

Gender Differences in African American Adolescents' Personal, Educational, and Occupational Expectations and Perceptions of Neighborhood Quality

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This study was conducted in an effort to generate information toward fostering academic outcomes among African American adolescents. Gender differences in African American adolescents' personal, educational, and occupational expectations were examined in relation to perceptions of neighborhood quality. Participants included 352 African American adolescents residing in an urban area. Measures were self-reported expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality. Regression analyses indicated that (a) expectations were positively associated with perceptions of neighborhood quality, (b) female adolescents reported more positive expectations than male adolescents, and (c) the association between expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality depended on gender, with male adolescents who rated their neighborhood higher in quality reporting higher personal and educational expectations than male adolescents who rated their neighborhood poorer in quality. Implications of this study for programs and research that focus on academic outcomes and neighborhoods of African American adolescents are discussed.

Keywords: *future expectations; neighborhood perceptions; African American adolescents*

African American adolescents have disproportionate rates of family- and neighborhood-level poverty and educational and occupational attainment relative to their counterparts from other racial and ethnic groups (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). African American youth represent 15% of the population, although 32% live in poverty (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003), and 6% of African Americans aged 25 years and older are unemployed, compared with only 3% of European

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Americans (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics & U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Furthermore, African Americans are more likely to reside in low-quality neighborhoods that offer few educational and occupational opportunities and that have high concentrations of unemployed adults (Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Massey & Shibuya, 1995; Wilson, 1987). Such neighborhoods afford African American adolescents limited role models for educational and occupational attainment. Indeed, neighborhood-level education and occupation have been inversely associated with key academic outcomes, including high school completion (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

African American adolescents' educational attainment and experiences in low-quality neighborhoods vary by gender. African American male adolescents have lower educational attainment relative to female adolescents (Gibbs, 1984; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics & U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). In 2004, fewer male African Americans graduated from high school, attended college, and received bachelor's degrees than their female counterparts (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics & U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). African American male adolescents are also more likely to witness or experience violence in low-quality neighborhoods compared with female adolescents (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993). Given such disparities, it is imperative to investigate factors that may promote positive educational outcomes among African American adolescents in general and among African American male adolescents in particular.

Future expectations have been discussed as an important factor that may facilitate the educational attainment of racial and ethnic minority youth (Phalet, Andriessen, & Lens, 2004). Research from an expectancy-value perspective suggests that expectations vary by gender (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), although equivocal findings have been reported (Mau & Bikos, 2000; Soloranzo, 1992). Gender differences in adolescents' expectations may be more fully understood by considering social settings such as neighborhoods. Increased attention has been directed at neighborhoods and adolescent academic outcomes (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Researchers have proposed that neighborhood quality may be associated with adolescents' expectations through role-modeling and neighborhood-level socialization mechanisms

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(Sampson, 1997; Wilson, 1987). Furthermore, research has shown that male adolescents are more sensitive to neighborhood quality than female adolescents (e.g., Crowder & South, 2003). Thus, this study examined gender differences in African American adolescents' personal, educational, and occupational expectations in relation to neighborhood quality.

EXPECTATIONS AND GENDER

Expectations refer to a cognitive-motivational concept thought to contribute to behaviors (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) in personal, educational, and occupational domains. Adolescents' educational expectations have predicted academic outcomes in adolescence (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), and adolescents' occupational expectations have been linked to occupational attainment in adulthood (Schoon, 2001). Eccles and Wigfield (2002) proposed that adolescents' expectations are influenced by significant adults, such as parents and teachers. They argued that prevailing gender differences in expectations are due in part to parental gender stereotypes. In a study of 11- and 12-year-olds, it was shown that maternal gender stereotypic beliefs influenced adolescents' expectations (Jacobs & Eccles, 1992).

However, extant research has shown mixed results with gender and expectations. African American female adolescents have reported higher educational and occupational expectations than male adolescents (Dawkins, 1981; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Rojewski, 1995; Soloranzo, 1992). In contrast, other researchers have shown that female adolescents report lower expectations in educational and occupational domains, among African American college students (Thomas & Larke, 1989), in occupational domains among ethnically diverse college students (Arbona & Novy, 1991), and in personal domains among early adolescents (Wyman, Cowen, Work, & Kerley, 1993). Even still, other researchers have reported no gender differences among African American adolescents in occupational expectations (McCabe & Barnett, 2000). Mixed findings may stem from variation in the age ranges of participants and the measures of expectations that have been used.

NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES) AND EXPECTATIONS

Neighborhoods are most frequently defined as geographic spaces, such as census tracts (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Neighborhood-level SES includes the adult average income, education, and occupation in a neighborhood and is the primary definition of neighborhood quality. Neighborhood SES has been consistently positively associated with academic outcomes

(e.g., Harding, 2003) and may be associated with adolescents' expectations through collective socialization (Sampson, 1997; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Wilson, 1987). Researchers drawing from this perspective propose that neighborhood adults collectively socialize neighborhood children through neighborhood-adult supervising, monitoring, and role modeling. Thus, neighborhood adults may act as collective role models for adolescent residents. Prior research supports this perspective and has shown a significant association between levels of collective socialization and delinquency among children (Sampson, 1997). For example, collective socialization was inversely associated with conduct problems in a study of African American children aged 10 to 12 years residing in small towns and cities (Simons, Simons, Conger, & Brody, 2004).

Prior research suggests that neighborhood SES is positively associated with educational and occupational expectations (Ceballo, McLoyd, & Toyokawa, 2004; Hope 1995; Quane & Rankin, 1998). Hope (1995) showed that middle-class African American adolescents living in low-SES neighborhoods were less likely to aspire or plan to attend college than those in high-SES neighborhoods. Adolescents residing in neighborhoods with high-SES adults reported higher educational values than their counterparts living in low-SES neighborhoods (Ceballo et al., 2004). Quane and Rankin (1998) reported that neighborhood poverty, the proportion of adults living in poverty per census tract, was indirectly related to adolescents' occupational expectations through contact with nonnormative peers.

NEIGHBORHOOD SES, EXPECTATIONS, AND GENDER

Prior research indicates that neighborhoods are differentially associated with academic outcomes across gender, with many studies showing that male adolescents are more sensitive to neighborhoods than their female counterparts (Crowder & South, 2003; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1994). In a study of African American and European American primary and secondary school students, neighborhood income had a stronger effect on math achievement for male adolescents than female adolescents (Entwisle et al., 1994), and African American male adolescents had a substantially higher probability of dropping out of high school when residing in poor neighborhoods compared with female adolescents (Connell & Halpern-Felsher, 1997; Crowder & South, 2003). Similarly, residing in a middle-SES neighborhood was positively associated with high school completion for male but not female adolescents (Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson, 1996).

In contrast, some research has shown that female adolescents are more sensitive to neighborhood SES than male adolescents. Ceballo et al. (2004)

found that the educational values of African American female adolescents were positively associated with neighborhood SES, but not those of male adolescents. Even still, the relationship among neighborhood SES, puberty, and deviant behavior was the same for African American female and male adolescents (Ge, Brody, Conger, Simons, & Murry, 2002). Similarly, in a study of African American children, Brody et al. (2003) showed how the association between neighborhood SES, parenting, and conduct disorder was comparable for both female adolescents and male adolescents.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEASURES

Neighborhoods have most commonly been examined through objective measures such as U.S. census tracts (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). However, recent attention has focused on neighborhood perceptions as a useful way to investigate the connection between neighborhoods and adolescent developmental outcomes (Bass & Lambert, 2004; Jones, Forehand, O'Connell, Armistead, & Brody, 2005; Spencer, 2001; Taylor, 2000). Hadley-Ives, Stiffman, Elze, Johnson, and Dore (2000) showed that African American adolescents' perceptions of neighborhood quality predicted mental health outcomes, including depression and substance use, in a study of primarily (86%) African American adolescents. Perceptions of neighborhood quality included the presence of drug dealing, graffiti, or vandalism. In another study of neighborhood perceptions, African American female adolescents' academic achievement and school self-efficacy were positively associated with perceptions of neighborhood cohesion (Plybon, Edwards, Butler, Belgrave, & Allison, 2003). More recently, maternal perceptions of neighborhood violence were shown to be associated with parental monitoring in a study of African American mothers (Jones et al., 2005).

