BREAKING BARRIERS

PLOTTING THE PATH TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR SCHOOL-AGE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES

2008

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CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS FOUNDATION, INC.

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Foreword

…**plot a path** to academic success for black males, rather than cast a spotlight on their failures.

Elsie L. Scott, Ph.D., President and CEO, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.

The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (CBCF) is committed to creating, identifying, analyzing and disseminating policy-oriented information critical to advancing people of African descent toward equity in education. Several years ago, the CBCF Center for Policy Analysis and Research (CPAR) began dialogue about educational issues that are important to black Americans through issue forums at our Annual Legislative Conference held each fall in Washington, D.C., and district-level forums held across the country. Over the past two years, CBCF has been joined at these forums by luminaries such as Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti, author, founder of *Third World Press* and co-founder of *Betty Shabazz International Charter School*; Dr. Ronald B. Mincy, author of *Black Males Left Behind* and the late Dr. Asa G. Hilliard III, pioneering author of *Infusion of African and African American Content in the School Curriculum*. In 2006, we sponsored *Re-educating Our Community! Taking Control* of *Learning and Education in Our Community* at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) in Atlanta, Georgia. At the forum, we enjoyed commentary from MSM President Dr. John E. Maupin Jr., former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher and U.S. Rep. David Scott of Georgia. Our discussions with scholars, policymakers and other stakeholders of black education helped us to understand the exigency of meaningful research on factors that improve academic success among black males in primary, middle and high schools.

In1954, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed racially segregated schools, primarily on the premise that black students should be afforded a quality of education that is "equal" to white students, in the landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Subsequent legislation to improve racial equity in education included *Title VI* of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and *Title IX* of the *Education Amendments of 1972*, which prohibited discrimination based on race, sex and disability in federally funded educational facilities. In 1965, *Title I* of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* expanded federal aid to economically disadvantaged children.

In many ways, the language of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* reiterates the role that the federal government plays in enhancing the educational experiences of every student, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. However, disturbing educational trends indicate a decline in positive school engagement among all males, with black males experiencing the sharpest drop. Today, African-American males have higher dropout rates, lower grade point averages and lower subsequent enrollment in institutions of higher education when compared to black females and males of other races. However, the raw data represented in studies of the "achievement gap" do little to expand our understanding of these disturbing trends.

The research presented in this report elevates the discussion of African-American males' engagement in schools and suggests policy solutions to improve their level of academic success. Contributors to this report have been careful to focus findings on meaningful solutions, rather than recapping problems. The statistical findings in the report plot a path to academic success for black males rather than cast a spotlight on their failures. Policymakers, school administrators, advocates and activists, educators, researchers, parents and students can use the report to enhance the educational experiences of school-age African-American males.

Elsie L. Scott, Ph.D.
President & CEO
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Executive Summary

Parents, teachers, researchers, school activists and policymakers agree that current educational policies inherently neglect personal, social and emotional factors that contribute to academic achievement, particularly among African-American males. Currently, less than half of black males who start high school graduate within four years, compared to 75 percent of white male students.

The present study explored factors that statistically improve educational outcomes for African-American males by analyzing academic success indicators from four national surveys: *Health Behavior in School-age Children* (HBSC: N=1225), *National Crime Victimization Survey: School Crime Supplement* (NCVS-SCS: N=849), *National Survey of America's Families* (NSAF: N=2497) and *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (NSDUH: N=1208). The domain areas explored included personal and emotional factors, family factors, social and environmental factors and school factors. Linear relationships between academic achievement and external factors are the cornerstone of the findings. A linear relationship emerges when academic achievement improved, as the level of a characteristic or asset (e.g., participation in sports or praise from teachers) increased or decreased.

> With education, I know I can go beyond my wildest dreams. With help from my teachers, family and friends – the sky is the limit!
>
> **Zaniriusz Chambers**
> **8th Grade**
>
> *"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project: African-American Males Telling Their Own Stories*

In adherence to the standards for *Scientifically-based Research*, which are mandatory for application to federal educational policy and academic instruction, this research (1) applies systematic and objective procedures; (2) uses empirical and experimental methods; (3) involves robust data analyses that have the statistical power to test hypotheses and justify conclusions; (4) uses valid data and corroborates findings across multiple measurements, and (5) has been subject to peer review by independent experts. The findings will assist policymakers, educators, school advocates and families to plot the path to academic success for school-age African-American males.

The major findings of this study include:

Personal and Emotional Factors

- Quality of life, as measured by how happy the student felt about his life, was the strongest emotional predictor of academic success among school-age black males. Academically successful African-American males were almost twice as likely to report feeling happy about the quality of their life when compared to those with failing grades.
- Feeling tired in the morning and feeling lonely were additional mental health factors that significantly impaired academic functioning among black male students.
- When estimating the impact of gender, findings suggest that African-American males' academic success is more dependent upon emotional well-being than their female counterparts.
- When exploring the relationship between future plans and academic achievement, results indicated that black males who aspired to go to college were significantly more likely to perform better in school. The majority (61 percent) of the black male respondents wanted to go to college after graduation.
- Findings regarding nutrition indicated a statistical link between dietary practices and academic achievement across all races. Consumption of more healthy foods and less junk food was associated with higher academic achievement. Black students were more likely to eat junk food more frequently – and less likely to regularly eat healthy food – than Hispanic or white students.
- Eating raw vegetables was statistically associated with higher levels of academic achievement among black males.
- High-achieving black male students reported significantly more positive interactions with classmates and less

involvement with bullying and fighting compared to their peers.

- Although black male students significantly smoke less than white and Hispanic male students, the frequency of cigarette smoking predicted poor academic achievement better than any other psychoactive substance.

Personal and Emotional Factors: Policy Implications

Policies that emphasize mentoring programs and other means to reduce isolation among school-age African-American males are likely to improve academic progress. The findings also reinforce the need for college access programs for African-American male students, such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and Upward Bound. Food policies that promote equitable access to fresh produce in African-American communities can improve academic success. Educational programs that use agricultural projects to teach students how to grow vegetables can be effective learning tools. Educational policies that emphasize the role of peer education and mediation, as well as character development, would support the finding that students learn best when they perceive their classmates to be supportive, accepting and agreeable. Finally, the findings support school-based drug prevention programs that encourage peer participation.

Family Factors

- African-American males with a father in the home reported higher levels of academic achievement.
- Across two national surveys (HBSC and NSDUH), African Americans were the only ethnic group to report more fatherless homes than fathers in the home. Only 20 percent to 25 percent of white students reported fatherless homes compared to 56 percent to 60 percent of black students.
- Findings produced strong evidence that modeling is an important component to academic development among black adolescent males. Father's education, but not mother's education, had a significant impact on black males' – but not as much for black females' academic achievement.
- Parents who helped their children with homework, who were comfortable talking to teachers, who urged their children to do well in school and who maintained high expectations generally had higher-performing children.

Family Factors: Policy Implications

Educational policy should increase attention to parent involvement in children's learning experiences. Tax breaks and other incentives can be given to parents who devote a certain number of hours to parent-teacher associations and volunteering at the school. Welfare-to-work and other labor and economic policies need to be examined to determine whether work values are compromising educational values. In addition, the research suggests that the lack of male models has a more profound academic impact on black male students than black female students. Current revisions of 25-year-old criminal justice policies and remedial efforts should consider the relationship between inmates and parolees and their children. Funding for fatherhood programs and mentoring programs is supported by the current findings. In addition, healthy marriage initiatives, which help black people to understand the material and immaterial value of marriage and family, are important in developing a culture that is more conducive to academic success. The high number of African-American males who are being raised in homes without fathers increases the need for policies to support parent cooperation programs.

Social and Environmental Factors

- African-American males who were reared in homes with more financial resources had better odds of performing well in school. African Americans are more likely to live in poverty than any other racial group. African Americans also had the greatest wealth gap, suggesting that their finances are more sensitive to national economic trends.
- Black students in urban environments had significantly higher levels of academic achievement when compared with black students in rural environments.
- Involvement in the juvenile justice system greatly impairs academic achievement among black males. African-American males are more likely to spend time in jail or a detention center than any other race. Young black

males are involved in the juvenile justice system at twice the rate of white males.

- School-based activities, especially sports, had the strongest impact on academic achievement. Time spent using computers also predicted high achievement among black male students.

Social and Environment Factors: Policy Implications

Educational policies should consider the natural social disadvantages that students might have from low-income homes, by supplementing schools in impoverished areas with resources to build and maintain school-based activities. In addition, policymakers should encourage research to better understand the challenges and identify support for African-American students in rural areas. Juvenile justice policies should be examined to reduce the frequency and burden of jail and detention center involvement among black males. NCLB mandates for educational standards in juvenile detention centers should be followed to minimize academic distractions. Problems associated with the "digital divide" should be addressed within the current scope of educational policy. Volunteering and religious activity also appear to be important social reinforcers of educational values. Community service for class credit at public high schools could help black men gain a more secure investment in the educational process.

School Factors

- "Liking" school and not being "bored" by school appears to be language that is particularly salient to school-adaptive patterns for black males. Two national surveys (HBSC and NSDUH) demonstrated that the more black males report that they like school, and the less they report being bored by school, the better their educational outcomes.
- Across three national surveys (HBSC, NSDUH and NCVS-SCS), the profile of a teacher that was particularly effective in fostering academic growth among black males emerged as teachers who were interested in their students "as a person," treated them fairly, encouraged them to express their views and gave extra help when needed. Teachers who were effective also routinely let their students know when they did a good job.
- Black male students perform best in environments that they perceive as safe. High-achieving black male students reported more often that they feel safe at school. Low-achieving black male students were more likely to carry a weapon to school for self-defense than middle- or high-achieving black male students.
- Current school safety measures explored in this study did not have a relationship to academic achievement among African-American students. When comparing school safety measures by race, findings indicate that schools that educate black students devoted a disproportionate amount of resources to metal detectors and security officers. A black student is almost 500 percent more likely to pass through a metal detector than a white student. However, black students were significantly more likely than white or Hispanic students to feel unsafe at school.

School Factors: Policy Implications

Project-based learning, inquiry-based science, student-centered learning, inclusive multicultural education, critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education are educational strategies that are consistent with the findings and should be incorporated into revised educational policy. The findings suggest that teachers are most effective when they have a personal connection to their students. When educational policies outline criteria for teacher and teaching standards, schools should measure holistic teacher qualities including: (1) ability to make students feel supported and respected; (2) aptitude for creating forums for students to express themselves and (3) ability to critique students without making them feel bad about themselves. Programs should be implemented to instill a spirit of activism among diverse educators by equipping them with the tools necessary to influence educational and social policy. Safety is a factor that is uniquely related to academic success among school-age black males. School policies should view safety as an internal state that is sensitive to a nurturing environment.

Preface

The national discourse on school-age African-American males is veiled in a "litany of pathology" that reiterates negative statistics about African-American males in the media, policy and research. The litany has engrossed the nation in the fallacy that underperforming and marginalized African American males are the norm and that excellence and success are nonexistent in this population.. Most notably, the litany does not examine the role of institutionalized racism in systematically disenfranchising African-American males nor does it credit them with creating strategic equations for overcoming oppression.

Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-age African American Males provides a fresh perspective and in-depth analysis of the social, emotional and cognitive factors that contribute to African-American male students' well-being and school success. The report recommends policy advocacy that supports educational equity and holistic opportunities to learn – the centerpiece of which is access to quality teachers and supportive learning environments. *Breaking Barriers* reveals that African-American males who are positively engaged in school are more likely to report being happy with their lives, that they "like" school and that they feel respected by their teachers.

The classroom teacher is the critical linchpin in student engagement. The statistical findings in *Breaking Barriers* are consistent with the research literature that confirms a relationship between teacher quality and diversity and student success. Even still, too many African American students languish in schools that have high concentrations of noncertified teachers and high turnover rates among principals. Further, African American (and poor) students are 70 percent more likely than their white and affluent peers to have a teacher who is not certified in English, math, science, and social studies.

Further complicating matters is the tremendous demographic mismatch between the public-school student population and its teaching force. Nearly 20 percent of public-school students are African American. Yet slightly less than 8 percent of the nation's teachers are African American. In urban schools outside of central cities, 91 percent of public school teachers are white. In urban schools inside central cities, 73 percent of teachers are white. The demographic mismatch between African-American students and the adults who teach them has reached the point that many African-American students can get through 13 years of public education and never have an African-American teacher.

The research findings in *Breaking Barriers* indicate a relationship between academic success and a father's presence, a father's education and ease of talking to fathers for African-American male students. Here, Toldson's findings lend support to the growing body of evidence that confirms the impact of teacher diversity on student success. Tremendous benefits accrue to African American students when they have African American teachers. African-American students who attend schools with high concentrations of African-American teachers are less likely to be expelled or suspended, more likely to be recommended for gifted education, less likely to be placed in special education and more likely to graduate high school in four years (Fenwick, 2001). Additionally, in her study about teacher perceptions of African-American male students, Maddox (1999) found that African-American teachers are more likely than their white peers to describe African-American male students as "intellectually gifted" and to report that these students engaged in positive behaviors such as homework completion, attending school regularly and assuming leadership roles in classroom activities. These outcomes point to the primacy of the teacher-child relationship as explained in *Breaking Barriers* and affirm Gordon's (2000) assertion:

> Teachers do more than just teach content. They stand as models for what it is like to be an educated person. They also serve as surrogate parents, guides and mentors to young people. If students are to believe that they may one day be educated people who can make a positive contribution to society, then they need to see diverse examples.

Perhaps the singular best thing that policymakers can do to respond to Dr. Ivory A. Toldson's charge is to expand the minority teacher pipeline and fund efforts to increase the number of African-American males who become teachers. Less than 2 percent of the nation's teachers are African-American males. When African-American male children are inundated with negative images of African-American male adults there is a deleterious effect. That deleterious effect can be reversed, however, as one African-American male high school student explained when describing his school, which had a high number of African American men in nontraditional positions as counselors, assistant principals, teachers, and technology directors:

> When I watch TV, I see black men fighting, selling drugs and going to jail. When I came to Southside [Comprehensive High School in Atlanta, Georgia] I saw Dr. Shepherd [an African-American male principal] and all these other black men working together. And I thought to myself, if they are working together here, maybe there are black men like them in lots of other places doing the same thing (Carter and Fenwick, 2001).

This young man's reflection confirms C. Eric Lincoln's advice that "the young be inspired to noble aims and lofty goals (1972)." We have a moral obligation to inspire youth to achieve their highest potential. Whatever we do to cultivate and accelerate African American male students' success and wellbeing, in the end, benefits all students and society at large.

Leslie T. Fenwick, Ph.D.
Dean
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Background

…**break** over the unnatural **barriers** and occupy higher ground.

Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson (1933) –The Mis-Education of the Negro

Identifying the Barriers

The research presented in this report is an outgrowth of an ongoing programmatic investigation into predictors of academic success among school-age African-American[1] males. Parents, researchers, school activists and conscientious elected officials agree that current educational policies inherently neglect personal, family, social and school factors that contribute to academic achievement, particularly among African-American males. The literature that informs contemporary educational policy in the United States is replete with broad-brush racial comparisons of academic achievement that point to an "achievement gap" between African Americans and other ethnic groups. Racial disparities in standardized test scores, grade point averages and college enrollment, are a few indicators that breed consternation among people invested in black education. Currently, only half of black male students who start high school graduate within four years, compared to 75 percent of white male students (Edney, 2004; Valentine, 2005). In 2000, the Justice Policy Institute found evidence that more black men are in prison than in college (Browne, 2002). By contrast, in 1980, black men in college outnumbered black men in prison 3 to 1.

> If it wasn't for school, who knows where I'd be today. I have been living in poverty for almost 10 years and my community is horrible. It looks like it has been ransacked. There are some good things about my community though, like some of the people. Most of the teenage guys (maybe 50%) are high-school dropouts. Not me, though; I have high expectations of going to college.
>
> **Zaniriusz Chambers, 8th Grade**
>
> *"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project*
> *African-American Males*
> *Telling Their Own Stories*

In 1989, Janice Hale-Benson suggested that black children do not *enter* school disadvantaged; rather they *leave* school disadvantaged. The ultimate question she posed was "How is it that schools reproduce failure for black children generation after generation (Hale-Benson et al., 1989)?" Dismal statistics presented with little social or historical context have resulted in educational policies and practices that perpetually use a deficit model when working with black males. The deficit model focuses on problems, instead of evaluating strengths (Tucker and Herman, 2002). In addition, deficit models place underachieving black males at the center of the research and diminish the relevance of high-achieving black males.

Every black community, regardless of economic resources, contains shining examples of young black men who achieve in school, regardless of immeasurable social disadvantages. Exploring characteristics that vary on the spectrum of African-American male achievement levels provide a greater level of depth and insight into factors that are associated with high achievement among African-American males. A recent comprehensive review of the literature on educational research methodologies and race and school achievement called for "student-based inquiry" approaches to achievement research (Wiggan, 2007).

The statistical findings presented in this report adhere to an edict among contemporary educational scholars to expand the scope and relevancy of research on African-American students (Jackson and Moore, 2008; Spencer, 2005). Notably, Margaret Beale Spencer (2005) indicated that informed research strategies should: (a) expand the theoretical assumptions implicit in the work by employing strengths-based approaches and avoid having a narrow

[1] African American and black are used interchangeably throughout this report.

focus on risks factors; (b) eschew negative assumptions about African-American youth and their families and (c) acknowledge the presence of white privilege and its contribution to the achievement gap.

Relevant Literature

Previous studies have presented evidence that a variety of factors increase the likelihood that African-American males will achieve in school (Lewis et al., 2008). Family background, self-concept, teacher expectations and value orientation are factors that have been positively linked to academic achievement among black students (Parham et al., 1989). Similarly, another study found that student effort, parent-child communication and peer associations strengthened achievement among black students (Stewart, 2007).

When linking intrinsic factors to academic success among black students, Shernoff and Schmidt (2008) found an "engagement–achievement paradox," whereby black students reported higher school engagement but lower grade point averages when compared with white students. In a study of academically gifted black students, Donna Ford and her colleagues (2008) noted an "attitude-behavior discrepancy," whereby black students would attribute high academic achievement to "acting white." The study highlighted negative peer pressure as a unique barrier to academic achievement among black students (Ford et al., 2008).

