

Gender Differences in Role Models and Academic Functioning Among Jamaican High School Students

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There have been concerns among Jamaican scholars that students' role models (RMs) contribute to gender differences in academic functioning in Jamaica. The current study empirically investigated gender differences in the RMs of 269 fifth form traditional high school students in Jamaica and relations between RM choice and academic attitudes, goals and achievement. Using mixed qualitative/quantitative research methods, nine categories of RMs emerged. Consistent with international research findings, parents were by far the most frequently selected RMs. As predicted, most students had gender-matched RMs and more boys reported celebrity RMs. Having a celebrity/glamorized RM or a very distant RM was related to poorer academic functioning for both boys and girls; however, having a gender-mismatched RM was not. Findings are discussed in the context of North American research on students' RMs and gender socialization in the Caribbean.

“Did you ever know that you're my hero, and everything I'd like to be?” There are probably few of us who don't know by heart this classic lyric from Bette Midler's (1988) song “Wind Beneath My Wings.” We identify with these timeless words because we too have personal heroes and role models in our lives. The role models (henceforth known as RMs) of young people are of particular interest because youth are actively forming identities and setting life goals, and there is some empirical evidence that

choice of RM may relate to youth academic and psychosocial adjustment (e.g., Bryant and Zimmerman 2003). As Caribbean scholars have sought to understand factors related to academic achievement in our region, it has been suggested that boys' choice of RMs may be related to their increasing underrepresentation at higher levels of the education system (e.g., Leo-Rhynie 1993; Samms-Vaughan 2006). However, it appears that a systematic empirical investigation of RMs among Caribbean youth is yet to be published. The current article intends to fill this gap in the research literature by using mixed qualitative/ quantitative methods to examine the types of RMs held by male and female traditional high school students in Jamaica, and the relations between students' RMs and their academic attitudes, goals and achievement.

Definition of Role Models

The concept of role models (RMs) has been researched from at least as early as 1970 but definitional ambiguities have plagued the professional literature, particularly in relation to the concept of "mentor" (see Pleiss and Feldhusen 1995 for a brief review). Some researchers have used these two terms synonymously and others have made distinctions between them. To address this issue, Gibson (2003) offers a revised definition of RMs as "a cognitive construction based on the attributes of people in social roles an individual perceives to be similar to him or herself to some extent and desires to increase perceived similarity by emulating those attributes" (p. 136). Implicit in Gibson's definition is the idea of one-way awareness; that is, because identification with a RM is a cognitive rather than an interpersonal process, there need not be a relationship between the individual and RM (unlike the identification theory view—e.g., Erikson 1950—and the concept of mentors). Further, Gibson's definition conveys identification with an RM's broad

social role rather than observation and learning of specific behaviours (unlike the social learning theory view—e.g., Bandura 1977). The current article adopts Gibson's definition of RMs.

The remainder of this introduction will review theoretical perspectives relevant to the study of RMs, discuss RMs in the context of gender and education in Jamaica, explore international research findings on youth RMs, and present specific hypotheses for the current study.

Theoretical Perspectives on Role Models

The social/observational learning perspective (e.g., Bandura 1986) holds that “most human behavior is learned by observation and modeling,” which is an adaptive human capacity in that it allows us to “expand [our] knowledge and skills on the basis of information exhibited and authored by others” without the time, energy, and potential failures of direct personal exploration (p. 47). In this view, modeling works by observing another's choices and the consequences for them, from which one derives rules of behaviour and guides for one's own future actions. The social/observational learning perspective can be directly applied to educational/career contexts (see Leo-Rhynie 1993, 39), especially in British-based education systems of the Caribbean in which high school students must typically identify a potential career path at the end of third form/ninth grade. This educational structure allows little time, if any, for career and life role exploration before committing to a career path. Thus, students are likely to lean heavily upon vicarious experience gained from the observation of adults, whose social role or career they either admire and desire to emulate or dislike and desire to avoid.

Similarly, career development theories (e.g., Ginzberg et al. 1951) hold that a reality factor (i.e., the present pressures of one's society) and personal values are two factors which influence career choice. RMs provide information to youth about the pressures of the society through their social and occupational

choices, and they undoubtedly also help to shape youth's values. More recent self-theories offer alternate, but complementary, views of RMs. For example, RMs may be considered "self-guides" in the language of Higgins and colleagues (e.g., Moretti and Higgins 1990), who direct adolescents' actions and choices, or they may be considered "possible selves" amongst which adolescents choose identities (e.g., Markus and Nurius 1986).

In sum, across theoretical perspectives, a consistent scholarly view of RMs emerges: they are an important aspect of youth identity and career development warranting continued research attention.

Gender, Role Models, and Education in Jamaica

Numerous research reports on Jamaican education have documented that the ratio of boys to girls has, for decades, been steadily shifting in favour of girls, especially in upper high school and beyond (see Bailey 2000; Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture 2004; Parry 2000). One reason that has been suggested for this troubling reality, which Bailey refers to as the "feminization of education"¹ (p. 28), has to do with state of modern male RMs (Parry 2000; Samms-Vaughan 2006). Like sides of a coin, two related, yet distinct, concerns have been voiced. They are (1) the decline of "appropriate" male RMs, and (2) the rise of "inappropriate" male RMs. Appropriateness versus inappropriateness of RMs has been generally discussed by Jamaican scholars as the extent to which RMs' lifestyle and occupational messages conform to socially accepted notions of morality and values. For example, in a discussion of negative pressures on youth and families, Leo-Rhynie (1993) explains:

...[Public figures]] serve as role models for the youth and when the message of these models runs counter to the accepted societal values, then new expectations and new goals are created for our young people. When this 'counter-culture' is supported by films and television programmes which vividly portray the gun, violence, drugs, illicit-near pornographic-sex scenes which are often

glamorized, [it is] a much more difficult task to maintain a value system of decency, honesty and respect for humanity among its members (p. 38).