In addition to establishing relationships between adolescents' neighborhood perceptions and academic outcomes, researchers have shown that adolescents' perceptions are significantly correlated with objective neighborhood ratings such as the census (Ceballo et al., 2004). For example, in a study of African American adolescents, Ceballo et al. (2004) reported that adolescents' subjective ratings of their neighborhood were positively associated with census-tract data, including the percentage of middle-class residents. Additionally, Bass and Lambert (2004) showed that neighborhood perceptions were more similar among youth residing in close proximity to one another than the neighborhood perceptions of youth residing farther apart.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Given the importance of research on the future expectations of African American female and male adolescents and recent attention on neighborhood perceptions, we posed the following research questions. First, how are expectations in personal, educational, and occupational domains associated with perceptions of neighborhood quality? Given prior research establishing a positive association between neighborhood SES and academic outcomes (e.g., Harding, 2003), it was hypothesized that future expectations would be positively associated with neighborhood perceptions. Second, how do adolescents' future expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality vary by gender? Although the literature on gender differences is inconsistent, we hypothesized that female adolescents would have more positive future expectations than male adolescents, because much of the prior research has reported such a finding. Third, how is the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of neighborhood quality and future expectations moderated by gender? On the basis of prior research showing that male adolescents are more sensitive to neighborhood SES than female adolescents in academic outcomes (Crowder & South, 2003), it was hypothesized that the association between neighborhood SES and expectations would be strongest for male adolescents.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The data for this study were drawn from a longitudinal study titled Promotion of Academic Competence (PAC). The study examined the resiliency of low-income African American adolescents and began in the 1989-1990 academic year (Spencer, 1988). Students were recruited from four primarily African American middle schools in a large, southeastern urban city. Approximately 3,000 adolescents completed a 20-minute self-report survey. From this sample, students were randomly selected to participate in the longitudinal study ($n = 562$). Signed consents for participation ranged from 55% to 80% per school. Participants completed a battery of group-administered surveys. The surveys were read to respondents to control for varying levels of reading ability. According to parent-reported income, information collected in the 1st year of the study, 58% of the participants' families met federal poverty guidelines (i.e., an annual income of \$13,950 for a family of four).

Participants for the present study came from the final wave conducted in the 1994-1995 academic year. Data from that particular year were used given that this was the only wave in which future expectations were assessed. The sample included 352 African American 10th ($n = 149$ [42%]), 11th ($n = 103$ [29%]), and 12th ($n = 100$ [28%]) grade students and 240 male adolescents (68%). The participants' average age was 17 years ($SD = 1.10$ years). Parental information indicated that 69% of the participants ($n = 202$) lived in mother-headed households (58 cases had missing values).

MEASURES

Future expectations. Future expectations were assessed by a questionnaire developed for the PAC study by Spencer (1988). The instrument is similar to frequently used measures of future expectations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Items probed the degree to which adolescents expected to experience particular life events. Each item began with the stem "Ten years from now how likely are particular events to occur?" Response options included the following values: 0 (*never thought about it*), 1 (*not likely*), 2 (*somewhat likely*), 3 (*very likely to occur*). Items were summed to generate subscales reflecting personal, educational, and occupational domains. The personal domain included three items: "have a positive attitude towards life," "be proud of yourself," and "be living" ($\alpha = .71$, $M = 7.11$, $SD = 2.11$). The educational domain included two items: "have a high school diploma/GED [general equivalency diploma]" and "have a college degree" ($\alpha = .69$, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.65$). The occupational domain included one item: "have a good job" ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.91$).

Neighborhood perceptions. Perceptions of neighborhood quality were assessed using a 24-item questionnaire developed for the PAC study by Spencer (1988; $\alpha = .95$). Items began with the stem "Below are some questions about your neighborhood. Please tell us if you think each of the following is a big problem at all in your neighborhood." Items included such problems as vandalism, unemployment, and drug use. Responses were rated on a 3-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not a problem*) to 3 (*a big problem*). Items were recoded and summed such that a higher score reflected a higher quality neighborhood perception ($M = 52.30$, $SD = 12.89$).

