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Black Male Emerging Adults: Investigating Inequalities in Adult Transitions, Social Learning, and Criminality

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Black Male Emerging Adults:
Investigating Inequalities in Adult Transitions, Social Learning, and Criminality

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a life stage that developed as a result of numerous macro-structural changes in recent decades (Arnett 2015), and which has implications for life course criminality and identity formation (Massoglia & Uggen 2010). Much research has been done in the area of the new life stage known as “emerging adulthood,” however little to no research has been done on how emerging adulthood relates to or changes classic findings in criminology, especially about the importance of disadvantages embedded in racial inequalities. This mixed method study analyzes data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) to examine social learning criminology for black male emerging adults. Results provide an understanding of how peer criminality and education impacts personal criminality of black male emerging adults.

Key words: black males, emerging adulthood, mixed method study, criminality, and education

Word Count: 10,558

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I. Introduction

A burgeoning body of studies investigate the new life stage known as “emerging adulthood.” However, limited attention has been paid as to how emerging adulthood relates to or changes classic findings in criminology, especially about the importance of disadvantages embedded in racial inequalities. According to classic criminology, criminal activity declines with age but varies with the timing and sequencing of transition into adulthood. Yet, as Arnett (2015) has shown, adulthood markers are now less accessible, universal, and structured than previous generations. While it is generally accepted that changes in offending occur over time, ambiguities exist regarding how best to explain those changes. For example, Massoglia & Uggen (2010:04) posit “the criminal justice system today cuts a wider and deeper swath through the life fortunes of young adults than it did a generation ago: more people are formally marked as criminals, and the long sentences they serve inhibit their educational and employment prospects.”

In applying an understanding of classic explanations of crime and this new life stage, questions arise as to whether there are subgroup differences in transitions to adulthood that structure personal and peer criminality. This puzzle arises from the fact that, on the one hand, there is a rich and large and rich literature intersecting criminology and social inequalities, while on the other had, the relatively new field of emerging adulthood indicates that traditional adult patterns have changed. Under studied at this juncture is an understanding of the differential patterns of criminal activity during emerging adulthood. Especially lacking is a focus on the role of subgroup differences, particularly for black males.

This study advances upon extant studies in emerging adulthood, criminology, and cultural understandings of racial inequalities by merging their approaches into a single study that

investigates criminal activity in emerging adulthood, including the role of social learning. The particular goal of this study is to better understand racial inequalities in transitions to adulthood for black men. The primary data for this study is from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR). This study focuses on the emerging adult survey and in-person interview responses from Wave 4 when the respondents were in their mid-to-late twenties. The unique contribution of this study is a social network analysis of personal criminal activity in relation to peer criminal activity. Coupled with quantitative analysis of nationally representative criminality trends, this study also reports results of in-depth qualitative analysis of black male interviewees on a range of social and life issues and their relation to criminal activity and exposure to criminal activity among friends. Combined, the results of this mixed-methods analysis advances understanding of criminality in emerging adulthood, particularly for the subgroup of black men.

II. Literature Review

Cultural Changes Leading to Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2006; 2015) describes the social and economic changes in Western culture have contributed to the development of a new life stage called “emerging adulthood.” During this life stage, most people have in some ways moved beyond the central developmental tasks of adolescence but have not yet fully transitioned into adulthood, and thus the life stage is characterized by an overlap of adolescence and young adulthood. Emerging adulthood generally occurs between the ages of 18 and 25, with a great deal of variability in when young people assume adulthood roles (Mouw 2005). The adulthood markers that most emerging adulthood scholars agree are important in denoting when young people have transitioned into adulthood are completing educational goals, establishing gainful employment, moving out of parental

households, forming long-term romantic partnerships, and becoming a parent (Baynner 2005, Krahn 2015; Shanahan 2000).

Central to the demarcation of this life stage from the adulthood transitions of previous eras is elongated transitions to adult roles and the decline in normative patterns regarding when, how, and in what order adulthood roles are assumed. For instance, traditionally after the age of 18 young people grow increasingly independent from their parents (e.g. financial support and parental controls). However lately, young adults are living with their parents longer or returning to live with parents for periods of time, attending school longer, forming long-term romantic partnerships later, and often becoming parents later than in previous generations (Arnett 2015; Taylor 2014). This shift to non-normative transitions results in greater ambiguity at the crucial moments during when emerging adults are attempting to establish self-sufficiency and therefore decline in their reliance upon parental control and support (Settersten 2011).

This more ambiguous, disjointed period of life is characterized by fluctuation, an array of personal choices, and a general lack of clarity regarding subjective adulthood: the sense that one is an adult (Osgood et al. 2005). In the midst of these fluctuations, many emerging adults experience changing social support systems. Moreover, the style of relating with parents also often undergoes changes, adaptations, and sometimes challenges and conflicts as parents and their emerging adult children realign their expectations for their relationships (Settersten & Ray 2010; Taylor 2014; Nelson et al. 2007). Moreover, peers typically displace the family as the central reference group for socialization during this time period (Massogila & Uggen 2010; Giordano et al. 2002; Giordano et al. 2007; Haynie 2001; Laub and Sampson 2003).

In addition, a key characteristic of emerging adulthood is an intense focus on establishing identity, often revolving through numerous potential identities as life factors and social contexts

change (Schwartz et al. 2005). While identity work can be characterized as a highly psychological process, sociological understandings of this key developmental task instead focus on the dynamic social processes that surround identity formation. For example, Kroger (2007) finds that emerging adults form their personal identity by integrating their identities experienced in a myriad of social interactions into a cohesive sense of who they are and what kind of adult they want to become (Kroger 2007). The hyper self-focus involved in this identity work has conveyed to some emerging adult scholars that emerging adulthood is a time free from constraints and full of the ability to make personal choices as one wills (Tanner 2006). This can lead to the erroneous conclusion that adulthood is more of a state of mind than an objective reality (Horowitz 2007). However, a more sociologically informed approach to studying emerging adulthood recognizes that adulthood transitions remain patterned by social inequalities.

Social Inequalities in Adulthood Transitions

Transitions into adulthood do not result in equal outcomes and are rather profoundly shaped by social inequalities. Foner and Kertzer (1978) explain that life-course transitions are not purely the result of personal choices but instead also reflect influences from institutional structures. These institutional structures can influence emerging adult experiences and significantly shape adulthood trajectories based on race, class, gender, age, and sexuality. Therefore, emerging adulthood is not a homogenous life stage. Life course outcomes are significantly conditioned by early institutional experiences and can have long-term consequences. Based on these insights, Mayer (2009) identifies the need for future research to investigate the “interaction of psychological dispositions and processes with socially constructed life courses” (pp. 426). Taking this approach enables studies of emerging adulthood to examine how personal agency interacts with, responds to, and shapes social context (Herzog 2016). Krahn

et al. (2015) through their longitudinal analysis of emerging adults find that due to differentiation in socioeconomic status and gender variations there are exhibits in varying stability in employment and educational explorations. At this time, emerging adulthood scholarship overwhelmingly expresses this life stage as ambiguous, uncertain, and complex in which EAs have the stability to take this time to find themselves and explore. Instead, Krahn et al. (2015) purport that occupational and educational instability in the complex time of emerging adulthood can be described through the process of floundering or exploring. In other words, there are unequal experiences of adulthood transitions based on gender and class. As a result, some emerging adults explore during their time in this life stage, while in fact, the norm is floundering. The role of context can powerfully shape youth's physical and social lives due to their dependency and limited mobility. Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) posit that ecological settings create social networks and contexts in which developmental trajectories, institutional navigations, and powerful configurations of parental support and peer group influence operate. Thus, going beyond structural dimensions of such settings to capture social processes is important (Crosnoe and Johnson 2011:447).