With regard to the relative absence of RMs deemed appropriate or desirable, the sociological perspective considers that the dominant Jamaican family configuration does not include resident fathers (*see* Bailey et al. 1998; Leo-Rhynie 1993); whereas the educational perspective highlights the small proportion of high school teachers who are men (e.g., Parry 2000). In other words, in the two most important spheres of Jamaican adolescent involvement-family and school-admirable men are under-represented. Similar concerns regarding the potential negative effects of the lack of appropriate RMs have also been cited in research with Black youth in the USA (e.g., Bryant and Zimmerman 2003).

The increased popularity within youth culture of adults deemed to be inappropriate or undesirable RMs, including “DJs” (popular entertainers) and “dons” (organized criminals), further compounds this state of affairs, in the minds of many. Samms-Vaughan (2006) states:

Children and young persons grow up in communities where there are...wide choices in role models. In the past, the most upstanding members of the community were the minister, the teacher and the postmistress. Communities now offer children different role models from which to choose. While the minister and the teacher still exist, there are also the deejays, the dancers, and the dons. Young persons observe the lifestyle[s] of these persons and must make choices between the wealth and power of the dons...versus the modest...life of other professionals (p. 49).

In addition to highlighting the undesirable modern youth RMs, Samms-Vaughan’s (2006) quote above also indicates that desirable youth RMs are not only morally upstanding, but are also in traditional professions.

Beyond local community exposure, Leo-Rhynie (1993) acknowledges the media as another significant source of RMs, which influence students’ educational and career choices:

“during later childhood and adolescence, children identify with other RMs in the media and this is often expressed in their choice of occupational roles” (p. 38). With impressive modern access to local and foreign media—most of which come from the USA—a whole host of individuals in desirable and undesirable glamorized life roles (i.e., from world-famous doctors to notorious rappers and professional athletes) are also available as RMs for Jamaican students. Ironically, glamorized social and occupational roles, which formal Jamaican society considers undesirable, may be increasingly attractive to Jamaican boys, given that they have been shown to feel inferior and marginalized by formal high school education (Evans 1999).

The current research will add to the body of scientific knowledge by empirically investigating both concerns regarding male RMs. First, to answer the question of whether boys experience a shortage of desirable male RMs, this study will assess the breadth of RMs endorsed by high school boys relative to girls. Second, to examine the extent to which boys look up to undesirable RMs, this study will examine the relative numbers of boys and girls endorsing these types of RMs compared to other RM types.

International Research on Student Role Models

Types of Role Models

As depicted by the central characters in the movie “Beaches”, in which the song “Wind Beneath My Wings” first appeared, research shows that it is common to admire those whom we know personally. White and O’Brien (1999) investigated conceptions of heroes among approximately 600 kindergartners to 12th graders—majority White—in the Mid-Western USA using written semi-structured surveys and taped interviews. Results revealed that older children and adolescents generally defined heroes as “people to look up to and admire.” They most often named parents as heroes, followed by other family members, then friends

(White and O'Brien 1999, 91). In addition to known individuals, two other categories of RMs emerged in White and O'Brien's study: "public helpers" (i.e., individuals in service professions, military and religious figures), and "superheroes" (i.e., professional athletes, celebrity entertainers, fictional characters). Further, adolescents' reasons for choosing their RMs centred on recognition of the RM's accomplishments, hard work and sacrifices. A small percentage of adolescents in this study reported having no RMs or not knowing who their RM was.

In another large mixed-methods US study, Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) investigated RMs among nearly 700 Black adolescents, revealing highly similar findings. More than 90% of adolescents in this study named their parents or other relatives as primary RMs. Youths in this study also reported other relatives, friends and acquaintances, famous people, and no RMs. Although Bryant and Zimmerman found no statistically significant gender differences in choice of RMs, twice as many boys (6.9%) than girls (3.1%) chose famous people for RMs, most of whom were male. Drummond and Senterfitt's (1999) research with urban Black elementary students in the USA produced similar findings—athletes, mothers, and musical performers were the top three identified RMs.

Oberle (1974) investigated gender differences in RMs among rural Texas teenagers in grade 10 and again two years later. Compared to other studies, similar categories of RMs emerged and more boys than girls endorsed famous glamour figures as RMs (e.g., movie/TV stars, famous athletes, government officials) (49% vs. 26% at time one, respectively; 57% vs. 16% at time two, respectively). In fact, glamour figures were by far the most frequently endorsed RM type for Black males in this study. In addition, more girls than boys chose known professionals (i.e., teachers and school counsellors), extended family, and close friends (47% vs. 15% at time one, respectively; 56% vs. 28% at time two, respectively) as RMs. However, unlike the more recent studies, parents were not the most frequently reported RMs for

either boys or girls; rather, they were generally third or lower in relative endorsement (Oberle 1974).

Overall, a consistent picture emerges from the available empirical research literature on the RMs typically endorsed by youth: (1) RM types typically include parents and other relatives, close friends, acquainted and unacquainted professionals, and celebrities; (2) boys are more likely to adopt RMs in glamorized careers than are girls; and (3) a small percentage of youth generally indicate having no RMs. The gender differences in RM endorsement among US youth are consistent with the ideas of Jamaican scholars regarding the RMs Jamaican youth are likely to have.

Role Models and Youth Adjustment

There is evidence that the level of perceived *similarity* between an adolescent and his/her RM, especially in gender, may relate to RM choice and adolescent outcomes (e.g., Erkut and Mokros 1984; Zirkel 2002). For example, research studies have demonstrated that older adolescents and young adults are more likely to select same-gender RMs than cross-gender RMs (Perrone et al. 2002; Wohlford, Lochman, and Barry 2004). Further, having a gender-matched RM has been found to be advantageous for the academic outcomes of both male (Bettinger and Long 2005) and female students (Nixon and Robinson 1999), although some research suggests that the benefit is greater for females (e.g., Lockwood 2006).

