Black Males in Kindergarten:
The Effect of Social Skills on Close and
Conflictual Relationships with Teachers

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This study set out to test the D-Three Effect on Black male students in Kindergarten. This effect assumes that teachers inherently view Black boys and men through the lens of distrust, disdain, and disregard. Using data derived from 8,790 boys from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten class (ECLS-K, 2011), this study found that Black boys in kindergarten are perceived as having greater challenges with externalized problem behavior, attentional focus, and inhibitory control than their male peers. Moreover, they also have significantly lower levels of teacher-reported closeness in comparison to their White and Multiethnic peers. However, models predicting closeness and conflict were strikingly similar across racial/ethnic groups. This may suggest that teachers respond to social skills in the same manner (across groups), yet interpret behaviors differently for Black boys.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Black Boys, Kindergarten, Teacher-Student Relationships

Over the past several decades, there has been an increasing body of literature focused on the experiences and outcomes of boys, young men, and men of color in education. This literature base has expanded in response to the deleterious outcomes facing these males throughout the educational pipeline, beginning in preschool (Harper & Wood, 2016; Howard, 2010, 2014). For instance, while Black students account for only 18% of the preschool population, they represent 42% of all preschoolers who are suspended at least once and 48% of those who are suspended more than once (AFT, 2015). According to Wood and Harris III (2016a), these outcomes are even more concerning for boys of color who are overwhelmingly subjected to exclusionary discipline in comparison to their peers.

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While schooling serves as the core foundation for which children will grow and develop, research has demonstrated that Black boys' educational experiences are typified by academic and social marginalization (Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2008). Despite a ubiquitous literature base on Black males in education, the vast majority of studies have overlooked the early childhood context. This is challenging given that successful early education and care are critical to the learning and development of children in the cognitive, emotional, and social domains. These early experiences influence how Black boys interpret their worlds, engage school contexts, and become prepared to navigate schooling experiences throughout their lives (Johns, 2016).

Guided by this notion, this study set out to explore a set of key concepts in the early childhood literature that have been rarely extended to understand the lives of Black boys. Specifically, this study was interested in the relationships children have with their teachers, and the extent to which these relationships were typified by conflict and closeness. Moreover, given the pervasive criminalization of Black boys throughout the educational pipeline (Harper & Wood, 2016), this study sought to explore how teacher reported perceptions of child behavior served to influence their relationships with Black boys. To provide a fuller context for this inquiry, models were developed across several racial/ethnic groups to better understand if relational dynamics differed across populations in comparison to Black boys. The next section examines the research on the primary outcome variables of interest in this study.

Closeness and Conflict

Extant research demonstrates that children who have negative relationships with teachers experience greater challenges in building bonds with peers, exhibit greater behavioral concerns, and have stymied academic development. Moreover, negative relationships with teachers can intensify these challenges over time (Baker, 2006; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Declining achievement can be linked to more limited levels of academic engagement and decreased intrinsic motivation in school. Negative relationships in early childhood are often viewed through the lens of conflict. Conflict "refers to relationships characterized by negative interactions and negative affect" (Mashburn & Pianta, 2010, p. 163). Prior research has demonstrated the harmful effect of conflict on child outcomes. For example, kindergarten research has shown that conflict between teachers and children inhibits student achievement, classroom engagement, self-directedness, and leads to negative perceptions and attitudes towards school (Ladd & Burgess, 2001). Conflict has also been shown to mar students' language development (White, 2013).

Alternatively, while negative relationships are typified by conflict, positive relationships are associated with closeness. As defined by Koepke and Harkins (2008), closeness refers to the extent to which a teacher demonstrates "affection, warmth, and open communication with a particular student and believes that the student views the teacher as supportive and effective" (p. 846). Thus, this concept is two-fold, involving the communication between teacher and student as well as teachers' perceptions of how the student views them. Close bonds between children and their teachers are linked to productive learning, growth, and development. For instance, Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Painta and Howes (2002) demonstrated that close teacher-child bonds are associated with greater academic abilities. Specifically, students who have close bonds with teachers benefited with greater language and reading skills.

As noted by Mashburn and Pianta (2010), close relationships between teachers and children are particularly critical to students' emotional development in the early years of schooling. These relationships influence their ability to regulate physiological stimuli. Moreover, given the sheer

amount of time that a child spends in the classroom, these relationships affect their ability to form attachments with adults. In particular, close teacher-child relationships are a necessary precondition for fostering students' affective and motivational growth. As such, close relationships between teachers and children positively influence factors beyond the development of academic skills, to include the full range of learning competencies (e.g., socio-emotional, behavioral, physical) (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

The theoretical framework for this study was attachment theory (see Bowlby, 1958). This theory examines the emotional bonds that are developed between children and their caregivers. Though attachment theory was initially employed to examine the qualities of child-parent bonds, it has since been widely used to be inclusive of other care-givers, including classroom teachers (Ewing & Taylor, 2007; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994) with whom children spend a sizeable portion of their day. This is due to the notion that children form multiple attachments, in different areas of their lives, with different individuals. As with other individuals within the child's life, teachers can provide an environment of support that enables children to build attachments (Ewing & Taylor, 2007). These environments encompass both the physical and emotional safety and security of the child.

