with the help of Ms. Mott, Ms. Sinclair and Ms. McArchie the site coordinator who introduced me to the other teachers I ended up interviewing. I conducted the first group interview with the teachers about 4 weeks into my project and the remaining interviews with students and teachers were conducted in the last three weeks of my project. Through the interviews with the teachers (See Appendix B) I was hoping to get any insight that the teachers may have on the achievement gap based on their own experience.

I have also conducted classroom observations in order to see if I could notice any other factors that might be contributing to the achievement gap that were not brought up in interviews and also to see if I could validate through my own observation any of the factors that were brought up during the interviews. I observed student-student

interactions, student-teacher interactions as well as individual student and teacher behaviors. I observed the teachers for any difference in treatment between male and female minority students; how he or she responded or reacted differently to male or female student comments, how many male and female students the teacher called on, and any signs of favoritism. I observed the students to see if there was any difference in behavior/performance between male and female students in the classroom; how many male and female students volunteered to participate, how many do not participate and how many male and female students misbehaved in class. These observations were conducted in two different classrooms with three different groups of students.

Analysis and Interpretation

From the evidence that I have collected, I concluded that the male minority students have fewer relatable role models than the female students. While they may have role models or people that they look up to, the people that they have identified as their role models are most often their mothers and male figures that can help develop their sense of masculinity or show by example what type of men they should grow up to be. Of the 5 male students interviewed only one mentioned a male as a role model, and the male role models that particular student mentioned were all professional athletes and not males influencing his day-to-day life. Two students named their mothers as their role models, one mentioned his grandmother, and another claimed not to have a role model or anyone he looked up to in his life. I also questioned the female students about their role models and many of them also mentioned their mothers or grandmothers and one named Martin Luther King Jr. as her role model. While the male and female students both have similar role models what is significant about the fact that the male students tend to identify their

mothers' as a role model is that they don't have a positive male figure to look up to and relate their own experiences to. There is only one male teacher out of the 6 teachers in the cluster that the classes I observed belong to, so even though the male students are in an all-boys class, they don't have the same amount of same-gender role models to choose from as the girls in school. When I questioned the teachers about the kinds of role models they see their students looking up to, the English teacher, Ms. Sinclair said:

"I think the girls students do look up to some teachers in the building, I think they are very quick to point out family members, a lot of family members, they'll mention our moms, very few have dads around, so they're quick to point out the strong mom figures in their family and I think the girls in general like our school, feel comfortable in the building, feel safe and secure in the building...but they are willing to look for strong people in their life because they know that this is a good thing to do. I don't know, I find the boys extremely immature, it's also the age that they're at and they're not quite young men and they're not ten year olds and also the boys that I have are academically very low so that doesn't help them any..."

The teacher was very quick to point out same-gender role models that the girls had identified, but had trouble doing so for the boys mainly because of the lack of male figures in their lives. She also put down the male students by mentioning their maturity level and academic performance as reasons behind their lack of expression about role models and did not mention any lack of male figures in their lives as a reason. The social studies teacher mentioned an assignment he gave his students in the beginning of the school year where he would ask them to write about their role models and he found:

"...they always say parents, grandparents...their role models are always first going to be someone from their family, so 'my mom' is one that I see all the time; 'my mom, my mom, my mom', grandfather, grandfather, grandmother, brothers and sisters, 'my father' not as much and then music stars and entertainers, people on television and then after that, not much, not even for the boys I think compared to a suburban community or even a more affluent community, athletes are...they have role models that are athletes, but not to the degree that a suburban - When I think of myself I was obsessed with like male athlete role models and they aren't to the same extent and I think sometimes maybe because the fathers aren't home they haven't instilled that kind of love of athletics...family and then entertainers and things and then after that maybe

athletes and then after that people in the neighborhood and that can be positive or negative...” - Mr. McNeil

In this quote as well as the last one from Ms. Sinclair I found that the teachers see the same trend that I saw with students having more female role models, especially their mothers, but I also found that not only do the students have a lack of male teachers to look up to but have a hard time relating to the ones that they have. The teacher seemed to have a hard time relating to the students because he grew up in the suburbs and had a different outlook on life during his childhood than his students. However, he did find that he could “talk to them about certain things, like you have to act like a gentleman...I try and talk to them guy to guy”. However while one of the male students liked the idea of having more male teachers so that they could “talk about guy stuff” the rest of the boys I interviewed seemed to like things the way they were or seem impartial to the idea of having more male teachers and this may have been because they lacked a connection with the male teachers that they had.

