

Preventing Delinquency and Promoting Academic Success among School- Age African American Males

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The goal of this study was to establish culturally relevant priorities for school-based delinquency prevention programs, by exploring delinquency related factors that have a relationship with educational outcomes for Black males. The domain areas explored included bullying and fighting, use of alcohol and other drugs, and neighborhood safety. The findings suggest that reducing behaviors associated with delinquency improves academic performance across all races. Black males were significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe at school, and Black and Latino males reported problems with feeling safe and trusting others in their neighborhoods. Policy solutions emphasize the role of peer education and mediation, safe communities and schools, drug prevention and school-neighborhood connections.

The current fervor of American education to establish optimal performance standards and measures of accountability has opened the system to various forms of critical analysis, meticulous examination and scrutiny (Black, 2008; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). As a result of this increased emphasis on accountability, educational policy and mental health, researchers have begun to stress educational innovation for improving the academic outcomes for American students. This focus was the impetus for this paper, to provide empirical evidence of the need to establish culturally-relevant priorities for school based social-skills training programs targeting school-age African American males by exploring delinquency-related factors (e.g., bullying and fighting, use of alcohol and other drugs, and neighborhood safety) that are related to educational outcomes (e.g., school performance). The subsequent section reviews existing literature that is related to the domain areas central to this investigation.

Relevant Literature

Early in the twentieth century, articles appeared that linked school success to delinquency prevention (Clarke & Gray, 1950; Lenroot, 1943; Peyser, 1932). Many of these early studies noted that schools had a substantial role in contributing to the moral development of children. For example, in a study of adolescents in Harlem, Clarke and Grey (1950) concluded that schools should be in tune with children's lives outside of the classroom to develop emotionally secure children, particularly for those coming from severely disorganized homes. In many ways, the spirit and tone of earlier works reflected optimism in schools' abilities to resolve social problems and mold students into productive members of society.

In the 1970s, studies began to explore race as a central variable in delinquency prevention research. A seminal prevention study of Black seventh and eighth graders in poor neighborhoods in San Francisco evaluated a program that focused on tutoring, counseling or "rap sessions," and cultural enrichment programs. The project was successful in reducing the number of participants on probation and improving teachers' assessments of students' attitudes and behaviors (Bradfield, et al., 1975). Another study found that, compared to White children, Black students who participated in delinquency prevention programs had more positive participation from their parents (Hackler & Linden, 1970). Specifically, the researchers noticed that Black parents responded positively to employment preparation programs, and challenged the notion that Black parents are apathetic and unresponsive to programs in urban central areas.

Studies on delinquency prevention that appeared later in the century focused on the cognitive development of delinquent teens. Lower scores on tests of intellectual functioning and deficiencies in learning abilities were attributed to delinquent behaviors (Rizzo, 1981; Zinkus & Gottlieb, 1979). However, other studies that further explored the connection between school experiences and social behavior laid the foundation for many of the current scholarship on school-based delinquency prevention programs (Famiglietti, Fraser, & Newland, 1984; Gottfredson, 1986). Contemporary studies on the role of the school in reducing juvenile delinquency have focused on the importance of school engagement (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004), drug free schools (Dembo, et al., 1998), school-community connection (Forster & Rehner, 2003; Reese, Vera, Simon, & Ikeda, 2004), and school coordination with allied mental health services (Greenberg, et al., 2003).

Within the last ten years, several studies have emerged that inform the research presented in this study. In a sample of 778 students of which 24 percent were African Americans, Battin-Pearson, et al. (2000) found a relationship between dropout prevention programs and the prevention of deviant behaviors among adolescents. Specifically, the study examined five theories of high school dropout: (a) full academic mediation, (b) general deviance, (c) deviant affiliation, (d) poor family socialization, and (e) structural strains. In the developmental model, the authors found several factors with extremely strong direct relationships with poor academic achievement and subsequent dropout, including low parental educational expectations, low school bonding, and bonding to antisocial peers. It found that Black males were at the greatest risk for dropout. The study recommended that prevention methods focus on increasing the academic success of children at risk of dropping out, with a specific emphasis on children who come from families in poverty and who have deviant peer affiliations (Battin-Pearson, et al., 2000).

African American adolescents who reside in dangerous areas were particularly vulnerable to depression and delinquency at school (Bohnert, Richards, Kohl, & Randall, 2009). Further,

Munson and Estes (2002) found that the strength of adolescents' bond to society reduces the probability of them performing criminal acts. The study further explained that extracurricular activities promote skills and values that foster a sense of social responsibility (Munson & Estes, 2002). Similarly, another study found that violence prevention programs cultivate stronger moral judgment, conflict resolution skills, and a more profound sense of community responsibility (Larden, Melin, Holst, & Langstrom, 2006).

The same held true for youth who are already involved in the delinquent system. Bullis and Yovanoff (2002) found that the effects of work and school engagement are significantly more likely to refrain youth from committing further crimes or escalating their criminal behaviors. They noted that the more youth are connected with a positive activity, the more likely they will remain out of trouble. Community service significantly reduces juvenile delinquency due to the strong moral structure and increased cognitive ability to engage in less egocentric activities (Hoffmann & Xu, 2002). In addition, programs that accentuate social skills instruction and application reduce delinquent behaviors and substance use (Gottfredson, Gerstenblith, Soulé, Womer, & Lu, 2004). More structured programs; smaller program size, an educated staff, and more male staff were needed to enhance the possibility that the program produced positive behavior outcomes and decrease delinquency (Gottfredson, et al., 2004).

Recent studies have found a link between school experiences and delinquency prevention. A study investigating the impact of risk and protective factors on youth violence found that more perceived social support from teachers (as reported by students) predicted lower levels of aggressive behavior (Benhorin & McMahon, 2008). In addition, classmate fighting impacted negatively on African American students' belief in their ability to avoid violence (Jagers, Sydnor, Mouttapa, & Flay, 2007).