Providing emotional and physical support to a child is necessary for exploring and negotiating their worlds in a manner that fosters their cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral growth (Bowlby, 1982). Moreover, this environment influences a child's development at a time when they are making assessments of themselves and their actions (White, 2013). Guided by this lens, Pianta, Steinberg and Rollins (1995) developed a three-category classification to characterize relationships between teachers and their students. This classification included the concepts of: a) closeness - the degree to which the relationship is typified by support, care, and communication; b) conflict - the extent which anger, dissonance, and struggle exist between the child and teacher; and c) dependency - the extent to which a child is reliant and possessive of the teacher and their time. This particular study focuses on the concepts of conflict and closeness, examining how these concepts differ across racial/ethnic and gender groups.

Interestingly, while much research has focused on the antecedents and outgrowths of closeness and conflict, limited research has been attentive to the intersections of race and gender with these concepts (Ewing & Taylor, 2007). This research provides a more nuanced perspective of factors that lead to teacher-child relationships that are typified by closeness and conflict, with attention to Black male students in kindergarten. This is an essential topic, as it may illuminate areas of professional development and learning that can result in healthier bonds between these males and their teachers. For example, prior research from Wood and Harris III (2016a) has shown that Black boys may experience more challenges in building and maintaining relationships with their teachers as a result of external pressures outside of school and racial/gender stereotypes that portray them as deviant and unintelligent. These conditions may inhibit the development of healthy attachments that can foster success for Black boys.

A litany of prior studies has demonstrated that boys, in general, are more likely to experience relationships with their teachers that are conflictual and less likely to benefit from warm, caring, and supportive relationships from these same educators (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong & Essex, 2005). These differences are partially attributable to male gender role socialization patterns that place a greater emphasis on independence, control, and aggressiveness among boys (Wood & Harris III, 2016a), qualities that can foster greater levels of conflict and reduced linkages with teachers (Duffy, Warren, & Walsh, 2001; Koch, 2003). Prior research on ethnic diversity has shown that the quality and quantity of

teacher-child relationships differs by race/ethnicity. In particular, research has shown that African American/Black children are less likely to have relationships with teachers that are characterized as caring and trusting. Moreover, they are also more likely to experience conflict with teachers in comparison to their peers (Hughes, Gleason & Zhang, 2005; Saft & Pianta, 2001).

Purpose and Significance

Prior research has examined the relationship between social skills and the concepts of closeness and conflict. Specifically, Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) employed data from a sample of 490 first graders to understand the effect of closeness and conflict on social skills such as externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and social competence. Using data from the kindergarten and first grade years, they found that there was no relationship between internalizing behaviors in kindergarten and closeness or conflict. However, among first graders, they found that internalizing behaviors were positively associated with conflict and inversely related to closeness. With respect to externalizing behaviors, they identified conflict as a positive predictor of externalizing behavior in kindergarten and in first grade, and found no significant connection between externalizing behaviors and closeness in either grades. Moreover, they found conflict to be a negative determinant of rated social competence in both kindergarten and first grade while finding that closeness served as a positive predictor of social competence, but only in first grade.

While certainly insightful, this study did not account for the intersections of race, class, and gender among children. This research extends on prior examinations by focusing on the role of these intersections in producing varying relationships between children and their teachers, with a focus on Black boys. Moreover, Pianta and Stuhlman's (2004) conceptualization of closeness and conflict serving as a predictor of social skills assumes a directional relationship that seems to conflict with extant literature. Specifically, Wood and Harris III (2016a) have noted that the manner in which children are perceived by educators influences the way they engage and interact with them. Based on this notion, this study explores the relationship between perceived behavioral and social skills by conceptualizing them as determinants of whether Black male children and their peers will have close or conflictual relationships with their teachers.

This study also adds to the extant literature by addressing the influence of internalizing problems on closeness and conflict. Prior research has noted that the limited early childhood research on Black boys has been far more attentive to externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, antagonism, disturbances) and less attentive to issues of internalizing challenges (e.g., anxiety, depression) (Brown, Barbarin & Scott, 2013). Inadequate attention to internalizing challenges has produced a practitioner climate that is less attentive to these concerns, as more attention is paid to externalizing challenges (Lemery-Chalfant et al., 2007). This is particularly concerning given that externalized challenges can manifest as a declaration of unnoticed internalized challenges (Coyne & Thompson, 2011). Thus, this research provides a more balanced perspective, focusing on the role of these issues as well as a range of other factors (e.g., self-control, interpersonal skills) on Black boys' relationships with teachers.

Hypothesized Relationships

This study employed a two-part analysis, first, focusing on the differences in social and behavioral skills, closeness, and conflict between boys of varying racial/ethnic groups. Second, the research examined the effect of the social and behavioral skills as predictors of closeness and

conflict, generating separate models for each racial/ethnic group of males. For the first analysis, the researchers hypothesized that Black boys would have scores that demonstrated greater levels of concern in comparison to their peers on the social and behavioral scales. This hypothesis adheres to what the researchers refer to as the *D-Three Effect*. Based on a review of extensive research on boys and men of color (e.g., Howard, 2010, 2013; Harper & Wood, 2015; Noguera, 2008; Wood & Harris III, 2016), Wood and Harris (2016b) articulated the *D-Three Effect*. This hypothesis suggests that teachers inherently view Black boys and men through the lens of distrust, disdain, and disregard. Distrust is associated with the criminalization of Black boys and men, with widely held perceptions that they are defiant, disruptive, and aggressive. Disdain involves pathologizing cultural values for these males, in a manner which characterizes them as uncaring and apathetic. Disregard entails stereotypical perceptions that assume that Black males are academically inferior.