The relationship *proximity* between the adolescent and his/her RM has also been thought to be related to adolescent functioning. At the ends of this continuum, Gibson (2003) has described “close” versus “distant” RMs as individuals with whom there is direct and frequent interaction, versus those who are unavailable, observed rarely, or observed only through the media. For example, Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) find that students who had a

parent as an RM had more positive outcomes than students with sibling or extended family RMs. Specifically, teenagers who endorsed their father as an RM reported more positive school attitudes, boys with paternal RMs had significantly higher grades (as reported by school) and fewer days of skipped school, and girls with paternal RMs reported a higher likelihood of graduating from high school. In addition, adolescents who specifically named their mother as an RM reported the least psychological distress, whereas girls who named a brother as their RM were most at risk for school behaviour problems (Bryant and Zimmerman 2003). Perrone et al.'s (2002) finding that relationship quality and supportiveness improved the career decidedness of college students also lends support to the proximity hypothesis.

Research outside the USA has also supported the influence of parents as RMs. For example, using a very large national sample of over 70,000 Swedish teenagers, Dryer (2007, 375) finds that "parents working within a specific field increase[d] the probability that a child [would] make a similar choice of educational programme at upper secondary school," especially for fathers and sons. The current study will assess potential similarity and proximity effects among RM choices and educational outcomes of Jamaican high school students.

Lack of an identified RM has also been found to be problematic for youth adjustment. For example, male and female adolescents who reported having no RMs in Bryant and Zimmerman's (2003) study had more negative school outcomes. There may be a similar finding among Jamaican students in the current study.

No research studies investigating relations between endorsing glamorized RMs and adolescent outcomes were located. Thus, the current study may be the first research to empirically address this interesting question.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Jamaican high school students' RM choices in relation to gender and academic attitudes, goals and achievement.

Study Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. There will be significant gender differences in the types of RMs endorsed. In particular, more boys than girls will report celebrity/glamour figures as RMs and these celebrity/glamour RMs are more likely to be male than female.

Hypothesis 2. More students will select gender-matched RMs rather than gender-mismatched RMs.

Hypothesis 3. Students with gender-matched RM will demonstrate more positive academic attitudes, goals and achievement than those with gender-mismatched RMs.

Hypothesis 4. Students with more proximal RMs will demonstrate more positive academic attitudes, goals and achievement than those with more distant RMs.

Hypothesis 5. Students who identify celebrity/glamour figures as RMs will demonstrate poorer academic attitudes, goals and achievement than those with other RM types.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and sixty-nine 5th formers (144 boys, 125 girls) from a traditional high school in Kingston, Jamaica participated in this study. Participating students had a mean age of 15.99 years ($SD = 0.77$). Students reported an average of 9.49 ($SD = 2.57$) household amenities on a scale ranging from 1 (television set) to 14 (household helper) (adapted from Samms-Vaughan 2000) and most students had employed parents with a mean parental occupational prestige score² of 52.21 ($SD = 13.49$) (e.g., accounting/auditing clerk, health technologist/technician) on Stevens and Hoisington's occupational prestige scale (1987), which ranges from 14.69 to 81.09.

Traditional high school students were chosen for this study because they are among the youth most likely to go on to tertiary

education in Jamaica; thus it is important to understand factors related to their achievement or underachievement. Further, Jamaican dancehall celebrities, once thought to appeal only to the lower socioeconomic (SES) level of society, have, over the last several years, gained significant acceptance and popularity among youth in the middle and upper SES categories as well. Parry (2000) acknowledges this important social shift and the implications for youth:

Those who straddle the mainstream and subculture are the music dons whose reggae and dancehall music are considered to have an intrinsic value, which is accepted and promoted within the mainstream culture, even though most of the lyrical content reflects sub-cultural values. The penetration of values into mainstream culture because of the popularity of the music—particularly among the youth—is a major anxiety as it poses a threat of further erosions of...high standards of behaviour (40).

In addition, male teachers are probably equally underrepresented in traditional high schools compared to other secondary school types. Thus, traditional high school students may not be significantly different from their peers in the wider societal RMs to which they are exposed. Fifth formers were chosen because they were nearing the end of their high school careers and would soon be sitting their GCE O'Level/CXC³ examinations. This study intended to explore the factors related to academic functioning immediately preceding these major exams because the results of these exams greatly determine students' success in entering the work force or pursuing further study.

Measures

The measurement and coding of student RM types and reasons for RM choices were qualitative, whereas the remaining measures were quantitative in nature.

Role Models

Students were asked to identify their primary RM using the following open-ended survey question: “Think about the person you admire most because of the job they do or because of their lifestyle. Who is this person?” In addition, students reported their perception of their RM’s educational attainment using a single-item scale adapted from Regnerus (2000). Students responded to the question “What level of training do you think is necessary to become like that person?” using a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (Less than high school) to 10 (Ph.D./M.D.)⁴

Academic Attitudes

The Brookover *Self-Concept of Ability Scale* (Brookover, Thomas, and Paterson 1964) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$) was adapted for cultural appropriateness and brevity in this study⁵. Six items were used, one of which read “How do you rate yourself in school ability compared with those in your class?” Response options ranged from 1 (“my work is far below average”) to 5 (“my work is excellent”). The 6-item *Achievement Ideology Scale* (Sanders 1998) ($\alpha = .78$) was used to measure students’ belief in the personal utility and benefit of education. One item in this scale was “School will help me get a good job when I’m older” and response options ranged from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). For each scale, item scores were averaged and mean scale scores were used in analyses.

Academic Goals

Students indicated their Future Educational Expectations by answering the question “What level of education do you expect to achieve?” They indicated their expectations on the same 1–10 scale used for RM Educational Attainment.

Academic Achievement

Students’ mid-year examination average percentage grades were retrieved from school records in February of the fifth form year.

Procedure

As per custom in Jamaica, the high school principal gave consent for the participation of all interested 11th grade students. All participating students then gave their individual assent; a small number of students declined participation. Surveys were administered during a class period in December of the fifth form year.