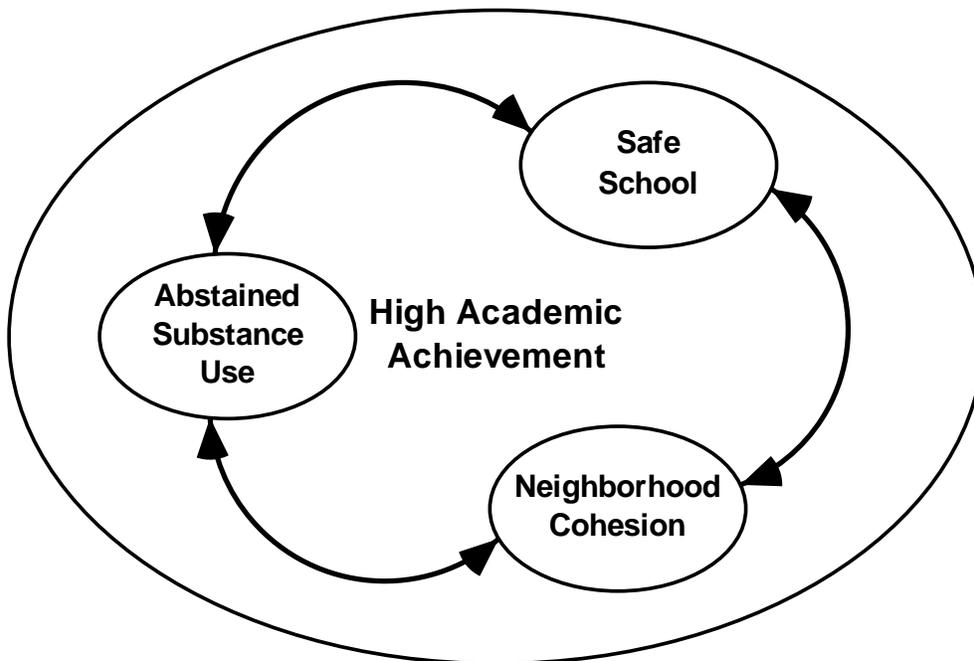


FIGURE 1: Conceptual model of the study illustrating the hypothesized relationship between the dependent variables to academic achievement.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research presented in the literature review section, this study posited that reducing behaviors associated with delinquency, such as bullying, weapons use, drug use, and community disunity, will lead to higher performance levels at school among all males. In particular, this study was concerned with the standpoint of Black male students in these areas in relation to other male students. Further, based on the work of Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) and Forster and Rehner (2003), we postulated that higher performing students will be less likely to drop out of school and more likely to be productive members of society. However, some research evidence suggests that some racial disparities will exist for Black and Latino males (Benhorin & McMahon, 2008; Bohnert, et al., 2009; Dembo, et al., 1998; Hackler & Linden, 1970; Jagers, et al., 2007; Smith, et al., 2007). The research that emphasized the importance of the environment in cultivating positive social behavior led us to the hypothesis that youth with more neighborhood cohesion would evince higher levels of academic potential (Gottfredson, 1986). In addition, studies cited that linked academic success to more harmonious school experiences, informed our hypothesis that school safety was vital to academic potential (Battin-Pearson, et al., 2000; Catalano, et al., 2004; Greenberg, et al., 2003). Finally, research that demonstrated the importance of drug abstinence suggests that students with less drug involvement have enhanced academic potential (Catalano, et al., 2004; Dembo, et al., 1998). Figure 1 visually depicts the constructs of central interest to this study, and provides a theoretical foundation for the method and analysis presented in the subsequent section.

Method

Participants

The study population included all Black, Latino, and White males who completed the survey for the 2002 Health Behavior in School-age Children (HBSC: N= 6,490). The survey sought to inform health promotion and educational policy aimed at school-age children, nationally. The World Health Organization (WHO) collected data for the HBSC survey between 2001 and 2002. The survey employed a three-stage cluster design in which the school's county was the first stage, the school was the second stage, and the classroom was the third stage. The U.S. sample of the HBSC included 340 schools in a stratified, three-stage cluster sample of classes. Schools were stratified by racial/ethnic status and geographic region using data from the National Center for Educational Statistics' website. The HBSC surveyed 11-, 13- and 15-year-old children's attitudes and experiences concerning a range of health-related behaviors. This dataset was selected because it had a clear indicator of academic achievement; had adequate African-American adolescent male representation (Black male N = 1,351); was a national survey that included multiple states and geographic areas; and had adequate measures of contributing factors. The database is indexed for public analysis at the *Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research*.

Procedures

Participating school representatives (i.e., teacher, nurse, school counselor, etc.) administered the HBSC survey in school settings. The school representatives read scripts that

explained the survey procedures. The questionnaire took approximately 45 minutes to complete and was administered in a regular classroom setting. The sample was comprised of 15,245 middle and high school students at public and private schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The WHO reported that of the sample, 57 cases were dropped from the database because they were missing a significant number of key variables from the HBSC protocol. In addition, the WHO dropped 365 cases due to the respondents' ages or grades being out of range or unknown. The WHO oversaw procedures to protect the anonymity of respondents. Public files made available for secondary analysis omitted variables that could be used to personally identify individuals. Specific measures used for this study from the larger questionnaire are delineated in the next section.

Measures

The measures used for this study were specifically related to the model developed from review of the literature. Specifically, research extracted measures for academic success; bullying, fighting, and school safety; illicit substance use; and neighborhood safety factors.

Academic achievement.

HBSC participants responded to the question, "In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates?" Response options were: (1) very good, (2) good, (3) average and (4) below average.

Contributing factors.

Contributing factors explored were divided into three domain areas: (1) bullying, fighting, and school safety; (2) illicit substance use; and (3) neighborhood safety factors. To improve the clarity of the findings, specific questions and indices that measured various aspects of each causal determinant are listed in the result tables. The following are general descriptions of the three domain areas that were posited to have a relationship with academic achievement among African-American males.