These three concepts are informed by Sue's et al., (2007) microaggression subtypes of assumption of criminality, ascription of intelligence, and pathologizing culture that Wood and Harris III (2016a) have found to be most recurrent in the experiences of males of color. As a result, the *D-Three Effect* suggests that educators should assume that Black males will be underrepresented in positive behavioral and academic outcomes, but, that these outcomes are not primarily a function of Black males but of stereotyped-laden assumptions about them. Stated more simply, concerning outcomes are a function of perception of action, not action itself. Indeed, other scholars have argued similar perspectives. Polite and Davis (1999) articulated the pathological ways in which Black boys and young men are often viewed in society. They noted that they are often perceived as being brutish, deviant, academically inferior, and hypersexual. This debasing has often resulted in harsher penalties from teachers in comparison to their racial/ethnic peers (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). As noted by Howard (2013), in an extensive review of literature on Black boys, they are most predominantly characterized as a 'problem' in society and in the scholarly research.

With respect to the second part of this analysis, the researchers hypothesized that negative behavior and social outcomes would be stronger predictors for Black boys than their peers. This hypothesis is informed by research which states that Black boys are more likely to received harsher punishments for their actions, in comparison to their peers (Harper & Wood, 2015; Howard, 2013; Wood & Harris III, 2016a). Moreover, it was presupposed that there would be an inverse relationship between scales that were predictive of the concepts of closeness and conflict. Given the oppositional connection between the concepts, it is reasonable to assume that there would also be a divergent directional effect between the predictors of these concepts. Guided by these notions, the next section articulates the methods employed in this study.

Methods

Data and Sample

This study employed data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten class (ECLS-K, 2011). ECLS-K is a nationally representative study sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The survey examines children who began kindergarten during the 2010-2011 school year. The study follows these students during the course of the elementary experiences to provide insight into factors that influence student learning and growth. The full sample includes 18,170 children (Tourangeau et al., 2014). While publicly available data are accessible across several collections, this study focused on young boys in their second semester

of kindergarten (Spring 2011). The sample was further delimited to focus on Black/African American, White, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Multiethnic boys (*n=8,790*). Given the complex sampling approach, these children represented a weighted sample of 1,979,698 children from across the nation. Specifically, the weighted sample of Black boys, the reference group in this study, were 275,639.

Measures

This research used a series of measures from the ECLS-K (2011) distribution. These measures were designed to assess the relationships between teachers and children as well as to assess differential social skills and behavioral dynamics that could perceivably influence these relationships.

Student-Teacher Relationship. Two scales from Pianta's (2001) Student-Teacher Relationship scale were employed as the dependent variables in this study. The scale is comprised of 15 items, that assess the degree to which the teacher and child's relationship are typified by closeness and conflict. The scale provides descriptions that characterize these concepts and the teacher is instructed to rate the child based on whether the degree to which the characterization applies to the child. This occurs on a five-point rating scale, raining from definitely does not apply to definitely applies. As noted earlier, closeness refers to the extent to which the relationship is typified by support, care, and communication (7 items, *a=*.89). Higher scores on this scale are indicative of more positive teacher-child relationships. In contrast, conflict entails the extent which anger, dissonance, and struggle exist between the child and teacher (8 items, *a=*.89). Higher scores on this scale represent more negative relationships between teachers and children.

Social Skills. This study employed constructs from the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) as the primary independent variables in this study. The SSRS is a self-administered questionnaire focusing on the child. As employed by ELS, the instrument collects data on four constructs, including self-control (4 items, *a=*.82), interpersonal skills (5 items, *a=*.87), externalizing problem behaviors (5 items, *a=*.89), and internalizing problem behaviors (4 items, *a=*.78). A description of the items is not included due to copyright restrictions. Composite scores were computed by NCES for respondents who rated at least all of the items or all but one of the items for each scale. Higher scores in the scale are indicative of the child exhibiting greater levels of the behavior measured. Thus, two scales assess positive outcomes, including self-control and interpersonal skills. Whereas, higher scores for externalizing and internalizing problem behavior represent greater levels of teacher-reported problems with the child (Tourangeau et al., 2014).

Child Behavior. Measures from ECLS-K very short form version of the Children's Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) were also employed. Across distributions of ECLS, teachers reported on twelve items designed to measure their attentional focus (6 items, *a=*.75) and inhibitory control (6 items, *a=*.72) (see Putnam & Rothbart, 2006). To assess these areas, teachers were presented with statements about the child's behavior within the past six months and responded on a seven-point scale from extremely untrue to extremely true about whether the situation applied to the child. Composite scales were employed when respondents addressed at least four the six items for each scale. Similar to the SSRS interpretation, higher scores indicate more presence of the target behavior. In this case, higher scores for attentional focus suggest that children are demonstrating the ability to have directed attention on academic tasks. Higher scores for inhibitory control refer to the capacity to intentionally inhibit and regulate attention responses (Tourangeau et al., 2014).

