Parenting in Moderation: Family Routine Moderates the Relation Between School Disengagement and Delinquent Behaviors Among African American Adolescents

H. Isabella Lanza and Ronald D. Taylor
Temple University

To address gaps in the literature regarding the role of family routine on school disengagement and delinquent behaviors, we tested whether family routine moderated relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors in an urban, low socioeconomic status (SES), African American sample of adolescents ($N = 204$, 48% male). Adolescents reported on school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. Family routine was assessed with mother report. Hierarchical regression analyses examined the independent and interactive effects of school disengagement and family routine on delinquent behaviors. After controlling for adolescent and mother age, marital status, and employment, school disengagement was independently associated with delinquent behaviors. Family routine was found to moderate school disengagement. Specifically, among adolescents exhibiting higher levels of school disengagement, lower levels of family routine were associated with higher levels of delinquent behaviors; however, higher levels of family routine were not associated with lower levels of delinquent behaviors. Findings suggest that lower levels of routine may be a particularly salient risk factor of delinquent behaviors among African American adolescents experiencing higher levels of school disengagement in low SES, urban communities.

**Keywords:** adolescence, delinquent behaviors, parenting, family routine, school disengagement

The transition from elementary school to middle and high school is marked by significant changes in school structure and expectations of students’ performance. Schools become larger and more impersonal, and measures of learning begin to emphasize performance rather than effort. Along with these changes, new issues emerge that come into conflict with student’s learning and achievement. Specifically, increases in school disengagement and behaviors requiring disciplinary action are central challenges administrators, teachers, and students encounter in middle and high schools (Elmore, 2009; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; McDermott, Mordell, & Stolzfus, 2001). Taken together, relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors are significant barriers to academic achievement (Luthar & Ansary, 2005; Norris, Pignal, & Lipps, 2003; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008; Wang, Blumberg, & Li, 2005), and pose a heightened risk for adolescents living in low SES, urban communities where there are disproportionately greater levels of school disengagement (Eccles & Roesner, 2009; Holt, Bry, & Johnson, 2008) and delinquent behaviors (Farrington, 1998; Fite, Wynn, & Pardini, 2009). Identifying moderators of relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors among populations at greater risk for poor academic and behavioral outcomes is warranted for understanding the potential processes by which school disengagement and delinquent behaviors are linked.

School disengagement refers to a lack of student involvement and commitment to school curriculum and activities (Glanville & Widhagen, 2007). School disengagement consists of multiple components taking into account behavioral, affective, and cognitive domains (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Involvement and attentiveness in school tasks, feelings elicited from schooling, and attitudes toward school are commonly used as measures of behavioral, affective, and cognitive disengagement, respectively (Archembault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagini, 2009). The behavioral component of school disengagement is commonly studied as it represents observable interactions and responses between student and school (Finn & Rock, 1997). There is an abundance of evidence showing increases in both school disengagement and poorer academic achievement from early- to late-adolescence (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Finn, 2006; McDermott et al., 2001). Urban, ethnic-minority, adolescents with low socioeconomic status (SES) are disproportionately at risk for poorer academic outcomes (Eccles & Roesner, 2009; Elmore, 2009; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002), resulting partly as a function of higher levels of school disengagement (Holt et al.,

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H. Isabella Lanza and Ronald D. Taylor, Department of Psychology, Temple University.

H. Isabella Lanza is now at Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, University of California, Los Angeles.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to H. Isabella Lanza, University of California, Los Angeles, Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, 1640 S. Sepulveda Boulevard, Suite 200, Los Angeles, CA 90025. E-mail: hilanza@ucla.edu
FAMILY ROUTINE MODERATES SCHOOL DISENGAGEMENT

Thus, examining school disengagement among African Americans living in low SES, urban communities is especially warranted. Associations between delinquent behaviors and poor academic outcomes in adolescence are also significant (Fergusson, Vitaro, Wanner, & Brendgen, 2007; Fite et al., 2009; Maguin & Loebel, 1996; Wang et al., 2005). Delinquent behaviors are commonly defined as behaviors that are prohibited by law, such as drug use, vandalism, theft, burglary, and violence (Farrington, 2009). During adolescence, delinquent behaviors increase dramatically (Kirk, 2006; Loebel, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loebel, & White, 2008) with estimates indicating 15% of adolescents participate in these behaviors at age 11 and about 50% participating in delinquent behaviors at age 17 (Huzinga, Loebel, & Thornberry, 1993). Adolescents from low SES, urban, high crime neighborhoods are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors, and residing in these neighborhoods has been used to explain higher delinquency rates in African Americans compared to Caucasians, as African Americans are more likely to live in these neighborhoods (Farrington, Loebel, & Stouthamer-Loebel, 2003; Fite et al., 2009; Piquero, Moffitt, & Lawton, 2005; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbusch, 2005).