Bullying, fighting, and school safety consisted of self-report variables that measured the extent of violent behaviors and conditions in the students' environment. Specific questions gauged the frequency that the student participated in, or fell victim to, bullying and fighting. Bullying was described to the participants as saying or doing nasty or unpleasant things to another. Bullying was specifically distinguished from fighting which involves two students of the same power and size in a physical conflict. Students also revealed how often they carried a weapon to school and the extent to which they felt safe at school. When testing the internal consistency of the items used to measure bullying, fighting, and school safety, the Cronbach's Alpha was .65ⁱ.

Substance-related factors measured the frequency that the students used tobacco products, alcohol, marijuana, and other street drugs. Present, past 30 days, and lifetime use were measured for alcohol and other drugs. When testing the internal consistency of the items used to measure substance use, the Cronbach's Alpha was .87.

Neighborhood safety factors explored the amount of volatility and disunity in the students' neighborhood communities. Specific questions asked participants the extent to which

they felt safe in their neighborhood and believed people in their neighborhood could be trusted. When testing the internal consistency of the items used to measure neighborhood safety, the Cronbach's Alpha was .61.

Analysis plan

The principal analytic technique used in this study was a 3 x 4 factorial analysis of variance ANOVA, whereby three levels of race (Black males, with White and Latino males served as a comparison group) and four levels of academic achievement were tested for their independent main effects, as well as interactions between the two factors. General linear modeling approaches were used to reveal differences in the relationship between academic achievement and associated variables along racial lines. The hypothesized relationships between academic achievement and external measures were tested and accepted or rejected based on the p-value (tested at .01). Means plots were used for select variables to display the linear relationship between various indicators of academic achievement and hypothesized covariates, across races. The plots include a dashed reference line on the Y-axis that marks the estimated mean of the variable of interest. The reference line is useful for determining the distribution of scores around the mean for various levels of academic achievement.

Statistical Findings

Descriptive information

The participants were 1,351 (20.8 percent) Black, 3,766 White (58 percent), and 1373 (21.2 percent) Latino male students who were currently attending middle or high school. Most of the students participating in the study were in middle school (63.7 percent). The national sample covered urban (40.3 percent), suburban (29.7 percent) and rural (28.5 percent) areas. With respect to academic achievement, 22 percent described their performance to be “very good,” 36.6 percent “good,” 28.6 percent “average”, and 8.3 percent “below average”.

Bullying, fighting and school safety factors

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and F-ratios of bullying, fighting and school safety variables that have a hypothesized relationship with academic achievement among Black, Latino, and White male students. The table marks variables that are significant by race and academic achievement. All six of the variables analyzed had a significant relationship with academic achievement. Mean scores with a negative relationship with academic achievement, such as being bullied, get smaller when reading from left to right as academic performance increases. The opposite is true for the one variable with a positive relationship with academic achievement (feeling safe at school). Four of the six variables were significant for race. When compared to White and Latino males, Black students were less likely to report being bullied or carrying a weapon, and more likely to report fighting and feeling unsafe at school.

The analyses of academic achievement revealed the largest effect size for feeling safe at school (eta-squared = .02) and taking part in bullying (eta-squared = .02). Black students were also significantly less prone to feel safe at school when compared to White students. As indicated in Figure 2a, although students of all races who feel safe at school are also more likely to have

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Ratios of Bullying, Fighting And School Safety Factors That Impact Academic Achievement Among Black, Latino, And White School-Age Males

	Race	Achievement					F-Ratio	
		Below Avg. (M, SD)	Avg. (M, SD)	Good (M, SD)	Very Good (M, SD)	Total (M, SD)	Achievement	Race
How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months? ^A	Black	1.52 (1.0)	1.45 (1.0)	1.42 (.9)	1.53 (1.1)	1.46 (1.0)	9.0*	14.3*
	White	2.08 (1.5)	1.66 (1.1)	1.57 (1.0)	1.67 (1.2)	1.66 (1.1)		
	Latino	1.92 (1.4)	1.66 (1.1)	1.48 (.9)	1.61 (1.1)	1.61 (1.1)		
	Total	1.96 (1.4)	1.62 (1.1)	1.53 (1.0)	1.63 (1.2)	1.61 (1.1)		
How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months? ^A	Black	2.35 (1.6)	1.65 (1.1)	1.63 (1.1)	1.63 (1.1)	1.69 (1.1)	29.9*	1.6
	White	2.17 (1.4)	1.72 (1.0)	1.64 (.9)	1.58 (1.0)	1.69 (1.0)		
	Latino	2.24 (1.5)	1.85 (1.2)	1.61 (1.0)	1.72 (1.1)	1.77 (1.2)		
	Total	2.22 (1.5)	1.74 (1.1)	1.63 (1.0)	1.61 (1.1)	1.71 (1.1)		
I hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked him or her indoors. ^A	Black	1.91 (1.5)	1.41 (1.0)	1.51 (1.1)	1.55 (1.2)	1.52 (1.1)	21.3*	9.0*
	White	1.77 (1.3)	1.39 (.9)	1.27 (.8)	1.28 (.8)	1.35 (.9)		
	Latino	1.90 (1.4)	1.45 (1.0)	1.34 (.9)	1.48 (1.1)	1.46 (1.0)		
	Total	1.82 (1.4)	1.41 (1.0)	1.33 (.9)	1.37 (1.0)	1.40 (1.0)		
During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight? ^B	Black	2.82 (1.6)	2.12 (1.3)	2.09 (1.4)	2.01 (1.4)	2.13 (1.4)	27.0*	3.3
	White	2.61 (1.5)	2.11 (1.3)	1.88 (1.2)	1.81 (1.3)	1.99 (1.3)		
	Latino	2.61 (1.6)	2.05 (1.3)	1.92 (1.3)	1.96 (1.4)	2.04 (1.4)		
	Total	2.64 (1.6)	2.10 (1.3)	1.93 (1.3)	1.87 (1.3)	2.03 (1.4)		
During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club? ^B	Black	1.85 (1.5)	1.30 (.9)	1.43 (1.0)	1.39 (1.0)	1.41 (1.0)	30.8*	9.1*
	White	2.21 (1.6)	1.70 (1.3)	1.51 (1.1)	1.44 (1.1)	1.61 (1.2)		
	Latino	2.27 (1.6)	1.44 (1.0)	1.35 (.9)	1.46 (1.1)	1.49 (1.1)		
	Total	2.17 (1.6)	1.56 (1.2)	1.46 (1.1)	1.43 (1.1)	1.54 (1.2)		
I feel safe at this school. ^C	Black	2.89 (1.5)	3.23 (1.3)	3.50 (1.3)	3.48 (1.4)	3.37 (1.3)	49.0*	27.0*
	White	3.06 (1.5)	3.57 (1.2)	3.91 (1.1)	4.01 (1.2)	3.76 (1.2)		
	Latino	2.74 (1.6)	3.38 (1.2)	3.69 (1.1)	3.71 (1.3)	3.50 (1.3)		
	Total	2.96 (1.5)	3.47 (1.2)	3.79 (1.1)	3.85 (1.3)	3.64 (1.3)		

