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Self-Efficacy, Religiosity, and Crime: Profiles of African American Youth in Urban Housing Communities

Christopher P. Salas-Wright¹, Margaret Lombe², Von E. Nebbitt³, Leia Y. Saltzman², and Taqi Tirmazi⁴

¹School of Social Work, Boston University Boston, MA, United States

²School of Social Work, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, United States

³Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, United States

⁴School of Social Work, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, United States

Abstract

Youth reporting independently elevated levels of religiosity and self-efficacy tend to abstain from externalizing behavior. However, little is known about the ways in which religiosity and self-efficacy interrelate to impact youth externalizing. Drawing from a sample of African American youth from public housing communities (N = 236), we use latent profile analysis to identify subtypes of youth based on self-reported religiosity and self-efficacy and, in turn, examine links with crime. Compared to youth in other subgroups, those classified as both highly religious and highly self-efficacious reported less involvement in minor and severe delinquency, but not violence.

Keywords

Self-Efficacy; Religiosity; Delinquency; Violence; African America; Youth

Evidence suggests that religiosity may function as a protective factor in deterring adolescent and young adult involvement in criminal and antisocial behaviors (Baier & Wright, 2001; Johnson, 2011; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Hodge, & Perron, 2012; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, & Maynard, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Yonker, Schnabelrauch, & DeHaan, 2012). This relationship has, in fact, been observed among a wide-array of populations, including samples comprised primarily of African-American youth (Johnson, Jang, & Larson, 2001; Ryan, Testa, & Zhai, 2008; Salas-Wright, Olate, & Vaughn, 2013a; Salas-Wright, Tirmazi, Lombe, & Nebbitt, 2015). Further, evidence exists connecting self-efficacy—that is, the belief of individuals that they have the capacity to achieve the goals they set and deal with life's demands (Bandura, 1986)—to increased capacity to resist involvement in criminal and other antisocial behaviors (Allen, Leadbeater, & Aber, 1990; Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Kuther, 2000). While additional research is necessary to determine the precise mechanisms

*Corresponding Author, Christopher P. Salas-Wright, 264 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. cpsw@bu.edu, Cell Phone: (857) 212-4049.

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by which self-efficacy deters delinquent behavior, it is likely that self-efficacy reduces delinquency by means of improved psychological and social functioning. For instance, youth who feel that they are able to attain the goals they set may be less inclined to take part in antisocial activities, such as crime and violence, which might interfere with goal attainment. That said, it may be that the link between self-efficacy and antisocial behavior is dependent on the nature of the goals and the orientation of the youth toward prosocial or antisocial ends. In this way, an examination of the interrelatedness of religiosity—which has been shown to be closely related to moral order (Smith, 2003) and pro/antisocial orientation (Salas-Wright, Olate, Vaughn, & Tran, 2013)—and self-efficacy promises to deepen our understanding of youth involvement in crime.

Theoretical framework

This study is informed by several theoretical perspectives. To begin, it has been hypothesized that religiosity may be related to delinquency by means of the promotion of *self-control*. While a number of discipline-specific definitions exist, self-control can be understood as the capacity of individuals to intentionally refrain from involvement in immediately gratifying behaviors on the basis of either subsequent expected benefit or conformity with social or moral expectations (Strayhorn, 2002). Self-control—which has been found to have far-reaching implications for involvement in deviant behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990)—is increasingly understood not as a fixed characteristic, but rather a malleable trait that is of great value to prevention and intervention efforts (Piquero, Jennings, & Farrington, 2010). Notably, recent scholarship has highlighted the role that religiosity and religious engagement can play in the promotion of self-control and self-regulation, and, in turn, the likelihood of involvement in nonviolent and violent delinquency (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009).

From the perspective of self-control theory, we can understand religion as exerting a “treatment effect” on criminal behavior by means of enhancing the self-regulatory capacity of individuals. The enhancement of self-control by means of religious involvement might take place via cognitive-based and behavioral driven pathways. In terms of a cognitive pathway, religious traditions often include behavioral proscriptions as well as communal narratives that speak to the importance of self-discipline, moral behavior, and the capacity to control one’s behavior (Smith, 2003). With respect to a behavioral pathway, religious communities typically encourage the involvement of individuals in regular, disciplined practices such as private prayer and meditation, involvement in service and charitable giving, and participation in frequent public religious services (Smith & Denton, 2005). If practiced routinely, both these cognitive and behavioral components may assist individuals in strengthening their capacity for self-control and self-regulation, thereby decreasing the likelihood of involvement in delinquent behavior.