Evaluating relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors may inform the interplay between school components and problem behaviors in adolescence. Available studies have reported direct associations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors (e.g., Connell, Halpern-Feisher, Clifford, Cricilow, & Usinger, 1995; Luthar & Ansary, 2005; Norris et al., 2003; Tyler, Johnson, & Brownridge, 2008). Potentially, school-based efforts to increase school engagement may mitigate delinquent behaviors (Najaka, Gottfredson, & Wilson, 2001). However, because efforts to promote school engagement are especially difficult in low SES, urban communities (Elmore, 2009; Holt et al., 2008; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Taylor et al., 1994), identifying other factors that moderate relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors may be useful for decreasing risk of delinquent behaviors among adolescents exhibiting higher levels of school disengagement. Potentially, familial factors may play a crucial role in decreasing associations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors, and provide an avenue for facilitating prevention and intervention efforts.

Identifying family contextual factors that decrease, maintain, or exacerbate delinquent behaviors among adolescents has long been encouraged. In fact, a proliferation of research has repeatedly demonstrated that poor parental monitoring or supervision is the most substantial parenting predictor of adolescent delinquent behaviors (Eddy & Chamberlain, 2000; Lohman & Billings, 2008; Loebel et al., 1998; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loebel, 1984; Pettit, Laird, Bates, Dodge, & Criss, 2001). Furthermore, uninvolved parenting, characterized as lack of behavioral control (Bean, Barber, & Cane, 2006), poor monitoring (Li, Feigelman, & Stanton, 2000), or permissiveness (Roche, Ensminger, & Cherlin, 2007) is a well-established contributor to delinquent behaviors among African American adolescents, particularly living in low SES, urban, high crime neighborhoods.

In terms of relations between familial factors and school disengagement, available studies have reported links between supportive and positive relationships with parents and higher levels of school engagement (Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). For instance, parental involvement expressed in an authoritative manner is associated with higher levels of school engagement in adolescence (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbeain, 2005; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992), and lower levels of parental involvement are associated with higher levels of school disengagement (Abd-El-Fattah, 2006). Parental involvement also has been specifically linked to higher levels of school engagement in African American adolescents' living in urban, low SES neighborhoods (Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, & Liddle, 2006; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994). Although research examining relations between family factors and both school disengagement and delinquent behaviors are abundant, there is currently a lack of empirical work evaluating the role of family routines on school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. Family routine refers to the level at which parents provide structure, consistency, and organization in the home environment for their children (Sytsma, Kelley, & Wymer, 2001; Voydanoff, Fine, & Donnelly, 1994). Past research on family routine has shown positive associations between family routine and children and adolescents' overall academic and social adjustment (Taylor, 1996; Taylor & Lopez, 2005). Clark (1983) indicated that high achieving as opposed to low achieving urban African American students had parents who structured and organized their child’s lives with daily and weekly scheduled activities. Adolescents exposed to home environments characterized by routines and organization demonstrated high attendance in school, and higher levels of responsibility and diligence in schoolwork and school activities. Generally, classroom management has focused on maintaining orderliness and predictability in order to promote academic achievement and social competence (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). Due to the increased routinization in the transition from elementary school to middle and high school (Elmore, 2009), family routine may play an important role in helping adolescents adjust to school transitions emphasizing structure and routines. Indeed, family routine has been shown to be positively associated with school engagement among urban, low-income, African American adolescents (Seaton & Taylor, 2003). Family routine also has been linked to lower levels of externalizing behaviors among African American children (Koblinsky, Kuvalanka, & Randolph, 2006) and delinquent behaviors among African American adolescents (Taylor, 1996; Taylor & Lopez, 2005). Potentially, family routine may mitigate positive associations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. Family routine may provide the organization and predictability that adolescents with higher levels of school disengagement are likely lacking, which potentially may decrease risk of involvement in delinquent behaviors. On the other hand, adolescents with lower levels of school disengagement may not benefit as much from family routine because their greater engagement in school may decrease risk for delinquent behaviors. Thus, family routine is likely to moderate relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors by providing adolescents exhibiting higher levels of school disengagement with a context of predictability and organization that may decrease risk of delinquent behaviors.

