

An Analysis of the Impact of Gender and Racial Background on Academic Wellbeing in Middle Childhood

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Background

Academics are a large focus as a child progresses into the middle childhood period. Therefore, it is valuable to assess the impact that personal traits can have on an individual as they move through traditional education courses. Variation in stressors, due to race/ethnic background can interrupt this progression (Benner, et al., 2017). Furthermore, this variation in academic opportunity due to institutional inequities offers insight into societal disparities, such as gender or racial pay gaps (Soland, J., 2018). Therefore, it is invaluable for research to address these potential imbalances prior to a student leaving the academic setting, as a perpetuation of these issues has the potential to cultivate greater disparities in the future. However, there is little data that encompasses both the impact of race/ethnicity and gender on the academic progression made by a student. Thus, in analyzing the racial and gender differences in the traditional academic setting, a greater opportunity for intervention is illuminated, providing an increased avenue for equality in the future.

Methods

- Participants:
- Age
 - 1,249 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students
 - 6th grade: 421, 7th grade: 398, 8th grade: 430.
 - Mean age: 12.44 years (SD= .98, range = 10 -15 years).
- Race
 - 5 American Indian or Pacific Islander, 73 Asian, 146 Black, 495 Hispanic, 474 White, 56 Biracial or Multiracial
- Gender
 - 652 girls, 597 boys
- Measure:
 - Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (SSWQ) (Renshaw et al., 2015)
 - 4 sub-scales: Joy of Learning, School Connectedness, Educational Purpose, Academic Efficacy
 - Scores: 4-point scale, ranging from 0, meaning almost never, to 3, meaning almost always.

Results

- Race:
 - Joy of Learning, School Connectedness, and Educational Purpose did not vary by race/ethnicity.
 - Academic Efficacy did vary by racial/ethnic group ($F(5, 1243) = 5.68, p < .001$). Hispanic participants were found to have significantly lower Academic Efficacy than White students (difference = $-.25, p < .001$).
 - A difference between Hispanic and White Participants only was again observed in the analysis of differences in overall Student Subjective Wellbeing, with Hispanic students again reporting lower levels ($F(5, 1243) = 2.38, p < .05$, difference = $-.11, p < .05$).
- Gender:
 - Joy of Learning, Academic Efficacy, and overall Student Subjective Wellbeing did not differ by gender.
 - Girls reported significantly lower School Connectedness than boys ($t(1234.2) = -3.10, p < .01$).
 - Girls reported significantly higher Educational Purpose ($t(1230.3) = 2.0696, p < .05$).

Conclusion

In conducting an analysis of the gender and race/ethnic group inequities in academic connection and development, it can be asserted that an academic intervention may be warranted to minimize disparities may be having a substantial impact on the outcomes of students experiencing decreased levels of academic wellbeing. In assessing the variation between Hispanic and White students in Academic Efficacy and Female and Male students in the context of School Connectedness, individuals with lower scores and therefore greater need can be identified. The results of this analysis offer a platform upon which to provide equality to students who currently lack it. Overall, these data illustrate the need for further exploration to determine the needs of students and clarify potential interventions to effectively minimize academic gender and racial disparities.

References

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