Beyond self-control, researchers and theorists have also underscored the relevance of religiosity to *social capital*. For instance, Christian Smith (2003) has made a very compelling argument that religious engagement has the potential to impact the lives of young people—including exerting influence on the likelihood of involvement in delinquency—by means of enhanced social and organizational ties. This includes the benefits that many religious

communities offer in terms of social capital, network closure, and links to extra-community resources. Indeed, young people who are integrated into religious communities often benefit from social network supports that can open up prosocial opportunities, deter involvement in problem behaviors (by means of social control), and function as a vital source of psychosocial support (Smith & Denton, 2005). It has also been well-documented that social capital is positively associated with self-efficacy which, as noted above, has important implications for psychosocial well-being and problem behavior (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006). Of course, religious communities are not the only sources of social and organizational support for young people. However, evidence has made it abundantly clear that religious communities function as a critically important source of social capital for youth residing in at-risk and resource constrained environments such as public housing communities (Johnson, 2011; Nebbitt, 2015).

Critical as self-control and social capital are in understanding the propensity of youth to be involved in nonviolent and violent delinquent acts, criminological research has long made the case that *opportunity* matters (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Wilcox, Land, & Hunt, 2003). That is, young people with very low self-control and little-to-no social capital do not automatically become involved in crime. Rather, they must also be presented with an unsupervised opportunity to act and access to places or situations that allow for, or encourage, delinquency (Laub & Sampson, 1993). That is, young people cannot sell drugs without first having access to drugs or commit a weapons offense without first obtaining a gun or a knife. Moreover, young people with relatively normal or elevated levels of self-control or social capital may find themselves at risk for delinquent behavior if consistently presented with criminal opportunities or immersed in high-risk environments. This may particularly be the case for violence as young people in communities characterized by high levels of concentrated disadvantage may be pressured to engage in fighting or become involved in violence despite efforts to avoid physical confrontations (Irwin & Alder, 2012; Jones, 2009).

Religiosity, Self-Efficacy, and Delinquent Behavior

Religiosity has long been viewed as a deterrent of engagement in delinquent or criminal behavior (Baier & Wright, 2001). A substantial body of evidence suggests that, among the general population, religiosity functions as a protective factor for youth involvement in crime (Baier & Wright, 2001; Johnson & Jang, 2010). For instance, Johnson and Jang (2010), from their comprehensive assessment of the relationship between religiosity and crime, identified an inverse relationship between religiosity and antisocial behavior. Along the same lines, Baier and Wright (2001) demonstrated, in a meta-analysis of numerous manuscripts, that public religious involvement and private religious beliefs had a consistent inverse effect on criminal behavior. Moreover, similar effects have been observed in samples comprised entirely of African American youth (Johnson, Jang, De Li, & Larson, 2000; Holmes & Lochman, 2012; Ryan et al., 2008; Molock & Barksdale, 2012). Such scholarship has certainly made an important contribution to the literature on the relationship between religiosity and delinquency among African American youth. Regrettably, however, only limited research effort has been devoted to understanding these relationships among African American youth in resource constrained environments such as public housing (Salas-Wright

et al., 2015). Such an understanding is critical as researchers, practitioners, and policymakers look to leverage potential sources of community-based support for youth living in public housing communities across the United States (Johnson, 2011; Nebbitt, 2015).

Self-efficacy has been linked to prosocial behavior (Capara, Alessandri, & Eisenberg, 2012) and there is also evidence to suggest that youth with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to resist engagement or desist from involvement in criminal and other antisocial behaviors (Ahlin, 2010; Allen et al, 1990; Bahr et al., 2010; Kuther, 2000). Most of the research on self-efficacy has conceptualized the construct as a protective factor with respect to antisocial behaviors. However, theoretically, there is little basis for this prosocial bias. It could be that youth who engage in problem behavior may have developed self-efficacy in relation to nonconventional pursuits—including crime and delinquency (Brezina & Topalli, 2012). Indeed, if the effect of self-efficacy is determined by a youth's preferences for (as well as aptitude for and access to) antisocial behavior, then the basis for these factors may merit exploration. For example, while noteworthy exceptions undoubtedly exist (Juergensmeyer, 2003), religiosity is typically understood as having the potential to positively influence a youth's behavior through the provision of clear expectations for behavior (Smith, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Hence, the youth's tendency to engage in prosocial behavior may be a function of the interactive effect of religiosity and self-efficacy – serving to bolster the capacity of the youth to develop and maintain prosocial values, and make prosocial decisions.