Results

Coding of Role Model Data

Role model data were analyzed using methods for qualitative data analysis suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) to induce emergent categories from the data. A detailed inspection of students' responses revealed eight types of RMs and a subset of respondents reporting that they had no RMs. A variable for RM Type was created to reflect these nine categories: father/mother, brother/sister, other relative⁶, friend/acquaintance⁷, unacquainted professional⁸, entertainer, professional athlete, ideological figure⁹, and none specified. All responses which included the word "friend" or listed a non-family member by name were considered friends/acquaintances except for past or present local politicians who were considered unacquainted professionals, or unless the named individual was an entertainer, professional athlete, ideological figure, or other celebrity. The "unacquainted professional" category indicated RMs who were professionals not personally known by the student (e.g., "pilot," "doctor," "Bill Gates"). Ideological figures were distant individuals characterized primarily by a particular philosophical, ideological, or religious stance. It was decided not to include local politicians in this category because they were not deemed to be as distant or inaccessible, or to have as defining an ideology as did other RMs placed in this category. Students who reported either having no role models (e.g., "no-one"), or emulating a personality prototype rather than a specific person (e.g., "all people who have

accomplished something in life”) were placed in the category “none specified”.

Separate variables were created for RM gender and RM nationality¹⁰. To create a variable for RM proximity, RM types were grouped into 4 levels: immediate family (i.e., parents and siblings), which was considered most proximal, followed by close others (i.e., other relatives and friends/acquaintances), unacquainted professionals, and distant others (i.e., entertainers, professional athletes, and ideological figures).

Some students spontaneously reported reasons for their choice of RM ($n = 39$), which fell into three categories: (1) work ethic (i.e., referencing committed or dedicated work habits); (2) professional/educational success (i.e., referencing advanced degrees, managerial success or earning money); and (3) admirable character/lifestyle (referencing positive character qualities or personal beliefs). Reasons for RM choice were coded by two raters: inter-rater reliability = .92, $p < .001$.

Preliminary Analyses

Bivariate correlations and MANOVAs were used to assess for any covariation between SES variables (i.e., household amenities and parental occupational prestige) and study variables (i.e., RM Type, academic attitudes, goals, and achievement). No significant relations were found, thus SES was not included in any further analyses.

Main Analyses

Descriptive Statistics

Parent was the most frequent RM Type ($n = 74$, 27.5%) followed by friend/acquaintance ($n = 57$, 21.2%), other relative ($n = 40$, 14.9%), unacquainted professional ($n = 37$, 13.8%), entertainer ($n = 22$, 8.2%), sibling ($n = 16$, 5.9%), professional athlete ($n = 12$, 4.5%), none specified ($n = 9$, 3.3%), and ideological figures ($n = 2$, 0.7%). More Jamaicans (77.3 %) than non-Jamaicans

(22.7 %) were chosen as RMs. Several significant local politicians (i.e. “Portia Simpson,” “PJ Patterson,” “Edward Seaga”), and local DJs (e.g., “Beenie Man,” “Sean Paul”) were named as RMs. Most non-Jamaican RMs were entertainers (86% of named entertainers) followed by unacquainted professionals (78% of those named) and professional athletes (75% of those named), and the most frequently chosen RMs were North American (i.e., “Ben Carson”, $n = 11$ and “Bill Gates”, $n = 10$). Overall, boys reported a wider array of RMs spanning all nine RM Types as compared to girls whose RMs represented seven Types.

Hypothesis 1. As predicted, there were significant gender differences across RM Type, $\chi^2(9, n = 269) = 23.64, p = .005$. Not taking into account RM Gender, the most dramatic gender differences in RM choice were found in celebrity/glamour figures-entertainers and professional athletes. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, significantly more boys (18.0%) than girls (6.4%) endorsed glamorized RMs, most of whom were male ($n = 26$), rather than female ($n = 8$), $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = 5.71, p = .018$. Gender differences in RM type, regardless of RM Gender, also emerged in the sibling category—12.5% girls chose a sibling as an RM versus 4.2% boys. There was no gender difference in the parent category; boys and girls were equally likely to choose a parent for an RM (27.1% and 28.0%, respectively).

Hypothesis 2. Numbers and percentages of male and female students endorsing each type of male and female RM are presented in Table 1. Chi-square analyses were used to assess the gender-match of RMs. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, nearly three times as many students’ RMs were gender-matched ($n = 173, 64.3%$) than gender-mismatched ($n = 60, 22.3%$). Further, more boys ($n = 104, 72.2%$) than girls ($n = 69, 55.2%$) selected gender-matched role models, $\chi^2(1, N = 233) = 53.05, p = .001$. Most male RM types—father, brother, other relative, friend/acquaintance, and entertainer—were endorsed by at least twice the percentage of boys as girls, and male professional athletes and

ideological figures were endorsed only by boys. Unacquainted professional was the only male RM type which was endorsed by less than twice as many boys ($n = 20$, 13.9%) as girls ($n = 12$, 9.6%). Results were similar for female RM types: most—mother, sister, other relative, friend/acquaintance, and entertainer—were endorsed by at least approximately twice the percentage of boys as girls. Female unacquainted professionals were endorsed only by girls, and no female professional athletes or ideological figures were identified as RMs by either boys or girls.

RM Choice

Students who offered reasons for their RM choice were compared to those who did not in order to assess any important differences between the two groups. MANOVAs revealed no significant group differences in any demographic or study variables; thus, students who gave reasons were considered highly representative of the total study sample.