Note: M =Mean; SD =Standard Deviation; *p < .01; ^A 1 = I have not – 5 = Several times a week; ^B 1 = I have not been in a fight this year – 5 = Four or more; and ^C 1= strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Ratios of Substance-related Factors that Impact Academic Achievement among Black, Latino, and white School-age Males

	Race	Achievement					F-Ratio	
		Below Avg. (M, SD)	Avg. (M, SD)	Good (M, SD)	Very Good (M, SD)	Total (M, SD)	Achievement	Race
How often do you smoke tobacco at present? ^A	Black	1.50 (1.0)	1.42 (.9)	1.38 (.9)	1.36 (.8)	1.39 (.9)	10.69*	5.23
	White	2.15 (1.3)	1.70 (1.1)	1.36 (.8)	1.31 (.8)	1.54 (1.0)		
	Latino	1.94 (1.3)	1.35 (.8)	1.24 (.7)	1.50 (1.1)	1.41 (.9)		
	Total	2.03 (1.3)	1.58 (1.0)	1.34 (.8)	1.36 (.9)	1.48 (1.0)		
At present, how often do you drink beer? ^B	Black	1.67 (1.1)	1.50 (1.0)	1.48 (1.1)	1.56 (1.2)	1.51 (1.1)	9.38*	13.54*
	White	2.46 (1.5)	2.03 (1.2)	1.76 (1.0)	1.76 (1.2)	1.92 (1.2)		
	Latino	2.79 (1.6)	1.80 (1.1)	1.70 (1.1)	1.95 (1.4)	1.91 (1.3)		
	Total	2.46 (1.5)	1.89 (1.2)	1.69 (1.0)	1.76 (1.2)	1.84 (1.2)		
At present, how often do you drink liquor? ^B	Black	1.83 (1.2)	1.46 (.9)	1.51 (1.0)	1.61 (1.1)	1.53 (1.0)	11.92*	6.75*
	White	2.45 (1.5)	1.87 (1.1)	1.67 (1.0)	1.70 (1.2)	1.82 (1.2)		
	Latino	2.64 (1.6)	1.77 (1.1)	1.58 (1.1)	1.74 (1.3)	1.80 (1.2)		
	Total	2.44 (1.5)	1.78 (1.1)	1.61 (1.0)	1.69 (1.2)	1.76 (1.2)		
During the past 30 days, how many times did you have five or more drinks on the same occasion? ^C	Black	2.22 (1.6)	1.68 (1.1)	1.81 (1.3)	1.89 (1.7)	1.81 (1.4)	9.65*	6.50*
	White	2.86 (2.0)	2.31 (1.7)	1.96 (1.5)	1.82 (1.5)	2.13 (1.6)		
	Latino	3.26 (2.1)	2.24 (1.6)	1.89 (1.5)	2.28 (1.8)	2.25 (1.7)		
	Total	2.90 (2.0)	2.18 (1.6)	1.91 (1.4)	1.92 (1.6)	2.09 (1.6)		
In your lifetime, how often have you smoked marijuana? ^D	Black	2.89 (2.3)	2.30 (2.0)	2.06 (1.9)	1.92 (1.7)	2.14 (1.9)	20.14*	4.35
	White	3.71 (2.6)	2.61 (2.3)	2.07 (1.9)	1.74 (1.7)	2.33 (2.1)		
	Latino	4.34 (2.6)	2.50 (2.2)	2.12 (2.0)	2.35 (2.3)	2.55 (2.3)		
	Total	3.80 (2.6)	2.53 (2.2)	2.07 (1.9)	1.89 (1.8)	2.34 (2.1)		
In your lifetime, how often have you used any other drug? ^D	Black	1.44 (1.5)	1.20 (1.0)	1.37 (1.2)	1.30 (1.0)	1.31 (1.1)	10.82*	9.64*
	White	2.40 (2.3)	1.61 (1.5)	1.33 (1.1)	1.43 (1.4)	1.55 (1.5)		
	Latino	2.94 (2.6)	1.50 (1.3)	1.52 (1.6)	1.65 (1.7)	1.71 (1.7)		
	Total	2.45 (2.4)	1.52 (1.4)	1.38 (1.2)	1.44 (1.4)	1.54 (1.5)		

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; * $p < .01$; ^A1 = I do not smoke – 4 = Everyday; ^B1 = Never – 5 = Everyday; ^C1 = Never – 6 = 4 or more times; and ^D1 = Never – 7 = 40 or more times

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Ratios of Neighborhood Safety Factors that Impact Academic Achievement among black, Latino, and white School-age Males

