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The Relative Importance of Teachers and Parents in the Formation of Negro and White Students' Academic Self-Concept

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ABSTRACT

This study compared the relative importance of parents and teachers in the formation of Negro and white students' academic self-concept. Measures of academic self-concept and perceived parents' and teachers' evaluations of academic ability were administered to 165 white tenth graders, 166 Negro eleventh and twelfth graders, and 133 Negro ninth graders. For white students, parents' perceived evaluation was found to be slightly more strongly related to students' academic self-concept than teachers' perceived evaluation. For black students, it was the teachers' perceived evaluation that was more strongly related to the student's academic self-concept, although the difference reached significance only for females. These results suggest the special importance of the teacher in the formation of the Negro student's concept of his academic potential.

A STUDENT'S concept of his academic potential may limit his efforts to achieve and thus strongly influence his school achievement. Academic self-concept has been found to be strongly related to school achievement for both white students (1) and Negro students (5, 6).

Social interaction theory suggests that a student forms his academic self-concept by internalizing the perceived evaluations of significant others such as his parents and teachers. For white students except at the twelfth grade level, parents' perceived evaluations appear to be more strongly related to the student's academic self-concept than the teacher's perceived evaluation (2). In a carefully controlled experiment, Brookover and others (1) found that working with white parents on improving their children's academic self-concept indeed increased their children's academic self-concept and achievement in school.

The purpose of the present study was to compare the relative importance of parents and teachers in the formation of Negro and white students' self-concept. Since Negro parents are less likely than white parents to be highly educated and expert on academic matters, their views on their children's academic potential may have less credibility than the evaluation of the teacher. For Negro students, the teacher's perceived evaluation may be more strongly related to the student's academic self-concept than his parents' perceived evaluation. If this is the case, working with teachers rather than parents may be the most powerful way to increase academic self-concept among Negro students.

Method

Sample. The white student sample consisted of 165 tenth graders attending a suburban northeastern school. The Negro student sample consisted of two groups, 166 eleventh and twelfth graders attending an inner-city northeastern school and 133 ninth graders attending a segregated school in the deep south.

Measures. The measure of academic self-concept, formed through a factor analysis of a number of academic self-concept items (6), consisted of one item from the Coleman Report (3) Academic Self-Concept Scale (How bright do you think you are in comparison with the other students in your grade?) and two items from the Brookover and others (1) General Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Do you think you have the ability to complete college? Where do you think you would rank in your class in college?).

The measures of teachers' and parents' perceived evaluations of academic ability consisted of three questions taken from the Brookover and others (2) measures which concern the student's perception of the parents' and teachers' estimate of (a) the grades he is capable of getting, (b) whether he has the ability to complete college, and (c) whether he has the ability to complete graduate school.

Findings and Implications

For white students, as in the Brookover studies, the parents' perceived evaluation showed a somewhat stronger relationship to the student's academic self-concept than the teachers' perceived evaluation (see Table 1). For Negro students, in contrast, the teachers' perceived evaluation was more strongly related to the student's academic self-concept. The difference in the strength of the relationship between parents' and teachers' perceived evaluation and student's academic self-concept reached significance for the Negro

Table 1.—Relationship of Parents' and Teachers' Perceived Evaluation of Academic Ability to Students' Self-Concept of Academic Ability

Students' Self-Concept of Academic Ability	Parents' Perceived Evaluation of Academic Ability	Teachers' Perceived Evaluation of Academic Ability
White tenth Graders		
Males	.828**	.799**
Females	.782**	.683**
Negro ninth Graders		
Males	.737**	.811**
Females #	.387**	.579**
Negro eleventh and twelfth Graders		
Males	.466**	.566**
Females ##	.469**	.721**

*p < .05 **p < .01 #†=2.444 p < .05
##—3.788 p < .01

females but not the Negro males in both age groups.

Among Negro students, especially females, the teachers' perceived evaluation appears to be more influential than the parents' perceived evaluation in the formation of the student's concept of his academic potential. There is increasing evidence that teachers can improve their students' academic self-concepts through such methods as making positive comments to them and creating an atmosphere of security in the classroom (4, 7). Training teachers to improve students' estimates of their academic potential may be an especially effective strategy for increasing the academic self-concept and school achievement of Negro students.

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