Control variables. Academic achievement and SES were included in analyses as control variables, given the consistent positive association shown between academic achievement, parental education, and neighborhood SES (e.g., Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Academic achievement was the

grade point average across English, social studies, math, and science courses and was ascertained on the basis of school records ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.79$). SES ($M = -0.12$, $SD = 1.22$) included parental education and occupation. Education was assessed using mothers' and fathers' reports of education level, with values ranging from 1 (*primary school*) to 6 (*graduate school*). Occupation was mother's occupation level, with values ranging from 1 (*service worker*) to 8 (*professional*). Father's occupation was not included because of the limited number of cases. Item raw scores were converted to z scores and combined to create the SES variable.

RESULTS

PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

Descriptive statistics indicated that the sample had an average personal expectation of 7.12 ($SD = 2.11$), an educational expectation of 4.53 ($SD = 1.66$), and an occupational expectation of 2.32 ($SD = 0.91$). The mean ratings of personal, educational, and occupational expectations were above the scale midpoints, indicating that on average, participants thought that events in such domains would be between somewhat likely or very likely to occur. A mean neighborhood perception of 52.30 ($SD = 12.89$) was reported, with values ranging from 24 to 72. Thus, the majority of the sample rated their neighborhoods as having somewhat of a problem.

PRIMARY ANALYSES

Neighborhood perceptions and expectations. Perceptions of neighborhood quality were positively associated with educational and occupational expectations, partially supporting the first hypothesis (see Table 1, Model 2). The more individuals endorsed the likelihood of events occurring in educational and occupational domains, the higher the participants rated their neighborhood quality, after controlling for both SES and academic achievement ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$, and $\beta = .18$, $p < .05$, respectively). Personal expectations were not associated with neighborhood perceptions ($\beta = .12$, *ns*). Pairwise correlations indicated that future expectation variables were positively associated with one another. Personal expectations were positively correlated with educational expectations ($r = .60$, $p < .001$) and occupational expectations ($r = .54$, $p < .001$), and occupational expectations were positively associated with educational expectations ($r = .59$, $p < .001$).

Gender differences. Gender differences in future expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality were examined. The results from Model 1 (Table 1) showed that African American female adolescents were more likely to expect events to occur in personal ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), educational ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), and occupational ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) domains compared with male adolescents. Gender differences in personal, educational, and occupational domains persisted after controlling for academic achievement ($\beta = 0.11, 0.13, 0.11$, respectively; $p < .05$), although gender differences only appeared in educational expectations when including SES and neighborhood perceptions (see Model 2). African American male ($M = 52.00, SD = 12.45$) and female ($M = 52.92, SD = 13.79$) adolescents did not vary in their perceptions of neighborhood quality, $t(328) = -0.68, ns$. African American female adolescents and male adolescents had similar perceptions of neighborhood quality.

Gender, expectations, and neighborhood perceptions. The degree to which African American adolescents' perceptions of neighborhood quality interacted with gender in predicting future expectations in personal, educational, and occupational domains was examined (see Table 1, Model 2). The neighborhood perception variable was centered to reduce collinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). An interaction term was generated by the product of a variable denoting gender (1 = female, 0 = male) and the centered neighborhood perception variable.

The results provided some support for the hypothesis that the association between African American adolescents' personal, educational, and occupational expectations and neighborhood perceptions would vary by gender. Model 2 (Table 1) shows regression analyses per expectation domain, after controlling for both SES and academic achievement. Personal expectations were predicted by the interaction between gender and neighborhood perceptions ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$). Figure 1 illustrates how African American male adolescents who perceived their neighborhoods with poorer quality reported lower personal expectations than female adolescents, after controlling for both academic achievement and SES. African American male adolescents were less likely to expect to be proud or alive or to have positive attitudes in 10 years when rating their neighborhoods with poorer quality than their counterparts.

