



Impact of School Bonding on Problem Behaviors: Ethnic Differences

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Project Overview

This study examined the different impacts of school bonding (SB) on problem behaviors between ethnic groups (minority students and white students). The study sample was a local Indiana Exemplar public school. A random number of fourth through eighth grade students (6-16 years of age) were asked to complete a survey. Teachers read to younger students to assist with survey completion. Of the sample 48% were boys and 51% were girls. Of the six categories for ethnicity, 51% were white and 49% comprised the other ethnicity categories, accounting for a total of 192 students. The study specifically examined the interaction effect of ethnicity on the relationship between school bonding (Attachment, Commitment, Involvement, and Belief) and misbehavior in school (delinquency). The variables were identified through a factor analysis from the copyrighted Gentle-Genitty Perception of School Social Bonding Instrument. The school bonding instrument is reliable and valid (Cronbach's Alpha .85). To test research hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Research Questions

1. Are the four constructs of school bonding associated with students' problem behaviors after controlling students' individual characteristics?
2. Does the impact of school bonding on problem behaviors differ according to ethnic groups?



Brief Summary of the Literature

School bonding (SB), considered to be synonymous with student engagement, encompasses the experiences of students in school and the feelings, thoughts and actions that arise from those experiences. School bonding is multidimensional and can assume different forms. Each form may have a distinct effect on student behavior that result in peculiar outcomes.

- **In an affective context:** SB indicates whether students possess an emotional connection or attachment to the school. This includes the existence of a supportive social network involving their peers as well as educators.
- **In a cognitive context:** SB highlights students' perceptions of themselves in relation to their school environment.
- **In a behavioral context:** SB highlights observable practices and actions that serve as indicators of students' acceptance and espousal of their school's ideals and goals.

These dimensions are critical factors to the wellbeing of students and also instrumental in many behavioral and academic outcomes. Studies also indicate that ethnicity and gender serve as moderating factors in the experiences of students. Racial prejudices and historical inequalities sometimes work against minorities who in most cases lack the economic and social resources to counteract such negative factors. The weakening of students' bonds to the school is a risk factor for truancy, dropping-out, substance use, and risky sexual behavior (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003, Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder Jr., 2001).

References

- Jimerson, S. R., Campos, E., & Greif, J. L. (2003). Toward an understanding of definitions and measures of school engagement and related terms. *California School Psychologist*, 87-27.
- Johnson, M., Crosnoe, R., & Elder Jr., G. H. (2001). Students' attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education*, 74(4), 318-340.