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether family routine moderated relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors in a sample of urban, African American, low
SES adolescents. In addition to the reasons highlighted above regarding disproportionate risk for delinquent behaviors and school disengagement in this subset of the population, examining the role of an understudied familial factor, like family routine, may further inform relations between adolescents living in low SES, urban communities and negative school and behavioral outcomes. In the proposed study, higher levels of school disengagement were expected to be associated with higher levels of delinquent behaviors. In terms of the moderating variable, the potential role of family routine was examined. It was hypothesized that adolescents reporting higher levels of school disengagement who experienced higher levels of family routine would report lower levels of delinquent behaviors than adolescents reporting higher levels of school disengagement and experiencing lower levels of family routine. Also, it was expected that adolescents with higher levels of school disengagement and lower levels of family routine would endorse higher levels of delinquent behaviors than those endorsing higher levels of school disengagement with higher levels of family routine. Factors that may serve to decrease the association between school disengagement and delinquency could protect against the emergence of delinquent behaviors, as well as negative correlates and sequelae associated with school disengagement and delinquent behaviors in adolescence (e.g., poor academic achievement, school dropout).

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from the most economically disadvantaged neighborhood in a large, Northeastern city in the United States. The sample consisted of 96 male and 104 female, African American adolescents along with their biological mothers or primary caregiver. Adolescents averaged 14.74 years ($SD = 2.00$) and mothers averaged 38.46 years ($SD = 8.05$). Mothers had completed, on average, 11.02 years of school ($SD = 2.91$), 48% were unemployed, and 76% were single mothers. Household annual income averaged between $10,000 and $15,000, families consisted of 4.75 members ($SD = 2.01$) on average, and the majority of families (75%) were at or around the poverty threshold of $16,600 for a family of four. For the present study, 197 (99%) participants had complete information for all study variables. No significant differences were found among participants with missing and nonmissing data in terms of demographic variables and major study variables.

Procedure

Census data was utilized to identify the city’s most economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Participants were recruited from all of the Census tracts making up this neighborhood. Using a national database containing the names and addresses of all potential residents, all households within these Census tracts were sent letters inviting those with an adolescent between 12 and 18 years to participate in a study of African American family life. Phone calls soliciting the families’ participation followed the letter sent. Interviews were scheduled with interested families who were eligible. Interviews occurred either in the home or in the laboratory depending on families’ preference. Of the 300 families who were contacted and eligible to participate in the study, 200 (67%) consented to the study. No significant differences in demographic information (based on Census tract information) between those who did and did not consent to be interviewed were found. Parents provided informed consent and adolescents provided assent to participate in the study. Trained interviewers interviewed parents and adolescents separately for approximately 1 hour. Families were compensated $30.

Measures

Demographics. Adolescents reported on their age and sex (male = 1; female = 2). Mothers reported on a range of demographic variables including their age, education completed (1 = less than high school to 7 = postgraduate degree), annual family income, family structure, marital status (1 = married; 2 = common law marriage; 3 = separated; 4 = divorced; 5 = single; 6 = widowed), and employment (1 = working; 2 = not working, but looking for work; 3 = not working, not looking for work; 4 = nonworking student 5 = not working, disabled).

Outcome. Delinquency was assessed by obtaining adolescents’ self-report of their frequency of involvement in delinquent behaviors during the current school year (15 items; $\alpha = .80$; Gold & Reimer, 1975). Self-report of delinquent behaviors has been evidenced as a valid measure of adolescent’s deviant behavior (Kirk, 2006) and the items of this measure correspond with more recently developed self-report measures (e.g., Schwab-Stone et al., 1999; van der Lann, Veenstra, Bogaerts, Verhulst, & Ormel, 2010). Sample items include “bought beer or liquor yourself, or given someone money to buy it for you,” “taken something of value from another person,” “got into a physical fight at school,” “smoked marijuana,” and “purposely damaged school property.” Responses given were on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (several times). Item responses were summed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of delinquent behaviors.