According to the cumulative disadvantage perspective, the effects of disadvantages persist from birth to later life trajectories and the impacts of disadvantages are multiplicative and continuously combined throughout the life span; therefore, small disadvantages at an early stage of a process grow larger over time (DiPrete & Eirich 2006). Wilson's (1996) perspective on spatially concentrated disadvantage postulates that disrupted networks of social capital that socialize and supervise youth hinders the effectiveness of institutions (e.g. schools and churches) and informal networks in providing social control of young people in the community. Examining the role ecological context has on youth, Berzin & DeMarco (2009) find that the timing of

leaving parents' home was significantly affected by growing up in poverty. Emerging adults from impoverished neighborhoods who are impacted most by cumulative disadvantage, are more likely to leave home early and also less likely to move out of parental homes after the age of 18 (Herzog 2016). Additionally, the role of context not only effects young people but Chuang and associates (2005) found that parents might adjust their parenting based on neighborhood conditions. We see this in Anderson's code of the street when we illustrate parenting characteristics of 'decent' and 'street' families and how they differ from middle-class families (Anderson 1999). This complex, intersectional and non-linear relationship of how the role of context shapes youth's lives is important for understanding how social inequalities impacts the life span before, during and after emerging adulthood.

At the same time, numerous scholars identify the need for greater attention to how emerging adult social locations, especially regarding racial-ethnic and socioeconomic status, relate to adult outcomes (e.g. Benson and Furstenberg 2007). Extant studies find that racial and ethnic dynamics affect the timing of young people moving out of parental homes (Cohen et al. 2003), as well as the timing and sequencing of assuming other adulthood responsibilities (Burton et al. 1996). These studies on social inequalities in life course development reveal an intersection of social inequalities and life course development. This indicates that the personal choices that young people make in adulthood transitions are often shaped by their structural contexts (Echarri and Pérez Amador 2007). Youth and emerging adult scholarship, therefore, must take social inequalities and their intersections seriously. What remains unclear is how different social inequalities combine in shaping life course transitions, especially insofar as being "off course" – or deviant – from normative expectations is ambiguous during this phase of the life course.

Deviance and Criminality in Adulthood Transitions

The important role of social inequalities in adulthood transitions indicates the need to take into consideration a key institutional structure, deviance (and responses to it) in the life course. As a notable example of a life course perspective in criminology studies, Sampson and Laub (1993; 2003) studied social-structural factors in adulthood transitions for explaining delinquency and crime rates and found both patterns of change and of continuity as youth transition into adults. While the general norm is for young people to desist in criminal activity over time, they found that men who continued in participating in deviant and criminal activities into adulthood were those who had the most instability and fluctuation in assuming long-term adulthood patterns. The lack of structure they experienced from marginal and intermittent participation in mainstream social institutions made them more likely to continue deviant behaviors. In contrast, those who desisted from crime were more likely to assume adulthood roles within the expected timeframes that is not too early and not too late in the life course and rather gradually throughout emerging adulthood.

Pairing insights from life course criminology with studies of adulthood transitions, Massoglia & Uggen (2010) find that people who persist in delinquency are less likely to achieve adulthood markers and less likely to assume adulthood roles within the same timeframe as do most of their peers. This indicates the inadequacy of claims that emerging into adulthood is a non-normative process and instead reveals that a "normative timetable" does persist in adult transitions but may merely be obscured from view due to the multiple pathways available (545). While most young people experience a "settling down" as they transition into adulthood, criminal activity is more prevalent among those who experience these life course transitions in a timeline that is either too early or too late relative to dominant patterns.

The complexity of understanding normative processes operating in life course transitions highlights the need for social support that helps guide young people in making adult transitions in timely ways. This is especially needed given findings that criminal activity in youth has long-term consequence on adulthood patterns (Powell et al. 2009), and even on the extent to which young people consider themselves to be adults (Massoglia & Uggen 2010). Despite mounting evidence for the importance of updating knowledge on criminality across the life course to incorporate findings on emerging adulthood, only a handful of studies have charted this new terrain (Piquero et al. 2006; Lopes 2012; Jang & Rhodes 2012; Massoglia & Uggen 2010; Uggen & Wakefield 2005). Notably in need of further investigation is how well-known findings in criminology, especially the lingering importance of social and racial inequalities effect adulthood transitions. An application of criminology to studies of emerging adulthood raises questions as to how social contexts and supports pattern criminality in this important life stage.

Particularly necessary is a better understanding of race and gender differences in criminality during emerging adulthood, especially among black males, who experience intersecting social inequalities. This study advances upon (a) existing studies in emerging adulthood, (b) studies of social inequalities and deviance, and (c) life course criminology by investigating criminal activity in emerging adulthood. Specific attention to the case of black male emerging adults. The result is a mixed-methods study that examines emerging adulthood, social and racial inequalities, and life course criminology. In order to advance understanding of how structural context, social support, and life course transitions intersect in explaining criminal activity, especially among black men, I apply the theories of social learning, with attention to the role of peers. This study will specifically investigate if black male emerging adults operate

through a different set of social learning processes and may help to explain overrepresentation of black men in the criminal justice system.

III. Theoretical Orientations

Social Learning Theory

An important set of theories to consider in explaining criminal activity, generally and also in the case of black male emerging adults is social learning theory. Social learning theories focus on subgroup differences in attitudes toward violence and law violation. Studies utilizing social learning theories seek to investigate the question: Is criminal behavior learned? Burgess and Akers (1966) found that individuals in the peer group differentially reinforce an individual's conforming or deviant behavior, in short that deviance is learned through friends. They postulate that social learning is highest from those whom an individual interacts with most. The second aspect of theory is that people socially learn through interactions with friends their definitions of right and wrong, acquiring social norms that are favorable or unfavorable to crime. Differential reinforcement, the third aspect of social learning, refers to the balance of anticipated or actual rewards and punishments associated with any particular behavior. The fourth aspect of social learning theory is imitation, which describes how an actor may engage in behavior after she or he observes others engaging in such behavior, especially when they are regularly exposed to particular behaviors in their friend groups. This theory is particularly relevant to understanding criminality within the new life stage of emerging adulthood because social influence from parents may be displaced by greater influence from peer associations (Massogila & Uggen 2010; Giordano et al. 2002; Giordano et al. 2007; Haynie 2001; Laub and Sampson 2003).