The literature also points to unique cultural aspects of black development, such as collectivism and resistance to racism, as factors that increase the need for the mental health community to become stakeholders in black education (Berry and Asamen, 1989). Similar research suggests that motivational factors, self-esteem, self-concept and ethnic identity are associated with achievement among African-American males (Graham et al., 1989; Powell et al., 1989).

Parents and family also serve as important contributors to African-American students' achievement (Howard, 2003). Hill's study found that maternal warmth or acceptance was positively related to the early development of academic skills, while maternal hostility had a negative effect (Hill, 2001). Later mastery of reading and math have been attributed to parents' achievement-oriented behaviors (Halle et al., 1997). Another study that examined African-American students' transition to ninth grade found the mother to have a prominent role in student adjustment (Newman et al., 2000). Finally, in a study of rural African-American families, the authors found that parent–child interactions were the study's most robust predictors of African-American adolescent success factors. Adolescent participants who had more frequent communication with parents had higher levels of cognitive and social competence (Toldson et al., 2006).

Social and economic factors have also been cited as important considerations for educators of black students. Research highlights the need for community-based partnership education programs to empower black students to overcome adverse socioeconomic conditions (Tucker and Herman, 2002). In addition, afterschool programs have demonstrated effectiveness in improving school performance, specifically with black male students (Fashola, 2003). Fashola stressed the need for policy changes and enhanced legislative support for non-school-hour activities for black males. Successful afterschool programs emphasized the bonds between students and teachers, future objectives and aspirations and student work opportunities (Fashola and Slavin, 1998).

Finally, the school climate is a factor that has been linked to academic achievement among black students. Students' perceptions that the school is a cohesive environment and student-teacher relationships were important contributors to successful academic outcomes (Stewart, 2007). Stewart posited from her findings that school initiatives should incorporate individual-level and school structural factors to heighten achievement among black students. Black students, however, are at a greater risk of receiving negative attitudes from their teachers (Spencer, 2005). In a study that explored the relationship between risk and protective factors and academic achievement, Spencer (2005) found that students who were considered to have more psychosocial vulnerabilities elicited more negative perceptions from teachers. Incidentally, teachers considered black students to have more psychosocial vulnerabilities.

Plotting the Path

The present study explores factors that statistically improve educational outcomes for African-American males by analyzing academic success indicators from four national surveys:

- Health Behavior in School-age Children (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services et al., 2001);
- National Crime Victimization Survey: School Crime Supplement (U.S. Dept. of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006);
- National Survey of America's Families (Urban Institute and Child Trends, 2007); and
- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services et al., 2007).

Linear relationships between academic achievement and external factors are the cornerstone of the findings. A linear relationship emerges when academic achievement improved, as the level of a characteristic or asset (e.g., participation in sports or praise from teachers) increased or decreased. Four factors that have been empirically linked to academic achievement in previous observations served as exploratory targets: (1) personal and emotional factors, including emotional well-being and self-esteem, future aspirations, nutrition, peer relationships and substance use; (2) family factors, including household composition, parents' education and parents' relationship with children; (3) social and environmental factors, including economic standing, population density, the juvenile justice system, and civic, community, school-based and extracurricular activities; and (4) school factors, including perceptions of school, relationships with teachers and school safety.

With the composite of surveys reaching over 5,700 school-age African-American males from across the United States, the report is a comprehensive examination of academic success factors for young black men. In adherence to the standards for *Scientifically-based Research*, which are mandatory for application to federal educational policy and academic instruction, this research (1) applies systematic and objective procedures; (2) uses empirical and experimental methods; (3) involves robust data analyses that has the statistical power to test hypotheses and justify conclusions; (4) uses valid data and corroborates findings across multiple measurements; and (5) has been subject to peer review by independent experts. The findings will assist policymakers, educators, school advocates and families to plot the path to academic success for school-age African-American males.

Materials and Methods

Surveys and participants, procedures, measures and analysis plan

Surveys and Participants

The study population included all school-age African-American males who completed the Health Behavior in School-age Children (HBSC: N= 1225), National Crime Victimization Survey: School Crime Supplement (NCVS-SCS: N=849), National Survey of America's Families (NSAF: N= 2497) and National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH: N=1208). The total sample of this study was 5,779 school-age African-American males. Depending on the research question, African-American females and school-age males in other racial groups were used as comparison groups.

Databases were selected for this study that: 1) had a clear indicator of academic achievement, such as grades; 2) had adequate African-American adolescent male representation; 3) was a national survey that included multiple states and geographic areas; and 4) had adequate measures of contributing factors, such as parent relationship, school environment and involvement in extracurricular activity. All databases are indexed for public analysis at the *Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research*.

Procedures

Health Behavior in School-age Children (HBSC)

The World Health Organization (WHO) collected data for the HBSC survey between 1997 and 1998. 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 included 664 schools, in a stratified, two-stage cluster sample of classes at grades six through 10. Schools were stratified by racial/ethnic status, geographic region and Metropolitan Statistical Area status.

The HBSC surveyed 11-, 13- and 15-year-old children's attitudes and experiences concerning a range of health-related behaviors. The survey seeks to inform health promotion and educational policy aimed at school-age children nationally. A participating school representative (e.g., 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 resulting sample consists of 15,686 sixth-, seventh-, eighth-, ninth- and 10th-grade students at public and private schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Of this number, 1,225 were African-American males. The WHO reported that of the 17,000 participants, 835 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 479 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.

National Crime Victimization Survey: School Crime Supplement (NCVS-SCS)

Using data from the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Justice gathered data for the SCS as a supplement to the NCVS. The NCVS-SCS used a stratified, multi-stage cluster sample design. The Bureau of Justice described their selection of respondents as a "rotating panel design," in which households were randomly selected and all age-eligible individuals became members of a panel. Those selected in the panel were interviewed every six months for a total of seven interviews over a three-year period. The Bureau of Justice designated the first interview as the incoming rotation and the second through the seventh interview were in the continuing rotations. After the seventh interview, the household leaves the panel and a new household is rotated into the sample.

The NCVS-SCS surveyed 12- to 18-year-old adolescents who attended school in 2005. The survey population responded to questions regarding crime prevention measures employed by their schools, their participation in after-school activities, their perception of school rules, the presence of weapons, drugs, alcohol and gangs in their schools, and their fear of victimization at school. The primary purpose of the School Crime Supplement is to obtain information about school-related victimizations so that policymakers, academic researchers, practitioners at the federal, state and local levels and special interest groups who are concerned with crime in schools can make informed decisions concerning policies and programs.

The NCVS-SCS used paper and pencil interviewing and computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Initial interviews were conducted in respondents' households and subsequent computer-assisted interviews were conducted by an interviewer calling from a centralized telephone facility using an automated version of the paper instrument to administer the questions. Generally, interviews were conducted directly with the 12- to 18-year-old target. In unique situations, the Bureau of Justice conducted "proxy interviews" whereby one household member answers the questions for another. Proxy interviews were used if a parent did not consent for a 12- or 13-year-old respondent or if the household member was physically or mentally unable to answer the questions. The total sample of the NCVS-SCS was 11,525 12- to 18-year-olds who attended school at any time during the six months prior to the month of the interview. African-American males comprised 849 of the respondents.

The Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board (DRB) vetted data collected for the NCVS-SCS. For confidentiality and anonymity, recoding procedures and a control number scrambling routine were performed before the file was released for public use. In addition, personally identifying information, such as respondents' schools and city were omitted from the final dataset. Responses to the NCVS-SCS are confidential by law under BJS Title 42, United States Code, Sections 3735 and 3789g and by the Census Bureau under Title 13, United States Code, Section 9.

National Survey of America's Families (NSAF)

The Urban Institute collected data for the NSAF. The present study used the most recent round of surveys, which were collected in 2003. The NSAF selected households primarily from a list-assisted, random-digit dialing (RDD) sample of telephone numbers and alternatively by an area probability sample of households without telephones. A dual-frame design was used to draw samples separately from 13 focal states. The focal states were selected based on how well they represent the nation as a whole, to allow for national- as well as state-level analysis of data. The survey oversampled for adequate representation of low-income families with children.

The NSAF included household surveys that explored the well-being of children, adults and their families. The present study used data from households with children under age 18 and omitted the portion of the sample that included childless adults and emancipated minors. Individuals designated as the Most Knowledgeable Adult (MKA) in the household completed interviews for the NSAF. The MKA were persons in the household who was most knowledgeable about the questions being asked about the focal child or children. The Urban Institute collected the data from families in two stages: First, a screener interview administered to determine household eligibility, followed by a second, extended interview. The extended interview typically lasted for about 45-50 minutes.

Of the 133,503 households that were screened, detailed extended telephone interviews were conducted with 43,157. Of the individual family members surveyed, 34,332 were children. School-age African-American males comprised 2,497 of the family members surveyed. The Urban Institute used recoding techniques to restrict the data from being used to identify specific people or establishments.

National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

The NSDUH used a stratified 50-state design with a multistage area probability sample for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey sampling techniques allow for enhanced state estimates based on minimum sample sizes per state. The design oversampled youths and young adults, so that each state's sample was evenly distributed among major age groups.

The study population was designated to include all youth, aged 12 to 17 years, sampled in the NSDUH. Survey instruments primarily measured the scope and correlates of drug use in the United States. Correlates explored in the

present study primarily involved "youth experiences," which covered a range of topics, including neighborhood upbringing, unlawful activities, peer associations, social support, extracurricular activities and exposure to substance abuse prevention and education programs.

Surveys were gathered through computer-assisted administration. The target population for the 2005-2006 NSDUH survey included the civilian, non-institutionalized population of the United States who were 12 years of age or older at the time of the survey. Youth age 12-17 years were selected for participation in the survey based on multistage area probability sampling. Each respondent who completed a full interview was given a $30 incentive. The resulting sample consists of the NSDUH was 55,905. The total number of school-age African-American males was 1,208.

Micro Agglomeration, Substitution, Subsampling and Calibration (MASSC) methods were used to protect respondent confidentiality. The steps included eliminating variables for which there was a high risk that individuals may possibly be identified and collapsing the values of other variables, in addition to subsampling records and substituting data from donors.

MEASURES

Academic achievement

Academic achievement among school-age African-American males was the primary response construct in this study. Four national surveys (HBSC, NCVS-SCS, NSAF and NSDUH) that recorded specific indices of school-related competence were used to sort survey respondents into various levels of academic achievement. Indices measured included self-reports of the targets' grades and their perception of how their teachers might rate their academic performance, as well as reports from the most knowledgeable adult in the household (usually the parent). The following is a summary of the specific response indices.

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.

NCVS-SCS recorded academic achievement with the item, "During this school year, across all subjects have you gotten mostly…" Students who participated in this survey responded by indicating the letter grade, A through F, that they were most likely to achieve during the school year.

NSAF measured academic achievement with the "Positive School Engagement (PSE)" index. The PSE is a variable created using scores from the most knowledgeable adult in the household, who was asked how often the child (1) cares about doing well in school, (2) only works on schoolwork when forced to, (3) does just enough schoolwork to get by and (4) always does homework. The response categories included (a) all of the time, (b) most of the time, (c) some of the time and (d) none of the time.

NSDUH recorded responses to the statement, "Grades for last semester/grading period completed." Respondents selected one of the following options: (1) an "A+", "A" or "A-minus" average, (2) a "B+", "B" or "B-minus" average, (3) a "C+", "C" or "C-minus" average or (4) a "D" or less than a "D" average.

Contributing factors

The causal determinants of central interest are (1) personal and emotional factors; (2) family factors; (3) social and environmental factors; and (4) school factors. To improve the clarity of the findings, specific questions and indexes that measured various aspects of each causal determinant are listed and explained throughout the report. The following are general descriptions of the four factors that were posited to have a relationship with academic achievement among African-American males.

Personal and emotional factors explored emotional well-being and self-esteem, nutrition, peer relationships and substance use. Emotional well-being and self-esteem consisted of many affective components such as quality of life, happiness, loneliness, nervousness and despondence. In addition, some psychosomatic features, such as feeling tired in the morning, were explored. A mental health scale that was administered in the NSAF was also used in this

study. Students' future plans were ascertained through a direct question that asked what they planned to do after high school. Students were asked how frequently they ate or drank a variety of commonly consumed foods and beverages to assess nutrition. Peer relationships gauged students' self-report of the extent to which they found their friendships to be meaningful and the communication with their peers to be positive. The study also assessed whether bullying and fighting characterized the students' social lives. Substance abuse was assessed with questions that measured the respondents' use of tobacco products, illicit drugs and alcohol. The study also explored the extent of drug and alcohol use at the respondents' schools, the perception of their parents toward drug and alcohol use and drug use and attitudes of their peers.

Family factors that were posited to contribute to academic success among school-age African-American males included household composition, parents' education and parents' relationship with children. The presence of a father in the household and two-parent versus single-parent homes were compared to assess the impact of household composition on academic achievement. Parents' education compared the academic achievement of students whose father or mother did not finish high school, graduated from high school, had some education after high school, or graduated from college. Indices of parents' relationship with their children consisted of ease of communication with father and mother, the extent to which the parents feel angered or frustrated with the student, the parents' involvement in the child's school and parenting practices, like encouragement and discipline.

The social and environmental factors explored consisted of economic standing, population density, the role of the juvenile justice system and involvement with civic, community, school-based and extracurricular activities. Economic standing was measured with students' perception of whether their family was "well off," the annual household income of the family and the level of poverty. For population density, academic achievement was compared between school-age African-American males who lived in urban, suburban, small towns and rural areas. Juvenile justice system involvement was based on the respondents' self report of whether they had been to jail or a detention center. Volunteering, religious activity, youth activities, such as using a computer, watching TV, playing sports and school-based activities, such as clubs and team sports, were activities that measured the students level of civic and community involvement.

School factors explored the relationship between perceptions of school, relationships with teachers and school safety issues and academic achievement. Perceptions of school explored how much the respondents enjoy going to school and are not bored by school, as well as whether they found the schoolwork important and meaningful. Perceptions also included measures that gauged how restrictive the students found school. Relationships with teachers reflected the students' report of how much the teachers were interested in them, respected them, treated them fairly, provided them with positive feedback and encouraged them to express their views. School safety issues explored the students' perception that school was a safe environment and their reported need to carry a weapon to school for self defense. The students also reported school safety measures used at their schools.

Analysis Plan

Due to the large volume of variables, this study used "explore, analyze, explore" cycles, in which initial analytic procedures involved exploratory techniques to reveal the underlying distributions of each response variable and covariates. For response categories whereby the survey questionnaire asked many questions that seem to measure similar constructs, principle components analysis was used to reduce the data before using multivariate techniques. This effectively reduced redundancy in the findings and limited the chance of reporting any significant relationship that did not exist. Another strategy used to restrict the range of the variables used: stepwise multiple regression analyses. A stepwise multiple regression is a procedure that only accepts variables when they significantly affect the variance of the construct of interest, or in this case, levels of academic achievement among black males.

The principle analytic techniques used in this study was an analysis of the variance (ANOVA) in levels of academic achievement among black males and general linear modeling approaches that help to reveal differences in the relationship between academic achievement and an associated variable along race or gender lines. The hypothesized relationships between academic achievement and external measures were accepted or rejected based on the p-value. Where the p was less than .05, the likelihood that the reported result is due to random chance factors

is only 5 percent. In most cases, this study did not set a standard significance level. Rather, the actual p-values were used to gauge statistical certainty and values that ranged from .05 to .000 were interpreted.

Means plots are used throughout the report to display the linear relationship between various indicators of academic achievement and hypothesized covariates. A perfect linear relationship emerged when each level of academic achievement increased or decreased when the relationship with the covariate strengthened or weakened. A bend in the linear plot at a point signifies a more curvilinear relationship. In this study, the rare occurrences of a 'bend' typically happened between B and A students. This would happen, for example, if B-students had better communication skills than A-, C-, D- and F-students. Bonferroni post hoc analyses were used to statistically measure differences between levels of academic achievement. Many plots also include a dashed reference line on the Y-axis that marked 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.

Limitations

There are several limitations that must be considered within the context of the findings. First, since data were collected about academic performance, some students and proxies may have used impression management during self-report procedures. Although all surveys were confidential, some respondents may have embellished grades or other information to present their abilities and achievements most favorably. In addition, the surveys were all lengthy and solicited information beyond this study's scope. Their length may create some fatigue and lead to "Yea-Saying" or "Nay-Saying" whereby respondents tend to select only the positive or negative answers on the survey.

Personal and Emotional Factors

Personal and emotional factors, including emotional well-being and self-esteem, future plans, nutrition, peer-relationships and substance use

I think sometimes we don't get enough sleep and can't stay up during class, which affects how much information you get from the teacher. From that you don't take very good notes. Then, you study bad notes and have the wrong information. Now, you take test and get a bad grade. That gives people further reason to believe that we are dumb and don't know anything.