I questioned the students on their thoughts about college as well, but I was especially curious to hear students’ answers to the questions: “Has anyone ever spoken to you about going to high school/college? Who? What did they say? Do you know any Black/Hispanic men/women who have gone to college? If yes, have you spoken to them about it?” I was curious to see how the students viewed college, even at an age where it was not something that is in their immediate futures and to see if they were personally exposed to minorities in college or that had gone to college that they could look up to or talk to about college. I found that most of the students have had family members or people in school talk to them about college, sending them the message that it is important to go to college if they want to be successful in life, but few of the students have parents

that have graduated from college. All the female students knew someone in their family who had graduated from college and one female student's father had gone to college but did not graduate. Three of the male students had someone in their family who had graduated from college as well, but two of the boys did not know personally any Black or Hispanic people that had gone to college. Of the eight students interviewed who knew a minority that had gone to college only two mentioned men; one was a female student whose father had gone to college but did not graduate and the other was a male student whose stepfather had graduated from college. The other students who had family members that completed college all mentioned female cousins, aunts and one female student's sister and mother had both graduated from college. The significance of this is that, again the female students have available to them more tangible role models that they can relate to because of race and gender. Though all the male students expressed an interest and a desire to go to college, they are exposed to less visible proof that it is possible for male minorities to go to college, as opposed to the female students who see their aunts, mothers, cousins and sisters going to college and graduating and also encouraging them to do the same. I also found that the male students who did have a male figure in their lives still look up to the female figures in their lives as role models. Two of the male students that I interviewed, both mentioned talking to their fathers about college, but one claimed not to have a role model or anyone that he looked up to and the other said his mother was his role model even though his stepfather had gone to college and his mother had not.

I also concluded that there is a higher expectation for the performance of girls in school than boys. The teachers almost consistently refer to the boys as immature

throughout the interview, whereas the girls were either described as doing well or being disruptive, there were no excuses made for behavior of the girls, but when describing the boys' behavior the Math teacher Ms. Mott said, "We have some very challenging girls and we have some silly boys they're not, they're just immature, they're not um...they're just kinda young." Even the students themselves expressed higher expectations for female students. One student said when asked who he felt did better in school, "I think the girls do better in school...because they're more interested in stuff. Boys, we don't care, some of the boys..." The same student also made the comment, "When the boys aren't doing good and they see somebody else doing good, they be thinking about him as like a goody-goody...girls get called goody-goody, but they like type meant for it, almost sort of..." His comments show a double standard carried out by the students, where it's not as socially acceptable for a male student to do well in school, but it is for females.

I found in my observations that the female students in Spelman exhibited behavior that could be described as immature just as often if not more often than the boys that I observed and only one of the teachers that I interviewed, Ms. Calvin expressed that she felt that the Spelman group were not doing as well in her class as the male students. The girls in one instance on a trip to the bathroom with Ms. Mott were being very disruptive in the hallway; half of them ran to another teacher when Ms. Mott wasn't looking and after being told to be quiet walked back to class 'Shhh-ing' loudly and kicking each other the whole way back from the bathroom. Even with this behavior, the teachers did not use the word 'immature' to describe the female students, but rather would point out specific girls as being disruptive and express that when certain students were out of the classroom, the girls as a group work better. I did observe on that same day when two of

the six girls who have been a part of the group that was acting out were removed from the class, the rest of the girls were much more settled and able to work much better.

However, in the boys groups there were fewer instances where boys had to be sent out of class or the teacher had to threaten to call their parents. It seemed to me that the teachers were harder on the female students who acted out because they expected more from them, whereas they expected the boys to be hyperactive in class because they saw them as immature. When one of the quieter students in the class started sitting with the more disruptive girls and emulating their behavior, Ms. Mott said to her, “Don’t talk to me like these other girls, you don’t do that”. She expected certain things of certain students and didn’t want this particular girls to switch roles.

