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## Do Inner-City, African-American males exhibit “bad attitudes” toward work?

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*Many potential employers of inner-city African-American men believe that African-American men have poor work attitudes. The investigations reported here attempted to evaluate the veridicality of this assumption. The responses of African-American men who utilize a soup-kitchen were compared with college men on a variety of attitude measures, as well as on their reactions to a scenario about a man who worked for an unfair boss and quit in response. Generally, little support for the view that inner-city, African-Americans men have a predilection to presume prejudice or unfairness, or to render a favorable evaluation of quitting under unfair conditions, was found.*

According to William Julius Wilson (1996; see also Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991, pp. 203–234), employers, regardless of their own race, often view inner-city, African-American men as having “bad attitudes” toward work. Although data attest that employers harbor the assumption of attitude problems among inner-city, African-American males (Wilson, 1996), little investigation of the veridicality of the widely held assumption has occurred. Wilson (1996, pp. 140–145) references unpublished data presented at the Chicago Urban Poverty and Family Life Conference presented by Richard Taub, suggesting that African-American, inner-city men do, in fact, harbor bad work attitudes. Additionally, Massey and Denton (1996, pp. 137–162) offer ethnographic findings indicating that as a result of isolation, poor African-Americans have developed values and attitudes that are essentially “oppositional” to mainstream society. There has, however, been little quantitative research addressing this issue.

Since the assumption of poor work attitudes seems to be the motivation for employers of persons in minimum wage jobs often preferring immigrants over indigenous African-Americans (Newman & Lennon, 1995; Sassen & Smith, 1992), it is important to determine the extent to which the assumption is justified.

Five investigations are presented which examined the extent to which poor African-American men who participate in the labor force through minimum wage, temporary-labor jobs, harbor negative work attitudes. These five investigations compared the attitudes of African-American men recruited through a soup-kitchen ministry in a southern, metropolitan area, all of whom were homeless or tentatively sheltered, with a comparison group of male, college students. College students were selected as a comparison group because these men had sufficient discretionary income to pay for schooling. Further, these college men had every reason to assume an upwardly mobile future. Thus, in terms of the objective opportunities in and controllability of their lives, the college men offered a maximal contrast to the men frequenting the soup-kitchen.

#### MECHANISMS FOR OPERATIONALIZING A "BAD WORK ATTITUDE"

According to Taub (Wilson, 1996, p. 141),

*"inner-city black men have a greater sense of "honor" and often see work, pay, and treatment from bosses as insulting and degrading. Accordingly, a heightened sensitivity to exploitation fuels their anger and gives rise to a tendency to "just walk off the job."*

In operationalizing "attitude", an attempt was made to capture the essential features of Taub's articulation, viz., the low threshold for the perception of discrimination, as well as Massey and Denton's concept of attitudes which are oppositional to mainstream. One particular manifestation of oppositional attitude, would be that effort reduction is evaluated as justified, appropriate to the situation, and perhaps even admirable in response to unfair conditions even when a worker badly needs the job. Thus, the features of a "bad work attitude" include (a) a low threshold for the perception of unfairness; and (b) approval or admiration for those

who quit under unfair circumstances despite the importance of the job.

In order to determine whether inner-city, African-American men recruited through a soup-kitchen differ on this "attitude" dimension from college students, several vehicles were employed. First, subjects read one of eight versions of a story about Joe. In the story, Joe either was or was not treated unfairly, and then, either quit his job or continued to maintain a high level of effort. After reading the story, subjects evaluated Joe. The evaluation of Joe allowed comparison of the evaluations of inner-city, African-American men with the evaluations of college men of an actor who quits his job under unfair conditions. Thus, differential approval/admiration of quitting under unfair conditions, a manifestation of oppositional attitude, could be assessed.

In the narrative of the Joe story, there were several different descriptions of Joe's boss. In one condition, the boss was depicted as African-American, an ex-convict, and someone wishing to provide a second chance for those who were on parole. In another condition (the unfair boss condition), the boss was depicted as paying Joe, an ex-convict, less than other workers as the boss realized that due to Joe's parolee status, he was desperate and "would put up with anything". In a third condition, the boss was described in ambiguous terms. The ambiguous boss assigned Joe to work on older machines which were difficult to operate but was friendly and offered fair pay. After reading a particular version of the depiction of the boss, subjects were asked to evaluate the boss. The ambiguous boss condition was included as a projection device. Given little actual information about a boss, the "ambiguous boss" story allowed an opportunity to observe what subjects would assume about the boss. The "ambiguous boss" conditions provided a mechanism for evaluating Taub's claim that African-American "underclass" males exhibit a "heightened sensitivity to exploitation", that is, a lower threshold for the perception of exploitation. If Taub is correct, inner-city, African-Americans should ascribe negative characteristics to the ambiguous boss.