	Race	Achievement					F-Ratio	
		Below Avg. (M, SD)	Avg. (M, SD)	Good (M, SD)	Very Good (M, SD)	Total (M, SD)	Achievement	Race
Generally speaking, I feel safe in the area where I live. ^A	Black	3.05 (1.1)	3.15 (.9)	3.22 (.9)	3.36 (.9)	3.22 (.9)	24.11*	26.72*
	White	3.18 (1.0)	3.33 (.8)	3.48 (.7)	3.57 (.7)	3.43 (.8)		
	Latino	2.87 (1.0)	3.20 (.9)	3.31 (.8)	3.38 (.9)	3.24 (.9)		
	Total	3.08 (1.0)	3.27 (.8)	3.40 (.8)	3.49 (.8)	3.35 (.8)		
It is safe for younger children to play outside during the day. ^B	Black	3.58 (1.4)	4.05 (1.1)	3.96 (1.1)	4.01 (1.3)	3.97 (1.2)	11.20*	31.10*
	White	3.94 (1.3)	4.10 (1.1)	4.27 (.9)	4.34 (1.0)	4.21 (1.0)		
	Latino	3.66 (1.3)	3.86 (1.1)	3.89 (1.1)	4.04 (1.1)	3.88 (1.1)		
	Total	3.81 (1.3)	4.04 (1.1)	4.14 (1.0)	4.22 (1.1)	4.10 (1.1)		
You can trust people around here. ^B	Black	3.02 (1.5)	3.21 (1.4)	3.34 (1.3)	3.47 (1.5)	3.31 (1.4)	19.63*	76.12*
	White	3.54 (1.4)	3.74 (1.2)	3.98 (1.0)	4.07 (1.1)	3.89 (1.2)		
	Latino	3.02 (1.5)	3.41 (1.2)	3.52 (1.2)	3.63 (1.3)	3.45 (1.3)		
	Total	3.32 (1.5)	3.57 (1.2)	3.77 (1.2)	3.87 (1.2)	3.70 (1.2)		
I could ask for help or a favor from neighbors. ^B	Black	3.62 (1.6)	3.78 (1.3)	3.88 (1.1)	3.86 (1.3)	3.83 (1.3)	14.95*	21.89*
	White	3.70 (1.4)	3.92 (1.1)	4.13 (1.0)	4.19 (1.1)	4.05 (1.1)		
	Latino	3.33 (1.5)	3.70 (1.2)	3.85 (1.1)	3.90 (1.2)	3.76 (1.2)		
	Total	3.60 (1.5)	3.84 (1.2)	4.03 (1.1)	4.07 (1.2)	3.95 (1.2)		
Most people around here would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance. ^B	Black	3.15 (1.7)	2.95 (1.5)	2.94 (1.5)	2.89 (1.6)	2.94 (1.5)	7.75*	41.22*
	White	2.73 (1.5)	2.53 (1.4)	2.33 (1.3)	2.26 (1.4)	2.40 (1.4)		
	Latino	3.07 (1.5)	2.77 (1.3)	2.55 (1.4)	2.75 (1.5)	2.72 (1.4)		
	Total	2.88 (1.6)	2.66 (1.4)	2.48 (1.4)	2.48 (1.5)	2.57 (1.4)		

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; * $p < .01$; ^A 1 = Rarely or never – 4 = Always; and ^B 1 = strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree.

higher levels of academic achievement, Black students' feelings of safety at school was below the mean, regardless of academic standing. Figure 2b demonstrates a relationship between academic achievement and fighting, but reveals no significant differences between races. The relationship between bullying and academic achievement was similar for White and Hispanic males, with low achieving students being the most likely to be bullied and to bully others. Black males who bullied others were also most likely to have low levels of academic achievement; however Black males of all achievement levels were less likely to report bullying than White and Hispanic males (See Figures 3a and 3b).

Substance-related factors

All substance-related variables had a negative relationship with academic achievement. When reading the mean scores for substance-use behaviors in Table 2 from right to left, the numbers get smaller as academic performance improves. Four of the six variables measured were also significant across races; however the effect sizes were smaller than those for academic achievement. Across all variables that were significant for race, black male students reported the least involvement with the associated behavior.

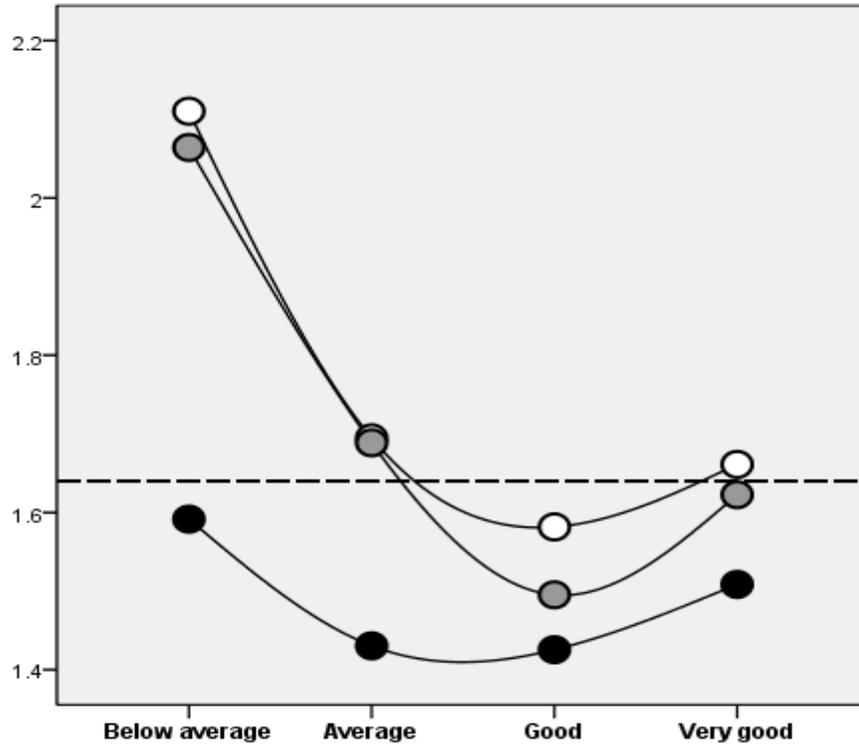
Neighborhood Safety factors

The five variables measured that were associated with neighborhood safety were significantly different across races and academic achievement. Unlike other factors explored in the current study, the effect sizes for race were greater than the effect size for academic achievement. As shown in Table 3, when reading the mean scores for each variable across races, black males students are more likely than white students to feel unsafe in their neighborhood and have difficulty trusting and relying upon neighbors.