Life Course Criminology

Traditional criminological theories inadequately address the changing patterns in criminal trajectories over the life-course and therefore have resulted in the incorporation of developmental theories within traditional criminogenic behavioral theories. The integration of life course perspectives have been incorporated in strain, symbolic interaction, control, and social learning theories. Utilizing a life course perspective encourages a deeper understanding of the “prevalence, age of onset of offending, duration of careers, escalation and de-escalation of criminal behavior in terms of both frequency and seriousness, and desistance from criminal involvement” (Thornberry 1997:22).

While it is beyond question that changes in offending occur over time, ambiguities exist regarding how best to explain those changes. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1983) contend that crime declines with age irrespective of time, place, demographic subgroup, or type of crime. In contrast to life-course explanations that argue the importance of attachments developed in adulthood, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) state that opportunities for social connectedness, in employment and marriage, for instance, do not replace age as the predominant explanation of desistance from criminality. The life course perspective offers a framework for understanding change in behavior. However, questions remain concerning how these findings differ across racial and ethnic groups (Piquero, MacDonald, and Parker, 2002).

Peers, The Life Course, and Crime

Applying social learning theory to the study of emerging adulthood, I orient this study to investigating the role of peers in criminality. Many scholars have investigated the influences that peers have on social behaviors (Hartup and Stevens 1997; Berndt 1992). The influence of peers changes across the life course (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Dishion and Tipsord, 2011). While young

children are most predominantly influenced by their primary caregivers (Erikson 1959, Erikson & Erikson 1998), the influence of peers increases over the life course. Miller (2006) finds that teenagers spend 29 percent, twice as much, of their time with peers than their parents or other adults. He explains that the primary power that youth exert in influencing their social circumstances is expressed through choosing which people they associate with as friends.

For many youths their sense of belonging is grounded in those who they identify with most, and these peer associations often last into emerging adulthood (Branje et al. 2014). Moreover, as people transition into adulthood, the primary source of influence shifts from involuntary relationships, such as parents, to voluntary relationships, such as friends (Hartup 1996: 8; Farrington and West, 1995; Warr 1993: 25). Furthermore, Young et al. (2015) describe transitions to adulthood as a “peer project” because peer relationships are crucial in processing transitional experiences. In applying social learning theories to this study, I focus on the special role of peer relations in emerging adulthood for the particular case of young black males. Considering the overrepresentation of black males in incarceration rates, it is particularly important to investigate whether exposure to criminal activities among close friend networks is part of an explanation for the persistence of racial inequalities in criminality.

IV. Data and Methods

Data Sources

The primary data for this study is from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR). As described by Smith and Denton (2005) and Smith and Snell (2009), the NSYR is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of English and Spanish-speaking adolescents in the United States. The first NSYR fielding took place in 2002, the second 2005, third 2008, and the fourth 2012. The fourth and final fielding of the NSYR in-depth interview took place from May

through December 2012. This study focuses on the emerging adult survey and in-person interview responses from Wave 4 when the respondents were in their mid-to-late twenties, as well as employing Wave 1 parent responses for these matched respondents. In addition, statistical weights adjust for all known remaining minor discrepancies, making the survey sample a nationally representative survey of American emerging adults.

This study also analyzes Wave 4 qualitative data from the NSYR on interviewed randomly sampled survey respondents. During this wave, 261 of the respondents who had been interviewed previously were re-interviewed, along with 42 respondents who had taken the survey but had never been included in the interview sample before. The respondents began the study in 2001 as adolescents ages 13 to 17 years old (81% response rate), and the same panel of respondents has been resurveyed in a total of four waves of data collection, concluding most recently with Wave 4 in 2013 when respondents were ages 23 to 27 (n=2,144, 65% retention rate from Wave 1). The interviews averaged four hours in length with most interviews being conducted on-site in coffee shops, libraries, restaurants, near the interviewee residence. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and additionally, each interviewer wrote field notes on the interview location and the interviewee. This intense qualitative analysis of this study in particular focuses on 17 black male respondents who were interviewed in-depth and for which survey data on the number of times interviewees went to jail is available.

Derived Hypotheses

The methodology of this mixed method study draws heavily from Kreager's (2007) work on peer networks and male violence. Kreager's (2007) study provides a model for operationalizing social control and social learning as mediators of individual criminality. Based on his approach, I investigate friend criminality (social network alters) as it relates to respondent

criminality (egos). I hypothesize that greater criminal activity in one's closest friend networks relates to greater levels of personal criminal activity.

Additionally, I draw upon the work of Anderson (1999) to postulate that there are important differences operating in the social surrounding black males. Therefore, my approach is to include interaction terms of race and gender measures to investigate whether there are subgroup differences in potential relationships between friend criminality and personal criminality. In other words, I hypothesize that the particular case of black men operates through a different set of social learning processes and may help to explain overrepresentation of black men in criminal activities.

In intersecting these sets of approaches, I also merge quantitative data with qualitative data, in order to unpack the complexities involved in social and racial inequalities as they relate to peer social learning and criminal activity. Therefore, I employ a mixed-methods design modeled upon the approach of Terriquez and Gurantz (2014), who find that the important nuances of everyday experiences for black males are often not adequately captured in quantitative data alone and thus pair national quantitative trends with in-depth interview data on the subgroup of black male emerging adults.

Measures

Outcome Measure. Based upon extant studies utilizing measures of self-reported criminality (Kreager 2007; Hayine 2001; Young 1990; Waldo and Chiricos 1972), the dependent variable for the current study, personal criminality, is drawn from self-reported survey data regarding the number of times the respondent has been to jail. The survey question asked: "How many times have you ever spent time in a jail, prison, juvenile detention center or other correctional facility?" Respondents could answer never, once, twice, 3-10 times (as separate

response options), or 11 or more times. This measure is reverse-coded to analyze it such that never is low and 11 or more is the highest option. Although the measure asks if the respondent has ever been to jail, prison, juvenile detention center or other correctional facility for the remainder of this study will refer to this outcome as number of times to jail.

for the remainder of this study will refer to this outcome as number of times to jail.

Explanatory Measures. The primary explanatory measure is the number of close friends who have been to jail. Respondents were asked how many friends they have, and then were provided a social network grid populated with the number of friends they listed, up to five close friends. Among the social network questions, respondents were asked how many of their five closest friends had been to jail (or if they listed only one friend they were asked whether this friend had been to jail). To compare across number of friends respondents had, I employ a constructed variable that codes 0 as having no exposure to friend criminality (either because none of the closest friends listed had been to jail or in 29 cases because the respondent reported having no close friends). Number of friends who went to jail is coded such that, for example, respondents listing three friends and reporting two of them went to jail are coded as two, as are respondents who listed having four friends and reporting two of them went to jail. Due to the small number of cases reporting four and five friends having been to jail, the highest category is three or more friends have been to jail. Included with this primary explanatory measure is a control for the number of friends listed by the respondent, thus allowing for an investigation as the number of friends who have been to jail net of the overall number of friends respondent has.