Several other mechanisms were employed to evaluate whether inner-city, African-American men harbor bad work attitudes. The inner-city sample and the college-men sample were compared on their responses to the question, "Have you ever had

a job in which you were treated unfairly?" Finally, these samples were compared on their endorsement of a menu of causes explaining why people are homeless and/or poor, on their endorsement of the pervasiveness of prejudice and discriminations against African-Americans, their assessment of the existence of equal opportunity for all children, and their responses to the Just World Scale. These latter measures allowed for evaluation of whether inner-city, African-American men have a low threshold for the perception of unfairness.

For clarity of presentation, the various dependent-variable investigations are presented separately although all subjects responded to a version of the Joe story, the question regarding having had an unfair job, and one or more of the attitude measures.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

The 180, African-American men comprising the inner city sample constituted a diverse group. Many were homeless or living in shelters. Most had sought employment through temporary, labor pool jobs. Some were native to the Atlanta-metropolitan area. Others had been dislocated from jobs outside the south-east and had come to the metropolitan area seeking jobs because of the city's purportedly low rate of unemployment. All had worked in some capacity, often through a temporary, labor pool service during the previous year. Some were impaired by disabilities attributable to head injuries, retardation, schizophrenia, or physical illness/incapacity. In order to fully represent the range of individuals who function in unskilled jobs, if the subject understood the questions, spoke intelligibly, and had been working periodically, his responses were included in the data analysis. Twelve subjects were excluded from participation, prior to data analysis, because their disability (incomprehension, schizophrenic, brain injury) rendered them incapable of understanding the story. Eleven of those approached refused to participate.

One hundred and sixty-one male students from a southeastern university constituted the college-student sample. Sixty-one percent were Caucasian and 22% were African-American.

Data were collected in Criminal Justice, Business, Public Administration, and Biology classes. The largest percentage of students were Criminal Justice majors (32%) and Business majors (20%). Eighty percent of the students were employed. Ages differed significantly between the inner-city sample and the college student sample,  $F(1,328)=376.049$ ,  $p<.0001$ . Therefore, age served as a covariate throughout most of the analyses.

### *Procedure*

Inner-city subjects were approached randomly from those who were either waiting in line to receive some type of service through the soup-kitchen (e.g., use of the mail room, help in obtaining a Georgia ID needed for employment, or some referral to a social service) or who were congregated outside the front entrance of the facility. Subjects were given the option of reading the materials themselves or having the them read. The bulk of the sample opted to read along with the interviewer. Participation was completely voluntary and subjects were paid \$10. The "Joe" story was presented at the first part of the interview, directly after the obtaining of informed consent, followed by formal scales, and then a structured set of questions for obtaining historical and demographic data.

The college sample responded to materials at the beginning of their class-periods. Both samples responded to identical materials and measures.

## DEPENDENT VARIABLES FROM THE JOE STORY

### *Measures*

Subjects read one of eight versions of a story about Joe. The stories varied with regard to the conditions of Joe's employment (a fair boss in which necessity of work for parole maintenance was emphasized, an unfair boss in which Joe's necessity of work for maintenance of parole was emphasized, an unfair boss in which Joe's necessity of work maintenance as a condition of parole was deemphasized, or a boss whose behavior was equivocal with necessity of work for maintenance of parole emphasized). The stories also varied with regard to how Joe responded to his

employment situation, viz., whether he continued to work assiduously or whether he quit the job. The eight versions of the story, along with the "type of subject" factor, comprised a three randomized factor, completely crossed ANOVA design. There were two levels of the "type of subjects" factor, four levels of the "working conditions" factor, and two levels of the "Joe's response" factor. The "unfair boss, Joe quits" version of the experimental stimulus (the narrative) is presented in the Appendix.