At present, few, if any, studies have systematically examined the interrelatedness of religiosity and self-efficacy and their influence on delinquency. Some studies have examined the independent effects of religiosity and self-efficacy on psychosocial and behavioral outcomes. For instance, Adeyemo and Adeleye (2008) looked at the impact of these variables, in addition to emotional intelligence, on psychological well-being among adolescents in Nigeria and found self-efficacy, but not religiosity, to be linked with greater well-being. In another study, Hasking and Oei (2007) looked at the interaction between drinking refusal self-efficacy and religious coping among an alcohol-dependent sample, identifying an indirect effect for religious coping but no interactive effect between efficacy and coping. Still other studies have found that religiosity is positively related to self-efficacy among a number of populations, including African American adolescents and young adults (Jang & Johnson, 2004, Nasim, Utsey, Corona, & Belgrave, 2006). All of the aforementioned studies suggest that it is reasonable to suspect that religiosity and self-efficacy are related in important ways, both in the general population and, in particular, among African-American youth.

Despite these contributions, however, a number of pressing questions remain. For instance, can religiosity, in the absence of self-efficacy, function to deter involvement in problem behavior? Conversely, does self-efficacy protect when religiosity is low or absent? Do we observe a particularly robust protective effect among youth reporting elevated levels of both religiosity and self-efficacy? The literature reviewed above provides a strong empirical foundation for such exploration. Moreover, evidence seems to suggest that these constructs are related in the lives of African-American youth, but research has not specifically looked

at the nature of these relationships among African-American youth in resource constrained environments such as urban public housing.

The Present Study

Using a sample of African American youth living in public housing, an environment perceived to be of high psychosocial risk, we utilize a person-centered approach (i.e., latent profile analysis) to model the unique profiles of youth with respect to religiosity and self-efficacy. In turn, we examine the degree to which youth in the identified religiosity/self-efficacy profiles are involved in a wide range of delinquent behaviors. While prior research indicates that youth reporting independently elevated levels of religiosity and self-efficacy tend to abstain from externalizing behavior, few, if any, studies have systematically examined the ways in which religiosity and self-efficacy interrelate to impact youth involvement in crime. Is it necessary that youth have both elevated religiosity and self-efficacy in order to avoid involvement in problem behavior? Or is it sufficient to only have elevated religiosity or self-efficacy? Providing answers to such questions would provide important insight into the etiology of youth problem behavior and may help to influence the development and implementation of interventions designed to promote favorable youth adaptations.

Method

Design and Study Procedures

This study is based on data collected in a cross-sectional study of African American youth living in public housing located in West Baltimore, Maryland (USA). The target area had a median family income of \$14,487; with 68.5% of families having an annual income of less than \$25,000 (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, 2008). Further, most (99.4%) of the school-aged respondents in the target areas were enrolled in public schools that are predominantly African American (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, 2008). The study used a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. In compliance with the core principles of the CBPR, the research team developed relationships within the community. Adolescents, adults and social service providers acted as our community advisory board (CAB). These stakeholders were involved in every phase of the study. A more exhaustive description of the design and study procedures is available elsewhere (Authors own, 2015).

Study Sample

Youth participants were recruited at recreation centers and social services agencies in or around the public housing units. Recruitment consisted of flyers posted in the community centers and agencies as well as announcements made at local community centers. In addition, recruitment cards were distributed to youth living in the target community. The flyers and recruitment cards included a brief overview of the study, the date and location for data collection, and contact information for the research team. Participants under the age of 18 were required to provide signed parental consent and sign youth assent forms before participating in the study. Participants 18 years and older were asked to sign an adult consent

form on the day of the data collection. The survey took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. Participants received a \$15 Visa gift card and a snack after completing the survey. Morgan State University's Institutional Review Board approved the research protocol.

Measures

Indicator Variables

Religiosity—Religiosity was assessed by means of the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.90$; Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). This widely-used measure examines various domains of religious faith, including self-reports of the importance of religion, public religious engagement, and private religious practice. Sample items include: “My religious faith is extremely important to me” and “I pray daily” with response options ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (4). Higher scores indicate greater levels of religiosity. Previous psychometric research indicates that this measure has acceptable psychometric properties for use with young people and adults of diverse cultural backgrounds (Plante, 2010).

Self-efficacy—Self-efficacy was measured using the General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = .94$; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This 10-item scale measures personal competence to deal with a variety of life situations. Respondents were asked how true the following statements were: “When I am faced with a problem, I can find several solutions.” or “I am confident that I could handle unexpected events.” Response options range from “not true at all” (1) to “true all of the time” (4). Items were summed with higher scores representing greater general perceived self-efficacy.

Sociodemographic and Outcome Variables

Sociodemographic factors—Respondents were asked to indicate their age in years (continuous), gender (male, female), and whether or not their biological father lived with them in their primary residence (yes, no). Notably, while recent research suggests that the presence of a biological father in the household should not be taken as the sole indicator of parental involvement (Jones, & Mosher, 2013), prior evidence does suggest that the presence of a biological father is associated with the decreased likelihood of externalizing behavior among youth in public housing communities (Salas-Wright et al., 2015).