There were no statistically significant gender differences across the three categories of reasons for RM Choice (i.e., strong work ethic, educational/professional success and admirable character/lifestyle), $\chi^2(2, N = 39) = 1.59, p = .453$ (see table 1). Nevertheless, somewhat more boys ($n = 9$, 45%) than girls ($n = 5$, 26.3%) chose RMs based on their educational/professional success. Closer inspection of reasons in this category revealed that six students (four boys, two girls) gave reasons primarily related to professional success (e.g., “the ideal entrepreneur” [boy] or “has her own school” [girl]); four students (three boys, one girl) gave reasons primarily related to educational accomplishments (e.g., “finished medical school at 28!” [boy] or “has nine distinctions in CXCs” [girl]); and four students (two boys, two girls) gave reasons primarily related to wealth (e.g., boy—“makes him billions” [boy] or “makes a lot of money” [girl]). Thus, boys may have been somewhat more likely than girls to choose RMs on the basis of professional or educational success, but they were no more likely to choose RMs on the basis of wealth.

Table 1
Number of Boys and Girls Choosing Male and Female Role Model Types
and Reasons for Role Model Choice

Role Model Type	Males (<i>n</i> = 144) <i>n</i> (% of males)	Females (<i>n</i> = 125) <i>n</i> (% of females)
<i>Male role models</i>	104 (72.22)	36 (28.80)
Father	24 (16.67)	11 (8.80)
Brother	5 (3.47)	2 (1.60)
Other relative	13 (9.03)	4 (3.20)
Friend/acquaintance	15 (10.42)	5 (4.00)
Unacquainted professional	20 (13.89)	12 (9.60)
Entertainer	12 (8.33)	2 (1.60)
Professional athlete	12 (8.33)	0 (0.00)
Ideological figure	2 (1.39)	0 (0.00)
<i>Female role models</i>	24 (16.67)	69 (55.20)
Mother	15 (10.42)	24 (19.20)
Sister	1 (0.69)	8 (6.40)
Other relative	3 (2.08)	8 (6.40)
Friend/acquaintance	3 (2.08)	20 (16.00)
Unacquainted professional	0 (0.00)	3 (2.40)
Entertainer	2 (1.39)	6 (4.80)
Professional athlete	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Ideological figure	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
<i>Missing</i>	17 (11.80)	20 (16.00)
	Males (<i>n</i> = 20) <i>n</i> (% of males)	Females (<i>n</i> = 19) <i>n</i> (% of females)
Reason for Choice		
Strong work ethic	4 (20.00)	6 (31.58)
Educational/professional success	9 (45.00)	5 (26.32)
Admirable character/lifestyle	7 (35.00)	8 (42.10)

Note: Students in the “None specified” RM type were captured in the missing data row of this table, as well as students who gave insufficient detail about their RM to code RM Gender (e.g., “doctor”).

With regard to students' academic functioning, the means and standard deviations for the total sample were as follows: Academic Self-Concept ($m = 3.90$, $SD = .56$); Achievement Ideology ($m = 4.62$, $SD = .49$); Educational Expectation ($m = 8.88$, $SD = 1.48$); RM Educational Attainment ($m = 7.73$, $SD = 2.48$); and Grades ($m = 53.17$, $SD = 10.45$). Outcome variables were, for the most part, significantly and positively inter-correlated, as would be expected (see table 2). Most notably, students' reported RMs' Educational Attainment was significantly correlated with their own Academic Self-Concept ($r = 0.17$, $p < .001$), Grades ($r = 0.18$, $p < .01$) and Future Educational Expectations ($r = 0.41$, $p < .001$).

Table 2
Intercorrelations among Students' Academic Attitudes,
Goals and Achievement

Variable	Ach Ideol	ASCon	Fut Exp	RM Edu	% Grade
Ach Ideol	1	.309***	.132*	.116+	.043
ASCon		1	.281***	.172**	.215***
Fut Exp			1	.414***	.244***
RM Edu				1	.182**
% Grade					1

Note: Ach Ideol = Achievement Ideology; ASCon = Academic Self-Concept; Fut Exp = Future Educational Expectations; RM Edu = Role Model's Perceived Educational Attainment; % Grade = Average 5th Form Mid-Year Exam Percent Grade

+ $p \leq .10$ * $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Hypothesis 3 and 4. To address Hypotheses 3 and 4, a custom-built Gender (2) X RM Gender (2) X RM Proximity (4) MA-NOVA was computed to examine all main effects and the Gender X RM Gender interaction on all five academic outcomes.¹¹ There were no statistically significant main effects of student gender or

RM Gender on outcomes, and there was no significant Gender X RM Gender interaction. Thus contrary to Hypothesis 3, students with gender-matched RMs did not demonstrate better academic functioning than did those with gender-mismatched Rms.

However, there was a significant main effect of RM Proximity on Grades, $F(3, 205) = 9.46, p = .001^{12}$, and RM Educational Attainment, $F(3, 205) = 3.55, p = .015$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons with a Bonferroni correction revealed that students with the most distant RMs ($m = 47.24, SD = 12.57$) had lower grades than students in the other three RM Proximity groups, which did not differ significantly from each other in student outcomes, all $ps < .01$. ($ms = 55.99, 55.56, 54.17$; $SDs = 10.72, 9.25; 9.63$, respectively and in order of increasing proximity). In addition, students with the most distant RMs ($m = 5.21, SD = 3.11$) perceived their RMs to have attained the lowest level of education compared to students in the other RM Proximity groups, all $ps < .001$ ($ms = 9.56, 8.10, 7.67$; $SDs = 0.62, 2.04; 2.24$, respectively and in order of increasing proximity). There was no significant effect of RM Proximity on students' Academic Self-Concept, Achievement Ideology or Future Educational Expectations.

Whereas these findings may appear to provide support for the proximity hypothesis in that the most distant group demonstrated the lowest grades, it is important to note that the other three groups earned the same grades despite having differing levels of RM proximity. To fully support the proximity effect, the grades of each successively distant RM proximity group should have been lower than the previous. Therefore, in fact, these findings only provide partial support for Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5. To address Hypothesis 5, an RM Gender X RM Type MANOVA was computed. Means and standard deviations of students' academic outcomes are presented in Table 3 for male and female RM Types along with paired comparisons across RM Type for each outcome.

