

Chapter 7

Educational Disparities Among Marginalized Groups of Students: Do Bully Victimization and Unsafe Schools Impede Students' Educational Attainment?

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ABSTRACT

Parents play a critical role in shaping their children's educational outcomes. Scholars identify parental resources, family background, and capital investments in children as factors that contribute to educational outcomes later in life. Schools also prove to be important contexts where children develop, suggesting that both families and schools are important for promoting youths' educational success. Ecological systems theory suggests the importance of considering how multiple contexts affect youths' social, cognitive, and behavioral development and maintains that socio-demographic factors, such as race and ethnicity, may affect interactions with immediate settings, such as families and schools. Therefore, drawing from this perspective, this researcher argues that perceiving one's school as unsafe and being the victim of bullying disrupts the educational process, particularly for students of color. Bullying encompasses a power dynamic between the bully and bully-victim, and the presence of bullying in schools may exacerbate unequal school environments.

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INTRODUCTION: RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational attainment is important for improving individuals' life chances (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Gangl, 2006; Levy & Murnane, 2004). Higher levels of education are linked to greater average earnings (Day & Newburger, 2002; Levy & Murnane, 1992; 2004), better jobs (Hauser & Warren, 1997), and lowers the risk of unemployment (Gangl, 2006). College graduates are healthier (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003) and their marriages are less likely to end in divorce (Cherlin, 2010). Although we know the importance of educational attainment in promoting positive life outcomes, in the United States approximately 10 percent of individuals ages 25 to 29 have less than a high school diploma and only 34 percent of the same age group have a bachelor's degree or higher (Kena et al., 2015). There are also racial/ethnic disparities in regard to educational attainment. African American, Latino, and Native American students have higher rates of dropping out of high school compared to their white and Asian peers (Reardon, Robinson-Cimpia, & Weathers, 2015). Additionally, whites and Asians are more likely to complete college compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Musus-Gillette et al., 2016). These disparities suggest the importance of understanding why some individuals end their education before completing high school, and why we continue to see racial and ethnic gaps in educational attainment.

Prior sociological literature establishes that both families and schools are important for youths' socialization and development, particularly the capital resources that are available to students from each context (Coleman, 1961; Parcel & Bixby, 2016; Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). However, while we know that resources from both families and schools help promote students' educational attainment, less is known regarding how students' perceptions of their schools as unsafe and experiences with school-based bullying may disrupt the educational process and impede high school graduation. This is important because students who perceive their schools as unsafe or have been the victim of bullying may be at an educational disadvantage, despite having high levels of capital at home and at school. Additionally, there may be cumulative negative effects for students who have low levels of family and school resources *and* feel unsafe at school. While scholars find that school capital is important for fostering academically successful students (Parcel & Dufur, 2001a), Grubb (2009) argues that many school resources cannot be bought, such as a positive school climate. Drawing from Grubb's ideas, this chapter explores how negative school environments, including students' perceptions of their schools' as unsafe contribute to inequitable school environments.

Chapter Objectives

This chapter draws from Bronfenbrenner's (1974; 1979) ecological systems theory, which suggests the importance of considering how multiple contexts affect youths' social, cognitive, and behavioral development. Bronfenbrenner argues that socio-demographic factors, such as race and ethnicity, may affect interactions with immediate settings, such as families and schools. This suggests that the negative effects associated with unsafe school environments and school-based bullying may have unique and potentially more consequential effects for students of color. For example, research suggests that marginalized groups of students may be specifically targeted for bullying (Emery et al., 1999) or may experience different forms of bullying than their white peers (Mouttapa et al., 2004; Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008). Additionally,

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