Predictor. School disengagement was assessed in the areas of attendance, attention, and sense of challenge (Steinberg, 1987). The areas assessed reflect students’ level of involvement and commitment to school tasks and activities across multiple domains (Archambault et al., 2009; Glanville & Widhage, 2007). Specifically, the behavioral component underlying school disengagement was of interest, as this component represents more observable types of disengagement, such as student’s presence in school and attention in the classroom (Finn & Rock, 1997). Adolescents reported how often they attended (4 items; $\alpha = .84$, paid attention to (four items; $\alpha = .62$), and experienced a sense of challenge (four items; $\alpha = .72$) in four types of classes (Math, English, Social Studies, and Science). Adolescents were asked, “How often do you cut each of these classes?” “How often do you really pay attention in each of these classes?” and “How often in each of these classes do you feel challenges to think hard?” Responses provided were on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Attention and sense of challenge items were reverse coded and then all items were summed to create a school disengagement score. Higher scores reflect higher levels of school disengagement.

Moderator. Family routine was assessed with the Family Routine Inventory (Jensen, James, Boyce, & Hartnett, 1983). Mothers reported on the degree of day-to-day routines in family
life and also on the importance of these routines (28 items, $\alpha = .74$). The subscale related to frequency of family routine ($\alpha = .75$) was used in the current study. The subscale of the Family Routine Inventory referencing importance of family routines was not examined in this study because we were interested in measuring behaviors, as opposed to attitudes, of family routine. Sample items for the frequency of family routine subscale included “Parents talk about children’s schoolwork with them. Is this routine in your family?” “Children do regular household chores. Is this routine in your family?” and “Children go to bed at the same time almost every night. Is this routine in your family?” Mothers responded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (almost every day). Item responses were summed to create a frequency of family routine score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of family routine.

### Statistical Analyses

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to test whether family routine moderated relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. Initial analyses were conducted to obtain descriptive statistics and possible outliers for each of the variables. No outliers were identified in the initial analyses. Bivariate correlations were conducted to examine relations among the major study variables. Bivariate correlations, as well as $t$ tests for sex, were conducted to assess significant associations among demographic factors, including adolescents’ sex and age, mothers’ age, education, marital status, employment, family income, and family structure, and major study variables. Demographic factors significantly associated with the major study variables (i.e., adolescent age, mother age, marital status, and employment) were entered in the first step of the equation as control variables; school disengagement and family routine indicators were entered second; and the cross-product interaction term for school disengagement and family routine were entered third. Each of the independent variables were centered and their interaction was centered ($M = 0$) prior to inclusion in the regression equations to minimize multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). For significant interaction terms, procedures outlined by Holmbeck (2002) for post hoc probing of significant moderational effects were followed.

### Bivariate Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study Variables

The school disengagement $\times$ family routine interactions were examined in Step 3. No significant interactions were found, such that the addition of the interaction term to the model did not substantially increase the amount of variance explained for the prediction of delinquent behaviors. Although the demographic variables had some explanatory power ($R^2 = .15$), the addition of the independent effects of school disengagement and family routine indices in Step 2 indicated a substantially greater explanation of delinquent behavior ($\Delta R^2 = .09$). A significant main effect of school disengagement was found ($\beta = .26, p < .001$), indicating higher levels of school disengagement were associated with delinquent behaviors. Family routine was not significantly associated with delinquent behaviors ($\beta = -.10, p > .05$), indicating there is no direct association between family routine and delinquent behaviors when accounting for control variables and school disengagement.

### Table 1

Bivariate Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Delinquent behaviors</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adolescent age</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mother age</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Marital status</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Employment</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. School disengagement</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Family routine</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>20.57</td>
<td>14.74</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>24% Married</td>
<td>45% Working</td>
<td>22.63</td>
<td>42.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>19% Separated/divorced</td>
<td>48% Not working</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>7.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>15–46</td>
<td>10.67–18.92</td>
<td>24–74</td>
<td>50% Single</td>
<td>2% Student</td>
<td>8–45</td>
<td>20–56</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Percentages provided for categorical variables.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
routine term predicted delinquent behaviors ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$). Following procedures described by Aiken and West (1991) and Holmbeck (2002) for probing and graphing significant interactions, the school disengagement × family routine interaction term was further examined. Two new conditional moderator variables (±1 SD from the mean of family routine) and new interactions that incorporated the conditional variables were computed. Two post hoc regressions were run, each of which involved simultaneous entry of school disengagement levels, one of the conditional family routine variables, and the school disengagement × conditional family routine variable (Holmbeck, 2002). From these analyses, we derived unstandardized betas (slopes) and regression equations for families reporting high (1 SD above the mean) and low (1 SD below the mean) family routine (see Figure 1). For high family routine, the slope was not significant ($B = -.69, t(195) = -1.36, p > .05$). For low family routine, the slope was significantly different from zero ($B = 1.28, t(195) = 2.58, p < .05$), indicating that the association between low family routine and delinquent behaviors differed for adolescents with low versus high levels of school disengagement. Specifically, those adolescents experiencing low family routine with higher levels of school disengagement were more likely to report higher levels of delinquent behaviors than adolescents experiencing low family routine with lower levels of school disengagement.