The other set of primary explanatory measures are race and gender. In particular, I am interested in the interaction of race and gender. Respondents were asked whether they were male or female (coded 0 for male and 1 for female). They were also asked to describe their race and

ethnicity as: white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, a mix, or other. Due to the prevalence in criminology of studying black crime rates as compared to white crime rates (Piquero and Brame 2008), I here collapse all the other racial categories and analyze a categorical measure of: white, black, and other. The key for this analysis is the interaction term combining gender with race, resulting in six gender-race combinations, and in which I focus on subgroup comparisons between black males and white males.

Control Measures. In addition to these primary explanatory measures, I also include a number of control measures in order to help isolate the peer social learning relationship net of other potentially spurious effects. To control for the parental social class of the respondent, I include measures drawn from the parent survey, conducted during the first wave of the NSYR when the respondents were teenagers. The first of these measures is parental income, reported in \$10,000 increments beginning with less than \$10,000 and ending with more than \$100,000. Parental respondents were also asked to report their own educational attainment, and the educational attainment of the teen's other biological parent. Response options for this were: Less than high school, high school degree or GED, vocational degree, some college, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate or professional degree. A constructed variable is included which combines the mother and father educational attainment into the highest degree earned by either parent. Both parental income and parental education are included in the models as continuous measures.

Based upon the well-known connection between female-headed households and criminal activity (Sampson 1987), I include a measure for whether the respondent grew up in a female-headed household. This is also drawn from the parental survey conducted when the respondents were teenagers. I constructed the measure by combining the gender of the parental respondent

with their responses to questions regarding their household living situation and the status of their partner (if applicable) relative to the teen. Male and female parental respondents were asked to describe their household living situation as: married, living with unmarried partner, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married. Respondents who reported living with an unmarried partner were asked if this was the teen's parent, coded as yes (1) or no (0). Female parental respondents were asked about their relationship to the teen, in response options of: biological mother, adoptive mother, step-mother, grandmother, foster mother, legal guardian, father's partner, or other. Likewise, a similar measure was created for male parental respondents, with the substitution of father for mother in the above description.

A final control included in the models is the educational attainment of the respondent. During Wave 4, respondents were asked to report which of these options was their highest degree earned: no degrees, high school or GED, associate's or vocational degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree. As described further below, this is included initially as a continuous measure and is subsequently investigated more thoroughly for ordinal predicted margins. Respondents were coded as living in a female-headed household if the parental respondent was female and responded that she was widowed, divorced, separated, or never married, and if she reported that she was living with an unmarried partner who was not the teen's parent. Table 1 reports population-weighted descriptive statistics for all included measures.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Quantitative Analysis

Stata statistical software is employed to estimate OLS regressions, using the `svyset` commands to weight the study sample based on population demographics. The baseline model (M1) estimates the relationship between the number of times respondent has been to jail and the

interaction term of race and gender. The control measures are added to this baseline model in M2. Model 3 returns to the baseline model and adds the peer criminality measure. Model 4 estimates the relationship of personal criminality with the three-way interaction of race and gender with peer criminality, net of controls. To test for subgroup differences, I employ the post-estimation command of `testparm`, which returns confirms that all differences noted in the table are statistically significant ($p < 0.000$) subgroup differences for black males as compared to white males (and also for females compared to males, though that is not the focus of this study). Predicted margins are plotted by employing the `margins` and `marginsplot` commands. Figure 1 visualizes the subgroup differences in Model 3 of black males compared to white males in their relationships between peer criminality and personal criminality. Model 4 is visualized in Figure 2 and displays results for ordinal educational attainment with the interaction of race, gender, and peer criminality, net of controls set to their mean values.

Qualitative Analysis

NVivo qualitative software is employed to analyze the NSYR interviews, using a meticulous abductive coding guideline. Timmermans & Tavory's (2012) abductive qualitative data analysis approach is aimed at theory construction by cultivating "anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis" (169). Interviewees were asked questions about a number of topics related to their transition to adulthood. I use the in-depth interview data to further shed light on the various factors that aid explaining why emerging adults engaged in criminogenic or deviant acts. Systematic methodological coding is conducted in three waves of analysis, first for the presence of criminal activity within the interviews. Second, I analyze the qualitative data into broad topical themes (such as personal criminality, friend/context criminality, personal & friend

criminality, etc.). I then recoded relevant transcripts based on explaining the emerging themes. The findings presented below reflect exemplary quotes that directly relate to the above mentioned quantitative analysis. Pseudonyms are used to preserve respondent confidentiality.

V. Results

Quantitative Results

Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to test for multicollinearity, which suggested that multicollinearity would not further obstruct analysis. The analysis was also used to examine the strength and relationship between the predictor variables and personal criminality. Almost all of the independent variables had significant relationships in the expected direction with personal criminality (bivariate correlations are included in the appendix).

Table 2 displays the results of the quantitative analyses, representing the standard OLS regression estimates for Models 1-4. Model 1 tests the combined and individual relationship gender and race with the number of times the respondent has been to jail. The predictors of the individual and interaction effect of race and gender are significant and explain 5% of the variability of the number of times to jail. In Model 2, control measures are introduced to the previous baseline model. The control variables introduced in this model are female-headed households, parent education, parent income, and educational attainment. The measures female headed households and educational attainment added statistical significance to the prediction. Higher number of times respondent went to jail are statistically significantly related to growing up in a female headed household and with lower levels of educational attainment. The baseline model coupled with the control measures are significant predictors and explain 10% of the variability of the number of times to jail.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Model 3 returns to the baseline Model 1 and adds the measure of peer criminality. As in Model 1, the combined and individual relationships between gender and race with the number of times the respondent has been to jail are statistically significant and positive. Greater number of times respondent has been to jail is statistically significantly related to have more friends who have been to jail, net of having more friends overall. Introducing this peer criminality measure to the model increased the explained variability in Model 1 to 12%, and test of model comparisons reject the null hypothesis that the models are equal.

Figure 1 displays the results of Model 3, comparing predicted margins for black males compared to white males in their relationship between peer and personal criminality. In this plot, margins are predicted for each value of the number of friends who have been to jail (0, 1, 2, and 3 or more). This measure is plotted in relation to black male respondents as compared to white male respondent and allows a direct test of the first proposed research question regarding whether the fact that black males have more friends who have been to jail (see bivariate relationships in the appendix) relates to their own greater levels of criminality. The substantial difference between the two lines provides evidence that this is indeed the case.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Model 4 estimates the relationship of personal criminality with the three-way interaction of race and gender with peer criminality and net of controls introduced in Model 2. Substantively, this model estimates the subgroup differences of personal criminality with peer criminality. Greater number of times the respondent has been to jail relates to greater numbers of peers who have been to jail. It is notable that higher personal criminality is related to black males having one criminal peer, black males with three or more criminal peers, white males with one criminal peer, yet white males with three or more criminal peers have less personal criminality.