Analytic Technique

This study employed a two-stage analytic approach. Prior to these stages, exploratory data analyses were conducted to examine the properties and patterns within the data. This included calculation of descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and percentages. As part of this exploratory stage, bivariate correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between the independent variables comprising the SSRS and the dependent variables of closeness and conflict. These analyses provided initial insight into the interrelationship among independent variables and their association with the outcomes of interest.

In stage one, the researchers employed analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine whether differences were evident in the SSRS, CBQ, and Student-Teacher Relationship scales across racial/ethnic groups for male kindergarteners. Data were analyzeds using the Welch ANOVA procedure with posthoc analyses employing Dunnett's C. This allowed the researchers to adjust models for potential issues with the homogeneity of variance assumption. Effect sizes for eta squared (n^2) were interpreted as follows at .01, .06, and .14 representing small, moderate, and large effect sizes. In stage two, regression analyses were employed to examine the effect (if any) of the SSRS and CBQ composite variables on closeness and conflict. This approach enabled the researchers to understand the effect of these variables (in combination) on the dependent variables. In each case, separate models were conducted for each male subgroup, based on racial/ethnic affiliation. This included analyses for Black/African American, White, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Multiethnic children. Analyses for Hispanic/Latino children were restricted to race-specified respondents.

For stages 1 and 2, comparisons of standardized beta coefficients and effect sizes were made using Black/African American boys as the reference group. Given the focus of this study on responses from Spring of 2011, the analyses were cross-sectional in nature. As such, this study employed a base child weight that adjusted for non-response during the Fall and Spring of kindergarten across the child-level teacher questionnaire (W12TO). Cohen's D effect sizes were employed for single-time comparisons of ANOVA posthocs and for interpretation of standard regression coefficients using the following scale, 0.0-.20 (small), .20-.50 (moderate), and .50 and above (large). In consideration of the large sample size, all models were tested at .001 and model interpretations prioritized findings with moderate and large effect sizes. Using these approaches, the next section presents the results from this study.

Results

Differences in Teacher Perceptions of Behavior

As previously stated, it was hypothesized (based on the *D-Three Effect*) that teachers would report higher levels of concern with the problem behaviors and social skills among Black boys and lower scores for positive aptitudes. Across the measures, the anticipated patterns were supported by the data. Means and standard deviations for the SSRS and CBQ scales are presented in Table 1. Table 2 presents the results from the Welch ANOVA tests with effect size information.

Table 1.
Means and Standard Deviations for SSRS and CBQ Scales, Spring of Kindergarten

	Black	White	Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Multiethnic
Externalized	2.00 (.80)	1.74 (.66)	1.71 (.64)	1.64 (.54)	1.80 (.71)
Internalized	1.55 (.54)	1.52 (.49)	1.54 (.51)	1.44 (.43)	1.60 (.58)
Self-Control	2.87 (.69)	3.11 (.64)	3.09 (.63)	3.12 (.62)	3.00 (.66)
Interpersonal	2.86 (.68)	3.05 (.64)	3.02 (.64)	2.96 (.65)	2.96 (.65)
Attentional	4.31 (1.41)	4.73 (1.34)	4.56 (1.34)	4.92 (4.60)	4.64 (1.36)
Inhibitory	4.38 (1.42)	4.83 (1.33)	4.77 (1.28)	4.95 (1.21)	4.76 (1.30)
Closeness	4.19 (.70)	4.33 (.62)	4.18 (.69)	4.23 (.61)	4.26 (.65)
Conflict	2.04 (1.01)	1.74 (.86)	1.70 (.77)	1.63 (.72)	1.89 (.92)

With respect to externalized problem behaviors, there were significant differences across the sample, *asymptotic F*=7996, *p*<.001. According to n^2, this represented a medium effect size at .10. Black boys had significantly higher scores than all other groups. This suggests that teachers reported higher levels of challenges with externalized behaviors with this population in comparison to their peers. The mean differences between Black boys and their male peers were as follows: White (MD=.26, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (MD=.28, p<.001), Asian (MD=.36, p<.001), and Multiethnic (MD=.20, p<.001). Differences for internalized behaviors were also significant across groups, *asymptotic F*=2857, *p*<.001. That being said, the magnitude of these differences was small (n^2=.02). Posthoc comparisons indicated that Black boys had higher scores than their White (MD=.04, p<.001), Hispanic (MD=.02, p<.001) and Asian (MD=.11, p<.001) peers. They also had lower scores than their Multiethnic boys (MD=-.05, p<.001).

Table 2.
Welch's ANOVA results and partial eta squared effect sizes, Spring of Kindergarten

Rating Area	Asymptotic F	Sig.	Effect Size (n^2)
Externalized	7996.42	.001	.10
Internalized	2856.96	.001	.02
Self-Control	1513.01	.001	.003
Interpersonal	709.24	.001	.002
Attentional	6277.37	.001	.08
Inhibitory	6073.98	.001	.08
Closeness	5624.37	.001	.07
Conflict	7313.72	.001	.09

In like manner, significant differences were identified for attentional focus (*asymptotic F=6277.37, p<.001*) and inhibitory control (*asymptotic F=6073.98, p<.001*). According to n^2, both of these differences were representative of moderate effect sizes, at .08. For attentional focus, Black males received significantly lower scores from their teachers in comparison to every other racial group, including White (MD=-.42, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (MD=-.25, p<.001), Asian (MD=-.61, p<.001), and Multiethnic boys (MD=-.29, p<.001). This suggests that Black boys were reported by their teachers as having more challenges in the area of attentional focus. Similar, Black males also had lower scores in inhibitory control than all other groups. The mean differences in comparison to other groups were as follows: White (MD=-.45, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (MD=-.39, p<.001), Asian (MD=-.57, p<.001), and Multiethnic boys (MD=-.38, p<.001).