### Discussion

Although associations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors have been studied, relatively less research has examined moderating factors of relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors in adolescence. Past research has demonstrated strong inverse relations between parental monitoring and delinquent behaviors (Eddy & Chamberlain, 2000; Li et al., 2000; Pettit et al., 2001), as well as parental involvement and school disengagement (Annunziata et al., 2006; Connell et al., 1994; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Steinberg et al., 1992); however, little empirical work has examined the role of family routine among these school and behavioral factors. To address this gap, family routine was evaluated as a potential moderator of relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors among a sample of low SES, urban, African American adolescents. Examining the potential moderating role of family routine is particularly important among ethnic-minority adolescents living in low SES, urban communities, as these individuals are at higher risk for poor school and behavioral outcomes (Eccles & Roesner, 2009; Elmore, 2009; Farrington et al., 2003; Fite et al., 2009; Gutman et al., 2002; Piquero et al., 2005). The findings of the current study supported relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. Moreover, results indicated that family routine moderated relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors, such that adolescents experiencing higher levels of school disengagement with lower levels of family routine reported higher levels of delinquent behaviors than adolescents experiencing higher levels of school disengagement and higher levels of family routine. The current findings suggest that a lack of family routine exacerbates relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors.

Although it was hypothesized that higher levels of family routine serve a protective role against delinquent behaviors among adolescents reporting higher levels of school disengagement, post hoc probing revealed that higher levels of family routine were not significantly associated with lower levels of delinquent behaviors among adolescents with higher levels of school disengagement. One explanation for why family routine was not found to serve as a protective role considers the fit between family routine and adolescent development. It is possible that higher levels of family routine may be viewed as too restrictive for an adolescent beginning to seek autonomy from parents; therefore, higher levels of structured routines may actually hinder parents’ efforts to prevent problem behaviors in adolescence. Given the study’s findings that only lower levels of family routine were related to higher levels of delinquent behaviors in the context of higher levels of school disengagement, potentially more moderate levels of family routine may be sufficient to protect against the increased levels of delinquent behaviors reported by adolescents with higher levels of school disengagement. Moderate, as opposed to higher, levels of family routine may be more in line with a home environment that provides adolescents with both support and autonomy, which may contribute to school engagement and decreased risk of delinquent behaviors. Relevant research has shown that optimal, effective

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Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent age</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother age</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School disengagement</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family routine</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School disengagement × routine</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
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</table>

Note. Adolescent age, mother age, marital status, and employment were entered in the first step; school disengagement and family routine were entered second; and the school disengagement × family routine term was entered third.

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

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Figure 1. The relation between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors among adolescents experiencing low (1 SD below mean) versus high (1 SD above mean) family routine.
parenting varies as a function of both adolescent’s developmental needs and the social challenges posed by important social contexts (e.g., peer group; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996). Moderate levels of family routine may involve activities that promote adolescents’ time management and capacity for sustained work (e.g., common meal time and curfew, scheduled time for homework or household chores), but are not extreme enough to restrict developmentally appropriate autonomy and self-reliance.

Future studies are needed to assess the utility of moderate levels of family routine in decreasing risk of delinquent behaviors in the context of school disengagement. In addition, given that the sample consists of children from early to late adolescence, it would be of interest for future studies to assess if the influence of family routine changes across adolescence. Potentially the influence of family routine may differ between early, middle, and late adolescence, as parents change their behaviors in the context of autonomy-seeking among adolescents.