Brian Bunkley, 8th Grade

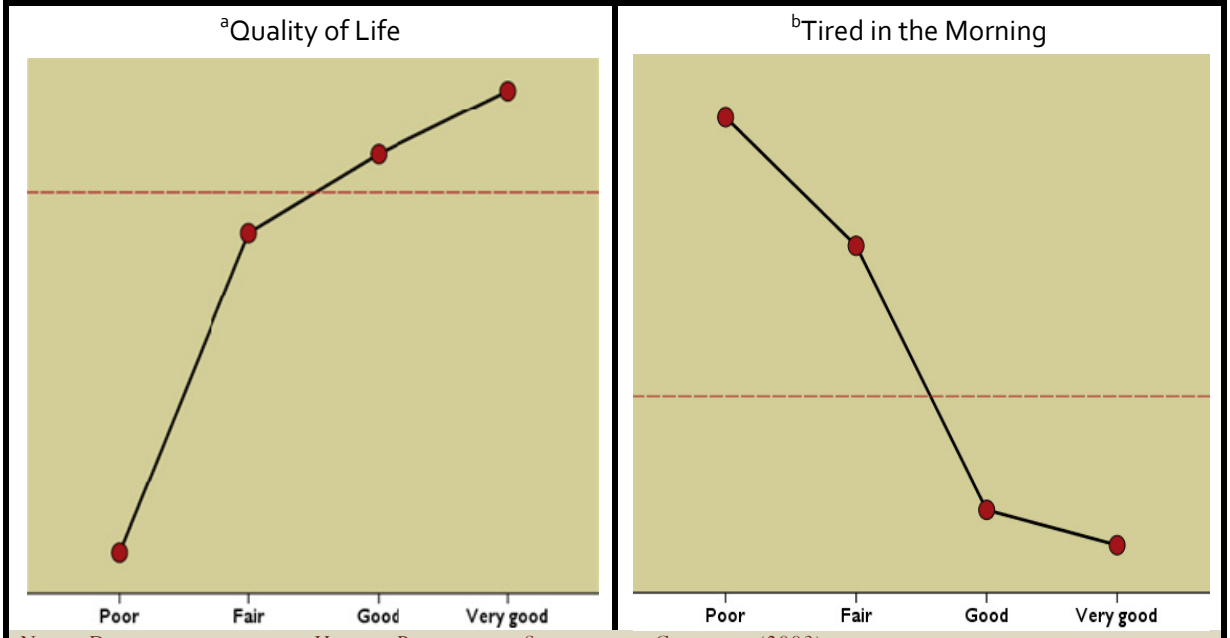
"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project

American Males Telling Their Own Stories

Emotional Well-being and Self-Esteem

A wide range of factors directly and indirectly measured emotional wellbeing and self-esteem in the HBSC dataset, including measures of self-worth, psychomotor stressors and use of psychotropic medication. In order to minimize the presence of random significance, stepwise multiple regression analysis was used, whereby measures of wellbeing and self-esteem that significantly increased or decreased academic achievement were accepted into the equation and others were thrown out. Of the factors proposed, three demonstrated a significant relationship with academic achievement: (1) quality of life, (2) tired in the morning and (3) feel lonely (Do you ever feel lonely?). ANOVA results revealed that collectively the three factors had an F(3) value of 9.03 with a p of less than or equal to .001. Figure 1.1 displays the linear pattern of the top two factors and academic achievement among African-American males, with the distribution around the mean of quality of life and tired in the morning (represented by the red dashed reference line). The figures show that as the self-reported quality of life improves, academic achievement also improves. The opposite is true of feeling tired in the morning. Students who reported being more frequently tired in the morning had poorer performance in school.

Figure 1.1: The linear relationship between wellness factors (Y-axes) and academic achievement among African-American males (X-axes)



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) In general, how do you feel about your life at present? (Range = I'm not happy at all; I don't feel very happy; I feel very happy; and I feel quite happy); (b) How often do you feel tired when you go to school in the morning? (Range = Rarely or never; Occasionally; 1 to 3 times a week; and 4 or more times a week).

Quality of life, which addressed the question "In general, how do you feel about your life at present?" had the greatest impact on the variance in grades among African-American students. To further scrutinize the relationship between quality of life and academic achievement, descriptive statistics with Pearson Chi-Square was used. Cross-tabulated scores on quality of life and academic achievement revealed that African-American male students who receive very good grades were almost twice as likely (64.3 percent compared to 33.3 percent) to report feeling "very happy" about the quality of their life. Thirty-eight percent of black male students with poor academic performance reported not being happy with their life, compared to only 13 percent of the students with good grades. Pearson Chi-Square (X^2 = 75.94, df = 9) indicated a less than .01 percent probability that the differences are due to chance alone.

The NSAF dataset was explored to further explain the relationship between mental health and wellbeing and academic success among African-American males. A MANOVA was run on the five items that comprise the NSAF Mental Health Scale, with positive school engagement (two levels) as one factor and gender of participants as the second factor. No significant differences between male and female students' were found. Positive school engagement exhibited significant main effects for all five items including: (1) very nervous in past month; (2) felt calm and peaceful in last month; (3) felt downhearted in last month; (4) was a happy person in last month and (5) could not be cheered up in the last month. Collectively, the items yielded a Hotelling's Trace of .036, F (5) = 13.7, p < .001. The linear relationship of the mean score of the mental health factors and positive school engagement is displayed in Figure 1.2.

ANOVA was used to explore the main and interaction effects of each item. A significant interaction effect, F (1) = 7.36, p < .001, between gender and positive school engagement was found for the item, "Was a happy person in last month." As the first figure in Figure 1.2 illustrates, academic achievement is significantly more sensitive to happiness among African-American boys than for African-American girls.

Figure 1.2: The linear relationship between wellness factors (Y-axes) and positive school engagement among African-American males (X-axes)

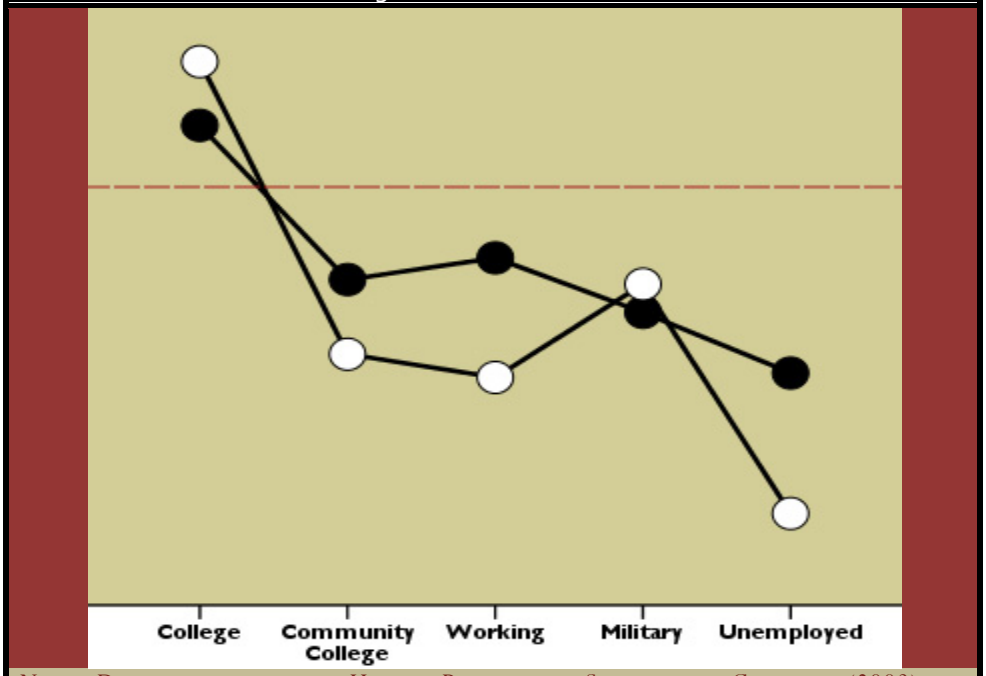
NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF AMERICA'S FAMILIES (2002)

X Axis = Positive School Engagement, as a dichotomous and continuous variable; Red line=females. Blue line=males. (a) How much of the time during the past month have you been a happy person? Male/Female comparison (Range: All of the time; Most of the time; Some of the time; and None of the time); (b) The respondent mental health scale is derived by the sum of responses that asks how often in the past month the respondent felt nervous, felt calm or peaceful, felt downhearted and blue, happy or felt down in the dumps.

Future plans

Using HBSC dataset the level of academic achievement was compared among black males with different reported future plans. When replying to the question, "What do you think you will be doing when you finish high school?" the majority (61 percent) of the black male respondents replied, "4-year college or university," and less than 1 percent planned to be unemployed. The remaining future plans were evenly split between those who planned to go to a community college, work, the military or who did not know. Black male students who planned to go to a 4-year college or university reported significantly higher levels of academic achievement than all other groups ($F = 6.56$, $df = 6$, $p = .000$). As Figure 1.3 indicates, black male students who aspired to go to a 4-year college were the only group of black male students who reported a level of academic achievement that was higher than the mean of their peers (represented by the red dashed reference line). When comparing the relationship between future plans and academic achievement across races, a more lucid pattern emerged for white males. White males who aspired to go to a 4-year college reported higher levels of academic achievement than black males, however, black males who planned to go straight to work or to be unemployed had significantly higher levels than white males with identical plans. This was a statistically significant interaction ($F = 2.92$, $df = 12$, $p = .000$).

Figure 1.3: The relationship between plans for the future[a] (X-axis) and academic achievement among African-American males (Y-axis)



Note. Data retrieved from Health Behavior in School-age Children (2003)

● = black male students; ○ = white male students.

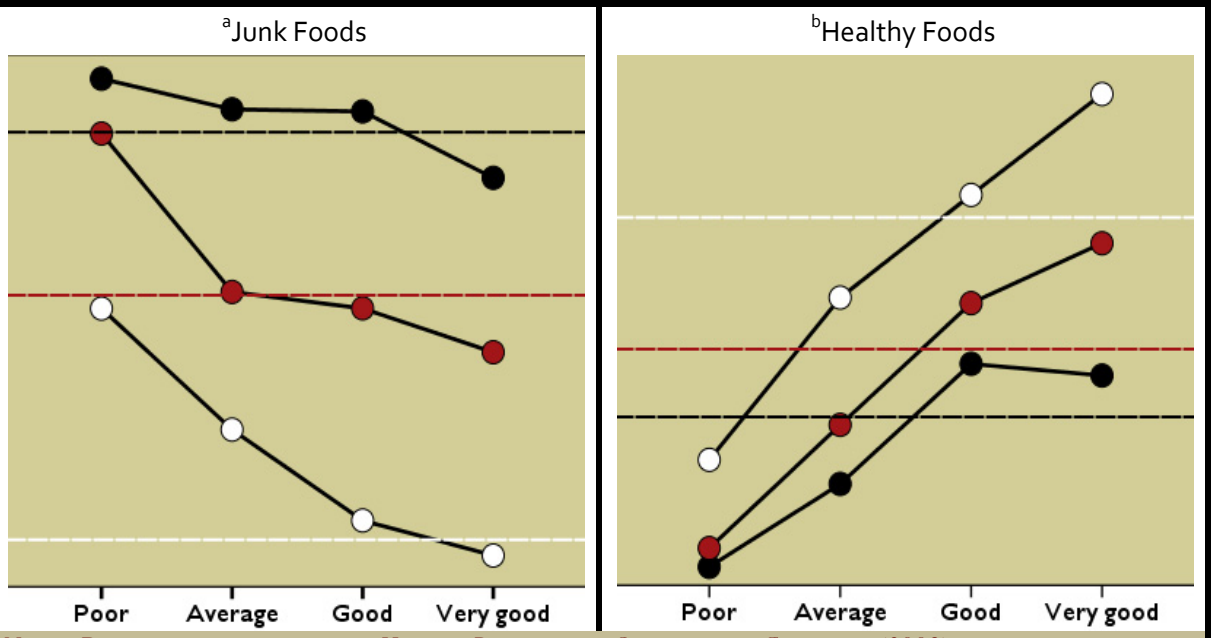
(a) What do you think you will be doing when you finish high school? Red reference line marks mean of academic achievement.

Nutrition

Using the HBSC dataset, 13 food and beverages were tested to assess their relationship with academic achievement among black males. Survey respondents were asked, "How often do you eat or drink any of the following?" Due to the large number of and similarity between the food and beverage items, principle components analysis with varimax rotation was used to reduce the odds of random significance. Four factors were derived, which were initially accepted based upon statistical derivations of the Kiser-Guttman eigenvalue one criteria, a scree plot and the logical arrangement of items. The total amount of the variance accounted for by the four factors was 59.57 percent. Most of the items clustered in the first two factors. Factor 1 indicated a statistical relationship between all the items that might be considered "junk food" (chips/fried potatoes, potato crisps, cakes and pastries, hamburgers, hot dogs, sweets and cola). Factor 2 revealed a statistical link between the items that are considered healthy (cooked vegetables, raw vegetables, fruit and whole wheat or rye bread).

Figure 1.4 displays the means plot of a MANOVA that tested the main and interaction effects of nutrition on academic achievement across black, Hispanic and white students. Findings indicated a statistical link between dietary practices and achievement across all races (F = 27.25; df = 6; p < .00) and significant differences between the nutritional habits of black, Hispanic and white students (F = 70.86; df = 3; p < .00). Black students were more likely to eat junk food frequently and less likely to regularly eat healthy foods than Hispanic or white students. More healthy foods and less junk food are associated with high achievement.

Figure 1.4: The linear relationship between nutritional habits (Y-axes) and academic achievement (X-axes) across black, Hispanic, and white students



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

● = black students; ● = Hispanic students; ○ = white students.X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) How often eat/drink chips/fried potatoes, potato crisps, cakes and pastries, hamburger, hot dogs, sweets and drink cola? (Range 1-5 = Never – More than once a day); (b) How often eat cooked andraw vegetables, fruit and whole wheat or rye bread? (Range 1-5 = Never – More than once a day). Black, red and white reference lines marks means for foods/beverages consumed across races.

Subsequent ANOVA procedures revealed that eating raw vegetables was the only nutritional practice that independently had a significant relationship with academic achievement for black males (F = 2.61; df = 3; p < .05). African-American males who reported eating raw vegetables more frequently were significantly more likely to also report higher levels of academic performance.

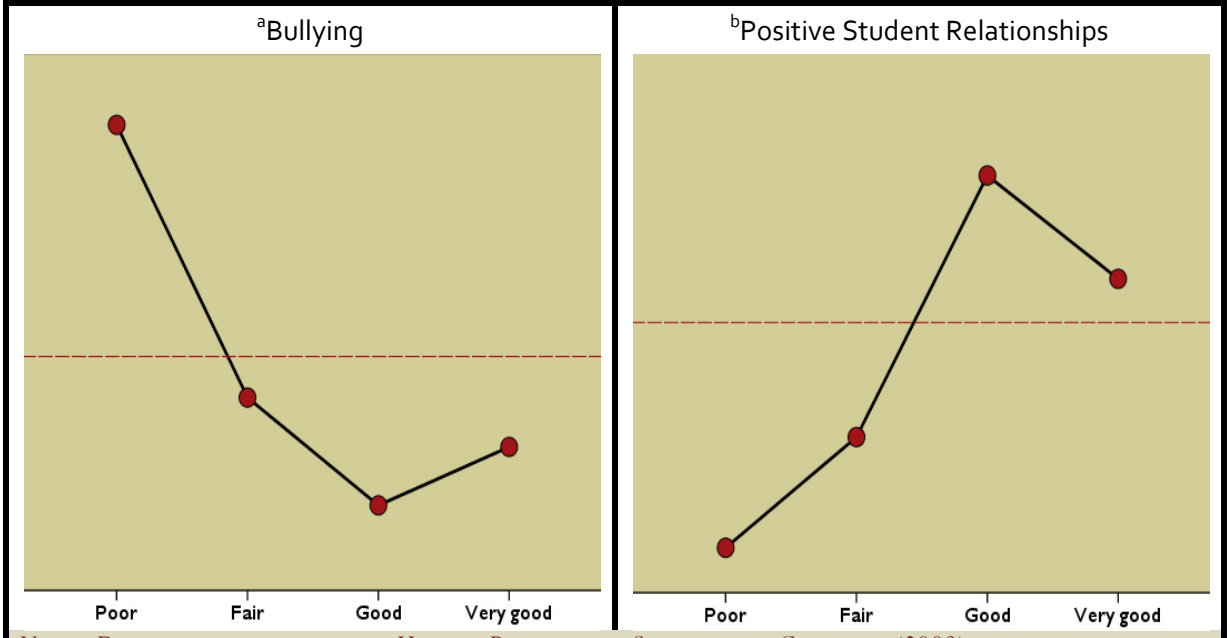
PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Using the HBSC dataset, 15 items that measured distinct aspects of peer relationships were reduced using principle component analysis with varimax rotation. The five factors derived from the items were accepted based upon statistical derivations of the Kiser-Guttman eigenvalue one criteria, a scree plot and the logical arrangement of items. The total amount of the variance accounted for by the five factors was 59.23 percent. Based on the item clusters, the five components of peer relationships were named: (1) meaningful friendships; (2) bullying; (3) positive student relationships; (4) positive communication and (5) fighting.

ANOVA was used to test the relationship between the statistically derived peer relationship factors and academic achievement among African-American males. Each respondent was given a score on the factors based on a calculation of the items comprising each factor. The results suggested that bullying (F = 6.16, df = 3 and p < .001), positive student relationships (F = 3.58, df = 3 and p < .01) and Fighting (F = 2.86, df = 3 and p < .05) significantly affected academic performance among black males. The bully factor included items that measured the extent to

which students were subject to bullying and have bullied others. Interestingly, the results of the factor analysis suggested that students who bully are likely to also have been bullied. The Positive Student Relationships factor measured the extent to which respondents felt accepted by others at the school, enjoyed being with other students at the school and felt other students are generally kind and helpful. Fighting measured the nature and number of physical fights the student participated. As expected, bullying and fighting lowered achievement among African-American males and positive student relationships increased achievement. Interpreting the means plots, as well as Bonferroni post hoc analyses, revealed that low achieving students were significantly more prone to bullying or being bullied than fair, good or very good students. Students who described their academic achievement as "good" were more likely than other students, including those who described their academic achievement as "very good," to report a positive relationship with peers.

Figure 1.5: The linear relationship between peer relationship factors (Y-axes) and academic achievement (X-axes) among African-American males



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) How often have you taken part in bullying other students in school this term? (Range = I haven't bullied others in school this term – several times a week); and How often have you been bullied by other students in school this term? (Range = I haven't been bullied by others in school this term – several times a week); (b) The students in my class(es) enjoy being together; Most of the students in my class(es) are kind and helpful; Other students accept me as I am. (Range = Never – Always).

SUBSTANCE USE

The NSDUH dataset was used to explore 25 items that measured attitudes, perceptions and experiences with substance use among school-age African-American males. To reduce data, researchers used principle component analysis with varimax rotation, which revealed six underlying variables that measured: (1) The extent of drug and alcohol use at the respondents' school, (2) the perception of parents toward drug and alcohol use, (3) perception of peers toward drug and alcohol use, (4) participation in drug prevention programs, (5) participation in drug counseling and (6) participation in illegal drug distribution. The total amount of the variance accounted for by the six factors was 78.1 percent.