Delinquency—Nine variables in the domains of *minor delinquency* (i.e., public disturbance, property damage, theft of an item worth less than \$50), *severe delinquency* (i.e., theft of an item worth more than \$50, drug selling, automobile theft), and *violent delinquency* (i.e., physical fighting, severe attack, weapons crime) from the Self-Report Delinquency Scale (Huizinga, Esbensen, & Weiher, 1991) were examined as outcome variables. Each item was dichotomously scored (0 = no, 1 = yes) to reflect involvement in the outcomes over the previous 12-month period. These items have been widely used in previous studies examining delinquency and problem behavior among minority youth (Olate, Salas-Wright, & Vaughn, 2011, 2012; Salas-Wright, Olate, & Vaughn, 2015; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003).

Statistical Analyses

This study utilized latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify latent subgroups on the basis of respondent self-reports of religiosity and self-efficacy. These indicator variables—religiosity and self-efficacy—were utilized along with indicator covariates (i.e., age, gender, and the presence of the respondent's biological father in the primary residence) that were included to improve the quality of the LPA estimation (Wurpts & Geiser, 2014). To be clear, we utilized the computed indexes for religiosity and self-efficacy, rather than a list of individual items for these measures, as indicator variables. This was due to the very high internal consistency of the aforementioned indexes (i.e., $\alpha > .90$) and the results of preliminary analyses revealing that all items in the respective scales represented an ordinal gradient. LPA is a latent modeling approach designed to assign individual cases to their most likely latent subgroups on the basis of observed data (McLachlan & Peel, 2000). LPA can be said to be an exploratory approach inasmuch as one does not specify subgroup characteristics, but rather one identifies indicator variables and indicator covariates that are used to “uncover” subgroups within a particular sample. Beginning with the LPA, a sequence of latent class models were identified between one and four classes using Latent GOLD® 4.5 software (Vermunt & Magidson, 2008). Five statistical criteria were used to identify the best fitting model: the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC), Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion (CAIC), Log Likelihood (LL), and entropy. Lower BIC, AIC, and CAIC values and higher LL values reflect better model fit (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996). Entropy is a measure of classification certainty with greater values (ranging from 0.00 to 1.00) reflecting greater accuracy in classification. While these quantitative criteria are essential in the determination of the number of latent classes, researchers should also consider the parsimony and substantive interpretability of the solutions in the selection of the final model (Jung & Wickrama, 2008). After identifying latent subgroups and assigning subjects to classes on the basis of the probability of membership, the distributions of outcome variables were examined by means of contingency tables and chi-square tests.

Results

Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics

Descriptive statistics of the study sample are provided in Table 1. The age of the respondents ranged from 12 to 25 with a mean age of 18.28 years ($SD = 3.70$). A considerable percentage of the sample (58.47%) was female and just over one third of the sample (36.36%) reported residing in a household in which their father was present. In terms of participation in minor delinquency, more than half of the respondents (57.63%) reported causing a public disturbance in the past year and about two in five (43.78%) reported having intentionally damaged property. A smaller proportion of youth reported stealing an item worth less than \$50 (35.17%) during the past 12 months. With respect to severe delinquency, about one quarter of the sample reported having stolen something worth more than \$50 (24.58%) or having stolen a car (21.61%), and roughly one in three participants reported having sold drugs during the previous year (34.75%). With respect to violent delinquency, levels of physical fighting (75.00%) and severe violent attacks (50.85%) were markedly higher than most other delinquent behaviors. Weapon crime, however, was slightly lower;

roughly one in three participants (30.93%) reported using or threatening someone with a weapon to achieve a desired end.

Bivariate Associations between Key Variables

Table 2 presents bivariate associations between key study variables: religiosity and self-efficacy (both measured as continuous variables), and the nine dichotomous (no, yes) measures of delinquent behavior. Results indicated significantly lower levels of religiosity among youth who reported participating in delinquent behaviors, including: public disturbances ($p = 0.017$, $d = 0.33$), property damage ($p = 0.037$, $d = 0.27$), theft of an item worth more than \$50 ($p = 0.014$, $d = 0.36$), and car theft ($p = 0.002$, $d = 0.47$). Along the same lines, significantly lower levels of self-efficacy were also observed for youth who reported participating in delinquent behaviors such as: public disturbances ($p = 0.029$, $d = 0.28$), theft of an item worth less than \$50 ($p = 0.020$, $d = 0.32$), theft of an item worth more than \$50 ($p < 0.000$, $d = 0.52$), drug selling ($p = 0.020$, $d = 0.31$), and car theft ($p < 0.000$, $d = 0.61$). Notably, no significant differences in religiosity or self-efficacy were observed for any of the explicitly violent manifestations of delinquency.