While there were significant differences between groups for self-control and interpersonal, the effect sizes were very small, at .003 and .002, respectively. As such, no interpretation of these results is provided; however, it should be noted that for both variables Black boys had the lowest scores (on a scale where higher scores were more positive). That being said, detecting differences was affected by greater sums of squares within group scores. For informational purposes, the researchers examined the pairwise differences between Black and White boys for the measures. Based on Cohen's *D*, noticeable differences in scores were identified: externalized (.36, moderate), internalized (.07, small), self-control (.36, moderate), interpersonal (.29, moderate), attention (.31, moderate), and inhibitory (.33, moderate).

Analyses were also conducted to determine whether differences were evident in the outcome variables, across racial/ethnic affiliation. With respect to closeness, there was significant variation across the sample (asymptotic, F=5624.37, p<.001). These differences were, according to n^2, representative of a moderate effect size, at .07. Teachers reported significantly lower feelings of closeness with Black boys in comparison to their White (MD=-.14, p<.001) and Multiethnic (MD=-.03, p<.001) peers. In contrast, Black boys had slightly higher reported levels of closeness than Hispanic/Latino boys (MD=.01, p<.001). There were no significant differences between Black and Asian boys (*p*=n.s.). In contrast, findings for conflict demonstrated a more congruent

pattern of significance across groups (*asymptotic F*=7313.72, p<.001). This variation accounted for a moderate effect size, at .09. Specifically, Black boys had higher reported levels of conflict with teachers than boys from all other racial/ethnic groups. The differences were as follows: White (MD=.31, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (MD=.35, p<.001), Asian (MD=.41, p<.001), and Multiethnic (MD=.16, p<.001). For the outcome variables, the differences in scores between Black and White boys was indicative of moderate effect sizes for both closeness (.21) and conflict (.32). In total, this suggests noticeably lower levels of closeness between children and their teachers among Black boys and conspicuously higher levels of conflict in comparison to their White peers.

Predictors of Closeness and Conflict

The next stage of the analysis examined the predictive utility of the SSRS and CBQ scales on closeness and conflict across racial/ethnic groups. As noted previously, these data were examined using multiple regression with the models for Black boys serving as the reference models.

Closeness. In terms of closeness, the model for Black and Multiethnic males accounted for 34% of the variance in the outcome, at R=.58, $adjR^2$=.34 and R=.58, $adjR^2$=.34, respectively. This model accounted for a higher proportion of variance in the closeness than did the models for White (R=.55, $adjR^2$=.30) and Hispanic/Latino (R=.51, $adjR^2$=.26) boys, but for less variance than the model for Asian (R=.60, $adjR^2$=.36). Moreover, every analysis indicated that the models, as a whole, were significantly predictive of closeness. The model regression ANOVA results were as follows: Black, F=22329.09, p<.001, White, F=74011.86, p<.001, Hispanic/Latino, F=25166.58, p<.001, Asian, F=6619.51, p<.001, and Multiethnic, F=7388.63, p<.001.

For Black males, all scales were significantly predictive of closeness. Self-control was negatively predictive of closeness (B=-.083, p<.001). This suggests that when Black males are perceived as less self-controlled they have higher levels of reported closeness with their teachers. This variable was also negatively associated with closeness for all other groups. Interpersonal skills were identified as a positive determinant of closeness between teachers and Black boys (B=.565, p<.001). A similar relationship was detected among White (B=.58, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (B=.60, p<.001), Asian (B=.68, p<.001), and Multiethnic (B=.59, p<.001) boys as well. For Black males (B=.214, p<.001) and males from other racial/ethnic groups, externalized problem behaviors were found to be predictive of closeness with teachers. This suggests that greater externalized challenges are determinants of closer contact with boys. In contrast, internalized problem behaviors had an opposite effect on the outcome. For example, Black boys who have fewer internalized problem behaviors are more likely to have reported closeness with their teachers (B=-.122, p<.001). A similar relationship was identified for White (B=.-.11, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (B=.14, p<.001), Asian (B=.08, p<.001), and Multiethnic (B=1.13, p<.001) boys.