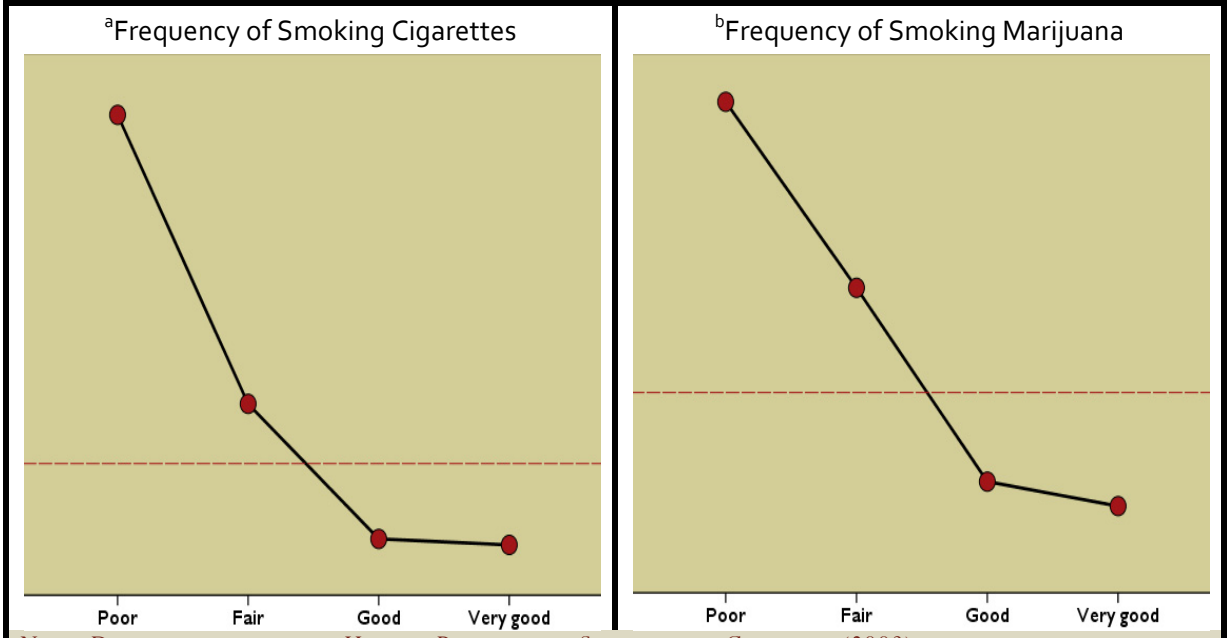
To explore the specific contribution of substance use factors to academic achievement among African-American males, the statistically derived factors were entered into a regression equation. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was specified to reject factors that did not significantly increase the variance of academic achievement among black males. Of the factors proposed, (1) the extent of drug and alcohol use at the respondents' school and

(2) Perception of peers' drug and alcohol use, were accepted into the regression equation. Results of aANOVA revealed that collectively the two factors had an F value of 6.08 with a p of less than or equal to .001.

The HBSC dataset was used to further examine the relationship between problematic alcohol and drug use and academic achievement. The specific substance relating behaviors explored were frequency of (1) binge drinking; (2) drinking liquor, beer or malt liquor and wine or wine coolers; (3) smoking cigarettes; (4) smoking cigarettes at school; (5) smoking marijuana and (6) using alcohol and other drugs at school.

Among the drug-related behaviors explored smoking cigarettes, in general ($F = 14.68$, $df = 3$ and $p < .001$) and at school ($F = 10.81$, $df = 3$ and $p < .001$), had the most significant negative impact on academic achievement among black male students. Other behaviors that were linked to poor academic performance were smoking marijuana ($F = 8.87$, $df = 3$ and $p < .001$), binge drinking ($F = 7.77$, $df = 3$ and $p < .001$) and using alcohol and other drugs at school ($F = 6.80$, $df = 3$ and $p < .001$).

Figure 1.6: The linear relationship between substance use behaviors (Y-axes) and academic achievement (X-axes) among African-American males



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) How often do you smoke tobacco at present? (Range = I do not smoke; Less than once a week; At least once a week, but not every day; Everyday); (b) In the past 12 months, how often did you use marijuana? (Range = Never; Less than once a month; Every month; Every week; and Every day or almost every day).

Analysis of substance related behaviors across cultures revealed that school-age black males smoked cigarettes and binge drank significantly less than white and Hispanic male students. However, black males were significantly more likely to report drinking wine and liquor. Black, white and Hispanic male students reported similar levels of beer and marijuana use.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section explored personal and emotional factors that contribute to academic success among school-age African-American males. Specifically, data was analyzed that measured emotional well-being and self-esteem, future plans, nutrition, peer relationships and substance use, and used a series of statistical techniques to estimate the relationship between these factors and academic achievement.

Initial results suggest that quality of life, as measure by overall feelings of happiness and self-worth, was the strongest emotional indicator of academic success among black males. Academically successful African-American

males were almost twice as likely to report feeling happy about the quality of their life when compared to those with failing grades. The final regression equation also suggested that students who reported feeling tired in the morning and generally felt lonely had more difficulty in school. Severe morning fatigue is a psychomotor indicator of depression and stress. Feeling of loneliness might also suggest depression or a poor affective disposition.

Further analysis of a different sample corroborated findings that linked well-being to academic achievement among black males. When estimating the impact of gender, findings suggest that African-American males' academic success is more sensitive to emotional well-being than their female counterparts. Black males who were not positively engaged in school were less likely than females to report being happy in the past month. Those who were positively engaged in school were extremely more likely than females to report being happy.

When exploring the relationship between future plans and academic achievement, results indicated that black males who aspired to go to college were significantly more likely to perform better in school. Comparisons by race suggested that level of academic achievement did not predict future plans for black males as clearly as it did for white males, with white college aspirants outperforming blacks, and black non-college aspirants outperforming whites. This finding might indicate that black male students have some ambivalence about their future plans and what level of academic achievement is necessary to meet them.

Findings regarding nutrition indicated a statistical link between dietary practices and academic achievement across all races. More healthy foods and less junk food were associated with higher academic achievement. Black students were more likely to eat junk food more frequently and less likely to regularly eat healthy food, than Hispanic or white students. Although high achieving black students eat less junk food than low-achieving black students, they eat significantly more junk food than the lowest-achieving white students. Only the lowest-achieving Hispanic students eat as much junk food as the average black student.

Eating raw vegetables was the only food that was independently associated with higher levels of academic achievement among black males. Direct and indirect factors may explain the relationship between eating raw vegetables and academic achievement. Raw vegetables are rich in enzymes, minerals and vitamins, which can improve natural bodily functions, including central nervous and digestive functions. Such physiological benefits can improve brain functioning and reduce psychosomatic stressors. In addition, students who eat more raw vegetables will likely have parents who stress healthy diets and possibly other healthy behaviors.

The results found that the statistical link between peer relationships and academic achievement among African-American males was strongest when considering positive interactions with classmates and limited involvement with bullying and fighting. Results also found that students who bully are likely to be bullied, suggesting no clear offender-victim dichotomy. Positive peer associations also relate to patterns of substance use and academic success.

Of the six substance use factors proposed, only the two that measured peer drug and alcohol use had a significant impact on academic success among black males when analyzing the NSDUH dataset. Black males who had less drugs and alcohol in their school and had more negative perceptions associated with drug use, tended to achieve at higher levels. These findings were supported through analysis of the HBSC dataset, which revealed a strong negative relationship between smoking, drinking and using other drugs at school and academic achievement. Although black male students smoke less than white and Hispanic male students, the frequency of cigarette use predicted poor academic achievement better than any other psychoactive substance. Compared to other illicit substances, black male students use marijuana more, which also significantly impairs academic performance.

Policy Implications

1. Educational policy should recognize the significant contribution of emotional wellbeing to the academic success of African-American males. Policies that increase funding for school counselors and require a smaller ratio of counselors to students could help to improve the emotional wellbeing of students. The American School Counselor Association recommends a school counselor to student ratio of 1:250 (Towner-Larsen, 2000). Since many African-American students deal with greater social and environmental pressures, greater emphasis should be placed on family counseling, loss and bereavement and community empowerment. The findings also suggest that level of fatigue might be a barometer of emotional wellbeing. Training for school counselors and teachers to recognize less obvious signs of depression and anxiety is also important to support student growth. Policies that emphasize mentoring programs and other means to reduce isolation among school-age African-American males are likely to also improve academic progress.
2. Consistent with findings in previous studies (Jackson and Moore, 2006), the findings reinforce the need for college access programs for African-American male students. College access programs that emphasize college preparation and funding for higher education could reduce the ambivalence associated with future plans. Programs such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and Upward Bound are U.S. Department of Education programs that support the findings, by offering awareness of and access to college for lower-income students.
3. Nutrition and fitness should be integrated into the academic experiences of school-age African-American males. School breakfast and lunch programs should include a healthy measure of foods that are rich in enzymes, minerals and vitamins. In addition, parents should be informed of the health benefits of vegetables, which include improved cognitive functioning. The findings also support food policies that promote equitable access to fresh produce in African-American communities. Educational programs that use agricultural projects to teach students how to grow vegetables can be an effective learning tool.
4. Policymakers should also consider the nature and role of peer relationships on the academic success of African-American males. Educational policy that emphasizes the role of peer education and mediation, as well as character development, would support the finding that students learn best when they perceive their classmates to be supportive, accepting and agreeable. The findings also suggest that good policy to address bullying deals with them less like offenders and more like people who feel isolated and likely to be perceived as an outcast. Overall, peer support networks can be an integral component of the learning environment and supplement the important role of teachers in the classroom.
5. The findings support school-based drug prevention programs that encourage peer participation. The dangers of smoking among underage children should be emphasized, with attention to the psycho-physiological effects of nicotine abuse and withdrawal, which could increase nervousness and fatigue at school.

Family Factors

Household composition, parents' education and parent relationship with children

> Even though I don't live with my father, he still shows me what it is like to be a man by visiting every other week, and keeping his word. It is important for fathers to see their children and teach them right from wrong … It is important for fathers to give their children love and my father shows me how to do this. Young men must have positive males as role models to offer them guidance.
>
> Diontre Miles, 8th Grade
> *"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project*
> *African-American Males*
> *Telling Their Own Stories*

Household Composition

One-way ANOVA was used on the HBSC dataset to determine if a father's presence in the household improved academic success among school-age African-American males. Respondents who reported that their father was present outperformed those with no father in the household ($F = 4.77$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Among students who had a father present, 62 percent reported good or very good grades, compared to 55 percent for students with no father present. When comparing students who had both parents present, to those with one parent present the results were almost identical (63 percent versus 55 percent), suggesting that most students with a father present lived in a two-parent home. Among the students who reported having neither their mother nor father in the home, only 45 percent reported making good or very good grades in school.

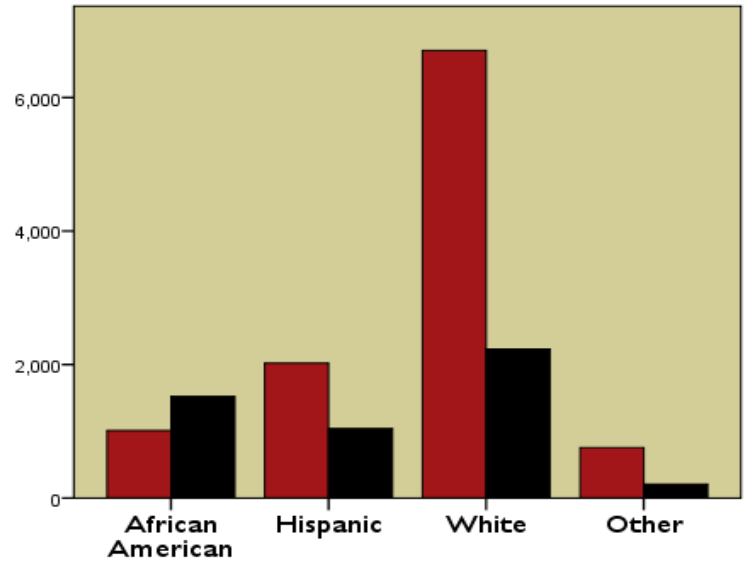
Incidentally, African Americans were the only ethnic group that was more likely to live in a fatherless home than to live with a father in the home. Sixty percent of African-American children live in fatherless homes, compared to 15 percent for Asian American, 25 percent for white and 34 percent for Hispanic when analyzing the HBSC dataset. The NSDUH dataset validated these findings. When cross-tabulating the item, "Father in Household" with race, 56 percent of African-American adolescents reported living in fatherless homes, compared to 13 percent for Asian American, 20 percent for white Americans and 29 percent for Hispanic Americans.

Father / Mother Education

The HBSC dataset was used to test the relationship between fathers' and mothers' education and academic achievement among African-American males. Pearson correlations revealed a linear relationship between school-age African-American males' and fathers' educational attainment. Participants who reported having a father who graduated from college were significantly more likely to also report making good grades in school ($p < .01$). No such relationship existed between mothers' education and academic achievement for boys. However, when performing the same Pearson correlations for African-American girls, academic achievement had weaker ($p < .05$) significance for fathers' education. Interestingly, African-American girls were significantly ($p < .01$) more likely to report good grades when their mothers had a higher educational attainment.

Findings on the relationship between African-American males' academic achievement and fathers' education gain context when comparing fathers' education across ethnic groups. Forty-three percent of European-American students and 51 percent of Asian-American students reported having a father who completed college. Only 26 percent of African-American students reported having a father who completed college.

Figure 1.3: Number of students who live with their father by race.



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

■ = LIVES WITH FATHER ■ = DOES NOT LIVE WITH FATHER

PARENT RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN

Ease of Communication

Figure 2.1: The linear relationship between ease of communication with parents (Y-axes) and academic achievement (X-axes) among African-American males and females

[a]Easy to talk to father

[b]Easy to talk to mother

NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? Red line=females. Blue line=males. (a) How easy is it for you to talk to your father about things that really bother you? (Range = Very difficult– Very easy); (b) How easy is it for you to talk to your mother about things that really bother you? (Range = Very difficult– Very easy)

When responding to the question, "How easy is it for you to talk to your father about things that really bother you?" in the HBSC survey, African-American males students who responded "very easy" were significantly more likely to have good grades ($F = 11.07$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). Across all levels of academic achievement, black males found it easier to talk to their fathers than black females ($F = 59.21$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$). When asked the same questions about the mother, the results were similar. Black males who found it easy to talk to their mothers had higher levels of academic achievement than those who reported that talking to their mothers was "very difficult" ($F = 11.27$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). Interestingly, black males also had an easier time talking to their mothers than did black females, however, the significance as not as high as it was for fathers ($F = 9.81$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$).

Parent Aggravation

MANOVA was used to investigate the relationship between the "Parent Aggravation" factors identified in the NSAF dataset and academic achievement among black male and female students. The Hotelling's Trace was used to test the main and interactive effects of gender and positive school engagement on the four dependent variables that gauged the extent to which the parents felt: (1) their child does things that really bother them; (2) they are sacrificing more of their life to meet their child's needs than they ever expected; (3) angry with their child and (4) their child is much harder to care for than most.

The significance of the F tests indicated that the main effect of gender was not significant, implying that parents were no more prone to becoming aggravated with males than females. A significant main effect ($F = 25.49$; $p < .001$) presented for positive school engagement. African-American students who were more positively engaged in school had less frustrated parents. The significance of F was analyzed with univariate ANOVA to determine the effects for school engagement and gender on individual indicators of parent aggravation. All four Parent Aggravation factors had significant ($p < .001$) main effects for positive school engagement. Analysis procedures indicated one main effect of gender for item number 2. Parents of African-American females were significantly ($F = 4.51$; $p < .05$) more likely to report that they are giving up more of their life to meet their child's needs than they ever expected.

Parental Involvement With School

When using MANOVA to investigate the relationship between parental involvement with school and academic achievement among black male and female students, using the HBSC dataset, similar findings were revealed. There were no apparent differences between the ways in which males and females were treated with respect to parents' participation in the school. However, parents who interacted in more positive ways with the school had children who were more likely to receive good grades ($F = 3.93$; $p < .001$). Table 2.2 displays univariate ANOVA results for the effects for academic achievement on individual indicators of parents' involvement with school.

Table 2.2: The effect of parental involvement with school on school-age African-American males' academic achievement

Variable	F	df	Sig.
1. My parents are willing to come to school to talk to teachers.	9.45	3	.000
2. If I have problems at school, my parents are ready to help.	9.37	3	.000
3. My parents encourage me to do well at school.	7.32	3	.000
4. My parents expect too much of me at school.	3.80	3	.010

Parenting Practices

Using the NSDUH, questions related to standard parenting practices were tested to determine their relationship to academic achievement among African-American males. MANOVA procedures revealed that collectively the six indicators had a significant relationship ($F = 4.05$; $df = 18$; $p < .001$) with academic achievement. Table 2.3 displays univariate ANOVA results for the effects of academic achievement on individual indicators of parenting practices with school, listed in order of significance. Notably, the intangible factors, including parents telling children they did a good job and that they are proud of something they did, had the strongest significance. The two factors that

related to a disciplinary measure did not significantly contribute to the variance in academic grades among school-age African-American children.

Table 2.3: The effect of parenting practices on school-age African-American males' academic achievement

Variable	F	df	Sig.
1. How often did your parents tell you they were proud of you for something you had done?	13.730	3	.000
2. How often did your parents let you know when you'd done a good job?	8.802	3	.000
3. How often did your parents provide help with your homework when you needed it?	4.606	3	.003
4. How often did your parents make you do chores around the house?	3.236	3	.021
5. How often did your parents limit the amount of time you watched TV?	2.318	3	.074 NS
6. How often did your parents limit the amount of time you went out with friends on school nights?	1.052	3	.368 NS

NS = Non-significant finding

Since the NSDUH divides academic achievement into four levels, means plots were examined to determine the nature of parenting practices on black male achievement. A near perfect linear relationship emerged for Questions 1 and 2. In other words, the more often parents told their children that they were proud of them and let them know they did a good job, the better the children performed in school. Parents who helped with homework clearly helped their children avoid failure, but only moderately effected differences between average and above average students. Similarly, the frequency in which parents required their students to do chores made little difference beyond the D/F range. However, students with a B average reported doing more chores than A or C students. Figure 2.4 presents the linear display of results from the ANOVA of parenting practices and grades among African-American males.