Educational expectations were predicted by the interaction between gender and neighborhood perceptions, after controlling for academic achievement and SES ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$). Figure 2 illustrates how African American male adolescents who perceived their neighborhoods with poorer quality were less likely to expect educational attainment than female adolescents, after controlling for both academic achievement and SES. Finally,

TABLE 1
Predicting African American Adolescents' Personal,
Educational, and Occupational Expectations by
Gender and Perceptions of Neighborhood Quality

	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>Gender Differences</i>			<i>Gender-Neighborhood Interaction</i>		
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Personal expectations						
Intercept	8.91***	0.17		7.08***	0.27	
Gender	1.03*	0.31	.18	0.49	0.12	.11
Academic achievement				0.64***	0.16	.24
Socioeconomic status				0.17	0.10	.10
Neighborhood perceptions				0.02	0.01	.12
Gender \times Neighborhood Perceptions				-0.04*	0.02	-.16
R^2	0.03			0.10		
F	10.97**			6.45**		
Educational expectations						
Intercept	4.31***	0.11		4.49***	0.12	
Gender	0.66*	0.19	.19	0.45*	0.21	.13
Academic achievement				0.50***	0.01	.24
Socioeconomic status				0.19*	0.02	.14
Neighborhood perceptions				0.02*	0.13	.19
Gender \times Neighborhood Perceptions				-0.04*	0.08	-.16
R^2	0.03			0.13		
F	12.52***			8.46***		
Occupational expectations						
Intercept	2.21***	0.06		2.30***	0.06	
Gender	0.32*	0.10	.17	0.23	0.12	.12
Academic achievement				0.23**		.21
Socioeconomic status				0.05	0.01	.07
Neighborhood perceptions				0.01*	0.07	.18
Gender \times Neighborhood Perceptions				-0.01	0.05	-.12
R^2	0.02			0.08		
F	9.83**			5.67***		

NOTE: Adjusted R^2 values are shown. Academic achievement and parental education were standardized. Gender coded 1 = female and 0 = male.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

occupational expectations were positively predicted by neighborhood perceptions, after controlling for both academic achievement and SES ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), although the interaction between gender and perceptions of neighborhood quality in predicting occupational expectations was not significant.

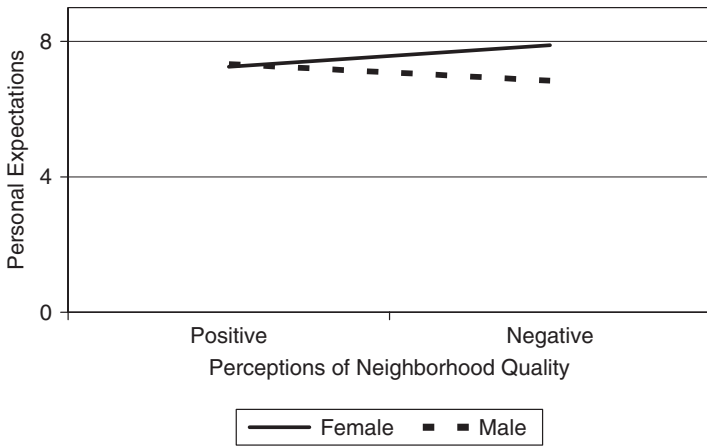


Figure 1: African American Female and Male Adolescents' Personal Expectations and Perceptions of Neighborhood Quality

NOTE: Personal expectation scale truncated.

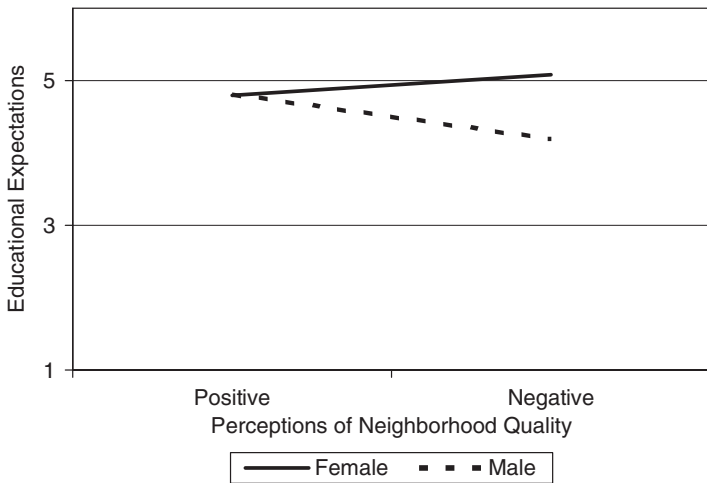


Figure 2: African American Female and Male Adolescents' Educational Expectations and Perceptions of Neighborhood Quality

NOTE: Educational expectation scale truncated.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine gender differences in African American adolescents' personal, educational, and occupational expectations in relation to perceptions of neighborhood quality. Drawing from perspectives on expectations and gender (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and neighborhood collective socialization (Sampson, 1997; Wilson, 1987), it was hypothesized that African American adolescents' future expectations would be positively associated with perceptions of neighborhood quality and that such an association would vary by gender. The findings provide partial support for the hypotheses, showing that expectations were positively associated with perceptions of neighborhood quality, that female adolescents reported more positive expectations than male adolescents, and that gender interacted with neighborhood perceptions in predicting personal and educational expectations.