After reading the story about Joe, subjects were asked to evaluate both Joe's behavior and also to evaluate his boss, creating two dependent measures with the 2 x 4 x 2 design. In regard to Joe's behavior, responses to twelve items were averaged to yield an overall favorability rating. The first item was an open ended question asking "What do you think about Joe's behavior?" Responses were given a rating of "1" if favorable, "3" if unfavorable, and "2" if neutral words were used to describe Joe's behavior. The other items were forced choice responses ("yes", "no", "don't know") asking whether Joe's behavior was "appropriate", whether "Joe acted as the subject hoped he/she would act under similar circumstances", whether Joe was "stupid", "ineffective", "bad", "likable", "smart", "honorable", whether "Joe respected himself", whether "Joe was admirable", and whether the subject "respected Joe". To avoid a "yes/no" response set, items included both negatively valenced descriptors and positively valenced descriptors.

In regard to the evaluation of Joe's boss, responses to seven items were averaged to yield an overall favorability rating. Again the first item was open-ended. In a forced choice format, subjects indicated whether the boss was "a nice guy", "fair", "likeable", "a cheater", "honest", "totally unfair".

## Results

*Evaluation of internal consistencies of the dependent measures.* The coefficient alpha for the twelve items evaluating Joe's behavior was .9434. The coefficient alpha for the seven items evaluating Joe's boss was .9509.

*Responses to items evaluating Joe.* Cell means for Joe descriptors are presented in Table 1. Unless indicated, age was a covariate

in all analyses. The main effect for the evaluation of Joe's behavior was significant:  $F(1,308)=315.57, p<.0001$ . Joe was evaluated more favorably when he continues to respond eagerly than when he quits. The main effect of the four-level factor "working conditions" (unfair boss-stress parole, unfair boss-deemphasized parole, fair boss, ambiguous boss) was also significant,  $F(3,308)=10.94, p<.0001$ . The two-way interaction between the "Joe's response" factor and the "working conditions" factor was significant,  $F(3,308)=13.32, p<.01$ , suggesting that the evaluation of Joe's response (working or quitting) differed depending upon the conditions under which he labored. The main effect for the type of "subject factor" (inner-city versus student) was not significant. The "type of subject" factor did not interact with any of the other factors nor was the 3-way interaction significant.

Consistent with prior work in which it was found that an actor who quits under unfair conditions is rated more favorably than an

Table 1

*Evaluation of Joe's Response*

Joe's Response	Unfair Boss (parole emphasized)	Working Conditions		
		Ambiguous Boss	Fair Boss	Unfair Boss
Joe Quits				
Students	1.58 (N = 18)	2.52 (N = 21)	2.63 (N = 14)	2.00 (N = 15)
Inner-City	1.95 (N = 24)	2.30 (N = 22)	2.42 (N = 22)	1.92 (N = 25)
Joe Eager				
Students	1.36 (N = 18)	1.27 (N = 20)	1.38 (N = 33)	1.31 (N = 18)
Inner-City	1.19 (N = 17)	1.11 (N = 19)	1.13 (N = 17)	1.20 (N = 22)

Note: Evaluation of Joe's behavior averaged over 12 items.

Values can range from 1.00 to 3.00 with lower numbers signifying greater favorability.



actor who quits under fair conditions (Littrell, 1993), Joe's quitting behavior was viewed more favorably under unfair conditions than under fair conditions. This was the case when looking at the college students for the comparison of the two averaged unfair conditions with the fair condition,  $F(1,314)=10.18$ ,  $p<.01$ , and also for the same comparison among the inner-city subjects,  $F(1,314)=9.17$ ,  $p<.05$ . (Since type of subject was not a variable in these analyses, age was not a covariate in these analyses). A significant three-way interaction is required before any two way interactions are analyzed. As previously noted, the three-way interaction was not significant. However, because the evaluation of an actor who quits under unfair conditions was the major concern in our study, we examined whether the evaluations of the inner-city men differed from the college students. The difference (mean=1.93, SD=.67, N=49 for inner-city versus mean=1.77, SD=.61, N=33 for students) was not significant,  $F(1,312)=1.46$ , ns. Thus, there was no evidence that the average evaluation of quitting under unfair conditions from the inner-city men differed from the college students' evaluations.

*Responses to items evaluating the boss.* Cell means for the boss descriptors are presented in Table 2. The responses in the evaluation of Joe's boss function as a manipulation check on subjects' understanding of the story, attesting that the differential working conditions were understood as intended. Consistent with expectation, the only significant main effect was for the "working conditions" factor,  $F(3,307)=125.44$ ,  $p<.001$ . Neither the "type of subject" (students versus inner-city), or Joe's response choice (working or quitting) yielded significance. None of the two-way interactions nor the 3-way interaction was significant. The fair boss was viewed more favorably than the boss in the two unfair conditions,  $F(1,313)=257.03$ ,  $p<.0001$ . (Age was not covaried for this latter comparison as "type of subject" was not a variable).