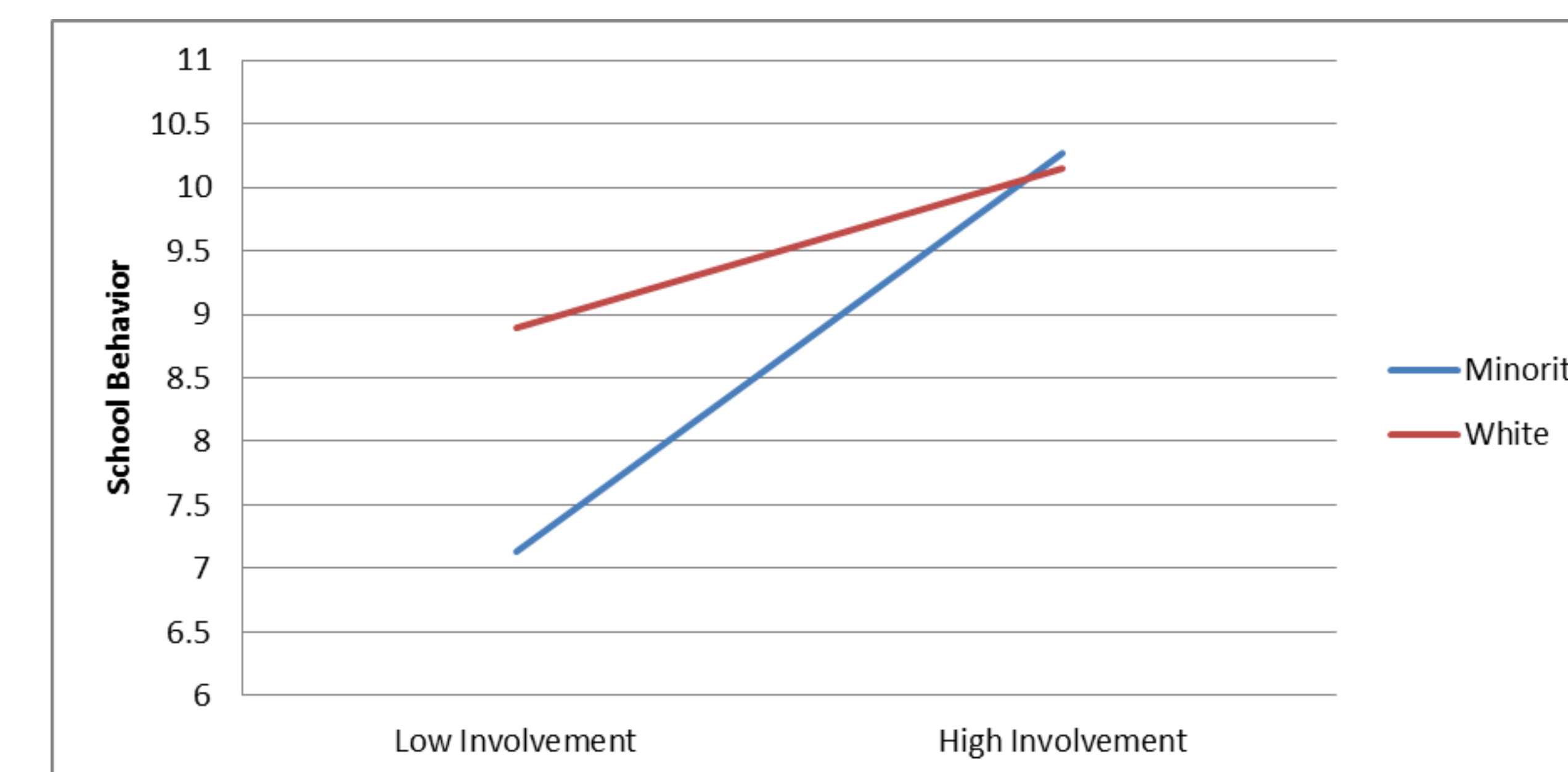
Preliminary Findings / Limitations

Preliminary results show that...

- Involvement and belief are significantly associated with reduced misbehaviors in school.
- Minority students exhibit behavior that is perceived as delinquent more often than white students.
- Older students in higher-grade levels are more likely to exhibit negative behavior than younger students in lower grade levels.

| Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| School Bonding | | | | | |
| Attachment | -.108 | -.158 | -.108 | -.125 | -.109 |
| Commitment | -.002 | .000 | -.026 | -.019 | .008 |
| Involvement | .312** | .310** | .310** | .224* | .307* |
| Belief | .245* | .244* | .247* | .204* | .151 |
| Ethnicity (Minority=1) | -.174* | -.415 | -.312 | -.943* | -.660 |
| Gender (Boy=1) | .004 | .003 | .004 | .006 | -.002 |
| Grade | -.201* | -.204* | -.194* | -.180* | -.199* |
| Years at school | -.135 | -.126 | -.130 | -.128* | -.128 |
| Attachment*Ethnicity | | .253 | | | |
| Commitment*Ethnicity | | | .146 | | |
| Involvement*Ethnicity | | | | .803* | |
| Belief*Ethnicity | | | | | .503 |
| Adjusted R ² | .263 | .259 | .258 | .283 | .264 |
| F(df) | 6.762*** (8,121) | 6.019*** (9,120) | 5.978*** (9,120) | 6.646*** (9,120) | 6.147 (9,120) |

- The impact of one of the social bonding variables (involvement-participation in activities) on problem behavior is significantly greater for minority students than white students, as seen in the graph below.



Future Plans

1. Continue data collection
2. Exploring factor analysis and other statistical properties of the instrument
3. Conduct an Indiana school evaluation
4. Expand assessment to a school in each 50 states
5. Dissemination of work