The results of this study extend our understanding of the relationship between adolescent academic outcomes and neighborhood SES quality by showing how African American adolescents' future expectations in educational and occupational domains are positively associated with perceptions of neighborhood quality. Consistent with the collective socialization perspective (Sampson, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997; Wilson, 1987), the higher adolescents rated the quality of their neighborhoods of residence, the more likely they expected to attain high school diplomas, college degrees, or good jobs in 10 years, after controlling for academic achievement and SES. These results contribute to a growing body of research that emphasize adolescents' perceptions of neighborhood quality as a useful and meaningful indicator of the neighborhood social setting (Bass & Lambert, 2004; Ceballos et al., 2004; Spencer, 2001; Taylor, 2000).

Gender differences were observed in both future expectations and the association between future expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality. African American male adolescents reported fewer positive expectations in personal, educational, and occupational domains than female adolescents. Similar gender differences have been shown in prior research (Mau & Bikos, 2000) and in a recent study showing that female high school students had fewer negative thoughts about the future than male adolescents (Mello & Worrell, 2006). Gender differences in future expectations are illustrated in an item that asked participants how likely it was that they would be alive in 10 years, on which, in this study, 18% of the male adolescents reported that it was not likely that they would be alive in 10 years, compared with only 9% of their female counterparts.

Gender differences in future expectations have important implications, given that adolescents' expectations have been linked to both adolescent and

adult outcomes (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Schoon, 2001) and that when male adolescents have low future expectations, they are more likely to engage in risky behavior, such as early sexual intercourse and drug use (Harris, Duncan, & Boisjoly, 2002). Similar to research examining the career choices of African American male adolescents (Parmer, 1993; Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997) and to the discussion that African American male adolescents face increased challenges to schooling and work compared with their counterparts (Gibbs, 1984), this study indicates that research is greatly needed that focuses explicitly on the educational and occupational attainment of African American male adolescents.

African American male adolescents' future expectations in personal and educational domains were strongly associated with their perceptions of neighborhood quality compared with their female counterparts. The more negative African American male adolescents perceived their neighborhoods, the less likely they thought that they would graduate from high school, go to college, be happy, be proud, or be alive. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that African American male adolescents are more sensitive to neighborhood SES than their female counterparts (Connell & Halpern-Felsher, 1997; Crowder & South, 2003; Entwisle et al., 1994; Spencer et al., 1995).

Gender differences in the relationship between future expectations and neighborhood perceptions may stem from the degree to which African American male adolescents are exposed to adult role models. As Wilson (1987) suggested, African American adolescents form ideas about their own future through the observation of adult role models in their neighborhoods of residence. Thus, African American male adolescents may form future expectations that are similar to average adult unemployment and educational attainment in their neighborhood. Indeed, research has shown that educational expectations are positively related to the number of self-reported role models (Cook et al., 1996) and that some primarily African American inner-city communities have experienced an exodus of middle-class individuals (Spencer, 2001; Wilson, 1987). The following statement illustrates this point:

How many of these kids get close to a black businessman? Or a black lawyer, or somebody? None. They need these people right around them who will guide them and show them how to take hold of life . . . they make you feel like "here's someone who is a leader of the community" and "I want to be like him." (Anderson, 1990, p. 60)

Another potential explanation of the gender differences in the relationship between African American adolescents' future expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality involves neighborhood experiences. Research has

shown that male adolescents are more likely to witness or experience violence in their communities than female adolescents (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993). Moreover, other research has found that for male adolescents only, exposure to community and school violence predicts aggressive acting-out behaviors, even when controlling for the effects of family violence and other SES variables. (O'Keefe, 1997). Thus, African American male adolescents appear to have different neighborhood experiences compared with female adolescents, which is linked to how they think about their future. This finding supports additional research linking the self-reported neighborhood experiences of African American adolescents to future-related thoughts about self, schooling, and work.