However, black or white males with two criminal peers have a greater level of personal criminality. The introduced measures are significant predictors and explain 17% of the variability of the number of times to jail. To summarize, peer criminality matters in terms of retaining statistical significance and in terms of explaining some but not all of the subgroup differences. More important, education matters. Of the net controls introduced educational attainment retained statistical significance in which as the number of times went to jail is higher when educational attainment is lower.

Figure 2 displays the results of Model 4, plotting predicted margins for each category of educational attainment with the interaction of race, gender, peer criminality, and with control measures set to their mean values. White and black males are displayed for each number of friends who have been to jail (0, 1, 2, 3 or more). The figure displays that black males are at high-risk because they are more likely to associate with someone who has been to jail. Additionally, for male emerging adults who have low levels of education the risk is greater across the board. Risk is greatest for white males who have three or more friends who have been to jail. Moreover, the difference between one and three criminal friends for black males is much closer together than it is for whites. In other words, there is not only just a greater risk, but the difference between one and three friends has a greater risk for black males than it does for white males. Furthermore, most noteworthy is that greater levels of educational attainment relate to lower criminality for everyone; obtaining a bachelors degree is related to lower peer criminality. To summarize, peer criminality relates to personal criminality and is part of understanding black male's experience through emerging adulthood life stage.

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

Qualitative Results

Interviewees were asked questions about topics related to their transition to adulthood. I use the in-depth interview data to further shed light on the various factors that aid explaining why emerging adults engage in criminal or deviant acts. Overall I found support to unpack the trends from the quantitative work in the national study. To highlight the trends in the national study, I selected five of the seventeen individuals with varying levels of criminality and educational attainment. The findings presented below reflect exemplary quotes that directly relate to the above-mentioned quantitative analysis. Pseudonyms are used to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents.

Jévon

First I introduce you to Jévon, age 27. Jévon is a high school dropout, and in the survey instrument, he admitted that he has committed a criminal act and has two criminal friends. In his interview, he said that he has “been to jail a few times in the past year.” He does not have biological children, but his girlfriend does have five that he feels some sense of responsibility for. When asked about a difficult decision that Jévon had to make in the past several years, he exclaimed:

Yeah stealin’ and all that cause I ain’t wanna do it and then do it but I had to make a decision cause I broke, needed some money you know. So I feel like that was difficult decision I had to make. I was tryna steal some kinda scrap and all that to just go make some money. Scrap iron. And I knew what lotta was, I knew the person that had it. Some came through and let me borrow a little money I had called up. She ended up givin’ me a lil money so I ain’t had to do it. My mom.

Interviewer : Oh your mom. So you didn’t have to steal then? Okay, okay. Was that uh, yeah did that situation like did that feel um, ya know like it-it was about right and wrong?

Jévon: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay okay. Um, lets see. Were you uh, like were you sorta unsure of what to do or?

Jévon: Yeah I was. Mmhmm. A little.

Interviewer: What what what were you unsure about?

Jévon: I just- doin’ it or whatever and going to jail.

Here we see that there is a mutual acknowledgement from Jévon and his mother that he should avoid jail. To try and ensure that he didn't return, she stepped in so he could have the resources he needed and would not steal again. Due to his level of educational attainment, we can assume that he most likely has had to hold low income forms of employment. Jévon illuminates the potential reasons that individuals who do not achieve sustainable levels of education may have to commit criminal acts to survive.

Theodis

Now meet Theodis who is a married father of two children and has a vocational technical degree. He didn't report any personal instances of criminality on the survey measures, nor did he report any friends with criminal backgrounds. Even with some education, Theodis has had trouble making ends meet, so when he was asked if there are any rights and wrongs in life, he replied:

I have been in this situation. I hate thieves, guaranteed I do, but I have been in situation where I've had to take food from my job. From previous job. I didn't get fired for nothin' like that but. I felt so bad for doing it, but then again... We didn' have any food. Didn't ha' any money. Money wasn't coming fast enough. My child was starving. My-my-my wife was starving. Me, I didn't care about myself. It was absolutely wrong for me to do. I coulda asked for it. I coulda asked for help. I felt cornered so I had to do what... all animals do...hunger is basic instinct, so. People'll do anything for food. They even kill you over some food.

He then relates what's right in life is taking care of his family and that,

just like I would do for my child, I would do for my mom. She raised me, she kept me out of, uh, outta—out a lof of... issues, cause I was little bad boy. So, I mean, I could say one thing. She kept to her word. She said, I'm a keep you, uh, goin' keep me alive until I grew up and she also keep me out a jail until I grew up, and, thank God, I'm here, I ain't never been to jail, never been to prison, and I'm still alive.

Theodis' story alludes to the protective factor of education on black emerging adults by preventing them from going to jail. Like our previous respondent, Theodis is having trouble making ends meet, and his mother “[kept] him out of issues.” She worked hard to keep him alive and out of jail. The previous two respondents unpack what we were not able to explain in the

quantitative analysis. Theodis and Jévon show that when low educational attainment is coupled with encounters of the criminal justice system, black male emerging adults must rely on social support from parents.

Omar

Here I present cases of personal criminality that express a desire, either from the respondent or the caregivers, of the emerging adult to complete their educational goals in hopes of living a better life—a life not affected by instances of criminality. Omar is 26 years old, married, and a father. When asked whether he thinks that his parents are happy about the way that he's turned out, he goes into detail on how he feels he hasn't meet their expectations by saying:

But, they, they probably wish I finished college. They probably wish that some of the legal issues I ran into I didn't run into....Like, I got, I got into like two or three fights with my wife. Like, and...Yea. Like that's, that's pretty much like I slowed down like my working process over the past five years. Like, like I would sit there and I'd have a job. And I would get jammed up with her, and then I would like, something would happen with that job where like the season would end. Like I was doing construction for a while, and the season ended and they pretty much stopped construction in like November. So when it came back around time for February, March when it got nice again, I couldn't go back to that because I still had these court issues.

Omar then describes how the altercations with his wife occurred,

It was pretty much...alcohol was involved in every situation. And, it was pretty much like her word against mine. And every situation in [Northeast State] if the woman calls the police, you're going to jail. And...Yea. And every situation after the fact [calling the police] she wants to drop the charges, but she can't in [Northeast State]. It's been, it's been a time when the police told me not to go to her house and not to have any contact with her, but she called me and she called me, got into an argument with me, then called the police and told them I was at her house, and I was nowhere around her. But because she called them, they have to do something about it. Yea, a lot of foolishness.

Later in the interview, Omar discusses another encounter with the criminal justice system when he was arrested in a drug sting:

Interviewer: Do you feel like that's how they really feel, like "what I'm doing is fine"?
Omar: Yea. I mean, uhm, I actually spoke to the mayor of [Northeast City], uhm because I wanna say like maybe a year ago they arrested me and two-hundred people in a drug

stint called “Blood Line” I think it is... It’s not like light charges like possession or anything, it’s like drug trafficking, conspiracy to cook drugs, like

Interviewer: Like heavy charges?