The ambiguous boss cells were included for a test of a specific hypothesis, that is, to determine whether inner-city men evaluate an ambiguously presented boss more negatively than college students. Without controlling for age, the inner-city men were more favorable than were the college students,  $F(1, 313)=4.44$ ,  $p<.036$ .

Table 2

*Evaluation of Joe's Boss*

<i>Joe's Response</i>	<i>Unfair Boss (parole emphasized)</i>	<i>Working Conditions</i>		
		<i>Ambiguous Boss</i>	<i>Fair Boss</i>	<i>Unfair Boss</i>
<i>Joe Quits</i>				
<i>Students</i>	2.80 (N = 18)	1.90 (N = 21)	1.30 (N = 14)	2.55 (N = 14)
<i>Inner-City</i>	2.60 (N = 24)	1.61 (N = 22)	1.26 (N = 22)	2.50 (N = 25)
<i>Joe Eager</i>				
<i>Students</i>	2.61 (N = 18)	1.91 (N = 20)	1.33 (N = 34)	2.71 (N = 18)
<i>Inner-City</i>	2.75 (N = 17)	1.71 (N = 19)	1.14 (N = 16)	2.57 (N = 22)

Note: Evaluation of Joe's boss averaged over 7 items.

Values can range from 1.00 to 3.00 with lower numbers signifying greater favorability.

Controlling for age, there was no difference between the samples in their evaluation of the ambiguous boss,  $F(1,307)=1.75$ , ns.

*Discussion*

The results from the Joe scenario offer no support for the hypothesis that inner-city, African-American men harbor attitude problems. In evaluating an individual who quit his job under unfair conditions, inner-city subjects did not differ in their evaluations from college students. Thus, if a "bad attitude" can be operationalized as approving of walking out of a job given an actor's perception of unfairness, there is no support for the hypothesis that African-American laborers differ from college students on this dimension. The hypothesis that inner-city, African-American men have an attitude problem was also tested by examining whether they would project unfairness onto an ambiguously described boss. Given the ill-defined boss, the inner-city subjects were more positive about the boss than were college students,

although this more favorable evaluation of ambiguous boss was due to age, rather than inner-city status.

There are some alternative explanations for the findings in this study. It is possible that demand characteristics were operating. The bulk of the inner-city sample responded to the story and questions verbally as they were administered by a white, female researcher. Perhaps, the inner-city men were unwilling to openly approve of a quitting actor. However, mitigating against this possibility, some men spontaneously remarked that they had been in unfair situations similar to Joe and had quit. If the context had subtly encouraged subjects to offer a favorable impression at the expense of accurately conveying their true sentiments, it is unlikely that these men would have volunteered this information.

## ATTITUDE SCALE DEPENDENT MEASURES

### *Measures*

Another avenue for determining whether inner-city, African Americans have a low threshold for assuming prejudice/injustice, an aspect of bad work attitudes, is to evaluate them on known measures of this construct. Subjects were administered the Just World Scale (Rubin & Peplau, 1975), items tapping belief in the existence of equal opportunity in America (Rasinski, 1987), and questions assessing belief that prejudice against African-Americans exists in America (Katz & Hass, 1988). Each pool of items was evaluated for internal consistency, and items were discarded to yield sets of items with high coefficient alphas.

### *Results*

Three items, with a coefficient of .69 (N=124), captured belief in equal opportunity for children ("In America, every child who wants to learn has the opportunity to do"; "No matter which neighborhood a child grows up in, he/she can get a good education if he/she is motivated to do so"; and "If a child is taught the proper values at home, that child can develop his/her potential regardless of the neighborhood in which he/she is raised"). Five items, with a coefficient alpha of .70 (N=126), measured perceived discrimination against minorities in the workplace ("Black people do not have the same employment opportunities that Whites

do"; "Too many Blacks still lose out on jobs and promotions because of their skin color"; "Most big corporations in America are really interested in treating their Black and White employees equally"; "Most Blacks are no longer discriminated against"; and "Blacks should take the jobs that are available and then work their way up to better jobs"). The 20-item, Just World Scale (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) yielded a coefficient alpha of .64 ( $N=120$ ) and was not subjected to further refinement. The Likert scale items, "Poor people get a fair hearing from the court system in America", and "Police in this country are more likely to assume a poor person has committed a crime than a rich person" were evaluated separately because of their low correlation,  $r=.10$ ,  $N=124$ ,  $p=ns$ . When Likert scale items were combined they were reverse scored where appropriate. All items were responded to on an 11-point scale with "1" signifying "agreement" and "11" signifying "disagreement".

