

SELF-ESTEEM AMONG UPWARD BOUND STUDENTS:
DIFFERENCES BY RACE AND GENDER

by

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ABSTRACT

Higher education has experienced an increase in enrollment. Of the approximately 14.9 million students in higher education, 24.5% are minority students. Although this percentage is not far from the percentage of minorities in the U.S. population (24.7%), the distribution of minorities enrolled in higher education is significantly different than the distribution of minorities in the nation's population. The percentage of African Americans (10.1%) and Hispanics (7.3%) in higher education is lower than their population in the general population (12.1% and 9% respectively).

There is also an unequal distribution of enrollment in higher education based on socioeconomic status. The percentage of students from the top family income quartile attending college is 86%. The percentage of students from the bottom family income quartile attending college, however, is 52%.

The disproportionate representation by race and socioeconomic status in higher education has prompted campuses across the country to develop a variety of precollege programs. These programs provide students who are disadvantaged by race or socioeconomic status with the resources and academic skills needed to pursue higher education.

One of these precollege programs is Upward Bound. Upward Bound serves high school participants aged 13 to 19 years who are either first generation, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or both. Upward Bound staff focus primarily on promoting academic performance among participants. There is a significant body of literature that suggests self-esteem directly correlates with academic performance. However, Upward Bound staff do not purposefully offer programs to promote self-esteem among participants.

This study was designed to gain a better understanding of self-esteem among Upward Bound participants by race (majority versus minority) and gender. The Self-Esteem Index (SEI) was used to collect data. The SEI yields an overall self-esteem score as well as scores on four subscales. Data were analyzed using a series of two-way analyses of variance to explain differences by race (majority versus minority) and gender.

There were no statistically significant differences in self-esteem by race. The findings, however, reflected a trend in which majority students consistently scored higher than did minority students. There were statistically significant differences in self-esteem by gender on the Academic Competence scale, Peer Popularity scale, and Personal Security scale.

This study was significant for future practice in higher education. The results of the present study might benefit Upward Bound counselors, who might learn more about the self-esteem of Upward Bound students. The results might also inform Upward Bound students about their own self-esteem. In addition, the results of this study might provide directors of federal programs with baseline information about the self-esteem of students participating in the Upward Bound program.

DEDICATION

To all of the Upward Bound students

Your courage and determination encourages me to work for social justice.

Watch out world – these young women and men are going to amaze you!

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