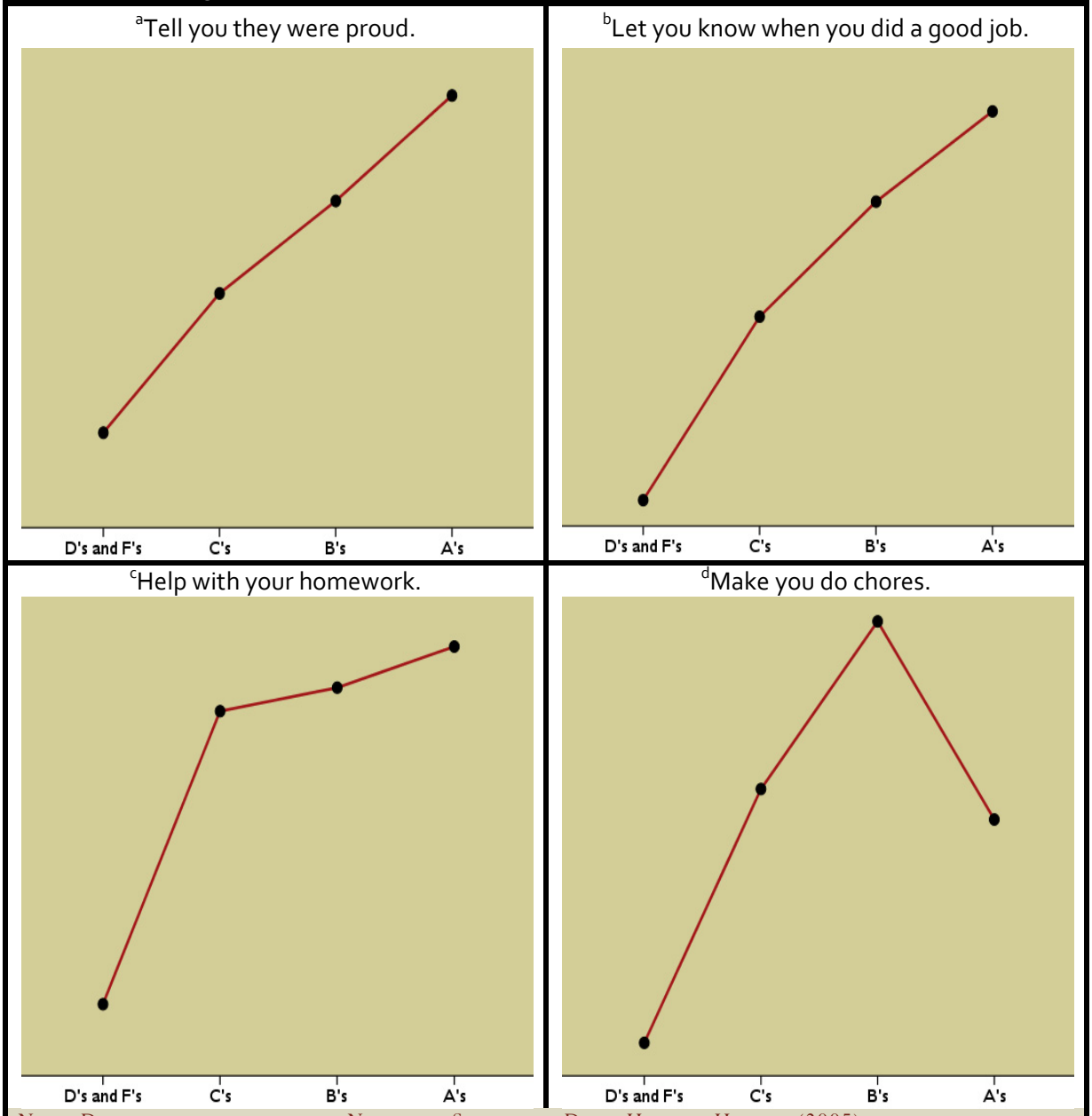
Entering my teenage years I saw my dad a lot, just about every week, and it was good. I was very happy and relieved that he cared about me enough that he would spend time with me and try to get to know me again. I was very excited and very relaxed … Then things started to get difficult between us. It was difficult between us like I had done something wrong. But really, it was another adjustment he was making in learning his responsibilities regarding me.

The reason I wrote this is because young black men need to keep their heads up during painful and deceitful times no matter what. Family is important and we need black men to stand up and take responsibility. Sometimes that means waiting for them to figure that out. Keep your head up!!!

Brian Byrd, 11th Grade

"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project African-American Males Telling Their Own Stories

Figure 2.4: The linear relationship between parenting practices (Y-axes) and school-age African-American males' grades (X-axes)



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON DRUG USE AND HEALTH (2005)

X axis = grades for the last semester or grading period completed. (a) How often did your parents tell you they were proud of you for something you had done? (b) How often did your parents let you know when you'd done a good job? (c) How often did your parents provide help with your homework when you needed it? (d) How often did your parents make you do chores around the house?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section explored a range of family related variables that were hypothesized to contribute to academic success among African-American males. Household composition, parents' education and various aspects of the parents' relationship to the child, in theory, can foster developmental processes that are important to academic achievement.

With respect to household composition, African-American males with a father in the home reported higher levels of academic achievement. The impact of the father's presence in the household corresponded to results on two-parent households. Two-parent households outperformed single-parent households, and two-parent and single-parent

households outperformed no-parent homes, which might include children reared by other family members or in foster homes. The impact of the father's presence could indicate shared responsibilities that lessen stress on the home, additional financial resources or role modeling. Unfortunately, African Americans were less likely to have a father in the home than any racial group. Across two national surveys, African Americans were the only ethnic group to report more fatherless homes than fathers in the home. Only 20 percent to 25 percent of white students reported fatherless homes compared to 56 percent to 60 percent of black students.

Father and mother education was assessed based on a proposed impact of family educational values and modeling. Findings produced strong evidence that modeling is an important component of academic development among black adolescent males. Father's education, but not mother's education, had a significant impact on the academic achievement of black males – but not as much for black females. The contrary is true for black females, who demonstrated stronger academic achievement when their mothers had a college degree. Understanding these findings within the context of other ethnic groups provides further insights into possible reasons black males are underperforming in schools. African-American males were almost twice as likely to have a father who did *not* complete college as Asian Americans or European Americans.

Not surprisingly, caretakers of black students who perform poorly in school reported that the child often 'bothers' and angers them and that they are generally sacrificing more to care for the child. These relationship dynamics could signal that the parent is frustrated with the child's performance in school, or that the parent has a low threshold for frustration that is interfering with the child's abilities. Children of the aggravated parents may also have general special needs such as alternative learning styles or social challenges. This has implications for support for mental health and wellbeing, which are detailed in the Personal and Emotional Factors section.

Another aspect of parenting that had a significant impact on black males academic progress was a parent's involvement with school. Parents who helped their kids with school-related problems were comfortable talking to teachers, encouraged their children to do well in school and maintained high expectations all had higher performing children. When analyzing similar parenting practices with a separate dataset, the strongest parenting indicators of academic success were holistic factors: (1) Parents who often told children they were proud of them; and (2) Parents who let students know when they did a good job. Interestingly, although probably important for other aspects of development, restricting children's behavior, such as time spent with friends or watching TV, did not produce significant effects on grades.

Policy Implications

1. Educational policy should increase attention to parent involvement in children's learning experiences. Tax breaks and other incentives can be given to parents who devote a certain number of hours to parent-teacher associations and volunteering at the school. In addition, school policies should incorporate parent involvement practices such as having parents 'sign-off' on homework and providing each parent with a "Parent Handbook" that details ways of getting involved in their child's education.
2. Welfare-to-work and other labor and economic policies need to be examined to determine whether work values are compromising educational values. Current economic trends are requiring mothers to spend more time working. Black mothers have unique challenges because they are more likely to raise a child without a father. Fair trade practices that improve the wages and benefits, such as paid leave, of her employment, and social welfare that allows her to be a parent, will ultimately improve academic progress among African-American students.
3. The explosion of the black male inmate population has conceivably contributed to the alarming number of black students in fatherless homes and fathers with less education. The research suggests that the lack of male models has a more profound academic impact on black male students than black female students. Current revisions of 25-year-old criminal justice policies and remedial efforts should consider the relationship between inmates and parolees and their children. Educational programs that allowed inmates to obtain degrees in prison should be reintroduced. In addition, barriers that deny men from pursuing education after they have been released from prison should be eased.
4. Funding for fatherhood programs and mentoring programs is supported by the current findings. In addition,

healthy marriage initiatives, which help black people to understand the material and immaterial value of marriage and family, are important for developing a culture that is more conducive to academic success. Family values are virtues that should be understood and promoted in a more bipartisan way than they are currently presented in the United States.

5. Parent education and parenting organizations should stress aspects of positive parenting that has translated into academic success. A premium should be placed on the good things students do, as restrictions are placed on the negative things they do. The findings support a "positive referral" system in school, whereby schools send formal notices to parents when their children are exemplary. Overall, parents should be taught the material benefits of using positive reinforcement and affirmations.
6. The high number of African-American males who are being raised in homes without fathers increases the need for policies to support parent cooperation programs. Family court judges who oversee child custody cases should encourage parents to use formal parental cooperation and agreement courses to increase opportunities for students to have harmonious contact with both parents.

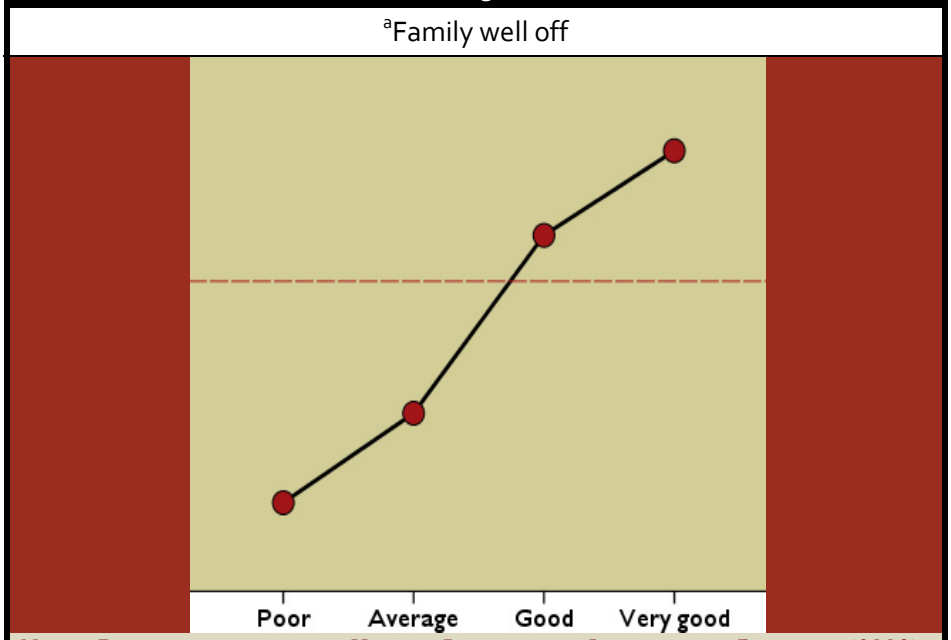
Social and Environmental Factors

Role of economic standing, population density, the juvenile justice system, and civic, community, school-based and extracurricular activities

Economic Standing

Figure 3.1 graphically displays the mean of African-American males perception of how "well off" they were, sorted by their reported level of academic achievement, using the HBSC dataset. Students were asked "How well off do you think your family is?" Among the students who replied "very well off" or "average," 65 percent also described their academic achievement as "very good" or "good." African-American males who described their family as "not well off" were more likely to report "average" or "below average" grades rather than "very good" or "good" (53 percent compared to 47.2 percent). Chi-square analysis indicated that the difference is significant (X^2 = 29.15, df = 1, p < .001).

Figure 3.1: The linear relationship between being "well off" (Y-axes) and academic achievement (X-axes) among African-American males



Note. Data retrieved from Health Behavior in School-age Children (2003)
X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) How well off do you think your family is? (Range = Never – More than twice a day)

I witnessed one of my best friends getting shot in the daylight and I couldn't do anything. We were in the wrong place at the wrong time. I lost my father to the streets, and my mother to drugs, but they are still alive. It takes time but I am going to have to take back everything the devil stole from me. It's a work in progress, but with prayer and supplication I will do it.

Dyquan Caldwell, 11th Grade

"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project African-American Males Telling Their Own Stories

The findings from the NSDUH dataset were similar. Students who reported an annual household income of less than $20,000 were twice as likely to report a 'D' or less in school, as those from families making $50,000 or more per year (10.4 percent versus 5.6 percent, X = 9, df = 2, p < .01). African-American youth who acknowledged not attending school in the last year were also over-represented among those from families making less than $20,000 per year. Findings from the NSDUH data revealed that 15.7 percent of poorer African-American students did not attend school during the year they completed the survey, compared to 9.4 percent of students from families making more than $50,000 per year.

The NSDUH revealed that a higher number of African-American students are currently living in poverty. Thirty-five percent of African-American adolescents reported living below the federal poverty threshold, compared to 9 percent of whites. In addition, findings suggest that the wealth gap is most pronounced among African Americans.

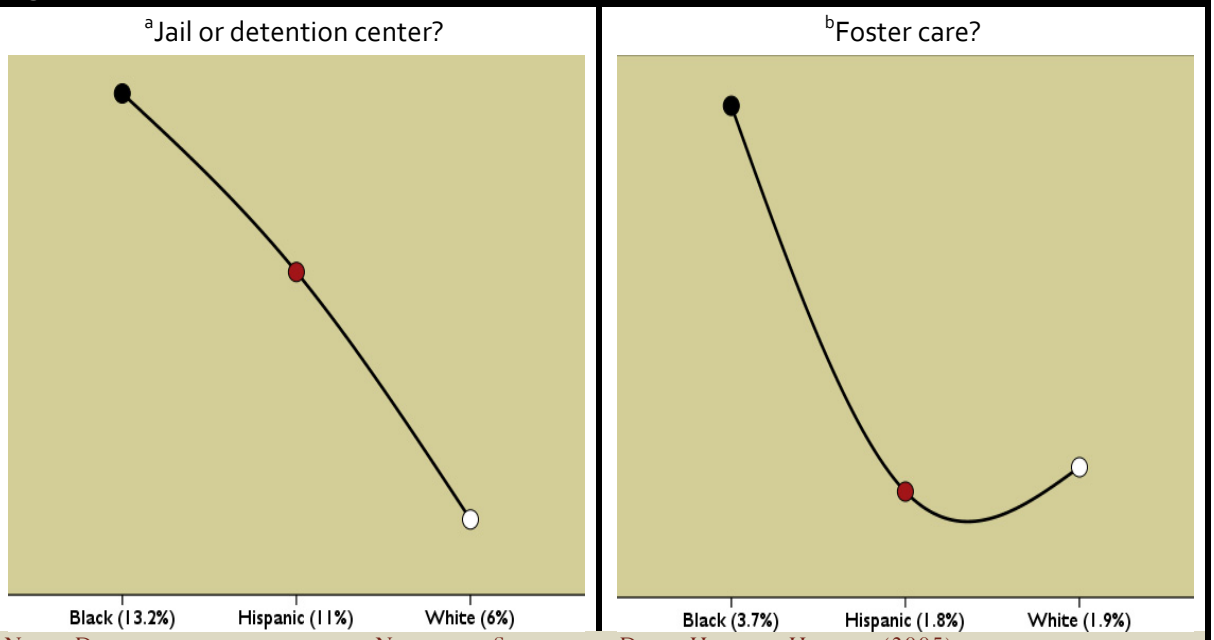
Population Density

Academic achievement was compared between school-age African-American males who lived in urban, suburban, small towns and rural areas using the HBSC dataset. ANOVA procedures revealed significant differences in the academic achievement by city environment ($F = 4.05$; $df = 3$, $p < .01$). Further examination with Bonferroni post hoc analysis indicated that the mean difference in academic achievement between urban and rural settings accounted for the difference. African-American males in rural areas reported significantly lower levels of academic achievement from those in urban areas. The same analysis was conducted with the NSDUH dataset using three levels of population density as the indicator variable. Differences were not significant.

State Involvement

School-age African-American males who responded "yes" to the question, "Have you ever been in jail or in a detention center?" on the NSDUH were significantly more likely to report lower levels of academic achievement ($F = 7.660$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$). African-American males reported juvenile justice system involvement more frequently than any other race ($X^2 = 89.670$; $df = 2$; $p < .01$). Cross-tabulated responses with chi-square analysis revealed that school-age African-American males reported jail or detention center involvement at more than twice the rate of European Americans (13.5 percent versus 6.3 percent). Eleven percent of school-age Hispanic males reported juvenile justice system involvement. Black males were also more likely than white or Hispanic males to have been in foster care. However, the academic achievement of black males in foster care was not significantly different from black males who reported never being in foster care.

Figure 3.1: Comparison of state involvement (Y-axes) by race.



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON DRUG USE AND HEALTH (2005)

(a) Have you ever been in jail or in a detention center? (Range = yes or no); (b) Have you ever been in foster care? (Range = yes or no)

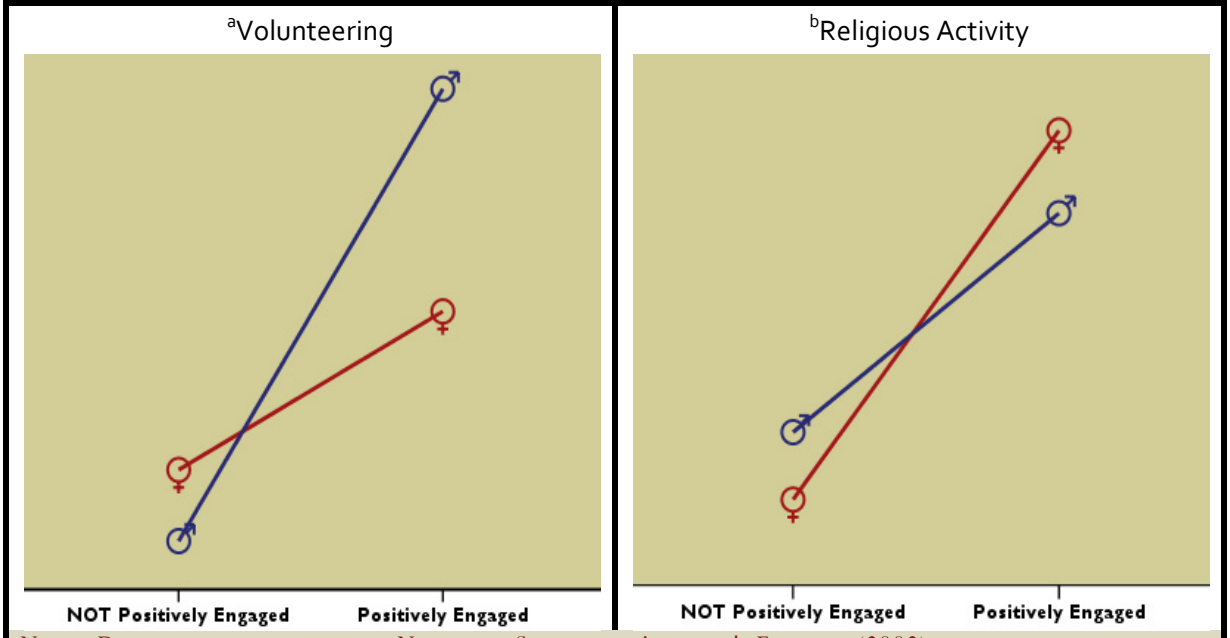
Youth Experiences

Civic engagement

MANOVA was used to investigate the relationship between civic involvement, as measured by frequency of time spent volunteering and attending religious activity and academic achievement among school-age African-American males and females, using the NSAF dataset. The Hotelling's Trace indicated a significant relationship between civic involvement and positive school engagement ($F = 6.63$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$). In other words, both males and females improved academic engagement when they were more involved with civic activity. Figure 3.2 displays interaction plots of the estimated means for volunteering and religious activity across positive school engagement. Since the male and female lines intersect, there are some differences in the degree to which they respond academically to

civic involvement. Specifically, volunteering appears to affect positive school engagement of males more profoundly than for females. The opposite is true for religious activity. However, tests of significance indicated that the interactions based on gender are not significant.