The female students expressed low expectations of male students similar to that of the teachers and the male students. The female students also expressed that they felt the male students were immature, for example one 8th grade student from one of the all-girl groups said, “A lot of people say that boys are more immature, but just it’s like they rather have fun than take things seriously.” Another student from the mixed class, when asked what she would change about the school to make herself do better, replied, “I would change the boys, I would take them out ‘cause they’re like the most people that distract the class...” I also observed that when male students would come into the all female Spelman class for any reason, most girls would continue with their work while a few girls would make a big deal of his presence, by either flirting with him or making statements like, “No boys allowed” or “Get out of our class, you don’t belong here”.

The single-gender classrooms, I concluded are beneficial to both male and female students, but more so for female students, which does nothing for an achievement gap

where female students are already ahead. The intention of the teachers who proposed the idea of the single gender classes was not to raise the performance level of either gender group or to close the gender achievement gap, but rather just to do something to raise the performance level of their students in general. The teachers did research on gender grouping and found evidence that it was helpful to student achievement overall; “we thought it would kind of eliminate distraction” –Mr. McNeil; “we felt that we had an at-risk population and we wanted to eliminate that as a deterrent from education, so we tried it and it’s been successful.” –Ms. Bernstein. When I questioned the teachers about the benefit of the single-gendered classrooms for the students the majority felt that their female groups were benefiting more.

Ms. Mott: “I think the girls made really the most progress. Cause sometimes you have couple boys that are out and it’s great but I think the girls make more gain when they’re focused.”

Ms. Sinclair: “Well the girls are a whole lot more serious in their academics, again that’s the girls wanting to please, wanting to have their notebooks done, wanting to have the work done, wanting to participate in the class, as a whole to make their class good. The boys...they don’t own their group yet, I don’t know if that will happen over time, but that’s what we’re hoping for.”

Mr. McNeil: “...with the boys, it’s kind of, I think, it’s a little less successful than I wanted it to be. I think they do have a good some kinda sense of teamwork, but their level of immaturity is increased when they’re all together in a group...there’s not a girl there for them to act appropriately for...”

Ms. Calvin, however, expressed that her male groups were making more progress and that the Spelman girls had a lot of drama and did not work as well together as the male students. However, Ms. Mott who had the same group of girls initially had the same response to this question, but after talking it out changed her position and decided that though the girls were more disruptive, they were actually making more gains. I observed that the female students tend to work in groups more often and though they can get

gossipy, they also help each other with schoolwork more often than the boys who tend to sit more scattered around the classroom, while the girls often sit in pairs or groups.

The boys themselves did not express any significant opposition to the single gender classes, and some actually expressed the idea that being separated from the girls was a good idea because it allowed them to focus more on their work as opposed to spending class time trying to impress the girls, but academically, the teachers found that the girls were still making more progress. The female students were more positive in their interviews about their experience with the single gendered classes. The female students were able to express more feelings of comfort with the new classes, while one of the male students actually related being in an all-male class to being in jail. The girls admit to there being a lot of gossip among the girls in their class, but feel that being away from the boys is “better ‘cause you don’t get distracted” and “you get to like talk things that you won’t say when boys are around, like girls talk”. I found that the girls, being you teens going through puberty were able to benefit from being in an all-female class with a female teacher because it provided a level of comfort for them, whereas the boys did not express that, nor was I able to observe if they had that comfort with the male teacher in the cluster.

I believe that the single gender classes could potentially be very beneficial to male students only if the instructional methods were altered to meet their needs as suggested by Mr. McNeil. Ms. Sinclair actually indicated that some particular instructional methods seem to work better for male students: “The boys are very competitive when I hand them out something and it’s like ‘we’re all going to do this together, see who gets it done first’ that’s where boys will thrive...they want to win, but when it’s working together, there’s

no motivation on their part, but when turned into a competition that's when they want to work." I have also observed that the female students are more apt to work in groups, while the boys tend to do their work on their own where they could benefit from working together. The students are not often pushed to compete against each other though that is the setting where the boys seem most motivated. Both groups of students and the teachers seem happy with the new class, however, without the change to the instructional method it is possible that the single gendered classes could serve to increase the achievement gap if the female students continue to thrive and increase in their performance and the male students do not.