Identification of Latent Classes

Convergent statistical and substantive criteria lent support for a three class solution as the best possible modeling of the data. As seen in Table 3, although the BIC, AIC, CAIC and LL values for the four class solution are slightly superior to those of the three class model, the accelerated flattening of values between the three and four class solutions indicates that the inclusion of a fourth class would not be parsimonious. Moreover, although the highest entropy value was observed for the two class solution, the three class solution possessed adequate entropy (0.84) and the decrease in entropy values between the two and three class solutions was negligible (-0.02). In conjunction with the aforementioned statistical criteria, the substantive interpretability of the three class solution was also assessed by means of plotting the mean values of the religiosity and self-efficacy values across the three latent classes. As illustrated in Figure 1, the final solution is comprised of three classes, including: Class 1: “*Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy*” (67.80%); Class 2: “*Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy*” (16.53%); and Class 3: “*High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy*” (15.68%). The three classes are clearly distinguishable and represent readily comprehensible combinations of religiosity and self-efficacy in the lives of African-American youth.

Sociodemographic Profile of Latent Classes

Table 4 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of each of the three latent classes. In terms of age, members of the High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 3) were significantly older than members of the Moderately Religious, Low Self Efficacy class (Class 1; $F = 3.49$, $p < .05$). However, no significant age differences were observed between the Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 2) and the High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 3). With respect to gender, members of the Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy class (Class 1) were substantially more likely to be male than members of the other two classes ($\chi^2 = 20.04$, $p < .001$) as 51.25% of this class was male compared to 25.64% and 16.22% in the Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy (Class 2) and High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy (Class 3) classes, respectively.

Delinquent Behavioral Characteristics of the Latent Classes

Table 5 displays the delinquent behavioral characteristics of each of the three latent classes in terms of minor, severe, and violent delinquency. In the realm of minor delinquency, compared to the other two classes, members of the High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 3) were significantly less likely to take part in all manifestations of minor delinquency measured in the study. Notably, members of the Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 2) were also significantly less likely to have stolen an item worth less than \$50 as compared to members of the Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy class (Class 1; $\chi^2 = 22.36$, $p < .001$). As for severe delinquency, members of the High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 3) were significantly less likely to report having stolen an item worth more than \$50 as compared to members of the other two classes ($\chi^2 = 6.52$, $p < .05$). Compared to the Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy class (Class 1) only, members of the other two latent classes were significantly less likely to report involvement in car theft as well ($\chi^2 = 10.79$, $p < .01$). Additionally, we identified significant differences between the High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 3) and the Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy class (Class 1) in terms of drug selling ($\chi^2 = 7.82$, $p < .05$). Finally, with respect to violent delinquency, members of the Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy class (Class 2) were significantly more likely to take part in a severe attack as compared to the other two classes ($\chi^2 = 10.44$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Prior research has examined the independent effects of religiosity and self-efficacy with respect to risk for involvement in various manifestations of high-risk and delinquent behavior. Such research demonstrates that higher levels of religious engagement and perceived self-efficacy are associated with the decreased likelihood of involvement in a wide array of delinquent behaviors (see e.g., Ahlin, 2010; Allen et al, 1990; Bahr et al., 2010; Hodge, Marsiglia, & Nieri, 2011; Kuther, 2000; Salas-Wright, Olate, & Vaughn, 2013b; Salas-Wright, Olate, Vaughn, & Tran, 2013; Salas-Wright, Lombe, Vaughn, & Maynard, 2014; Salas-Wright et al., 2015; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Hodge, & Perron, 2012; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Maynard, Clark, & Snyder, 2016). Notably, however, prior research has failed to examine the ways in which religiosity and self-efficacy conjointly manifest in the lives of youth to influence the likelihood of youth involvement in problem behavior. Cognizant of this important gap in the research, we drew from a sample of African-American youth residing in urban public housing communities to examine two interrelated questions: First, can we identify meaningfully distinct subgroups of youth on the basis of religiosity and self-efficacy? Second, if so, can we identify differences with regard to involvement in delinquent behavior across the religiosity/self-efficacy subgroups? Our exploration of these questions provides new evidence on the interrelatedness of religiosity and self-efficacy in the lives of African-American youth.

We identified three clearly distinguishable subgroups on the basis of religiosity and self-efficacy. First, roughly two thirds (68%) of the sample of African-American youth residing in public housing communities were classified as moderately religious with low levels of self-efficacy. These youth—who were disproportionately male compared to the other two

latent classes—were deemed members of the “Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy” class. Second, roughly one in six (17%), respondents in the sample were found to have a unique combination of low religiosity in conjunction with high self-efficacy. These youth were classified as members of the “Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class. Finally, we identified a class—comprised of roughly one-sixth of the sample (16%)—characterized by elevated levels of both religiosity and self-efficacy. These youth, who were slightly older than members of the other two latent classes, were classified as members of the “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class. Our latent modeling reveals substantial heterogeneity with respect to religiosity and self-efficacy among African-American youth in the high-risk social context of urban public housing communities.