Table 3
Students' Academic Attitudes, Goals and Achievement by Male and Female Role Model Types

Role Model Type	ASCon M (SD)	Ach Ideol M (SD)	Fut Exp M (SD)	RM Edu M (SD)	Grade M (SD)
Male role models					
a. Father	3.86 (0.68)	4.48 (0.74)	8.55 (2.55)	7.06 (2.90)	57.45 (8.74)
b. Brother	4.08 (0.66)	4.78 (0.33)	9.00 (0.63)	7.17 (2.14)	52.37 (9.84)
c. Other relative	3.85 (0.62)	4.63 (0.41)	8.82 (1.19)	8.82 (0.95)	55.75 (9.02)
d. Friend/acquaintance	3.95 (0.48)	4.78 (0.27)	9.20 (0.89)	8.05 (2.37)	54.21 (9.00)
e. Unacquainted professional	4.02 (0.60)	4.69 (0.36)	9.45 (0.91)	9.62 (0.62)	56.30 (10.45)
f. Entertainer	3.50 (0.76)	4.13 (0.70)	8.50 (1.01)	4.17 (2.89)	46.30 (13.15)
g. Professional athlete	3.99 (0.45)	4.35 (0.70)	7.25 (2.77)	5.33 (3.31)	47.92 (11.66)
h. Ideological figure	4.33 -	5.00 -	8.00 -	9.00 -	46.00 -
Female role models					
a. Mother	3.86 (0.40)	4.76 (0.29)	9.09 (0.85)	8.20 (1.39)	52.12 (9.88)
b. Sister	4.15 (0.32)	4.72 (0.20)	9.00 (1.58)	8.22 (1.79)	51.11 (9.66)
c. Other relative	3.81 (0.57)	4.53 (0.53)	9.00 (1.00)	7.91 (2.26)	57.99 (10.39)
d. Friend/acquaintance	4.05 (0.51)	4.59 (0.52)	9.18 (0.96)	7.68 (2.19)	55.43 (9.46)

Table 3 (continued)
Students' Academic Attitudes, Goals and Achievement by Male and Female Role Model Types

Role Model Type	ASCon M (SD)	Ach Ideol M (SD)	Fut Exp M (SD)	RM Edu M (SD)	Grade M (SD)
Female role models <i>cont'd</i>					
e. Unacquainted professional	3.83 (0.43)	4.56 (0.35)	9.00 (0.00)	9.00 (0.00)	53.03 (15.42)
f. Entertainer	3.67 (0.37)	4.65 (0.40)	9.00 (0.54)	6.13 (3.00)	47.78 (15.29)
g. Professional athlete	–	–	–	–	–
h. Ideological figure	–	–	–	–	–
Paired comparisons for total sample (.05 significance level except 0.1 = +)	ns	d > f (male RM)	a,b+,c,d,e+ > g	a,b,c,d,e > f a,c > g	c+ > f

Note: Ach Ideol = Achievement Ideology; ASCoN = Academic Self-Concept; Fut Exp = Future Educational Expectations; RM Edu = Role Model's Perceived Educational Attainment. *Note:* Table reflects n of Table 1 except for male Ideological Figure; N = 1 in the current Table (instead of 2 as in Table 1) due to missing outcome data for the other student in this category. *Note:* Students in the "None specified" RM type and those who gave insufficient detail about their RM to code RM Gender (e.g., "doctor") were excluded from these analyses.

There was no significant effect of RM Gender on outcomes, and Academic Self-Concept did not relate to RM Gender or RM Type. However, there were significant main effects of RM Type on students' Future Educational Expectations, $F(3, 204) = 2.07$, $p = .041$; Grades, $F(3, 204) = 6.08$, $p = .001$; and RM Educational Attainment, $F(3, 204) = 2.22$, $p = .028$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons with a Bonferroni correction revealed that the Future Educational Expectations of students with professional athlete RMs (all boys) were at least marginally significantly lower than students whose RMs were fathers, siblings, other relatives, friends/acquaintances, and unacquainted professionals ($ps < .10$). Students whose RMs were entertainers rated them as having attained significantly lower formal education compared to students whose RMs were fathers, brothers, other relatives, friends/acquaintances, or unacquainted professionals. In addition, students with professional athlete RMs rated their RMs' educational attainment as significantly lower than did those RMs who were fathers or other relatives. Students who chose an extended family RM had marginally significantly higher grades than did those who chose an entertainer RM ($p < .10$).

There was also an RM Gender X RM Type interaction for Achievement Ideology, $F(3,204) = 2.30$, $p = .046$. Follow-up comparisons with a Bonferroni correction revealed that for boys only, students who chose friend/acquaintance RMs had higher ratings than those who chose entertainer RMs ($p < .05$) Overall, these findings were in support of Hypothesis 5: students with glamorized RMs tended to have lower academic goals, and achievement, and for boys, also less positive academic attitudes.

There were too few students who chose a non-specific RM ($N = 9$) to reliably compare their academic outcomes to the rest of the sample; however, visual inspection did not suggest substantial differences.

Discussion

Summary

The current study investigated gender differences in the role models (RMs) of traditional high school students and relations between RM choice and academic attitudes, goals, and achievement. Overall, nine categories of RMs were reported including relatives, non-relative professionals and celebrities, and RMs were named from Jamaica and abroad. Consistent with North American research findings, parents were by far the most frequently selected RMs. As predicted, most students had gender-matched RMs and more boys reported glamorized RMs. Having a glamorized RM or a very distant RM related to poorer academic functioning; however, having a gender-mismatched RM did not. The remainder of this section will discuss in greater detail the findings and implications of this research, followed by limitations of the study and directions for further research.