Omar: Yea.

Here Omar unfolds occurrences of his own personal criminality. Most noteworthy in the excerpt above is that Omar did not feel as though his parents were happy with the way that he turned out because of dropping out of school and what he calls “legal issues.” As a result of the significance in how education played out in the quantitative analysis, we can assume that if Omar would have stayed in school, that he would have been better equipped to deal with the circumstances that he was faced with, and, like Omar’s parents, believes he could have been better off.

Khyree

Khyree is 25 years old and did not report any criminality in the survey measure. Like a few of our previous respondents, he is also a father, and received his bachelor's degree in criminal justice. While in college, he played on his school’s basketball team. When asked about the effects of his drug use he said:

I smoked marijuana, uh, started at 17. Lasted ‘til October 15, 2010. Uh, smoked it all during college. I actually got kicked out of college cause of marijuana. Uh, I did a little bit of sellin’ at the school. Somebody got caught and told on me. Uh, they ran the dogs on my car. The dogs barked. They found some weed in there. Uh, but since I played basketball, my coach kind of kept it, on the low, where I didn’t have to face any charges as far as that. They just didn’t let me walk cause it was the last two weeks of school, and all my grades already set in, so I still got my degree, but I didn’t get a chance to walk across the stage because of that, so I lost that opportunity with that. Uh, when I got out of that, I stopped smoking with that for about, enough time for me to go work at the prison. Take the drug test, pass the drug test.

Here Khyree’s story provides an example as to how education can serve as a protective factor in determining if a black male emerging adult has been to jail. Unlike our other respondents, Khyree was able to tap into the capital that is provided when attending a university or college. In school, Khyree was able to make a vital connection with his basketball coach that resulted in protecting him from going to jail. So much so, that the experience motivated him to quit selling

and smoking marijuana. Because of this experience, he was able to obtain gainful employment as a corrections officer in a prison. He eventually quit working there because of the disparate treatment of inmates, and he felt that the black inmates were consistently ill-treated, unjustly targeted and provoked. In sum, Khyree supports the quantitative analysis as an example of the positive effects educational attainment has in protecting a black male emerging adult going to jail.

Mahlik

Here we have Mahlik whose story generalizes to a majority of the respondents, specifically the black male emerging adults who did not express personal criminality. He did, however, admit in the survey measure that he has one criminal friend. This is consistent with our findings in the quantitative analysis. Mahlik is 24 years old, not a father, and is currently pursuing in bachelor's degree. When asked about how his life is headed and what he has been most happy and excited about, he replied:

Coming from where I come from, I don't think, I wouldn't say it's the best neighborhood, the best environment to grow up in as a young black male. Umm I think I'm pretty successful, I think I made it out, like a lot of us, like I can say that it's, there's a lot of things that happened [long pause] I think yeah going to school, staying out of trouble, ya know, heading in the right direction, working, clear mind, good heart, ya know. A lot of those things. People I look at every day eye to eye can't really relate to that but I can relate to them, it's interesting, it's interesting.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. What umm were some of the main influences on you staying out of trouble and getting to where you are today?

Definitely my family, absolutely. Definitely my family. My mother specifically, my grandmother specifically. Aunts and uncles. They kept me on the right path. My schools, all the schools that I went to. Umm I was in a preparatory school-- middle school, I had to wear a uniform every day, my day consisted of uhh class, I had to do a sport. And you had to go to like evening study to get your homework, like that was required of you. That's a long day for a middle schooler but looking back on that, like in retrospect, I didn't like it back then wearing a uniform and everything. But looking back in retrospect it was excellent, a great opportunity. I went to a private high school, had to wear a uniform again. So it kind of molded me more than I realized then but now that I look back I say wow, this all, all this played a part to where I am now. And it takes maturity to realize that.

Mahlik's story illuminates the power that his family's invested interest in him pursuing an education has had. Although Mahlik has a close friend who has been to jail and lives in a community context that is prone to accept behaviors that are deviant or criminal, he attributes his positive life outcome and trajectory to "going to school" and "staying out of trouble." The structured environment that school provided for this emerging adult gave him "a great opportunity."

The qualitative analysis supports the findings in the nationally representative data. What is most salient to take away from the combined findings is that the number of criminal friends and the level of education matters. Although the qualitative data was not able to unpack the narrative of the density of criminal friends, I was able to draw heavily on conclusions of the impact of education. With the stories of these five black emerging adults, we are able to see how the varying educational attainment levels either aid in predicting the likelihood of going to jail or, in some cases, protect a black male emerging adult from going to jail.

VI. Discussion

This study investigates the subgroup differences in criminality during emerging adulthood, especially among black males, who may experience unique intersecting social inequalities. This study advances upon (a) existing studies in emerging adulthood, (b) studies of social inequalities and deviance, and (c) life course criminology by investigating criminal activity in emerging adulthood. Specific attention is paid to black male emerging adults. Applying social learning theory, this is a study about the role of peers in criminality.

One of the major implications of this study is that discriminatory policies and practices specifically geared toward blacks, including but not limited to, the War on Drugs, disenfranchisement legislation, mass incarceration, and stop and frisk policies, may be

continuing to result in the social reproduction of the criminogenic black male. Although successful actions have taken place to eradicate many of these harmful practices, the results of this study indicate that there may be lingering effects of these historical structural ills.

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The theoretical orientations of this study indicated the need to study potential subgroup differences in criminality. An application of social learning theories led to the central research question of this study: Does the criminal behavior of peers relate to personal criminality? The findings indicate a resounding affirmative. This is an especially important contribution because it strengthens understanding of criminality within the new life stage of emerging adulthood. Additionally, the use of a life course perspective encourages a deeper understanding of the ways structural-agency processes interact in shaping life outcomes, and the implication of this study is that peer criminality appears to be an important part of the equation of personal criminality. In this study, we interact the theories of life course development and criminal social learning and in doing offer a model of how to advance knowledge by engage the insights of multiple subfields.

Additionally, this study contributes a mixed methods approach to the study of personal criminality. The majority of quantitative research in criminology investigates aggregated, macro-level data on the occurrence of criminal activities. In contradistinction, most understandings of personal criminality are drawn from in-depth qualitative analysis. This study combines the strengths of both approaches in contributing to a better understanding of the intersection between personal and social factors in criminal activity. As noted by Collins (2008) and others, violence is too complex and a pressing social problem to be subjected to methodological puritanism. This work provides evidence that keeping quantitative and qualitative methods separate can limit and reduce the potential impact of studies on this phenomenon. Hammersley (1992:50) argues, “the

distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods tends to obscure the complexity of the problems that face us and threatens to render our decisions less effective.” Furthermore, a mixed methods analysis provides the necessary empirical grounding for theory generation and data for theory testing. From these applied theories and their empirical evidence, we can formulate implications for the prevention, management, and resolution of violence and crime for black male emerging adults.