Beyond simply identifying subgroups of youth on the basis of religiosity and self-efficacy, we also systematically examined the involvement of youth in the aforementioned subgroups in an array of delinquent behaviors. While some differences were observed between youth in the “Moderately Religious, Low Self Efficacy” and “Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” classes, the clearest pattern of differences were observed in contrasting the two aforementioned classes with the minority of youth in the “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class. Indeed, with the exception of violence—which was elevated among respondents in all three latent classes—the proportion of youth involved in delinquent behavior in the “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class was markedly lower than that of youth in both the “Moderately Religious, Low Self Efficacy” and “Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” classes. Significant differences between highly religious and highly self-efficacious youth and other youth in the sample were identified for a wide variety of delinquent behaviors, including public disturbances, property damage, theft, drug selling, automobile theft, and severe attacks. Simply, results seem to indicate that youth who benefit from both elevated religiosity and self-efficacy appear to be behaviorally distinct from their peers, even those who independently report moderate religiosity and elevated self-efficacy.

The clear pattern of differences among the “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class and the other two classes with respect to delinquency begs the question: Why this divergent pattern of behavior? What is it that makes youth reporting both elevated religiosity and elevated self-efficacy behaviorally distinct from their peers? While the results of the current study do not provide specific insight that can answer these questions, a number of possibilities may be considered. First, we should note that youth in the “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class were slightly older than youth in the other two classes. Therefore, it is possible that the differences in externalizing—and religiosity and self-efficacy—may simply be a function of age. This would be in keeping with research indicating that an important proportion of youth reporting involvement in risky and antisocial behavior desist from such behavior during the young adult phase (Moffitt, 1993; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, & Reingle Gonzalez, 2016). However, this would not be consistent with research suggesting that, among youth in general and to a lesser degree among African American youth, religiosity tends to drop during the young adult stage (Smith & Snell, 2009; Uecker, Regnersu, Vaaler, 2007). Second, it is not particularly surprising that we see differences between youth in the “Moderate Religiosity, Low Self-Efficacy” class and youth in the “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class. This finding is, in fact, precisely what one would expect based on prior research that has independently examined the protective effect

of religiosity and self-efficacy—that is, youth involved in delinquency and other problem behaviors tend to be more likely to report low to moderate levels of religiosity and self-efficacy compared to their better-behaved peers.

The more interesting questions relate to the findings in contrasting youth in the “Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” and “High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” classes. Indeed, we see, although youth in both of these classes report markedly elevated levels of self-efficacy, robust and significant differences in involvement in disconcerting behaviors such as public disturbances, property damage, theft, and severe attacks. This finding suggests that self-efficacy alone may not be sufficient to prevent youth involvement in delinquency; rather, it appears that the combination of these two psychosocial factors confers a unique, interactive protective benefit. This is, of course, consistent with prior research that points to the importance of the presence of multiple protective factors in terms of protecting youth from involvement in problem behavior (Salas-Wright, Hernandez, Maynard, Saltzman, & Vaughn, 2014). But the question stands – why do we not see more of a protective effect for youth in the “Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy” class? One possibility is that self-efficacy is, by itself, ethically and morally neutral. That is, an individual may believe in his or her capacity to attain goals that are either prosocial or antisocial. Perhaps a proportion of youth who feel a high sense of self-efficacy, but lack in the moral orientation that typically comes along with elevated religiosity (Smith, 2003), feel highly confident in their capacity to, for example, meet their financial needs by means of theft. In contrast, youth reporting both high levels of religiosity—and presumably greater moral orientation—and self-efficacy may be more likely to have a strong belief in their capacity to achieve goals that are more prosocial or, at least, not antisocial. While our data do not allow us to answer such questions in any definitive way, these findings nevertheless point to important questions to be explored using more rigorous models.

As mentioned above, while we identified a consistent pattern of differences with respect to minor and severe delinquency, the proportion of youth involved in violence was roughly equivalent across the three latent classes. That is, even among youth reporting elevated levels of religiosity and self-efficacy, we observed markedly elevated levels of involvement in fighting, attacks, and weapons crime. While our data do not allow us to definitively interpret why we did not observe a consistent pattern of differences in violence across the latent classes, a number of possibilities should be highlighted. First, in contrast to delinquent behaviors, violent crime—particularly that which is reactive in nature—may, arguably, be less tempered by factors such as social capital and opportunity structures. That is, affording youth opportunities for prosocial engagement and personal advancement (i.e., social capital) and limiting access to antisocial opportunities via network closure (i.e., opportunity structures) is likely to influence premeditated problem behavior (e.g., theft, drug selling). However, involvement in violence may often be less a function of opportunity and supervision and more about impulse control and emotional responsiveness (Raine et al., 2006). In other words, violent encounters can take place quickly and in such a way that the protective effects of social capital and network closure are effectively short-circuited. A second possibility relates to violence simply being beyond the control of youth in marginalized communities in which violence is common. That is, a young person may have developed elevated self-control as a function of consistent religious practice and may be