Conclusions and Implications

Contrary to the idea that male students in Jamaica have a shortage of appropriate RMs, boys in this study reported a wider array of RMs than did girls. The types of RMs reported were highly consistent with findings among US students (e.g., Bryant and Zimmerman 2003; Drummond and Senterfitt 1999; Oberle 1974), including the presence of a small proportion of students who indicated having no role model (White and O'Brien 1990). Given that non-residential fathers have been of major concern for Jamaican scholars as having particular impact on students' role models, it was very encouraging to find that parents were the most commonly reported RMs and that fathers were selected as often as were mothers. The prominence of parental RMs is also consistent with international research findings (e.g., Bryant and Zimmerman 2003; Drummond and Senterfitt 1999; White and O'Brien 1990).

With regard to the complementary concern about a surplus of undesirable male RMs, study findings suggest that Jamaican boys are very similar to boys in other countries in their choice to emulate adults in glamorized roles (e.g., Bryant and Zimmerman 2003; Oberle 1974). It must be noted that only one boy in this study reported an RM with distinctly aversive qualities (i.e., international terrorist, Osama Bin Laden), and under 20% of boys chose RMs who were celebrities. Thus, the large majority of boys selected socially “appropriate” role models. Further, students’ reasons for selecting RMs were, with only one exception, positive and praiseworthy: personal or professional integrity and success. Although some Jamaican researchers have found that boys, compared to girls, place greater importance on wealth in their career choices (Evans 1999; Leo-Rhynie 1993; Parry 2000), there was no significant difference between boys and girls in the reasons they gave for choosing RMs in this study. There was a slight trend for more boys than girls to choose role models based on professional or educational success, but not primarily wealth.

Boys were overrepresented within the minority of students who chose glamorized RMs. This, too, is consistent with US data (Bryant and Zimmerman 2003; Oberle 1974). More boys than girls chose entertainers as RMs and only boys chose professional athletes. On the other hand, it was interesting that more girls than boys chose siblings as RMs. Considering all RMs on the whole, it appeared that boys and girls were equally likely to choose RMs they knew personally, whereas boys were more likely than girls to choose RMs with whom they were not personally acquainted. Oberle (1974) suggested a number of possible reasons for Black males students’ common choice of celebrities or “glamour figures:” (1) these careers “...promise many rewards [and] limited entrance requirements...”; (2) these occupations do not require formal education beyond high school; (3) boys may be socialized to believe that the pursuit of advanced education is emasculating; and (4) boys may not be deterred by the high risk of entering glamour-related fields if they perceive having “...nothing to lose

and everything to gain” (p. 243). Jamaican boys in this study may have chosen celebrity RMs for these or other reasons; further research is needed to empirically investigate this question.

There are several potential reasons why no girls chose professional athletes as RMs. Although Jamaica certainly has its fair share of world-renowned female track stars, there are few other professional sports available to female athletes, and fewer still which receive any notable publicity. Thus, it is possible that there simply are not as many available female professional athletes to emulate as there are male, and, clearly, these girls did not identify with male professional athletes to the extent that boys did. This finding may be different among other types of students; for example, girls in high schools with particularly strong female athletic traditions may be more likely to endorse professional athletes as primary RMs. This would be a very interesting avenue of empirical research.

It is also notable that only two students chose ideological figures as RMs, both students were boys, and both RMs were male. This phenomenon had such a low base rate that little reliable meaning can be made of this finding. Nevertheless, it does reflect girls’ general preference for RMs with whom they are acquainted, rather than unacquainted.

The gender similarity hypothesis was supported in one respect and not supported in another. As predicted, and consistent with prior international research (e.g., Wohlford, Lochman and Barry 2004), the majority of students selected gender-matched RMs. This suggests that students perceived greater similarities between themselves and same-gender individuals than cross-gender individuals, and were more likely to see qualities they wanted to mirror in same- versus cross-gender individuals. However, contrary to the second prediction following from the gender similarity hypothesis, having a gender-matched RM did not relate to better academic outcomes for students in this study. This finding is somewhat inconsistent with research among US youth (e.g., Zirkel 2002).

It was unexpected for more boys than girls to report gender-matched RMs. A closer look at the findings shows that girls were most likely to be cross-matched in the unacquainted professional RM category; in fact, three times as many girls chose male unacquainted professionals as RMs over female unacquainted professionals. In contrast to other types of male RMs where boys generally outnumbered girls several times over, only slightly more boys than girls endorsed a male unacquainted professional as their RM. This finding may reflect gender socialization patterns of Western societies in two respects: (1) gender-stereotyped career paths in high school education propel more boys into science and technical professions; and (2) patriarchal power structures afford men greater social power and better compensation for professional efforts. Ample research evidence demonstrates that gendered educational, social and occupational structures are characteristic of Jamaica and the Caribbean (e.g., Bailey et al. 1998; Evans 1999; Parry 2000). Notwithstanding, it is perhaps natural, and in some ways desirable, for students who are preparing to enter adult life and professional careers, to emulate the most successful adults and professionals in their society regardless of the gender of the student or adult. Accordingly, it is likely that the high school girls in this study had gender-astereotypical career aspirations and there were more available male RMs in those careers than there were female RMs. The fact that male professionals were particularly compelling RMs for girls may also suggest that they were striving towards a level of professional success or compensation more accessible to men in their society. In contrast to girls, remarkably few boys chose female RMs—only 17%. This suggests that boys were much less likely than girls to emulate gender-astereotypical social and occupational roles for the same gender socialization reasons cited earlier.

Taken together, these findings are highly consistent with prior findings in Jamaica that girls have less rigid notions of male and

female occupational roles yet have access to fewer skilled jobs compared to boys (Evans 1999; Bailey et al. 1998).

There was a proximity effect of RMs on academic achievement: students with the most distant RMs—entertainers, professional athletes and ideological figures—had the lowest grades. In addition, students whose RMs were entertainers or professional athletes had significantly lower goals for further education, and somewhat lower grades than students with most other types of RMs. Clearly selecting a celebrity RM was associated with negative academic functioning in this study. There was no gender difference in these findings: the academic functioning of girls who endorsed these celebrity or larger-than-life RMs was as poor as their male counterparts. Therefore, with regard to the concern about “inappropriate” role models, boys are not the only ones vulnerable to their influence.