On the equal opportunity for children items, the difference, with age as a covariate, between the inner-city men (mean=2.48,  $SD=2.3$ ,  $N=91$ ) and college men (mean=3.81,  $SD=1.7$ ,  $N=28$ ) reached marginal levels of significance  $F(1,116)=3.51$ ,  $p<.06$ , with inner-city men displaying greater subscription to belief in equal opportunity. On the perceived discrimination against minorities in the workplace items, the mean of the inner-city men (5.21,  $SD=2.3$ ,  $N=91$ ) did not differ from the mean of the college men (5.62,  $SD=2.3$ ,  $N=29$ ),  $F(1,117)=.12$ ,  $ns$ . On the Just World Scale, (with lower values signifying greater endorsement of justice) the mean of the inner-city men (5.6,  $SD=1.3$ ,  $N=87$ ) and the mean of the college men (5.83,  $SD=.83$ ,  $N=27$ ) did not differ,  $F(1,111)=.16$ ,  $ns$ . With regard to the statement, "Poor people get a fair hearing from the court system in America", inner-city men (mean=9.45,  $SD=2.5$ ,  $N=91$ ) did differ from college men (mean=6.21,  $SD=2.8$ ,  $N=28$ ),  $F(1,116)=24.11$ ,  $p<.001$  (analysis with age covaried) with the inner-city men more often in disagreement. With regard to the statement, "Police in this country are more likely to assume a poor person has committed a crime than a rich person", again the mean in the inner-city sample (9.76,  $SD=2.4$ ,  $N=91$ ) did differ from the mean in the student sample (8.37,  $N=2.5$ ,  $N=27$ ),  $F(1,121)=6.02$ ,  $p=.02$ , but was no longer significant after controlling for age.

### THE HISTORY-OF-PERCEIVED-UNFAIR-EMPLOYMENT DEPENDENT MEASURE

Seventy-one percent of the college-student sample (N=160) answered affirmatively to the question "Have you ever had a job where you were treated unfairly?" Sixty-three percent of the inner-city sample (N=174) responded affirmatively to this question. The difference between the percentages answering affirmatively to this question in the two samples was not significant whether or not age was controlled.

### ASSUMED-CAUSES-OF-HOMELESSNESS DEPENDENT MEASURE

Yet another way in which to assess whether inner-city, African-Americans have a low threshold for perceiving prejudice/injustice is to observe the causes they provide for unsatisfactory life circumstances. Homelessness/poverty constitutes an unsatisfactory life circumstance with which the inner-city sample would obviously be familiar. If the inner-city sample have "an attitude" or a low threshold for perceiving discrimination, they should be more likely to perceive unfairness/discrimination as a reason for homelessness. The college student sample and the inner-city sample responded to a list of possible reasons for homelessness (taken from a lists of causes of poverty developed by Feagin, 1972; Feldman, 1982; Furnham, 1982; and Nilson, 1981) rating the extent to which the factor contributed to causing homelessness or poverty. The list of reasons for homelessness included both attributions to structural factors in the society and attributions to individual traits.

#### *Results*

With age covaried, responses from the "reasons for homelessness" items were analyzed as a mixed ANOVA design with a 14-level repeated measure (the "reasons for homelessness" items) and the 2-level "type of subject" factor. Table 3 provides the mean responses for the 14-items in the two samples. The main effect for reasons was significant,  $F(13,3237)=71.74, p<.0001$ , suggesting that the reasons are not all viewed as equally salient in causing homelessness. The main effect for "type of subject" factor

was significant,  $F(1,248)=41.51, p<.0001$ . An inspection of sample means suggests that inner-city subjects, as compared to college students, use the higher end of the scale for all reasons including both structural and individual reasons. The interaction between the repeated measure, "reasons" factor and the "type of subject" factor was significant,  $F(13,3237)=8.87, p<.0001$ , indicating that the pattern of perceived importance for the various reasons differed among the inner-city, men versus the college-students.