I recommend that in future researchers should focus on the learning styles of minority male students in order to help the gender achievement gap. I believe that there is potential for single gender classes to help close the achievement gap and help expose male students the positive male role models if there was an increase in the number of male teachers and instruction was geared to the learning styles of minority male students. I believe that my findings have confirmed the findings of researchers like Nancy Lopez and Prudence Carter, but I hope that my project will also encourage other researchers to start focusing on the gender achievement gap among minority students in middle and elementary schools; hopefully tackling the problem earlier will make a difference.

References

- Carter, Prudence L. *Keepin' It Real : School Success Beyond Black and White*. Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005
- Davis, James E & Jordan, Will J (1994). The Effects of School Context, Structure, and Experiences on African American Males in Middle and High School. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 63(4), 570-587
- Firebaugh, Glenn, & Lundy, Garvey F. (2005). Peer Relations and School Resistance: Does Oppositional Culture Apply to Race or to Gender? *The Journal of Negro Education*, 74(3), 233-245
- Hu, Winnie. To Close Gaps, Schools Focus on Black Boys. New York Times, April, 2007
- Lopez, Nancy (2003). *Hopeful girls, Troubled boys: Race and gender disparity in urban education*. New York: Routledge
- Noguera, Pedro A. (2003). The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of Environmental and Cultural Factors on the Academic Performance of African American Males. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 431-459
- Osborne, Jason W. (1999). Unraveling Underachievement among African American Boys from an Identification with Academics Perspective. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 68(4), 555-565
- Strategic School Profile: "Meyer Ebling" Middle School. Retrieved 12 November 2007, from <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/ssp/SCH0607/dist041.htm>

Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How do you feel about school in general?
3. How do you feel about your teachers?
4. What keeps you interested/focused in school?
5. What bores you the most in school?
6. Do you usually hand in homework assignments? If no, why?
7. What kind of difficulties do you face at school?
With teachers? Other students? Schoolwork?
8. If something is bothering you at home does it affect your schoolwork?
9. Do you think boys and girls are treated the same/differently in school?
10. Who do you think does better in school, boys or girls?
11. How do you feel about the boys-only/girls-only classes? Benefits/Drawbacks?
12. Asked male students: How do boys build their 'reps'/reputations, why do certain kids get more attention?
13. Being in an all boys' class, do you think you should have more male teachers?
Being in an all girls' class is it easier to talk to your female teachers?
14. What are your goals for your education? For the future?
15. How important is college for your goals?
16. Has anyone ever spoken to you about going to high school/college? Who? What did they say?
17. Do you know any Black/Hispanic men/women who have gone to college?
18. Do you want to go to college? Do you think you can?
19. Has anyone in you family gone?
20. Do your friends talk about high school/college? If yes, what do they say?
21. Who is your biggest role model? Who do you look up to? Why?
22. Are you involved in any type of mentoring program?
If yes: Do you act as a mentor/mentee? What type of people are mentors at the program? What do you think makes them a good mentor? How does this affect you life (goals, schoolwork)?
If no: Would you join a mentoring program? Why/why not?
23. What would you change about your school to make you do better or be more engaged?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? At Meyer Ebling?
2. Have you always worked in schools with similar demographics as this one?
3. Where are you from originally/where did you grow up?
4. What made you decide to become a teacher?
5. What has your overall experience been like working at Meyer?
6. What has your experience been like working with single-gender classes?
7. Which group is most/least challenging?
8. How would you compare the academic performance of male and female students?
9. What kinds of role models do you find your students looking up to?
10. How do the students influence each other with school work?
11. Do you see any other factors influencing the students' work?
12. What kinds of messages are the students receiving about high school/college?
How do they respond?
13. How does the CMT affect what you do in the classroom?
14. If there was anything that you could change to raise the performance level of your students, what would it be?