Although proximity may be one important feature of celebrity RMs, it does not appear to be the only factor at work because students’ grades were not progressively lower as RMs became more distant. Rather, students with RMs who were immediate family, close others, and unacquainted professionals had similar grades and academic attitudes and goals. Thus, there are likely other important features of these very distant RMs which were related to students’ lower grades. For example, wealth, power/fame, and low formal education have been raised in the professional literature (e.g., Parry 2000; Samms-Vaughan 2006) as potential reasons for selection of larger-than-life RMs. Future research is needed to fully understand the relative contributions of these potentially jeopardizing RM characteristics: are some RM characteristics worse than others; is selecting an RM with multiple potentially jeopardizing characteristics (e.g., wealth, fame and low education) worse than selecting a RM with just one such characteristic (e.g., wealth or fame)?

Limitations and Future Research

It is important to bear in mind that students in the current study were asked to report only one RM—the person they admired *most*. Thus, it is quite possible that many students held additional RMs which may have had some influence on them. For example, is it possible that boys would be more likely to choose female RMs as secondary RMs than primary RMs, or that girls would be more likely to choose male RMs as secondary rather than primary RMs? These are empirical questions which future research can address.

The current findings are most applicable to students in traditional high schools in Jamaica. Traditional high school students are different from students in other school types in potentially important ways including SES, academic achievement and choices of career types/occupations (Evans 1999). Thus, students from other backgrounds and school types may select different types of RMs, or endorse RM types to different degrees, and their choices of RMs may relate differently to academic outcomes. For example, it is probable that students from lower SES levels and different school types are exposed to greater father absence; however, it is unclear whether this would impact the extent to which such students would endorse fathers as RMs. It is also possible that boys in inner-city secondary schools may endorse more dons or local music stars as RMs because of the higher value given to these positions in their communities. These are excellent topics for further research.

As with all cross-sectional research methodologies, it is important to remember that the relations between role models and academic functioning described in the current research do not indicate a particular direction of effect. That is, students may have had worse grades because they had celebrity RMs, or they may have chosen celebrity RMs because they were doing poorly in school. It is also possible that some third variable (e.g., intelligence) drove both RM choice and grades. Longitudinal research

measuring variables at more than one time point is needed to answer this ‘chicken-and-egg’ question.

Closing

In our efforts to better understand boys’ fate in the Jamaican education system, it is important not to lose sight of the positives. First, concerns about boys’ role models are not unique to Jamaican scholars, nor are the kinds of role models boys select unique to Jamaican boys; in both respects there are striking similarities to our neighbour, the US. Second, for the most part, boys in this study had worthy and upstanding role models, most of whom were individuals known personally to them. Therefore, whether we are aware of it or not, you and I, as family members, friends, and acquaintances of high school boys are much more likely to be the ‘wind beneath their wings’ than is any ‘mafioso’ or public glamorized figure.

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NOTES

1. Several other reasons have been offered for the feminization of education including (1) the presence of an “anti-academic culture” among boys giving rise to a fledgling male academic identity and

negative beliefs about the utility of education (Evans 1999, 79); (2) discriminatory and demeaning school beliefs and practices directed at boys (Evans 1999); (3) a greater expectation among boys of future migration to North America or the UK where they will not need Jamaican academic qualifications (Parry 2000); (4) “male privileging”, whereby men receive more financial and professional compensation in the job market despite lower academic qualifications than women (Bailey 2000; Cole 1997; Figueroa 1998; Parry 2000); and (5) greater importance of wealth in boys’ career choices (Evans 1999; Leo-Rhynie 1993; Parry 2000). Of course, the end of historic discrimination against girls in access to education decades ago (Miller 1990; *also see* Senior 1991) should not be overlooked as a contributor to girls’ current (over)population of secondary and tertiary learning institutions.

2. If both parents’/guardians’ occupations were reported, the higher occupational prestige was used in analyses. Household amenities was significantly and positively related to parental occupational prestige, $r = .378, p < .001$, indicating their concurrent validity.
3. GCE ‘O’Level—General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (British school-leaving examination); CXC—Caribbean Examinations Council.
4. The 10-point response scale for future educational expectations and RM’s educational attainment included: (1) Less than high school; (2) High school ‘O’ Levels; (3) High school ‘A’ Levels; (4) Less than 2 years of trade school/college; (5) 2 or more years of trade school/college; (6) less than 2 years of university; (7) 2 or more years of university; (8) Finished university; (9) Master’s degree; (10) Ph.D./M.D.
5. Two of the original items from the *Self-Concept of Ability Scale* were dropped for cultural incompatibility reasons (for example, the item questioning students’ perceived ability to complete graduate training was deemed culturally inappropriate because Jamaican students may enter directly into advanced professional training at the undergraduate level).
6. Other relatives included aunts, uncles, and cousins, grandparents, and step-grandparents.
7. There were a few peer RMs in this category, but mostly adults (such as neighbours, doctors, teachers, etc.).

8. It is likely that many RMs who were relatives (i.e., parents, siblings, extended family members) were also professionals. One character from a movie playing a professional role (a lawyer) was reported as an RM; this person was considered an unacquainted professional for the purposes of this study.
9. Two ideological figures were named as RMs—"Jesus" and "Osama Bin Laden".
10. Relatives and friends/acquaintances were considered Jamaican. Thirteen students' RMs in the remaining categories did not contain enough information to assign nationality (e.g., "pilot").
11. No other interactions were computed because the n in certain cells were too small.
12. n in many analyses was often lower than total sample n (269) due to pairwise deletion of missing cases. Pairwise deletion was chosen over mean substitution to avoid artificially decreasing the variation of scores, which may considerably change the values of correlations.

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