Conversely and importantly, African American female adolescents reported higher future expectations than male adolescents, and female adolescents' future expectations appeared to be impervious to the adversity associated with residing in low-quality neighborhoods compared with their male counterparts. Female adolescents' views of the future may reflect observations of demographic changes in gender and attainment. For example, in the 2003-2004 academic year, more female students attained associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees than male students, and projections suggest that female students will attain more doctorate's degrees than male students by 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). The rise in female educational attainment may act as a societal-level role model that encourages African American female adolescents to hold such high future expectations. This area may be better understood with research that uses interviews to capture the nuances of African American female adolescents' future expectations.

However, the findings are inconsistent with some prior research. In a study of the association between African American adolescents' educational values and perceptions of neighborhood quality, a significant effect was observed for female adolescents only (Ceballo et al., 2004). Discrepancies between findings may be due to variation in the dependent variable, given that Ceballo et al. (2004) examined educational values pertaining to math, reading, and writing, whereas the current study included expectations of attaining a high school diploma and a college degree. Even still, other researchers have shown a similar association between the genders when examining neighborhood SES and psychological outcomes among children and early to midadolescents (Brody et al., 2003; Ge et al., 2002). A potential explanation for the variation in these results centers on the participants' age. It is possible that gender differences in the association between neighborhood quality and developmental outcomes are more likely to emerge among older adolescents, the age range of participants in the current study, compared with younger participants. Future research could investigate the variation in findings by conducting longitudinal

studies including participants across the life span and focusing on gender differences, neighborhood quality, and developmental outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study may add to the literature base to support prevention and intervention implications. Program and policy developers may wish to focus on the future expectations of African American male adolescents as a particularly vulnerable group. Prevention programs that target aspects of future expectations may be especially useful. An example of one such program comes from Danish's (1997) prevention program, *Going for the Goal*. Two of the components of this program teach adolescents to identify positive life goals and to focus on the process, rather than the outcome, of goal attainment. The results of this prevention program have been encouraging and include such findings as participants' having better school attendance and the ability to achieve set goals compared with nonparticipants.

More recently, Oyserman, Terry, and Bybee (2002) reported on an intervention with urban, African American middle school students. The intervention consisted of an after-school program with small-group activities that prompted participants to think about their future through tasks such as imagining adulthood, thinking about the relationship between the present and the future, and connecting current behavior with future attainment. The results indicated that intervention youth reported more school engagement, better school attendance, and, for male adolescents only, less trouble in school. In sum, there is increasing evidence suggesting that adolescents' expectations are linked to educational outcomes and that expectations may be enhanced through intervention efforts.

LIMITATIONS

This study had significant limitations centering on issues related to research design and measurement. Although a relationship between perceptions of neighborhood quality and adolescents' expectations was observed, it occurred only at one point in time. Given the correlative nature, we cannot draw conclusions regarding the cause of such expectations. It is likely that adolescents' future expectations are shaped from prior neighborhood experiences. Additionally, surveys were read to participants. It is possible that this procedure contributed to the responses, potentially through intonation.

Second, this study had limitations in its measures. Major study variables came from adolescent reports. Including parental and/or census-level data would have provided more support to the results. Another limitation comes

from the expectations measure. Only one to three items were included for each domain. This may have contributed to the low reliability and small magnitude of the results. In fact, an interaction did not occur in the occupational domain, contrary to what would be expected, given Wilson's (1987) thesis.

It is worth noting why multilevel modeling, a common statistical approach with neighborhood research, was not used in the current study. First, the neighborhood-level data consisted of census tracts, for which there were a sizable portion of the sample missing information ($n = 89$ [25%]). Second, analyses were conducted to determine if expectations systematically varied across census tracts, indicating a violation of the ordinary least squares dependence assumption. Separate regression analyses by expectation domain, age, and gender were conducted. Residuals were used in an analysis of variance with census tracts as the categorical variable. The results indicated that expectations in personal, educational, and occupational domains did not systematically vary across census tracts (values not shown). Thus, ordinary least squares regression provided unbiased estimates for the present study.

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