Reviewer's report

Title: Childhood school segregation and adult sense of control in the African American Health cohort

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Reviewer: Diana Burgess

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This is a well-written, provocative and challenging paper, which focuses attention on the potential unintended negative consequences of school desegregation. Specifically, the authors found that childhood segregation was associated with a greater sense of control among African American men (which has been shown to be lower than Whites' sense of control). This is a potentially consequential finding because, as the authors point out, personal control is associated with beneficial health behaviors (e.g., quitting smoking, exercise) that, in turn, result in better health. However, while the findings and conclusion seem reasonable, in a narrow sense, they are presented in an absence of the larger literature on the broad-ranging benefits of integration and the costs of segregation, which include socio-economic and health effects. In the introduction, for instance, the authors mention cite a number of studies that look at the effects of school segregation on the health outcomes for children and young adults but do not summarize them. This omission weakens the manuscript, by failing to place this study within broader findings showing the benefits of integration (leading to a lack of balance in this paper). One of the papers cited by the authors, for instance, (by Rucker) that integrated schools were associated with lower black-white adult socioeconomic and health disparities in adulthood; another paper cited (Walsemann & Bell, 2010) found higher educational aspirations among Black students with schools that had lower levels of within-school segregation. Moreover, the authors also neglect to present analyses from their own data, examining the association between childhood school segregation and what are considered to be important consequences of segregation: employment status, income, and health. (It should be noted that the authors report, though do not show, greater likelihood of college attendance and completion by those with educational segregation.) Overall though, from reading the Results section, is not possible to determine whether greater levels of control, found among African American men with higher levels of childhood school segregation, was associated with other positive outcomes in this study (better health, higher socioeconomic status) or whether it coexisted with negative health and socioeconomic outcomes. This is particularly problematic because the authors do not measure health outcomes directly, but instead focus on a proximal psychological outcome, “sense of control,” which is really only important insofar that it has a beneficial effect on health (which the literature suggests is adversely affected by segregation). Despite these concerns, I appreciate the authors’ inquiry into the potentially overlooked, negative consequences of school desegregation.
desegregation on African American adults, and believe that it contributes to the literature on race and health.

Major compulsory revisions
1. Present analyses showing the effects of childhood segregation on key health and SES variables.
2. Summarize the extant literature on the effects of segregation/integration on the health and socioeconomic status of African American adults (socioeconomic status is important because it is such a strong predictor of health). The limitations of this literature and how the current manuscript addresses those limitations should also be included.
3. Presentation of research/theory (such as Pettigrew et al work on the “contact hypothesis”) that provide a more nuanced view about the conditions under which desegregation is expected to have a positive or negative effect on minority students.

Minor essential revisions
4. Introduction. Authors state that, “in a review of 39 studies on the association between segregation and health outcomes, 38 were found to have relied solely on measures of residential (rather than school) segregation [30], with the only study using school segregation having combined it into a composite with neighbourhood and church segregation [31].” Explain how/why using school segregation might be expected to lead to different results than using residential segregation.

Methods
5. Clarify why the measure of racial consciousness was included, and whether it was expected to be associated with childhood segregation and/or perceived control
6. The authors’ state: “AAH participants were 13-29 years old when Title IV of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 authorized the federal government to file school desegregation cases, leading to the infamously troubled St. Louis Voluntary School Desegregation Plan in 1983.” Please give a short description of this plan/why it was “infamously troubled.”
7. Move rationale as to why the effect of segregation on African American adults’ sense of control would be expected to be stronger for men rather than women from the Methods section to the Introduction section. Define John Henryism more clearly & explain how it informs these predictions about the effect of gender.

Discretionary revisions
Title and abstract. The title “Childhood school segregation and adult sense of control in the African American Health cohort” could be changed to more accurately reflect the study’s major finding that childhood school segregation was associated with a greater sense of control among African American men.

Discussion
1. Discuss more fully the policy implications of these findings.

The authors might want to discuss the implications of this work in light of the Obama Administration Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhoods program that focuses on building up high-poverty, often minority communities by providing resources to plan and implement a continuum of wrap-around services “from early learning to college and career.” This builds on the model of Geoffrey Canada’s Harlem Achievement Zones, which focuses on promoting achievement among African Americans by strengthening African American communities, rather than a traditional de-segregation model.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.