When responding to the question, "Generally speaking, I feel safe in the area where I live," Black students who were reported high achievers were more likely to respond, "Always." However, black students across levels of academic achievement generally felt less safe than white students. As Figure 4a illustrates, high achieving Black students are the only group of students that are not above the total average of feeling safe. Black and Latino students were similar in their feelings of safety and its relationship to their academic achievement. When comparing races, the ability to trust neighbors yielded the strongest effect size ($\eta^2 = .03$). As illustrated by the second graph in Figure 3b, no group of Black or Latino male students reported a level of trust that met or exceeded the total mean score. By contrast, only White students in the "below average" academic achievement group had a mean score for trusting others that was below the total mean.

Overall, the results of the ANOVA demonstrate a relationship between factors that are associated with delinquency and academic performance for Black males. Across all racial groups, good academic performance is related to fewer experiences with bullying, fighting, weapons use, and with an overall sense that the school is a safe environment. Higher achieving Black male students also reported less overall involvement with smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, and using illicit drugs. Neighborhood characteristics that contribute to feelings of unity and safety also evinced a positive impact on academic performance. The next section discusses the implications of these findings for institutions and individuals who work to facilitate academic success among Black males.

How often have you been bullied at school? (strongly agree – higher plot; strongly disagree – lower plot).



How often have you bullied others at school? (often – higher plot; seldom – lower plot).

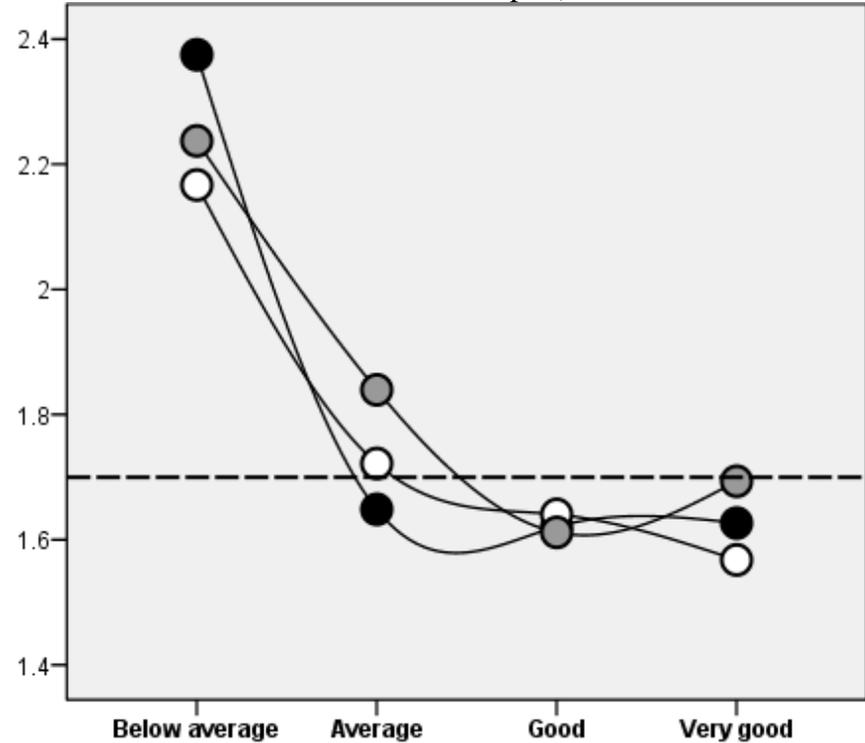
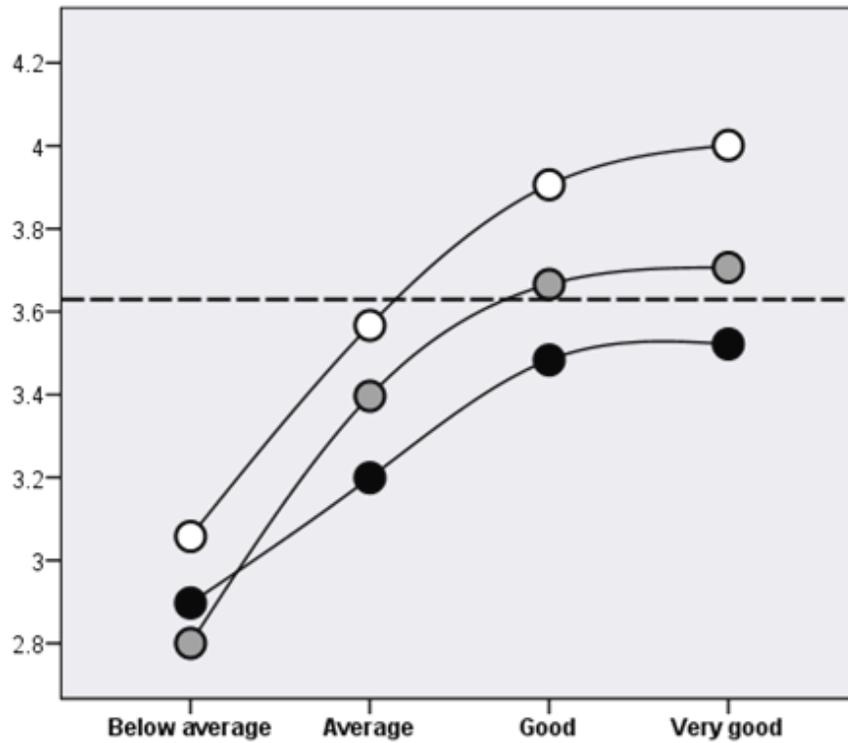


FIGURE 2a and 2b: Relationship between Race (separate plots) and Academic Achievement (X Axis) on Bullying (Y Axes). Note. ● = black Male Students; ● = Latino Male Students; ○ = white Male Students. Data Retrieved From Health Behavior In School-Age Children (2007). The dashed reference line on the Y-axis marks the estimated mean of the dependent variable.