Policy and Program Implications

The most significant empirical finding of this study is that obtaining a bachelor’s degree reduces the exposure to criminal close friends. This provides justification for hopeful policy and program implications because female-headed household, as readily discussed in concentrated disadvantage literature and one salient factor to criminality, is an extremely complicated social issue to eradicate from communities. This study provides practitioners, program managers, and legislatures evidence of something more attainable to focus on and change. The implication of the findings regarding educational attainment and the sociality of crime are hopeful because they indicate that with greater educational attainment the next generation of black males could have fewer friends who have been to jail and less instances of personal criminality, an effect that could exponentially relate to a decline in the overrepresentation of black males in the criminal justice system.

The findings also have implications for programs that can aid parenting practices. It appears that one lesson learned from this study is that it matters whom children associate with. Parenting programs could educate all families, and particularly those with black male emerging adults, regarding the protective role that they can play in their sons’ lives by helping them be careful in their friend choices. When coupled with insights from Elijah Anderson’s (1999) work

on the defining characteristics of “decent” and “street” families more practical insights can be gained. Anderson finds that decent parents have to encourage and support the ability of their child to code switch for their safety. For example, in disadvantaged communities, having one or two friends that have been to jail may be a protective factor because an individual can learn the necessary code of the street to abide by to ensure their safety. However, having a greater number of friends who have been to jail appears to be a risk. Parents can help their emerging adult children navigate this complexity by explaining the importance of being aware of and intentional about the degree of criminal social learning to which one is exposed. Another learning is that parents can help stress the apparent value of education as a protective factor beyond mere income acquisition. An implication of this study is that pursuing education is not just an individual preference, but instead interacts with a number of other protective social factors, such as contributing to changes in close peer networks and desistance from crime.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is one of the first of its kind to investigate social network effects in criminality, especially through a mixed-methods approach. However, it is not without limitations. The most notable of these is that in this initial step, the analysis is only of cross-sectional data and does not yet interrogate changes over time in order to establish the causal order of social learning. It could be that alter criminality affects ego criminality, or the reverse. Moreover, it could rather be that some other self-selection affects mean that criminal friends are more likely to associate with each other, but that neither is learning criminal activity from the other. These possibilities are important to test in the studies that continue the line of investigation offered in this study. Another fruitful continuation of this study is a multilevel analysis that investigates individual and community-level correlates, in order to assess whether the personal

criminality factors found here are truly individual-level characteristics versus that these individuals are more prevalent in community contexts in which criminality occurs at greater rates. Third, a subsequent study can investigate social control in emerging adulthood by analyzing whether there appears to be a substitution effect between parents and peers.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
personal criminality	2060	1.34	1.06	1	12
gender	2071	.53	.50	0	1
race	2056	1.45	.75	1	3
female headed household	2071	.25	.43	0	1
parent education	2071	4.77	2.0	1	9
parent income	2071	7.26	3.80	1	14
total criminal friend	2071	.40	.72	0	3
educational attainment	2064	2.97	1.11	1	5

Table 2. OLS Regression Results for Personal Criminality

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Constant	1.444**	.051	2.009**	.116	1.240**	.042	1.664**	0.098
race - black	0.707*	.301	0.523	.286	0.698*	.306	0.636	.392
race - white	0.069	.110	0.005	.109	0.086	.105	0.002	.082
gender - male	-0.281**	.057	-0.247**	.055	-0.197**	.050	-0.073	.039
black - male	-0.653*	.306	-0.672*	.294	-0.677*	.311	-0.698	.403
white - male	-0.078	.117	-0.128	.115	-0.074	.113	-0.071	.089
<u>Controls</u>								
female headed-household			0.185**	.0717			0.114	.065
parent education			0.006	.018			0.010	.017
parent income			-0.010	.009			-0.014	.009
educational attainment			-0.0186**	.021			-0.0142**	.020
<u>Peer Criminality (friend to jail)</u>								
number of close criminal peers					0.387**	.053		
one criminal peer							0.479**	.145
two criminal peers							0.756**	.195
three criminal peers							1.687**	.499
<u>Race & Peer Criminality</u>								
black & one criminal peer							0.046	.707
black & two criminal peers							-1.098*	.506
black & three or more criminal peers							-0.897	.937
white & one criminal peer							0.017	.251
white & two criminal peers							-0.047	.479
white & three or more criminal peers							0.863	1.411
<u>Gender & Peer Criminality</u>								
male & one criminal peer							-0.0297	.179
male & two criminal peers							-0.559*	.282
male & three or more criminal peers							-0.994	.551

Table 2 (Continued). OLS Regression Results for Personal Criminality

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Constant	1.444**	.051	2.009**	.116	1.240**	.042	1.664**	0.098
<u>Race, Gender & Peer Criminality</u>								
black male & one criminal peer							-0.154	.728
black male & two criminal peers							0.942	.586
black male & three or more criminal peers							-0.065	.972
white male & one criminal peer							-0.082	.298
white male & two criminal peers							0.119	.566
white male & three or more criminal peers							-1.750	1.430