Table 3.
Regression results for Closeness with unstandardized beta coefficients and standard errors

	Black/ African American	White	Hispanic/ Latino	Asian	Multiethnic
Constant	2.05***	2.48***	2.35***	2.27***	2.63***
	(.012)	(.006)	(.010)	(.024)	(.019)
Self-Control	-.08***	-.11***	-.13***	-.14***	-.11***
	(.003)	(.002)	(.003)	(.007)	(.005)
Interpersonal	.56***	.58***	.60***	.68***	.59***
	(.003)	(.001)	(.002)	(.005)	(.005)
Externalized	.21***	.17***	.22***	.13***	.12***
	(.002)	(.001)	(.002)	(.006)	(.004)
Internalized	-.12***	-.11***	-.14***	-.08***	-.13***
	(.002)	(.001)	(.002)	(.005)	(.003)
Attention	.08***	.05***	.00	.10***	.04***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.003)	(.002)
Inhibitory	.04***	.01***	.06***	-.05***	-.01
	(.002)	(.001)	(.001)	(.003)	(.003)
R	.58	.55	.51	.60	.58
adjR^2	.34	.30	.26	.36	.34

Table 4.
Regression results for Conflict with unstandardized beta coefficients and standard errors

	Black/ African American	White	Hispanic/ Latino	Asian	Multiethnic
Constant	1.674***	1.947***	1.567***	1.923***	1.775***
	(.004)	(.006)	(.009)	(.021)	(.021)
Self-Control	-.219***	-.226***	-.274***	-.112***	-.126***
	(.004)	(.001)	(.002)	(.006)	(.006)
Interpersonal	-.200***	-.231***	-.097***	-.316***	-.209***
	(.003)	(.001)	(.002)	(.005)	(.005)
Externalized	.661***	.577***	.587***	.497***	.610***
	(.002)	(.001)	(.002)	(.005)	(.004)
Internalized	.217***	.202***	.175***	.232***	.263***
	(.002)	(.001)	(.002)	(.005)	(.004)
Attention	.030***	.044***	.038	.056***	.079***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.002)	(.002)
Inhibitory	-.047***	-.068***	-.038***	-.087***	-.163
	(.002)	(.001)	(.001)	(.003)	(.003)
R	*.82*	*.81*	*.78*	*.77*	*.81*
adjR^2	*.68*	*.65*	*.60*	*.59*	*.65*

Attentional focus demonstrated a significant effect on closeness across most groups. This indicates that teachers report that students who exhibit greater levels of attention are more likely to have a close relationship with them. This was true for Black boys (B=.08, p<.001) as well as for White (B=.05, p<.001), Asian (B=.10, p<.001), and Multiethnic (B=.04, p<.001) boys. Notwithstanding, there was no identified effect between attention focus and closeness for Hispanic/Latino boys (p=n.s.). The scale with the most disparate effect across groups was inhibitory control. Greater levels of inhibitory control were a significant determinant of closeness for Black boys (B=.04, p<.001) as well as for their White (B=.01, p<.001) and Hispanic/Latino (B=.06, p<.001) peers. Juxtaposed to this effect, inhibitory control had a negative effect on closeness for Asian boys (B=-.05, p<.01) and no effect for Multiethnic boys (B=-.01, p<.001).

Based upon the standardized beta coefficients, the scale with the strongest effect on closeness was teacher reported interpersonal skills. The coefficients for these scales were as follows: Black (*std. B*=.57), White (*std. B*=.61), Hispanic/Latino (*std. B*=.57), Asian, (*std. B*=.65), and Multiethnic (*std. B*=.64). This represented a very large effect size as assessed by Cohen's D. A moderate effect size was detected for the effect of externalized problem behaviors on closeness for Black/African American (*std. B*=.25) and Hispanic/Latino (*std. B*=.20) boys but a small size for the other male groups.

Conflict. Informed by these data, the researchers examined the effect of the independent variables on reported teacher-child conflict. The models all accounted for a very large percentage of the variance in conflict, with the model for Black boys representing 68% of the variance in the outcome (R=.82, $adjR^2$=.68). Similarly, high variances were evidenced across models for White (R=.81, $adjR^2$=.65), Hispanic/Latino (R=.78, $adjR^2$=.60), Asian (R=.77, $adjR^2$=.59), and Multiethnic (R=.81, $adjR^2$=.65) boys. As expected (based on these results), every model was significantly predictive of the outcome. The model regression ANOVA results were as follows: Black, F=92135.15, p<.001, White, F=329319.82, p<.001, Hispanic/Latino, F=109567.50, p<.001, Asian, F=16709.74, p<.001, and Multiethnic, F=26960.86, p<.001.

For all males, across all groups, all scales were significant predictors of conflictual relationships between teachers and children. Self-control was found to be a negative predictor of conflict for Black boys (B=-.219, p<.001). A similarly negative effect was found between self-control and conflict for White (B=-.226, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (B=-.274, p<.001), Asian (B=-.112, p<.001), and Multiethnic boys (B=-.126, p<.001). This finding suggests that when boys are perceived as being less self-controlled, they have higher levels of reported conflict with teachers. Interestingly, the prior models for closeness demonstrated a comparable pattern. As such, less self-control is associated with greater levels of closeness with teachers as well as greater levels of conflict. As anticipated, interpersonal skills served as a negative determinant of conflict with teachers for Black boys (B=-.200, p<.001). Given this, higher levels of conflict are reported by teachers when children have more limited interpersonal skills. There was an analogous pattern for boys from other racial/ethnic groups.