I feel safe at this school (strongly agree – higher plot; strongly disagree – lower plot).



How many times were you in a physical fight? (often – higher plot; seldom – lower plot).

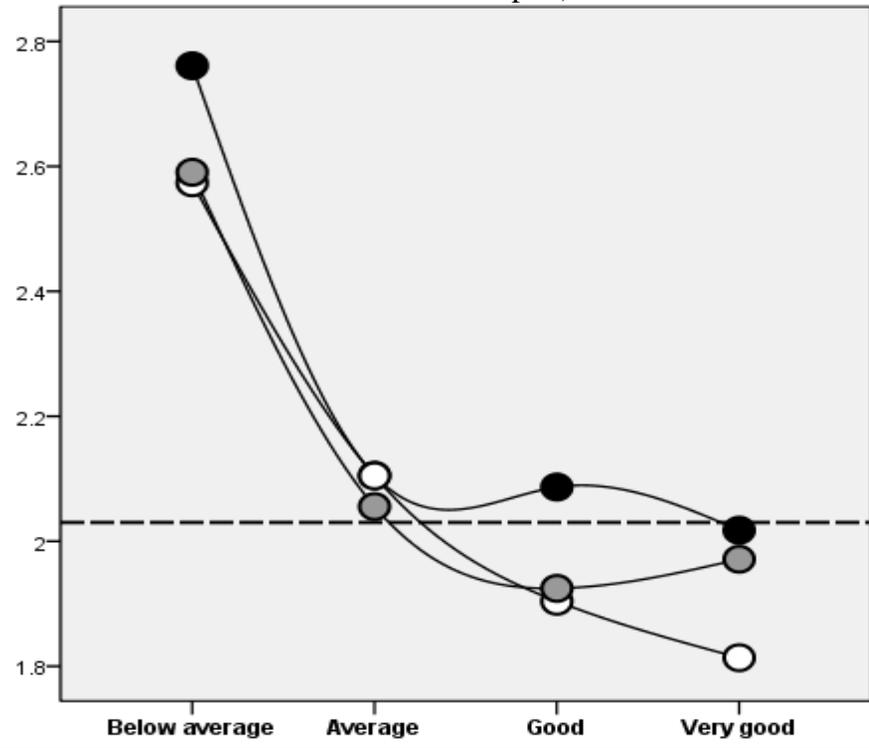
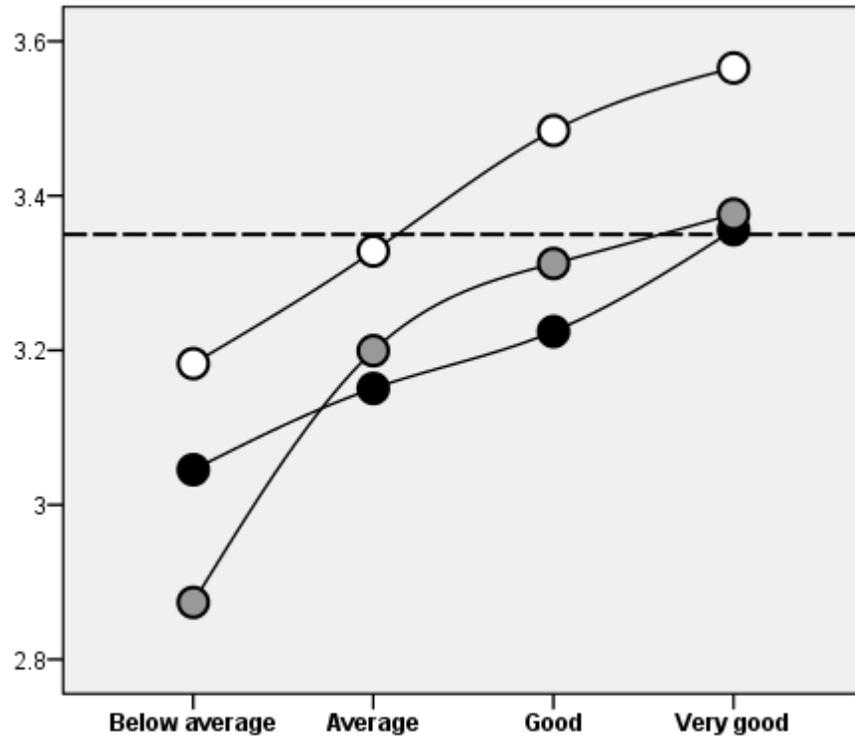


FIGURE 3a and 3b: Relationship between Race (separate plots) and Academic Achievement (X Axis) on School Safety Variables (Y Axes). Note. ● = black Male Students; ● = Latino Male Students; ○ = white Male Students. Data Retrieved From Health Behavior In School-Age Children (2007). The dashed reference line on the Y-axis marks the estimated mean of the dependent variable.

I feel safe in the area where I live (strongly agree – higher plot; strongly disagree – lower plot).



You can trust people around here (strongly agree – higher plot; strongly disagree – lower plot).