integrated into a religious community in a way that fosters social capital and limits opportunities for problem behavior. Moreover, that same youth may report a high degree of self-efficacy, social capital, and parental supervision. And yet, this healthy and prosocially-oriented person may find herself—particularly if she lives in a neighborhood where violence is common—with little choice but to exercise violence in an act of self-defense or in defense of her honor (Irwin & Adler, 2012; Jones, 2009). Simply put, while salient protective factors can shape a young person's capacity for self-regulation and even transform some of their social environment, it is difficult to buffer against the elevated risk of violence faced by many young people in resource constrained communities.

Findings from the present study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the data used in this study are cross-sectional. As such, we are unable to ascribe any causal relationship between membership in particular latent classes and involvement in various forms of delinquency. Future research utilizing a prospective study design would greatly enhance our understanding of the developmental and causal links between religiosity, self-efficacy, and delinquency. Second, the data were derived exclusively from self-report survey measures. It is therefore possible that respondents may have under- or over-reported with respect to religious engagement and self-efficacy, as well as their involvement in delinquency. Third, we did not use a recruitment strategy designed to provide a sample representative of all youth in the selected public housing communities. It is, therefore, possible that our sample may be biased in one way or another (e.g., undersampling of youth with low levels of religiosity and high levels of criminal behavior, or oversampling youth with elevated levels of social capital, etc.). A related point is that, while our examination of the relationships between self-efficacy, religiosity, and delinquency in the specific context of African American youth residing in public housing communities provides insight into a unique and important population, it nevertheless places limitations on the generalizability of our findings. Future studies examining self-efficacy, religiosity, and delinquency among African American youth may benefit from a broader, more representative sampling approach. Fourth, while our data provide information related to religiosity and self-efficacy, additional contextual questions remain with regard to the meaning and interpretation of these constructs in the lives of youth. For instance, the nature of our measure of self-efficacy did not allow us to discern between a young person's feelings of self-efficacy with respect to prosocial versus antisocial behavior. Additionally, we do not have a measure of the degree to which youth reporting elevated religiosity have internalized the moral directives of their religious communities or traditions.

To our knowledge, this study is the first to systematically examine the ways in which religiosity and self-efficacy conjointly manifest in the lives of youth to influence the likelihood of youth involvement in problem behavior. Our latent modeling identified three coherent and conceptually distinct latent classes on the basis of youth self-reports of religiosity and self-efficacy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, youth who were found to have only moderate levels of religiosity in conjunction with low levels of self-efficacy were most at risk for involvement in delinquent behavior. We also identified differences between youth characterized by low religiosity in combination with elevated self-efficacy versus those who reported both elevated levels of religiosity and self-efficacy. However, remarkably few differences were observed between the latent classes with respect to youth violence. In all,

study findings clearly indicate that youth in the latter group—those classified as highly religious and highly self-efficacious—were less likely to be involved in minor and severe delinquency, but not violence.

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Figure 1.
Latent subgroups and mean scores on protective factor indicators

Table 1

Demographic and behavioral characteristics of the sample

African American Youth in Urban Public Housing (N = 236)			
	<i>M(SD)</i>	%	Range
Demographic Factors			
Age	18.28 (3.70)		(12–25)
Gender (1 = Male)		41.53%	(0–1)
Father in Home		36.36%	(0–1)
Indicator Variables			
Religiosity	3.04 (0.78)		(1–4)
Self-Efficacy	2.89 (0.84)		(1–4)
Dependent Variables			
<i>Minor Delinquency</i>			
Public Disturbance		57.63%	(0–1)
Property Damage		43.78%	(0–1)
Theft < \$50		35.17%	(0–1)
<i>Severe Delinquency</i>			
Theft > \$50		24.58%	(0–1)
Drug Selling		34.75%	(0–1)
Stole Car		21.61%	(0–1)
<i>Violent Delinquency</i>			
Physical Fight		75.00%	(0–1)
Severe Attack		50.85%	(0–1)
Weapon Crime		30.93%	(0–1)

Table 2
Bivariate associations between delinquent behaviors and religiosity and self-efficacy