Figure 3.1: The relationship between school-age African-American males' and females' civic involvement (Y-axes) and positive school engagement (X-axes)



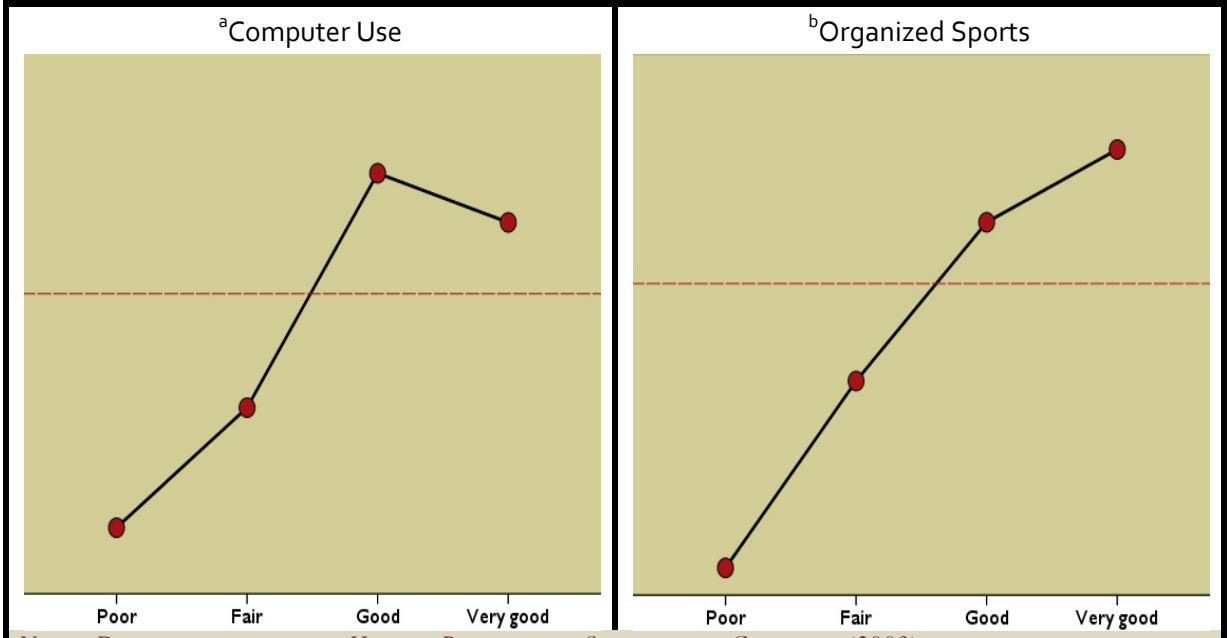
NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF AMERICA'S FAMILIES (2002)

X axis = School engagement. Red line=females. Blue line=males. (a) About how often in the past year have you participated in volunteer activities through a religious, school, or community group? (b) In the past 12 months, about how often have you attended a religious service?

Youth Activities

ANOVA was used to test the relationship between various aspects of youth activity and academic achievement among African-American males. Youth activity explored included: (1) Hours a week using a computer; (2) Hours a day watching TV; (3) Hours a week working for pay; (4) Hours a week playing computer games; (5) Time spent participating in organized sports and (6) Time spent participating in unorganized sports. The results suggest that hours using a computer ($F = 3.36$; $df = 3$; $p < .05$) and time spent participating in organized sports ($F = 2.86$, $df = 3$ and $p < .01$) significantly improved academic performance among school age African-American males. Working for pay also revealed significant differences ($F = 2.78$; $df = 3$; $p < .05$). However, inspection of the means plots revealed a curvilinear relationship between working and academic achievement among black males. Black males who reported working extensively either performed poorly or good in school. Black males who reported working less either had average or very good school performance. Using the computer had the strongest overall relationship with academic achievement and participation in sports had the most linear. In other words, the more committed the black male reported to being in an organized sport, the better the reported academic achievement across all levels (See Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: The linear relationship between school-age African-American males' youth activity (Y-axes) and academic achievement (X-axes)



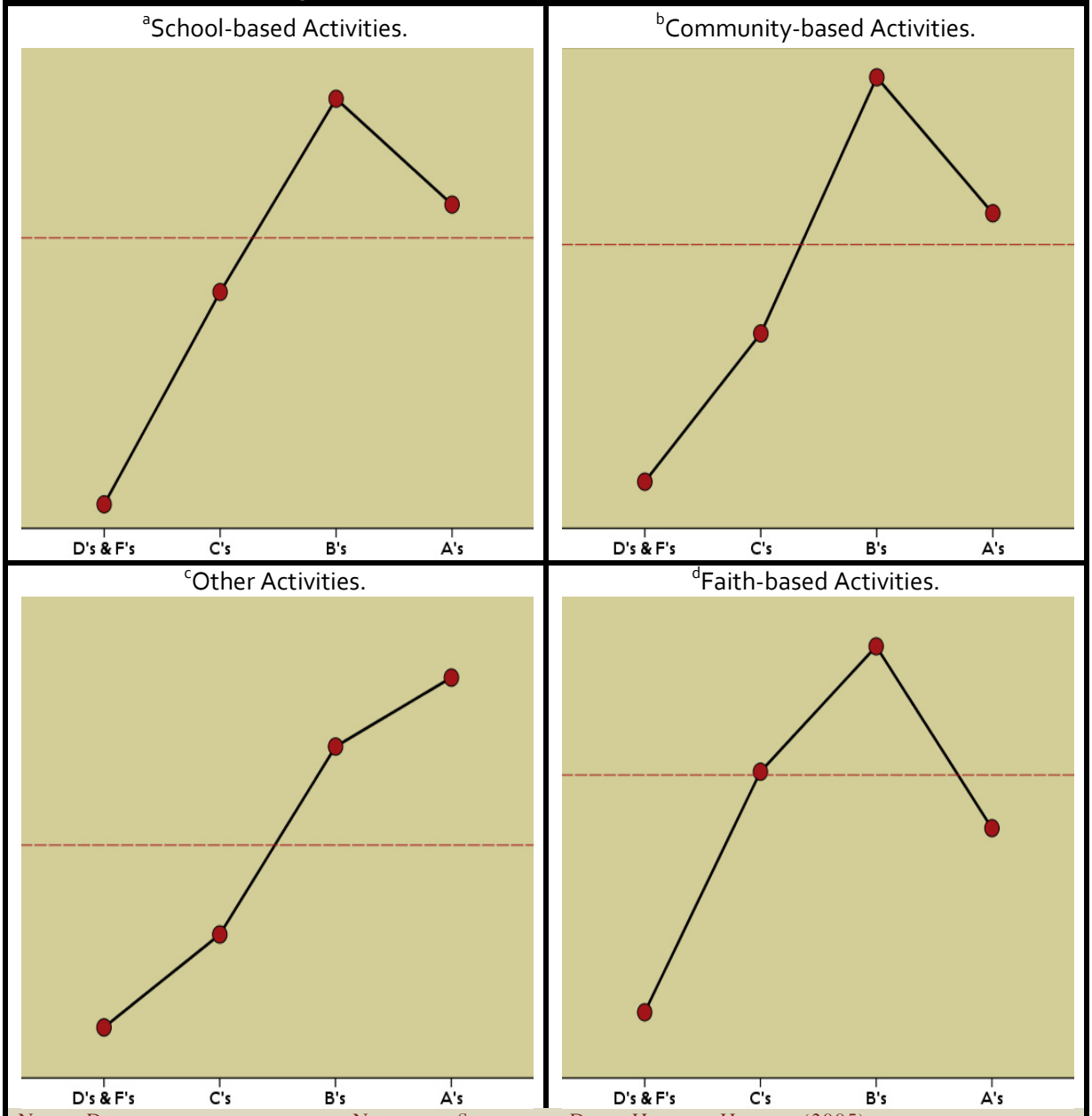
NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a)How many hours a week do you use a computer at home and at school, not counting computer games? (Range: None; Less than 1 hour a week; 1 to 3 hours a week; 4 to 6 hours a week; 7 to 9 hours a week; and 10 hours or more a week); (b) How often play or practice an organized or supervised sport such as volleyball, football, basketball, hockey, soccer, cheerleading or swim team? (Range: Rarely or never; About once a month; About once a week; 2 or 3 times a week; and Usually every day.

Civic, community, school-based and extracurricular activity

The NSDUH dataset was used to test the relationship between academic achievement and various aspects of youth activity among African-American males. The survey asked students about their involvement in school-based, community-based, church or faith-based and other activities using the examples listed in Figure 3.3. Results indicated that all activities significantly improved academic achievement among school-age African-American males. Consistent with findings in the preceding section, school-based activities, such as sports and community-based activities, such as volunteering, had the strongest level of significance. The means plots in Figure 3.3 indicate that 'B' students had the highest level of activity in most categories.

Figure 3.3: The linear relationship between school-age African-American male students' youth activity (Y-axes) and their grades (X-axes).



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON DRUG USE AND HEALTH (2005)

X axis = grades for the last semester or grading period completed. (a) Number of school-based activities, such as team sports, cheerleading, choir, band, student government, or clubs. ($F = 14.50$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$); (b) Number of community-based activities, such as volunteer, sports, clubs, or groups. ($F = 8.11$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$); (c) Number of other activities, such as dance lessons, piano lessons, karate lessons, or horseback riding lessons. ($F = 7.59$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$); (d) Number of church or faith-based activities, such as clubs, youth groups, Saturday or Sunday school, prayer groups, youth trips, service or volunteer activities. ($F = 3.74$; $df = 3$; $p = .011$)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings suggest that a range of social and environmental factors can increase the chances that an African-American male will make good grades in school. Various life experiences related to socioeconomic factors, juvenile justice system involvement and youth enrichment activities demonstrated a statistical relationship with African-American male academic achievement.

Not surprisingly, African-American males who were reared in homes with more financial resources had increased their odds of performing well in school. African Americans are more likely to live in poverty than any other race, with

poverty rates at greater than three times the rate of whites. African Americans also had the greatest wealth gap, suggesting that their finances are more sensitive to national economic trends. Notably, all datasets explored contained a respectable number of African-American males with high academic marks at every socioeconomic level. The higher than expected number of black males from poor homes with good academic marks suggests that protective factors, such as involvement in youth enrichment activities, can offset financial disadvantages.

With recent concerns about the status of urban education, one might expect black students in urban environments to have the lowest academic marks. Contrarily, analysis of the HBSC dataset revealed that black students in urban environments had the highest levels of academic achievement and black students from rural environments had the lowest levels. Several factors could be responsible for this finding. First, despite problems with crime, urban areas have the wealthiest black families, whereas rural areas have some of the poorest black families. Second, findings may reflect an all or nothing phenomenon in urban centers, where families' lives may be extremely socially enriched or extremely destitute. The polarized differences in the life circumstances of urban black students might conceal some of the social and environmental disparities in urban schools. Finally, rural areas have fewer opportunities for social and cultural enrichment such as museums, festivals and concerts. Notably, the NSDUH dataset found no differences in academic achievement based on population density.

Juvenile justice system involvement greatly impairs academic achievement among young black males. Given the disruptions in education because of the time a student might spend in the juvenile justice system, these findings are not surprising. Regrettably, African-American males are more likely to spend time in jail or a detention center than any other race. Young black males are involved in the juvenile justice system at twice the rate of white males. More analyses are necessary to determine why this disparity exists.

A host of youth enrichment experiences had very strong associations with academic achievement among African-American males. The findings suggested that school-based activities, especially sports, had the strongest impact on academic achievement. Time spent using computers also predicted high achievement among black male students. In general, the data portrayed successful black male students as well-rounded with high involvement in volunteering, religious activity and other personal growth activities.

Passive activity, such as watching television and playing video games did not diminish academic performance in a statistically significant way. However, the data clearly indicates that time spent watching TV and playing computer games could be used in more academically enriching ways. Working a part-time job affected school-ageblack males in divergent ways. 'B' students worked more than any other students; however, 'D' and 'F' students were not far behind. 'A' students worked the least amount of hours. Overall, the data suggests that working could contribute to the profile of a well-rounded student; however, it could also be a distraction.

Policy Implications

1. Educational policies should consider the natural social disadvantages that students might have from low-income homes by supplementing schools in impoverished areas with resources to build and maintain school-based activities. The findings clearly demonstrate that accountability alone will not address the factors that lead to academic success among school-age African-American males. Funding for team sports, cheerleading, choir, band, student government and student organizations is vital to fostering academic success.
2. Economic policies should address poverty in the black community. The declining number of jobs with a livable wage that provide benefits such as health insurance and access to safe and affordable child care are disproportionately burdening the black community. A safety net to ease periods of unemployment, health crises and family problems are necessary to increase the number of African-American males who are achieving in school.
3. Increased attention to educational issues among rural African-American populations is necessary. Policymakers should encourage research to better understand the challenges and identify supports for African-American students in rural areas.
4. Juvenile justice policies should be examined to reduce the frequency and burden of jail and detention center involvement among black males. NCLB mandates for educational standards in juvenile detention centers should

be followed to minimize academic distractions. In addition, the over-representation of black males in the juvenile justice system needs to be address by targeting biases in arrests and sentencing. In addition, pro-social skills training programs could reduce behaviors associated with delinquent acts among black males.

5. Problems associated with the "digital divide" should be addressed within the current scope of educational policy. Funding for updated computers in schools and public libraries is necessary to promote educational equity. Connectivity of existing computers is also an important issue facing many schools.
6. Volunteering and religious activity appear to be important social reinforcers of educational values. Community service for class credit at public high schools could help black men gain a more secure investment in the educational process. Also, support for faith-based educational programs, particularly those with foundations in community-based African-American churches, could help to foster an important vehicle to academic success among black males. The findings also support the use of service learning programs, such as AmeriCorps.

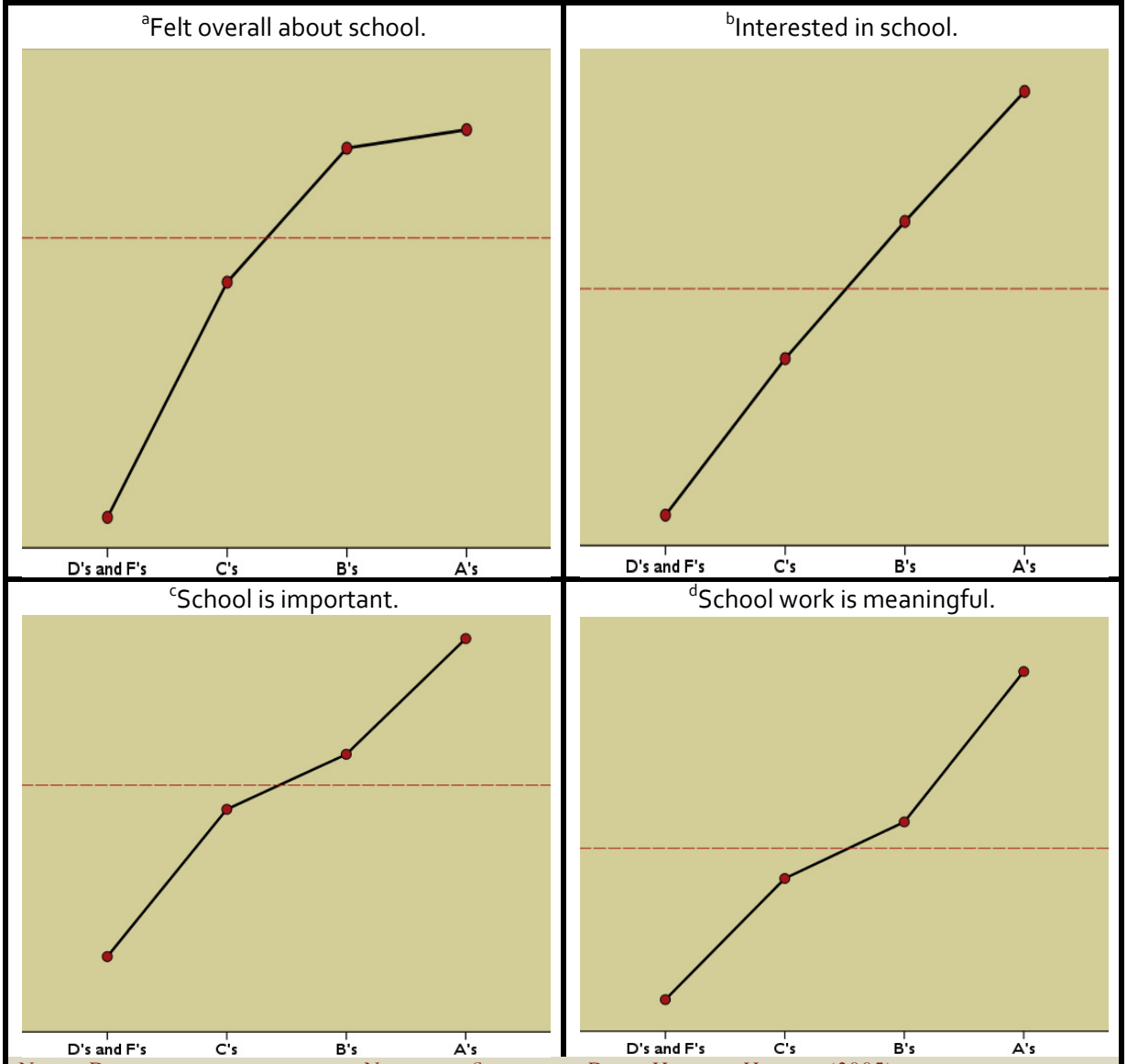
School Factors

Role of perceptions of school, relationships with teachers and school safety

Perceptions of School

Perception of school was assessed with four questions on the NSDUH. When analyzing African-American male youth with ANOVA procedures, all four demonstrated a significant positive relationship with academic achievement. The items, in order of F value are listed on Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: The linear relationship between school-age African-American male students' perception of school (Y-axes) and their level of academic achievement (X-axes).