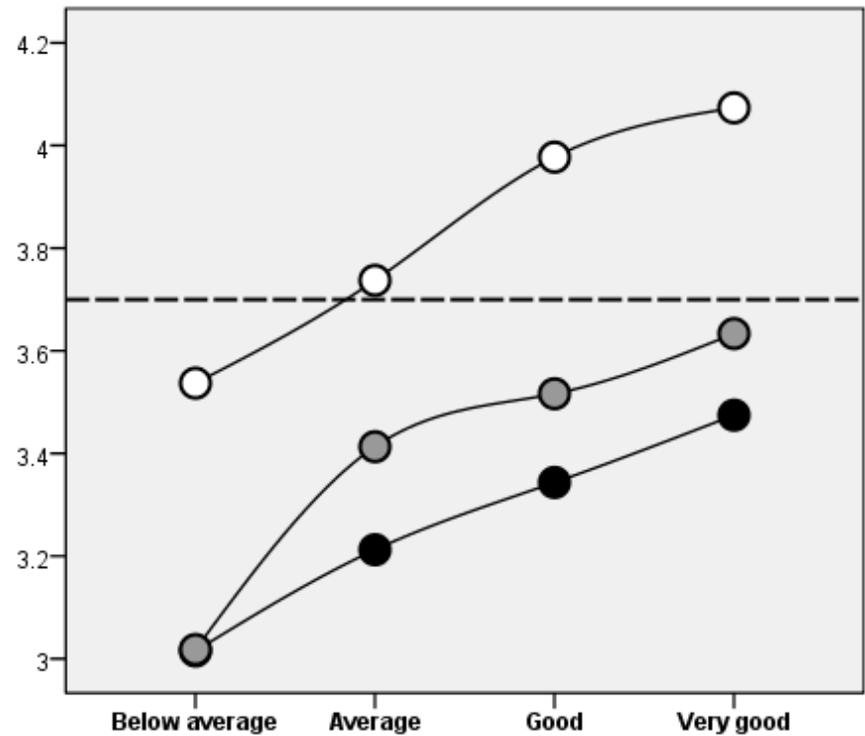


FIGURE 4a and 4b: Relationship between Race (separate plots) and Academic Achievement (X Axis) on Neighborhood Security Variables (Y Axes). Note. ● = black Male Students; ● = Latino Male Students; ○ = white Male Students. Data Retrieved From Health Behavior In School-Age Children (2007). The dashed reference line on the Y-axis marks the estimated mean of the dependent variable.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

Racial differences, as presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3, in delinquency related variables provide some insight into factors that can uniquely influence academic achievement across racial/ethnic groups. Although Black male students reported the lowest overall level of bullying, when compared to White and Latino males, Black males were the only racial group where high achievers experienced bullying at the same rate as the lowest achievers. Latino and White high achievers experienced bullying much less than their low achieving counterparts. ANOVA results revealed that low achievers in all races, most frequently, bullied others. Black male students reported more experiences with physical fights. The findings also indicate that Black and Latino males are more likely to report feeling unsafe in their school environment. With students across all races, feeling safe at school is associated with improved academic functioning. However, Black male students, regardless of academic standing, rated school safety below the average of their peers in other races.

Relative to Latino and White males, Black male students reported less involvement with drugs and alcohol. However, Black males used marijuana at a rate that was similar to their Latino and White peers, which is supported by previously reviewed literature and contradicts commonly held stereotypes about young black males. Incidentally, marijuana use evinced the most negative impact on academic achievement, when compared to other drug related behaviors. In addition, Black male students' reported tobacco use was not significantly different from White and Latino students.

Variables associated with neighborhood safety revealed the starkest racial differences. Black and Latino males were significantly more likely than White males to feel unsafe in their neighborhood and had a much more difficult time trusting neighbors. The findings also suggest that these experiences are associated with lower levels of academic success. Black and Latino males were also more likely than White males to report that their neighborhood was unsafe for children to play outside and that people in the neighborhood were prone to take advantage of others. These findings have some implications for formulating policies and practices that are conducive to academic success among Black males.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Educational policy that emphasizes the role of peer education and mediation, as well as character development, would support the findings that students learn best when they have fewer experiences with bullying and fighting. Peer support networks can be an integral component of the learning environment and supplement the important role of teachers in the classroom. Peer mentoring in schools usually involves upper class students providing social supports for younger students. Having Black males exercise more leadership and agency in the school environment can enhance academic success and reduce bullying and fighting in the school.

Safety is a factor that is uniquely related to academic success among school age Black males, therefore school and social policy should emphasize security when devising strategies to promote academic success. For example, school policies should view safety as an internal state that is central to a nurturing environment. The National Education Association's Safe Schools (2005) strategies are consistent with the findings of this study, which include: (1) eliminating

bullying and harassment; (2) expanding access to counseling, anger management and peer mediation; (3) providing ways for students to communicate with adults about rumors and threats; and (4) developing instruction that teaches values like respect and responsibility and expand opportunities for students to work with adult role models. In addition, legislators should consider ways to encourage and support schools and school districts in developing policies and practices designed to ensure student safety, developed in partnership with students.

Schools and neighborhoods should enact policies that build connections between schools and communities to improve feelings of security and reduce difficulties with trust among school-age Black males. Black males are far more likely to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods and have difficulty trusting their neighbors, which ultimately affect their academic performance. Increasing funding for community centers and providing incentive for community based organizations to monitor students' grades, visit the school and mentor children can reduce delinquency and improve academic success. Federal legislators should increase investments in Promise Neighborhoods. Promise Neighborhoods is a federal initiative to provide children and youth with academic and developmental support by fostering resilience and deepen their appreciation for their community environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The U.S. Department of Education can play a key role in helping states develop systems, strategies and policies to ensure that school leaders and teachers understand the importance of, and have the resources and support to, create positive learning environments for students. Specifically, school and community leaders can focus on the assistant deputy secretary for safe and drug-free schools' work around state indicators to ensure that the major findings on delinquency prevention at school are fully accounted for in the lowest performing schools.

Beyond the data presented in this report, many concerned citizens observe abject conditions in many public schools that serve Black males. Educators, advocates, and policymakers must do a better job of correcting deep and persistent racial disparities in education. For most, the findings in this report will remind them of, or provide statistical support for, commonly held truisms in contemporary education. Overall, the findings point to a cluster of school and social experiences and life circumstances that are associated with Black males who perform best in school. The insights gathered can help interventionists and community leaders to structure society and schools to prevent delinquency and increase levels of academic success among Black males.

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ⁱ The Cronbach alpha was lower than the general cutoff of .7. While this is lower than desired, lower alphas are sometimes used (see Flowers, 2006).