Externalized problem behaviors were also identified as a determinant of conflict. Specifically, when Black boys were reported as having challenges with externalized behavior, they were significantly more likely to have conflict with their teachers (B=.661, p<.001). This relationship was present across other racial/ethnic groups, including White (B=.577, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (B=.587, p<.001), Asian (B=.497, p<.001), and Multiethnic boys (B=.610, p<.001). In the same fashion as self-control, externalized problem behaviors were found to have the same directional effect on both outcomes variables, closeness and conflict. Internalized problems behaviors were also found to be determinants of conflict. As with externalized challenges, internalized challenges demonstrated a positive effect on conflictual relationship for Black boys (B=.271, p<.001). This indicates that greater levels of reported challenges with these behaviors lead to higher reported issues with conflict. Like other patterns, the findings for models across groups were comparable for White (B=.202, p<.001), Hispanic/Latino (B=.175, p<.001), Asian (B=.232, p<.001), and Multiethnic (B=.263, p<.001) boys.

Lastly, the CBQ scale for attention and inhibitory control demonstrated predictive utility on reported conflict among Black boys. While attention was found to have a positive effect for these males (B=.030, p<.001), inhibitory control was found to have a negative effect (B=-.047, p<.001). This suggests that greater attentional focus leads to greater conflict while lower inhibitory control leads to greater levels of conflict. In contrast to the hypothesized relationship, attentional

focus bore a comparable pattern to self-control and externalized behaviors, given that the directional effects of these variables on the outcome variables were the same. Thus, greater attentional focus was positively predictive of both closeness and conflict.

An analysis of the standardized beta coefficients demonstrated the powerful effect of externalized problem behaviors on conflict. For Black males, the effect of this scale on the outcome represented a large effect size (*std. B*=.52). This scale also represented the strongest effect on teacher reported conflict across groups, accounting for moderate effect sizes in White (*std. B*=.44), Hispanic/Latino (*std. B*=.48), Asian (*std. B*=.57), and Multiethnic (*std. B*=.46) boys. In a departure from models for Black and White boys, moderate effect sizes were also identified for the effect of self-control for Hispanic/Latino boys (*std. B*=.23), interpersonal skills for Asian boys (*std. B*=-.29), and inhibitory control for Multiethnic boys (*std. B*=-.23).

Discussion

Based on the aforementioned analyses, there are meaningful differences in teacher reported behaviors across racial/ethnic groups in several areas, including externalized problem behaviors, attentional focus, and inhibitory control. In general, this study demonstrates that Black boys in kindergarten are perceived as having greater challenges with externalized problem behavior, attentional focus, and inhibitory control than their male peers. Moreover, they also have significantly lower levels of closeness in comparison to their White and Multiethnic peers. Further, they have significantly higher levels of teacher reported conflict than all other racial/ethnic groups. These results adhere to prior research which has shown that Black/African American children are less likely to have caring and trusting relationships with teachers and more likely to experience conflict with educators in comparison to their peers (Hughes, Gleason & Zhang, 2005; Saft & Pianta, 2001). This of course, has significant implications for their ability to form healthy attachment relationships.

Overall, these findings paint a picture that aligns with prior research highlighting the different ways in which Black boys are viewed in comparison to other boys. For example, Wood and Harris III (2016b) noted that the actions of Black males are perceived differently than their peers. They note that their actions are more likely to be pathologized in comparison to their White peers. This results in differential treatment, harsher responses, and greater exposure to exclusionary discipline. Their work highlights that the greater differences are seen, not in actions, but in perceptions of those actions by teachers. These findings align with the hypothesized *D-Three Effect*, which suggested that greater levels of challenge would be perceived by educators in the behavior of Black boys. As noted, this is as a result of common perceptions of these males from teachers that view them from a lens of disdain (cultural pathologizations), distrust (criminalization), and disregard (perceived academic inferiority)

The models for closeness and conflict were strikingly similar across racial/ethnic groups. For closeness, few meaningful variations were evident. In general, interpersonal skills, externalized problem behaviors, attentional focus, and inhibitory control had a positive effect on closeness. In contrast, self-control and internalized problem behaviors had a negative effect. Interestingly, these results suggest that lower self-control and greater external challenges lead to higher levels of closeness. This study provides a couple departures from prior research. For example, Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) did not identify a relationship between internalized behaviors and closeness or conflict, in contrast, this study found a relationship with both concepts.

Moreover, externalized behaviors were also found to be determinants of closeness and conflict in this study, a pattern not identified by Pianta and Stuhlman.

Standardized regression results revealed that interpersonal skills had the strongest effect on closeness with teachers. However, a prior departure from the similitude of the results was that externalized problem behaviors had a moderate effect on closeness for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino boys yet yielded a smaller effect for other groups. As with the models for closeness, regression results for conflict also had comparable results across groups. Given this, higher levels of conflict were reported when there were greater levels of externalized problem behavior, internalized problem behavior, and attentional focus. Moreover, relational conflict increase when students were less self-controlled, have lower interpersonal skills, and more challenges with inhibitory control. The standardized beta coefficients demonstrated that externalized problem behaviors had a strong effect on conflict. This scale represented a large effect for Black males but a moderate effect for other groups.

In all, attentional focus, self-control, and externalized problem behavior were all found to have the same directional relationship for closeness and conflict models. Thus, lower self-control, higher externalized challenges, and greater attentional focus all lead to greater levels of closeness as well as higher levels of conflict. This differs from the pre-hypothesized relationship which assumed all predictors of closeness and conflict would have inverse relationships on the outcomes between the two series of models. Moreover, this study also hypothesized that noticeably differences across models would exist; however, the models were strikingly similar across groups for all boys.