Figure 1. Personal and Peer Criminality Comparing Black Males to White Males

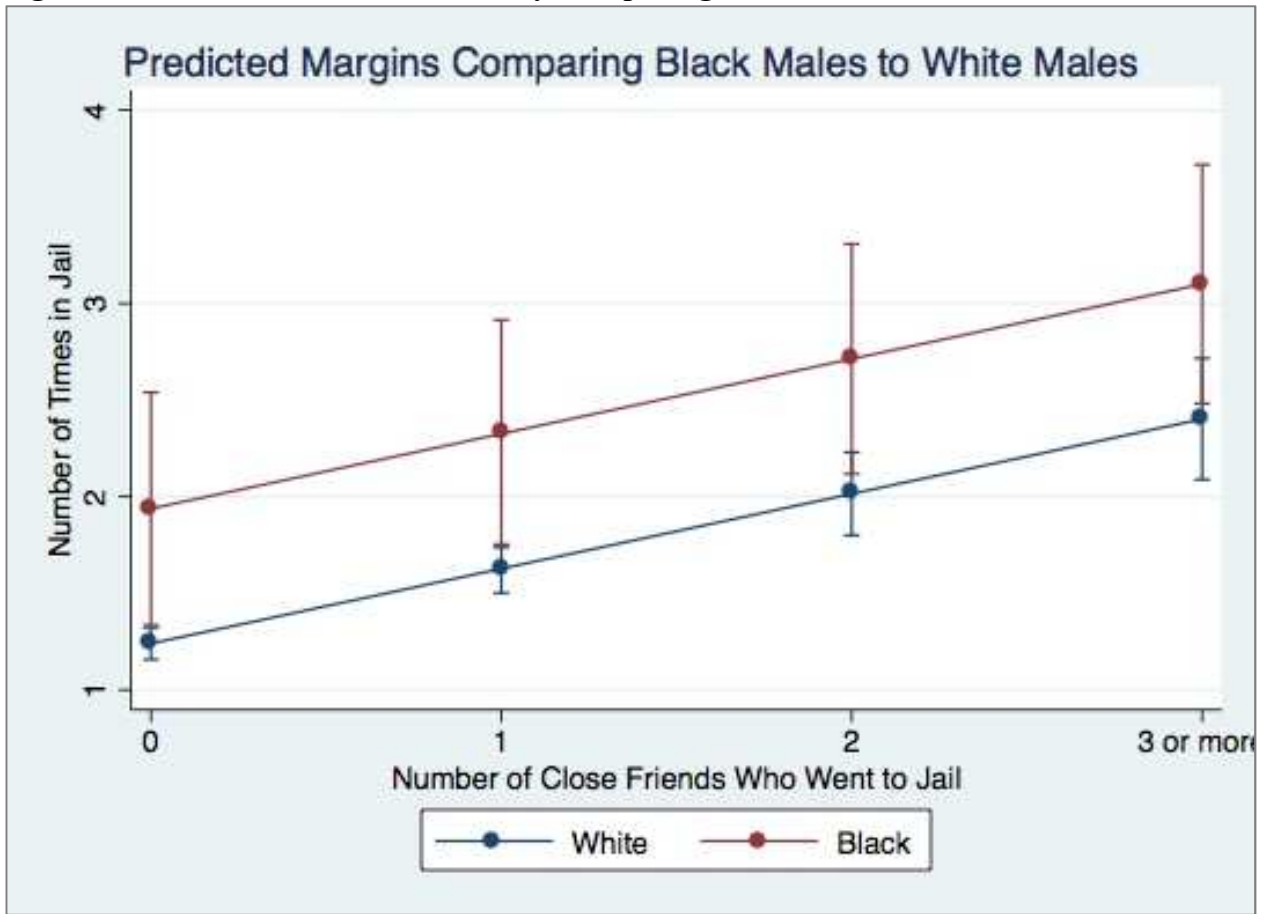
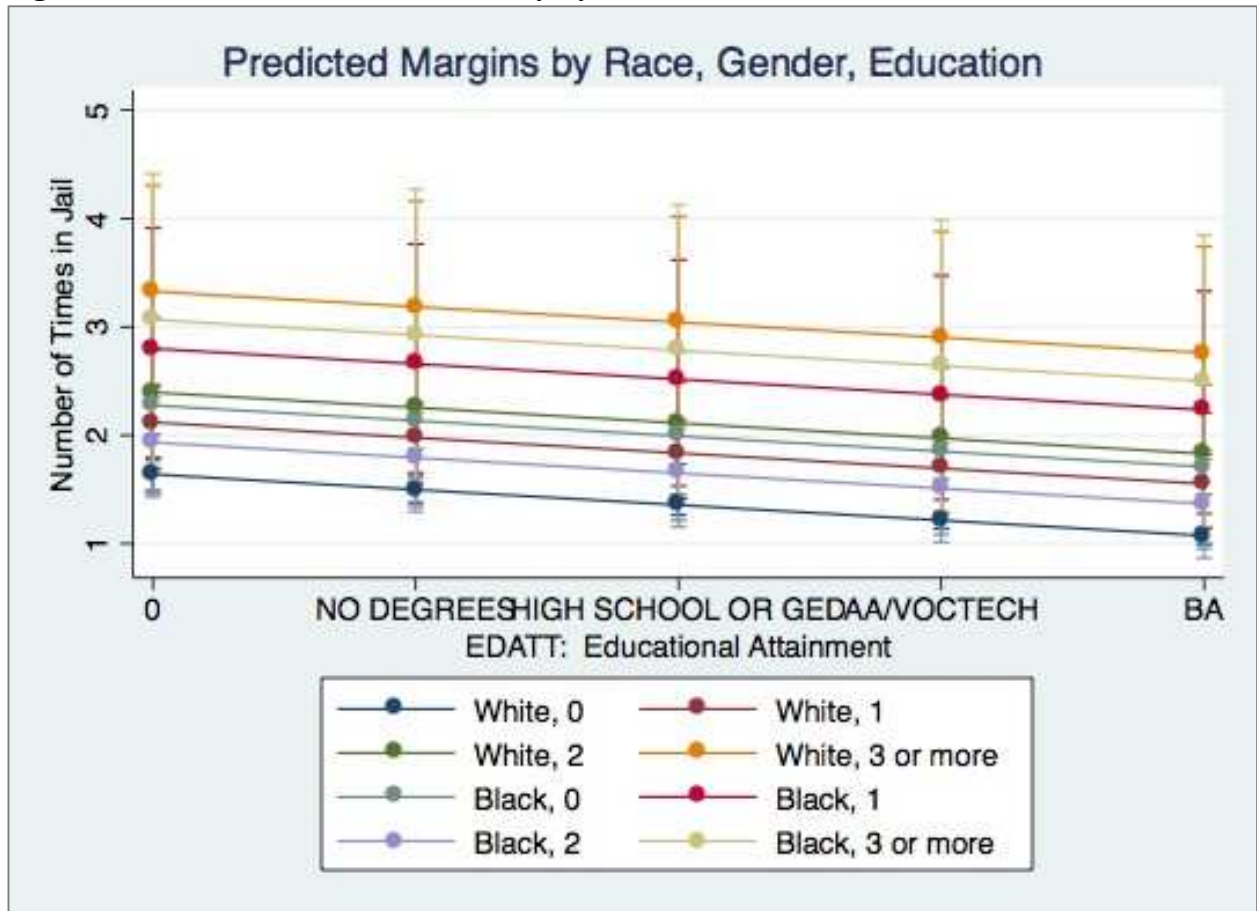


Figure 2. Personal and Peer Criminality by Race, Gender, and Educational Attainment



IX. Appendix

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations

	personal criminality	gender	race	female headed household	parent education	parent income	total criminal friend	educational attainment
personal criminality	1.0000							
gender	-0.1688*	1.0000						
race	0.0274	0.0458*	1.0000					
female headed household	0.1263*	0.0461*	0.1691*	1.0000				
parent education	-0.0875*	-0.1187*	-0.2086*	-0.2926*	1.0000			
parent income	-0.1286*	-0.0691*	-0.2220*	-0.4852*	0.5893*	1.0000		
total criminal friend	-0.2898*	-0.1620*	-0.0071	0.0720*	-0.0896*	-0.0849*	1.0000	
educational attainment	-0.2297*	0.0371	-0.1392*	-0.2114*	0.4208*	0.3938*	-0.2132*	1.0000

* $p < .05$



June 15, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: DeAndré T. Beadle
Patricia Snell Herzog

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 16-06-795

Protocol Title: *"Walking the Straight Line": Criminal Activity and Emerging Adulthood & the Special Case of Black Men*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 06/15/2016 Expiration Date: 06/14/2017

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.