Several limitations of this study need to be considered. School disengagement, family routine, and delinquent behaviors were assessed concurrently; therefore, no causal inferences about the relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors can be drawn. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether school disengagement predicts delinquent behaviors, and whether low levels of family routine are a risk factor for future delinquent behaviors in the context of school disengagement. Transactional effects between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors also need to be considered as both are likely to interact and influence each other throughout childhood and adolescence (Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, & Spann, 2008). Moreover, the association between family routine and school disengagement likely involves transactional effects as well, suggesting that adolescents’ level of school disengagement may also influence the degree of family routine provided by the parent. Parents with children experiencing higher levels of school disengagement may be less inclined to provide a structured setting at home due to feelings of disappointment or hopelessness that their child will not have successful occupational or educational outcomes. Another limitation of the study is shared method variance which may have biased findings as adolescents reported on both levels of school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. In addition, the range of delinquent behaviors was small and endorsement was generally low; consequently, the influence of family routine may change as delinquent behavior levels increase, although to what extent is unknown. Last, other conceptualizations or assessment of family routine should be utilized in future studies, as findings may differ when considering attitudes or beliefs about routine instead of report of behaviors reflecting routine.

One of the primary goals of this study was to identify familial factors that moderate relations between school and behavioral functioning among African American adolescents living in low SES, urban communities. Although this subset of the population has been indicated to be at higher risk for exposure to institutional poverty, crime, violence, and deviant peers, all of which increase the risk for delinquent behaviors (Farrington et al., 2003; Sampson et al., 2005), findings suggest that only lower levels of family routine are associated with higher levels of delinquent behaviors among adolescents with higher levels of school disengagement. This suggests that presence of family routine above lower levels may offset the greater risk of higher levels of delinquent behaviors by adolescents reporting higher levels of school disengagement. However, some limitations arise from focusing on such a specific population. Ethnicity and SES were confounded; moreover, the sampling method (i.e., self selection) introduces the possibility of sampling biases. Additional studies are needed to determine whether the moderating role of family routine is present across economic and racial/ethnic groups to determine its generalizability.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study have significant implications. The current findings suggest that not all adolescents with higher levels of school disengagement will exhibit higher levels of delinquent behaviors; rather, school disengagement in the context of lower levels of family routine is more likely to be associated with higher levels of delinquent behaviors. Family based interventions that encourage some level of structured, organized routines at home are likely to decrease relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors. Clark (1983) proposed that positive behaviors resulting from routine in the home environment transfer over to the school domain, thereby increasing responsibility and diligence in school related activities. Parents of high-achieving adolescents develop and maintain routines in the home with the expectation that behaviors fostered by these routines (e.g., responsibility and patience) will transfer to school. Taylor (1996) also indicated that the benefits of family routine may transfer over through the parent; that is, parents that foster routines and organization at home are more likely to be involved in their adolescents’ schooling, which may in itself increase school engagement by reinforcing the importance of school (Anunnziata et al., 2006; Connell et al., 1994; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Steinberg et al., 1992). Family routine may also have important implications for delinquent behaviors as well. At least moderately structured routines at home may increase child compliance and positive parent–child interaction by facilitating predictability of cues in the child’s environment and fostering the development of rule-governed behavior, which may consequently lead to lower levels of problem behaviors (Sytsma et al., 2001), including delinquent behaviors (Taylor & Lopez, 2005). Future research should continue to consider the contributions of family routine on both school and behavioral functioning in adolescence.

As for the lack of a significant main effect of family routine on delinquent behaviors, although the structure and organization family routine instills in the family environment may carry over to the school context to offset school disengagement, family routine is not necessarily related to control and supervision of adolescent’s behavior. For instance, a parent may be able to instill order in the home but lack the social skills to appropriately monitor and control their adolescent’s behaviors outside the home.

The current study focused on family routine as a moderator of relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors in a sample of low SES, urban, African American adolescents. Lower levels of family routine and higher levels of school disengagement were associated with higher levels of delinquent behaviors. However, higher levels of family routine in the context of school disengagement were not associated with lower levels of delinquent behaviors. Taken together, lack of family routine appears to be a potential risk factor of relations between school disengagement and delinquent behaviors in adolescence, suggesting that at least moderate levels of family routine may be sufficient.
in mitigating higher levels of delinquent behaviors among those adolescents experiencing higher levels of school disengagement.

References