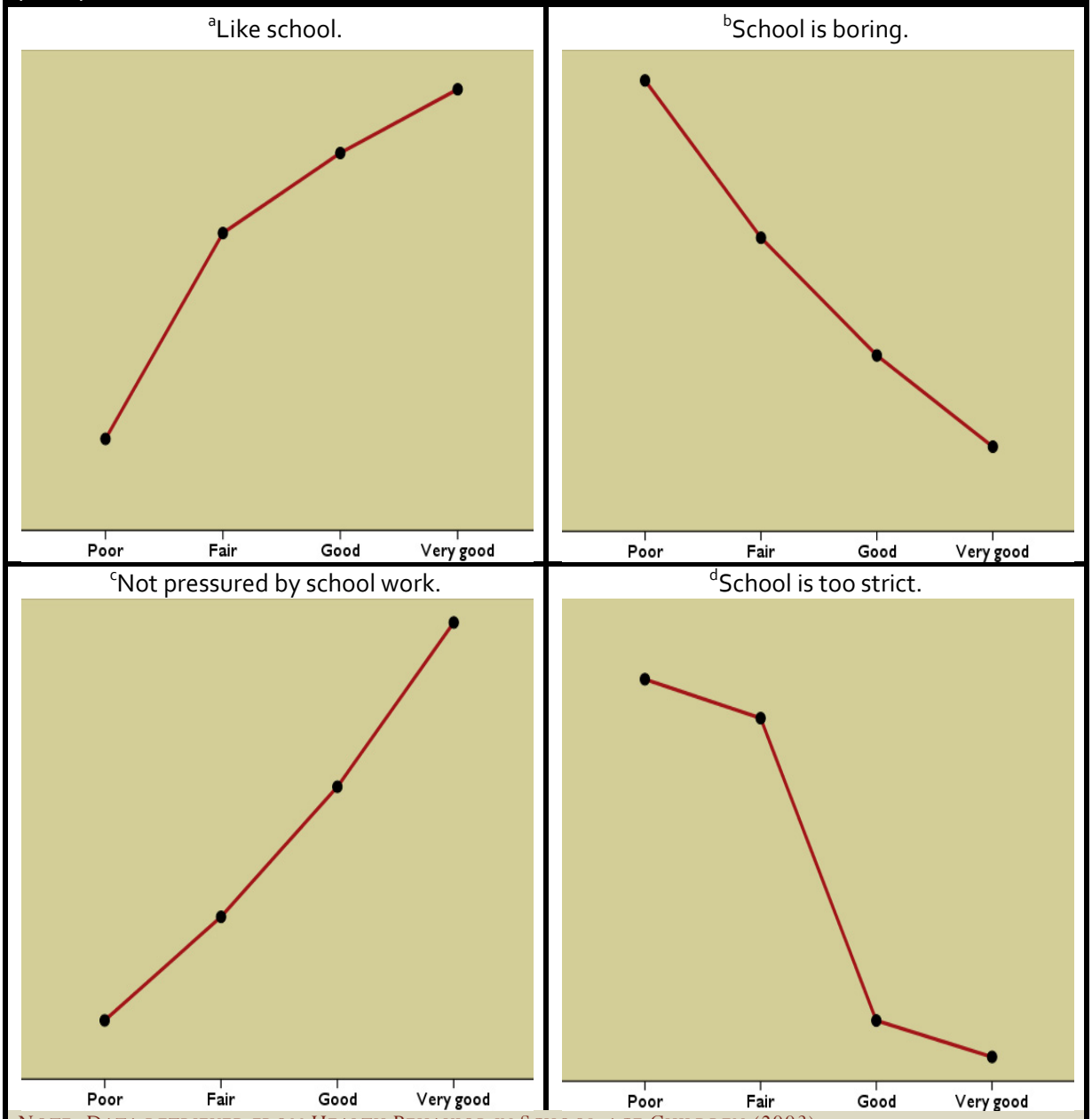


Note. Data retrieved from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2005)

X axis = Grades. (a) How did you feel overall about going to school? (Range = You hated going to school, You didn't like going to school very much, You kind of liked going to school, or You liked going to school a lot: F = 27.53, df = 3, p= .000); (b) How interesting are the courses at school? (Range = Very boring, Somewhat boring, Somewhat interesting, or Very interesting: F = 20.85, df = 3, p= .000); (c) How important are things that you learned going to be for your future? (Range = Very unimportant – Very important: F = 8.44, df = 3, p= .000); (d) How often did you feel school work was meaningful? (Range = Never – Always: F = 8.44, df = 3, p= .000).

When analyzing perceptions of school using the HBSC dataset, school-age African-American males who reported high levels of academic achievement stated, in order of importance, that they: (1) "Liked" school at the present time; (2) Were not bored by school; (3) Did not feel "pressured" by school and (4) Believed the rules are fair (See Figure 4.2 for F values).

Figure 4.2: The linear relationship between school-age African-American male students' perception of school (Y-axes) and their level of academic achievement (X-axes).



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) How do you feel about school at present? ($F = 27.17$; $p < .0001$); (b) How often do you think that going to school is boring? ($F = 14.43$; $p < .0001$); (c) How pressured do you feel by the schoolwork you have to do? ($F = 6.77$; $p < .0001$); (d) The students are treated too severely/strictly in this school. ($F = 4.30$; $p < .001$)

Interpretations of the means plots and Bonferroni post hoc analyses indicated mostly perfect linear relationships between school perception variables and academic achievement. The exception was the belief that rules are fair.

Poor to fair students believed school rules to be too strict, whereas good to very good students believed the rules were fair. High achieving black male students were also more prone to believe that school is a "nice place to be;" however, the level of significance was lower. The only perception that did not show significant differences based on achievement was the sense of "belonging." Low-achieving black male students acknowledged feeling like they belong at school similarly to high-achieving black male students.

Interestingly, when considering the response choices of the survey questions on the NSDUH, the top two perceptual predictors of academic success among African-American males were nearly identical across the two national samples explored. For the question, "How you felt overall about going to school?" the response choices ranged from "you liked going to school a lot," to "you hated going to school." For the second question, "How interesting are courses at school?" the response choices ranged from "very interesting" to "very boring."

Relationship with Teachers

Student-teacher relationships were assessed with responses to queries that followed the statement, "Please select one choice for each of the statements about your teachers" in the HBSC dataset. ANOVA procedures revealed that African-American males who agreed with the statements that followed, which are displayed in Figure 4.3, were significantly more likely to have higher levels of academic achievement. Figure 4.3 displays the linear patters of black males' agreement with the statements that reflected a positive relationship with teachers and achievement in order of significance.

Further examination of student-teacher relationships with Bonferroni post hoc analysis revealed that most of the differences in academic achievement among black males were between low-achieving black male students and all others. Across all teacher relationship variables, teachers who were perceived to treat their students "as a person" produced the highest levels of academic achievement among black males.

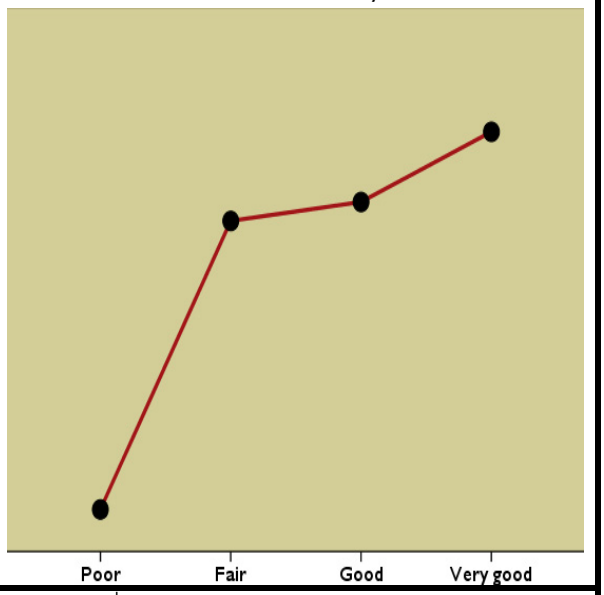
When analyzing the impact of student-teacher relationships on African-American males' academic achievement using the NSDUH, findings were similar to the HBSC dataset results. When black males responded to the question, "During the past 12 months, how often did your teachers at school let you know when you were doing a good job with your school work?" the higher achievers more frequently replied "always" ($F = 9.60$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$).

Finally, the NCVS-SCS respondents were asked to respond to three statements that gauged aspects of a students' relationship with their teachers. Statements were prefaced with, "Thinking about the teachers at your school during the last 6 months, would you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following…" When relating African-American male students' level of agreement with the statements to their reported grades, two of the three statements produced a significant effect, including: "Teachers treat students with respect;" and "Teachers do or say things that make students feel bad about themselves." The linear directions of the estimated means plots on Figure 4.4 illustrate that black male students with better grades were more likely to perceive respect from their teachers and less likely to perceive that their teacher did or said things to hurt or belittle them. Bonferroni post hoc analyses suggested that the effects were primarily attributed to differences between F-C students and B-A students. The statement, "Teachers care about students" did not produce significant results.

Figure 4.3: The linear relationship between school-age African-American male students' relationship with teachers (Y-axes) and their level of academic achievement (X-axes).

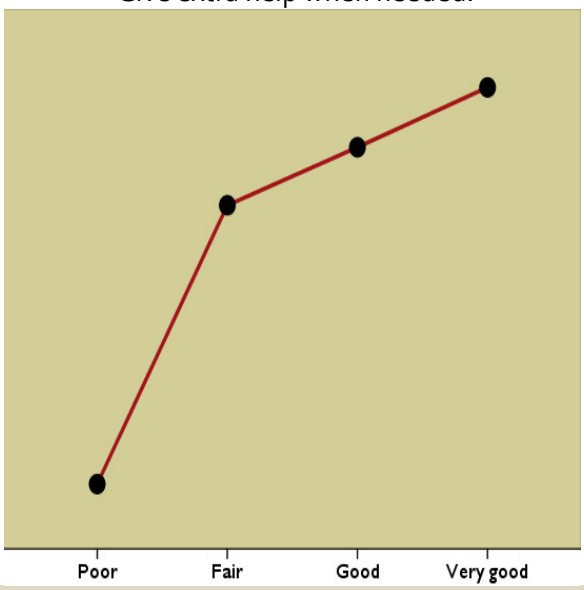
[a]Interested in me as a person.

[b]Treat me fairly.



[c]Encourage me to express views.

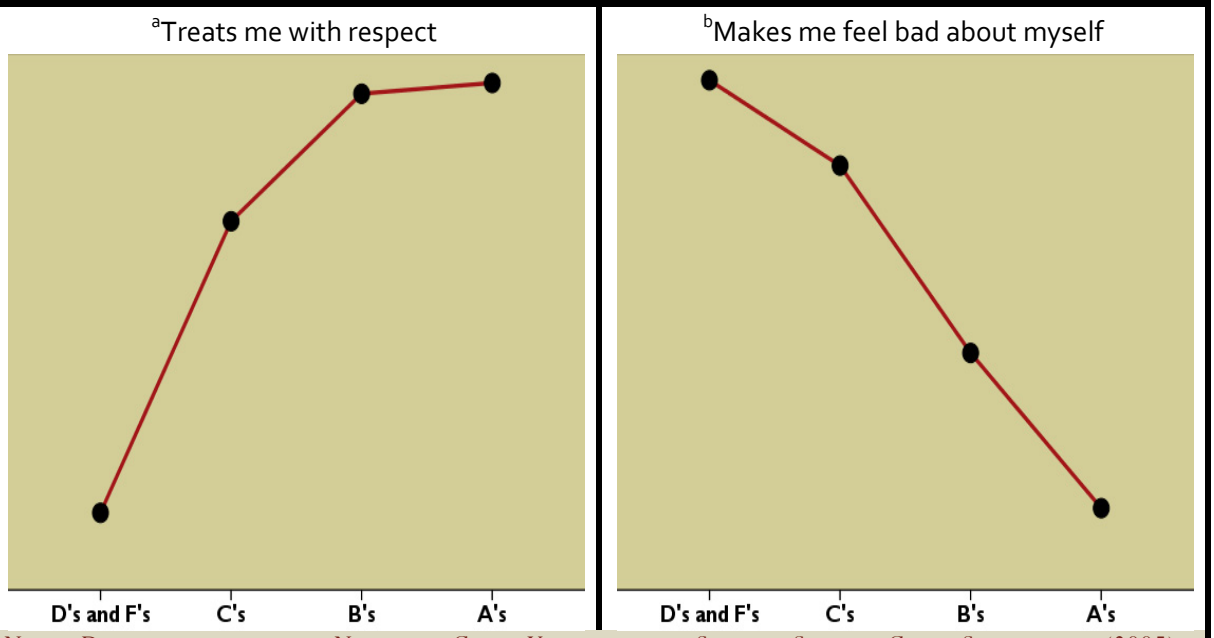
[d]Give extra help when needed.



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates? (a) My teachers are interested in me as a person ($F = 13.26$; $p < .001$); (b) Our teachers treat us fairly ($F = 6.8$; $p < .0001$); (c) I am encouraged to express my views in my classes ($F = 6.58$; $p < .0001$); (d) When I need extra help, I can get it ($F = 5.5$; $p < .01$).

Figure 4.4: The relationship between school-age African-American male students' perception of teachers (Y-axes) and their level of academic achievement (X-axes).



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY: SCHOOL CRIME SUPPLEMENT (2005)

X axis = "During this school year, across all subjects have you gotten mostly." (a) Teachers treat students with respect. ($F = 4.05$; $df = 3$; $p < .01$); (b) Teachers do or say things that make students feel bad about themselves. ($F = 6.18$; $df = 3$; $p < .01$).

SCHOOL SAFETY

School-age African-American males who acknowledged carrying a weapon at school for self defense on the HBSC survey were significantly more likely to report lower levels of academic achievement ($F = 21.59$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$). When asking whether they felt safe at school, black males who reported higher levels of safety were more likely to report higher academic achievement ($F = 10.4$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$). Plots of estimated means of "carrying a weapon" and "feeling safe" revealed that the two factors have almost an opposite effect on academic achievement (see Figure 4.5). Those reporting low levels of academic achievement were more likely than any other students to carry a weapon or feel unsafe.

Figure 4.5: The relationship between school safety (Y-axes) and level of academic achievement (X-axes) among school-age African-American males.

[a]Carry a Weapon

[b]Feeling Safe

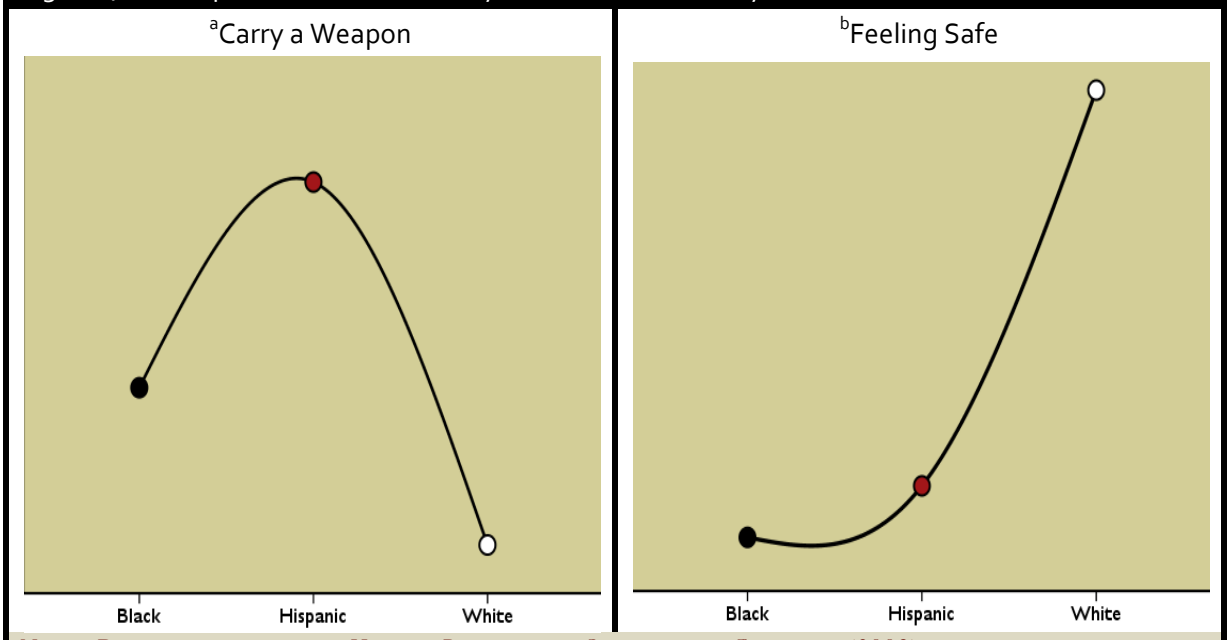
NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)

X axis = In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates?; (a) During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon, such as a gun, knife or club, for self-defense on school property? (b) Do you feel safe at school?