Assuming the legitimacy of Wood and Harris' (2016b) *D-Three Effect*, the combined information across analyses may infer that while the reactionary effect of perceived behaviors on closeness and conflict are primarily the same, the perceptions of the behaviors themselves differ greatly for Black boys in comparison to their peers. In other words, teachers respond to behavior in the same manner but their perceptions of behaviors are interpreted very differently across groups, leading to greater levels of conflict and reduced closeness.

It is important to recognize that behaviors that are traditionally attributed to "good students" (e.g., sitting for long periods of time, raising a hand before speaking) are not developmentally appropriate for young children, particularly young boys. Moreover, African American boys bring into the classroom a culture that is characterized by a call and response communication style where it is common place to speak while others are speaking as an act of validation (Wood & Harris III, 2016). As such, some actions that are categorized as challenging behaviors are rooted in male gender-role socialization and cultural values specific to African American communities. Bailey and Boykin (2000) refer to these actions as an "Afro ethos." In early childhood classrooms, African American boys are often disciplined for displaying behaviors that are validated by their culture and male gender expectations.

Implications of Practice and Research

All individuals have a set of beliefs that characterize the lens through which they view the world. For teachers, this lens influences how they engage with and view the actions of students. Attaining closeness with students can be difficult for teachers who are of differing cultural backgrounds than their students. Differing backgrounds can lead to misinterpretations of socio-cultural mores and behaviors (Bellanger 1999). Unfortunately, for Black boys, differential perceptions of behavior can be costly, resulting in greater exposure to exclusionary discipline and

marred relationships with educators. Research has shown that children with culturally responsive teachers are more likely to have meaningful engagements with them and lower reported instances of conflict (Howard, 2010). Responsiveness is typified by the teacher's ability to read emotional, behavioral and cognitive cues (Hamre & Pianta, 2014). If teachers are misreading cultural behaviors as negative behaviors, it is likely that conflict will be reported even when conflict is not evident.

Bearing this in mind, professional development for early childhood educators is needed to address teachers' perceptions of challenges with Black males. It is critical that educators be exposed to professional development trainings on culturally responsive and gender specific teaching that include anti-bias education. Such trainings can guide teachers into a greater level of self-awareness of their own biases (Wood & Harris III, 2015). As a part of professional development, reflective practices can be implemented. Reflective practices can include one-on-one and group sessions that are structured to provide guided introspection. This reflective practice may reduce stress as well as allow space for teachers to process challenges they are having in the classroom. Reflective supervision provides teachers with an opportunity to consult with other educators, self-reflect on their core assumptions and actions, and gain meaningful insight on their day-to-day interactions.

Greene (2005) posited that, in situations when educators are not familiar with a particular culture, cultural brokers can be used to bridge the gap. A cultural broker is a person from a specific community that is represented in the classroom who provides insights and interpretations about particular cultural needs. Cultural brokers can contribute key cultural context to provide a new framework for which teachers can view African American boys. To further this notion, educators can consider the use of cultural brokers as an external reviewer. Informed by their cultural insight, the cultural broker would employ a standardized tool to provide holistic recommendations for teacher success. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool can be utilized to record a baseline of the quality of teacher's interactions with students. The CLASS is a reliable observational measure utilized in p-12 grades that classifies teacher behaviors in the classroom into research-based domains proven to contribute to developmental outcomes (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). The CLASS is used to capture the overall experience of the child in the classroom and can be used to provide an objective perspective on the climate of the classroom from the child's perspective. This assessment system is informed by Pianta's et al., (1995) research on healthy attachments and positive relational dynamics between teachers and children.

When planning for the needs of African American boys it is important to take into account diverse learning styles. In early education, it is developmentally appropriate to engage learners through the use of multiple senses. African American boys are often kinesthetic learners and require the use of their body to remain engaged (Bailey & Boykin, 2000). Preschool boys have higher levels of physical activity than girls. A lack of opportunities to exude this energy can lead to more challenging behaviors (Finn, Johansen, & Specker, 2002; Wood & Harris III, 2016). The typical early childhood classroom's physical environment and daily routine is not arranged to meet the learning needs of African American boys. The majority (89%) of a typical day for preschool children is spent in sedentary activities like sitting or squatting, followed by light activity (8%). In contrast, "vigorous" activity accounts for only (3%) of a typical day (Brown et al., 2009). Early childhood learning environments and curricula should be created and revised with the needs of boys in mind. Moreover, providing more opportunities for children to use movement in situations where they will not be reprimanded is necessary for African American learner success.

Given the disparate perceptions of the behaviors of Black boys, these recommendations may serve to shape a climate that is more conducive to their success. Future research should continue to explore how differential perceptions of Black boys' behaviors shape their experiences and outcomes in educational settings. While this study focused on the cross-sectional data from the Spring of Kindergarten, the ECLS dataset allows for continued analysis of these trends over time. Thus, future research should determine whether the perceptions of behavior change over time, and if, the relationship between perceived behaviors and closeness and conflict remain similarly predictive over subsequent years. This will provide a better understanding of how patterns in early education shape experiences in latter grades.

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