Delinquent Behavior	Religiosity ($\alpha = 0.90$)				Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = 0.94$)			
	No		Yes		No		Yes	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Public Disturbance	3.20 (0.73)	2.95 (0.80)	0.017	0.33	3.05 (0.95)	2.81 (0.75)	0.029	0.28
Property Damage	3.15 (0.76)	2.94 (0.80)	0.037	0.27	2.98 (0.86)	2.80 (0.83)	ns	0.21
Theft < \$50	3.09 (0.81)	3.00 (0.71)	ns	0.12	3.00 (0.90)	2.74 (0.70)	0.020	0.32
Theft > \$50	3.13 (0.74)	2.84 (0.87)	0.014	0.36	3.01 (0.84)	2.59 (0.78)	> 0.000	0.52
Drug Selling	3.10 (0.73)	2.98 (0.85)	ns	0.15	3.00 (0.87)	2.74 (0.78)	0.020	0.31
Stole Car	3.14 (0.72)	2.76 (0.90)	0.002	0.47	3.01 (0.85)	2.53 (0.71)	> 0.000	0.61
Physical Fight	2.99 (0.86)	3.08 (0.75)	ns	0.11	2.96 (0.90)	2.89 (0.83)	ns	0.08
Severe Attack	3.10 (0.73)	3.01 (0.82)	ns	0.12	2.86 (0.84)	2.96 (0.86)	ns	0.12
Weapon Crime	3.02 (0.79)	3.13 (0.75)	ns	0.14	2.94 (0.83)	2.84 (0.89)	ns	0.12

Note: Mean values (M) are for continuous measures of religiosity and self-efficacy. Columns labeled “no,” “no,” and “yes,” are in reference to self-reports of involvement in delinquent behaviors listed in the far left-hand column.

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Table 3

Fit indices for latent classes

Class Solution	BIC	AIC	CAIC	Log Likelihood	Entropy
1 Class	1176.55	1162.64	1180.55	-577.32	n/a
2 Classes	1072.93	1045.58	1084.93	-503.61	0.86
3 Classes	1060.26	990.91	1080.26	-475.36	0.84
4 Classes	1040.87	950.99	1068.87	-443.77	0.82

Note: AIC = Akaike's Information Criterion, BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion, CAIC = Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion.

Table 4

Bivariate Sociodemographic Comparisons across 3 Latent Classes

	Class 1 (Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy) (N = 160; 67.80%)	Class 2 (Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy) (N = 39; 16.53%)	Class 3 (High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy) (N = 37; 15.68%)	
	M(SD) / %	M(SD) / %	M(SD) / %	F / χ^2
Demographic Factors				
Age	18.01 (3.8) ^a	18.03 (3.8)	19.76 (3.09) ^a	3.49*
Gender				
Female	48.75	74.36	83.78	20.04***
Male	51.25 ^{ab}	25.64 ^a	16.22 ^b	
Father in Home				
No	64.33	74.36	48.57	5.40
Yes	35.67	25.64 ^a	51.43 ^a	

All percentages are reported as column percentages unless noted otherwise.

Superscripts identify classes that are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) based on post hoc comparisons.

Table 5

Bivariate Severe and Violent Delinquency Comparisons across 3 Latent Classes

	Class 1 (Moderately Religious, Low Self-Efficacy) (N = 160; 67.80%)	Class 2 (Low Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy) (N = 39;16.53%)	Class 3 (High Religiosity, High Self-Efficacy) (N = 37; 15.68%)	
	M(SD) / %	M(SD) / %	M(SD) / %	χ^2
Minor Delinquency				
Public Disturbance				
No	33.75	43.59	78.38	24.54***
Yes	66.25 ^a	56.41 ^b	21.62 ^{ab}	
Property Damage				
No	53.50	46.15	78.38	9.45**
Yes	46.50 ^a	53.85 ^b	21.62 ^{ab}	
Theft < \$50				
No	54.37	74.36	100.00	29.30***
Yes	45.63 ^{ab}	25.64 ^{ac}	0.00 ^{bc}	
Severe Delinquency				
Theft > \$50				
No	71.88	74.36	91.89	6.52*
Yes	28.13 ^a	25.64 ^b	8.11 ^{ab}	
Drug Selling				
No	60.00	69.23	83.78	7.82*
Yes	40.00 ^a	30.77	16.22 ^a	
Stole Car				
No	72.50	87.18	94.59	10.79**
Yes	27.50 ^{ab}	12.82 ^a	5.41 ^b	
Violent Delinquency				
Physical Fight				
No	24.38	30.77	21.62	0.95
Yes	75.63	69.23	78.38	
Severe Attack				
No	54.37	25.64	51.35	10.44***
Yes	45.63 ^a	74.36 ^{ab}	48.65 ^b	
Weapon Crime				
No	68.13	64.10	78.38	2.02
Yes	31.87	35.90	21.62	

All percentages are reported as column percentages unless noted otherwise.

Superscripts identify classes that are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) based on post hoc comparisons.