When assessing school safety issues by race, school-age African-American males were more likely to feel unsafe at school than European or Hispanic Americans. White students were significantly more likely to report feeling safe at school than black or Hispanic students ($F = 219.63$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$). Black students were significantly more likely to report carrying a weapon to school for self defense than white students, but significantly less likely than Hispanic students.

The NCVS-SCS was used to test the impact of various steps that a school might use to keep students safe. The survey question used was "Does your school take any measures to make sure students are safe? For example, does the school have…?" Respondents were asked to reply "yes" or "no" to seven commonly used safety measures including: security guards; non-security adults in the hall; metal detectors; locked entrances; visitor sign-ins; locker checks; name badge requirement; security cameras and a code of conduct. ANOVA procedures revealed no significant effects for any of the safety measures on academic achievement among black males.

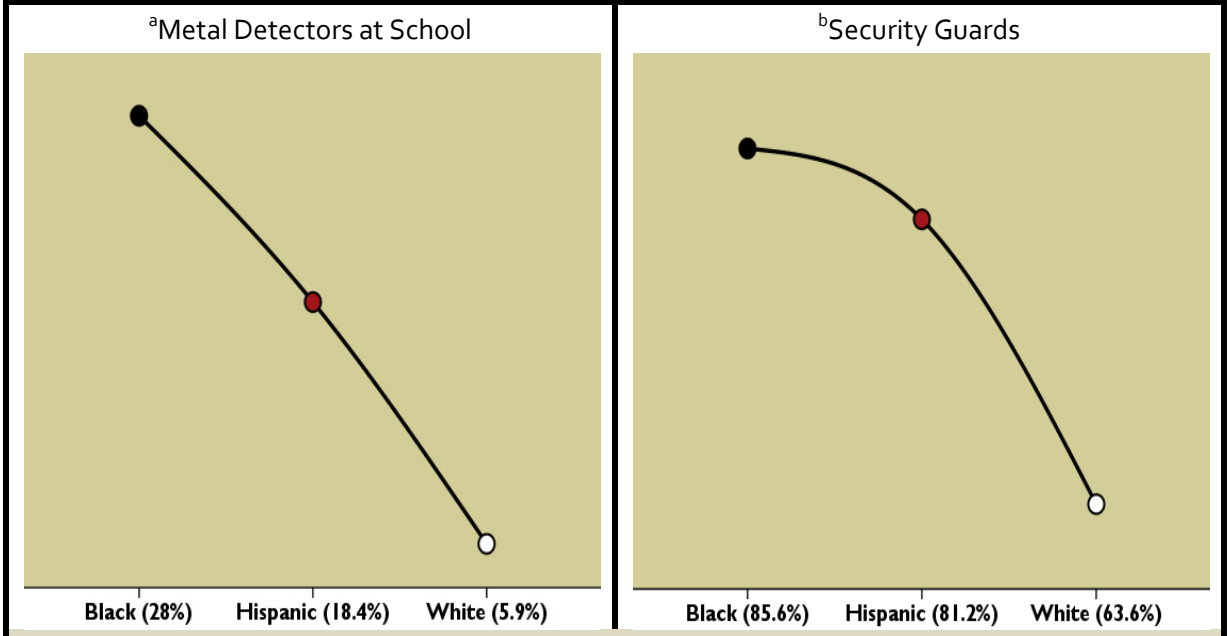
Figure 4.6: Comparison of school safety indicators (Y-axes) by race.



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM HEALTH BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (2003)
X axis = Race. (a) During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon, such as a gun, knife or club, for self-defense on school property? (b) Do you feel safe at school?

When exploring the security measures used by race, significant differences were found for all security measures except requiring visitors to sign-in. Large effect sizes were found with the presence of metal detectors ($F = 204.78$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$) in the school and security guards or assigned police officers ($F = 123.19$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$) in the school. Black students were almost 500 percent more likely than white students to pass through a metal detector at school.

Figure 4.7: Comparison of school safety measures (Y-axes) by race.



NOTE. DATA RETRIEVED FROM NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY: SCHOOL CRIME SUPPLEMENT (2005)
X axis = Race. (a) Does your school have metal detectors? (b) Does your school have security guards or assigned police officers?

Summary of Findings

Factors that are specifically related to African-American males' experiences in contemporary school settings were explored in this section. Overall, the findings indicate that high-achieving black male students tend to have a more positive perception of school, more congenial relationships with their teachers and perceive school as a safe environment. School safety issues were particularly unique to African-American students who generally feel less safe at school than their European American counterparts.

"Liking" school and not being "bored" by school appears to be language that is particularly salient to school adaptive patterns for black males. Two national surveys demonstrated that the more black males report that they like school, and the less they report being bored by school, the better their educational outcomes. Black males also need to believe that what they are learning is important for their future and that the school work is meaningful. Research findings also revealed that academic failure among young black males may also be attributed to feeling pressured by school work and feeling that school rules are too strict. Notably, low-achieving black male students' sense that they "belong" at school was similar to high-achieving black male students. "Belonging" might be an initial investment in the learning process for low-achieving black students that could ultimately foster an interest in school.

Across three national surveys, through the findings, a profile of a teacher that was particularly effective in fostering academic growth among black males clearly emerged. High-achieving black male students reported that their teachers were interested in them "as a person," treated them fairly, encouraged them to express their views and gave extra help when needed. Teachers who were effective also routinely let their students know when they did a good job. Overall, black male students who were successful perceived their teachers to be respectful people who treated them like they matter and nurturing people who builds up their strengths, instead of making them "feel bad" about their weaknesses.

> As a student at Timberland High School, I am exposed to countless opportunities, inspiring people, and the importance of having an education. Throughout my high school career, I have been part of Future Business Leaders of America, where I won three awards for public speaking. It was at school where I met teachers who are concerned about my education. One of those teachers is my AP US History teacher, Melissa Soule. Besides making history an exciting class, Ms. Soule expressed the realities of minorities living in the United States, especially Black men. She made me realize that struggle can be a luxury when you achieve, because it makes you the person you are. Besides Ms. Soule, there are other teachers who influence me to do my best, many of them being Black men.
>
> **Asa Fludd, 11th Grade**
>
> *"A Mile in My Shoes" Writing Project*
> *African-American Males Telling Their Own Stories*

The findings clearly demonstrated that black male students perform best in environments that they perceive as safe. Low-achieving black male students were more likely to carry a weapon to school for self-defense than middle- or high-achieving black male students. High-achieving black male students reported more often that they feel safe at school. The findings also revealed that black students were significantly more likely than white or Hispanic students to feel unsafe at school. Current school safety measures explored in this study did not have a relationship to academic achievement among African-American students. When comparing school safety measures by race, findings indicate that schools that educate black students devoted a disproportionate amount of resources to metal detectors and security officers. A black student is almost 500 percent more likely to pass through a metal detector than a white student. Black students are significantly more likely to pass through metal detectors than Hispanic students, although Hispanic students reported bringing more weapons to school.

Policy Implications

1. The findings suggest that educational policies would best serve black male students by helping them to become invested in the "concept" of school. Helping students to be interested in school by finding their class work meaningful for their current and future lives is important for black males to cultivate a perspective of school that is consistent with high achieving. Current educational policies that function on testing and benchmarks do not directly achieve objectives that are consistent with the statistical findings. In fact, excessive testing, particularly

tests that determine placement, could contribute to students' feelings that school is a "pressure" filled environment, or is "too strict." Statistically, black males who feel pressured, or that believe that school is too strict, are less likely to achieve good grades in school. Project-based learning, inquiry-based science, student-centered learning, inclusive multicultural education, critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education are educational strategies that are consistent with the findings, and should be incorporated into revised educational policy.

2. The findings suggest that teachers are most effective when they have a personal connection to their students. Current educational policies have specific criteria for teacher qualifications including, fulfilling a state's certification and licensing requirements, obtaining at least a bachelor's degree and demonstrating subject matter expertise. To meet these requirements many states have instituted rigorous subject matter tests for teachers or revised undergraduate educational requirements. However, current policies fail to address social and emotional qualities of teachers that are statistically related to high achievement among black males. When educational policies outline criteria for teacher and teaching standards, schools should measure holistic teacher qualities including: (1) abilities to make students feel supported and respected; (2) skill at creating forums for students to express themselves and (3) ability to critique students without making them feel bad about themselves. Incentives for teachers to become involved with students outside of the classroom, such as through clubs, sports and other activities, could also cultivate more cordial student-teacher relationships.
3. Importantly, additional resources should be allocated to teachers who work in tough learning environments. Difficulties attracting and retaining teachers in high need have been attributed to low pay, substandard working conditions and socioeconomic factors that impede student achievement. Many teachers, particularly in urban school districts, become disenchanted because they feel they have little control over the conditions and circumstances that weaken student achievement. Programs should be implemented to instill a spirit of activism among diverse educators by equipping them with the tools necessary to influence educational and social policy. Such tools will make the teaching profession more attractive to civic-minded individuals who want to educate young people and be agents of social change. Infusing diverse school districts with conscientious and politically savvy teachers will help to transform education and elevate achievement among African-American male students.
4. Safety is a factor that is uniquely related to academic success among school-age black males. Findings suggest that (1) black male students are more likely to feel unsafe at school than white or Hispanic males and (2) black male students who feel safer at school achieve better grades. The findings also demonstrate that the presence of superficial safety measures, such as metal detectors and security guards, do not improve academic achievement among black males. School policies should view safety as an internal state that is sensitive to a nurturing environment. The National Education Association's Safe Schools 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.
5. Finally, NCLB policies openly advocate for schools and districts to address the academic achievement of traditionally underserved groups of students, including "major racial and ethnic subgroups." However, this goal is futile if African-American students are not afforded the same basic respect and accommodations as students in other ethnic groups. The wide racial gap that exists between students who pass through metal detectors when they enter school is evidence of a larger problem of black students being treated less humanely than white students at school. Symbolically, metal detectors can invoke many feelings, such as insecurity, lack of respect andrigidity, which are statistically related to underachievement. School safety policies and procedures should be examined for consistency throughout school districts to make sure they are not being used for discriminatory purposes.

Going Forward

No people can **go forward** when the majority of those who should know better have chosen to go backward...

Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson (1933) –The Mis-Education of the Negro

The research presented in this report assessed the academic spectrum of African-American male students to inform best practices for promoting academic achievement. The study is unique because it wholly integrates high achieving black male students into the statistical design to help the readers readily identify empirically supported solutions, instead of becoming overwhelmed by deficits. The research findings provide compelling evidence that a range of personal, emotional, family, environmental and school factors contribute to academic success among school-age African-American males.

The research evidence is based on national survey data and the methodology adheres to standards for *Scientifically-based Research*, which are outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Notably, many of the findings in this report have implications that are contrary to, or beyond the scope of, many of the NCLB mandates. Smart policy extends beyond classroom instruction and fosters positive family communication, emotional growth and school relevancy.

As we search for more comprehensive and culturally congruent revisions of current educational policy, researchers, school activists and parents should understand the need to influence legislative agendas to enhance the quality of schools and advocate for the unique needs of students (Green, 2008). This involves understanding how to identify and interpret legislative bills and policies impacting schools and how to use the legislative process to enhance social advocacy and promote social justice and leadership for African-American students.

Legislative Landscape[2]

Several current and proposed legislative priorities are in line with findings presented in this report. Additionally, some existing policy goals could be enhanced by proposals contained within. Broadly, policies aimed at supporting the academic and emotional growth of African-American males should focus on creating healthy, safe and supportive learning environments.

Personal and Emotional Factors. As indicated by the research findings, feelings of happiness and self-worth were among the strongest indicators of academic success among school-age African-American males. Accordingly, it is important to identify methods to encourage and promote positive self images while providing students with opportunities inside and outside of school that are challenging and relevant to the 21st century global economy. Curricula should be anchored by college and workforce readiness standards and financial support must be made available to low-income, first-generation students. Federally funded programs like GEAR UP and TRIO are essential to encouraging college access and supporting academic success among African-American men, especially those from economically disadvantaged and single parent homes. Federal legislation aimed at improving success among this population must support the promulgation of programs and activities that encourage college access, promote positive self-images and support academic achievement. The reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*, which is before both committees in conference, contains several provisions that will enhance the provision of early intervention and awareness programs that target low-income and first-generation students; encourage the use of college-ready curricula and increase federal aid targeted to students with the highest financial need. Such provisions should be enacted and maintained.

[2] The author gratefully acknowledges the significant contributions of David Johns to this section.

*The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Resiliency Act of 2007*is consistent with the findings of this report. It amends the *Public Health Service Act* to improve the quality and availability of mental health services for children and adolescents. In addition, the *Mental Health in Schools Act of 2007*, which was introduced in the House and Senate, seeks to extend projects relating to children and violence and provides access to school-based comprehensive mental health programs. Access to these services is essential to ensuring mental health and emotional well-being.

In 2007, U.S. Rep. Danny K. Davis of Illinois submitted a resolution to establish a *School-Based Health Centers Month* to raise awareness of health services provided by school health centers. Finally, U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy's *Minority Health Improvement and Health Disparity Elimination Act* and the *Reducing Barriers to Learning Act of 2007* would address many of the global issues that present barriers to academic success for black males. This Act would amend the *Public Health Service Act* to improve the health and healthcare of racial and ethnic minority groups. The *Keep Our PACT Act* is another important bill that would require full funding of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Legislation included in these provisions should be codified.

Family Factors. As previously mentioned, legislation aimed at promoting healthy habits that are adopted by parents and care givers are vital to the success of African-American male youth. To overcome barriers associated with fatherless and disengaged households, federal policies must promote active and involved family practices. The *Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged Act (PACE) S. 1302* provides students and schools with community liaisons tasked with identifying and providing students with the support needed to stay engaged in school and to graduate. Mentoring programs, community and after school programs and activities and individual career and college guidance, such as those authorized by the No Child Left Behind Act, are but a few of the necessary elements needed to maximize the success/achievement of African-American males.

Few bills directly address the need for parents and families to be involved in student learning, beyond the debated school choice initiatives. However, U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee of California recently introduced the *Student Support Act*, which would amend the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* to provide grants to states for assistance in hiring additional school-based mental health and student service providers. Similarly, U.S. Rep. Susan Davis of California introduced the *I LEAD Act of 2007* to develop a "generation of school leaders who are committed to and effective in, increasing student achievement and to ensure that all low-income, underperforming schools are led by effective school leaders who are well-prepared to foster student success." This Act specifically identifies parents in the possible cohort of leaders.

Legislation that supports the provision of comprehensive support services, including those that provide parents and caregivers with opportunities to develop healthy habits, should be encouraged. The *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act* of 2007 built upon the success of the 43-year-old Head Start program to provide better access to programs and services for children, communities and families in need. The bill includes provisions for parental education and provides access to physical and mental health services. Legislation aimed at improving outcomes for African-American males should consider the provision of quality early childhood education and care programs and activities designed to facilitate smooth transitions to kindergarten.

Social and Environmental Factors. Economic disadvantage is difficult to overcome; however, for generations African-American males of varying backgrounds have found ways to achieve success. It is important to provide these students with the skills and opportunities that will enable them to surmount barriers associated with poverty. Policies aimed at improving educational outcomes among African-American males must be designed to address poverty in the black community and reformulating the school-funding formula must be considered in any real attempt to improve achievement among African-American males.

When the Workforce Investment Improvement Act (WIIA) is reauthorized it should maintain and strengthen programs designed to increase opportunities and remove barriers to job training, placement and support services for at risk populations. Programs that improve adult education, enhance vocational rehabilitation and focus on youth with the greatest need should be maintained and strengthened. Additionally, programs designed to provide youth with summer employment and job-training opportunities should be supported. Service-learning opportunities and

programs like AmeriCorps should be made accessible to African-American males in both urban and rural environments.

The recently codified *Second Chance Act Public Law* No. 110-199 provides expanded services to offenders and their families for re-entry into society; authorizes the Attorney General to award grants up to $500,000 to establish state, local and tribal reentry courts to monitor offenders and provide them with access to comprehensive re-entry services and programs, including programs for drug and alcohol testing and assessment for treatment; and provides access to technology career training, physical and mental health services and other job- and skill-training programs needed to facilitate a smooth transition and reduce recidivism. Legislation aimed at reducing the number of African-American males in juvenile facilities and supporting the re-entry of others should be promulgated.

School Factors. African-American males who reported high levels of academic achievement, were more likely to enjoy school, participate in positive and affirming relationships with teachers and peers, say they felt challenged and supported and believe things were fair. All students deserve to be treated fairly – without bias or prejudice – and provided with a relevant and challenging curriculum. Federal policy should support the identification and use of practices that promote positive and healthy relationships among teachers and minority males. Further research is also needed to better understand the impact of team teaching, looping and other instructional practices on the achievement of African-American males. Positive interactions between students and instructors are essential to success among African-American males.

Conclusion

Many bills have been proposed that would address some of the needs presented in this report. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of bills that are introduced to the House and Senate ultimately become law. In addition, many of the barriers that African-American male students face are beyond the scope of the present policies or legislation. In addition, while this report primarily highlights federal initiatives, state, private and school-led programs are equally, and sometimes more important. School and community activists, administrators, parents and students are the natural leaders in education reform and are tasked with using research, policy and common sense to advocate for change.

Although the findings in this study are far-reaching, many suggestions for further research are implied within. Specifically, further research is needed to identify and scale effective strategies for encouraging and affirming African-American male students and ensuring that they are engaged in activities and curricula that are challenging and relevant. Further research is also needed to identify and disseminate proven effective strategies for developing positive and healthy relationships between educators and African-American males. Programs aimed at supporting African-American males by addressing the unique social and cultural characteristics shared among various groups of African-American males must be supported and furthered studied. Additionally, more research is needed to identify and develop measures to increase school safety. Finally, more research is needed to better understand the unique challenges facing African-American males in rural settings.

For most, the findings in this report will remind them of, or provide statistical support for, commonly held truisms in contemporary education. Education is most effective when it promotes positive school-related growth experiences, with particular emphasis on teacher-child relationships, didactic learning and emotional support. Positive parent-child communication, including parents expressing praise, helping with homework, talking about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and cooperative parenting arrangements, promotes academic success among black males. Providing community resources and academic assistance to children in low-income areas, helps to build character through civic engagement, volunteerism and sports, all of which can improve academic functioning. Most importantly, we must advocate for policy that reduces racial disparities in income and increases equity and inclusion in education.

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