Probing further, we examined whether there was evidence of a general tendency for one sample to assign greater importance to structural factors versus individual factors as causes for homelessness. A composite measure in which the average of eight individual reasons was subtracted from the average of five structural reasons addressed the question. This composite measure also allowed a mechanism for circumventing the effect of the inner-city men more often using the "more important" end of the scale regardless of type of reason being evaluated. On the composite measure, values could range from 9 to -9, with higher values indicating greater attributions to structural as opposed to individual causes of homelessness. The mean value in the college sample (-1.19,  $SD=2.4, N=161$ ) did not differ significantly from the mean value in the inner-city sample (-.96,  $SD=2.3, N=90$ ),  $F(1,248)=.17, ns$ .

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our investigations offered no support for the hypothesis that the inner-city African-American men in our sample have "attitude problems" which compromise their capacity to become good employees. A "bad attitude" was defined in our study as (1) approval of quitting as a response to an unfair working environment and (2) a propensity to perceive unfairness.

With regard to the issue of differential approval of quitting behavior under obviously unfair conditions, the question was explored through the "Joe" narrative. Subjects evaluated the behavior of an actor (Joe) who quit under unfair conditions. The results of this investigation indicated that, as would be expected, inner-city African-American men are more approving of an actor who quits under conditions of unfairness than an actor who

Table 3

*Reasons for Homelessness:  
Means for the Inner-City Sample and the Student Sample*

Causes of Homelessness	Sample	
	Inner-City (N = 90)	Students (N = 161)
*Lack of jobs in some localities	7.86	5.12
*Lack of drive and ambition	8.56	7.27
*Lack of thrift and money management	9.03	5.91
*Lack of effort by the poor themselves	8.58	6.26
*Lack of ability and talent	5.43	4.64
*Alcohol and Drug problems	9.48	7.45
Sickness and Physical handicaps	6.84	6.14
Failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans	5.42	4.96
*Prejudice and discrimination against minority groups	6.91	5.02
*Bosses are unfair	5.74	4.01
Just bad luck	3.56	3.42
*Lack of jobs that pay a living wage	8.12	5.06
*Lack of intelligence among poor people	6.47	4.01
*No attempts at self improvement	7.74	6.49

Note: an "\*" indicates significance at the .05 level in a comparison between the two groups after controlling for age. Mean values could range from 1 to 10 with high numbers indicating greater agreement that the cause was an important factor in contributing to homelessness.

quits under conditions of fairness. However, contrary to what is sometimes assumed, African-American labor-class individuals are no more approving of quitting behavior under conditions of unfairness than are college-men.

The question of propensity to perceive unfairness was explored in several ways. Inner-city, African-American men and college men were asked to evaluate a boss about whom minimal information was provided. This procedure offered an opportunity for subjects to project into the scenario their general beliefs about bosses. Results of this investigation suggested that the ratings provided to the ambiguously described boss by the inner-city, African-American men were, if anything, more positive than were the ratings provided by the college students. The age difference between the two samples, rather than the inner-city status differential, was the factor mediating the more favorable view of bosses.

Established measures of beliefs about fairness in society also allowed a mechanism for exploring whether inner-city, African-Americans are more likely than college students to perceive injustice. With regard to perceptions of justice in the world generally, the inner-city African-Americans did not differ from college students on the Just World Scale. With regard to equal opportunity for children, the African-American, inner-city subjects were more likely to endorse this "Horatio Alger" type belief. With regard to the perception of discrimination against African-Americans in particular, the African-American, inner-city sample did not differ from college students. They were equally likely to attribute homelessness to structural as opposed to individual factors. Moreover, despite their longer duration of participation in the work-force, inner-city men were no more likely to endorse having been in a job in which they were treated unfairly than were the college students.

The only items on which the inner-city sample differed from the college sample with respect to perception of discrimination/victimization concerned the police and court system. The inner-city men more often believed (1) police are more likely to assume a poor person has committed a crime, and (2) a poor person is less likely to get a fair trial.

Our findings suggest that the expectation of discrimination in the labor-class African-American men is restricted to a specific



institutional arena of the society, viz., the criminal justice system. The Atlanta City Council had passed ordinances (e.g., making possession of an open container of alcoholic content illegal) within the two years prior to our data collection. Many of our inner-city subjects had either gone to jail or knew others who had been jailed for behaviors whose illegality is probably not even recognized by middle class persons. The perception of injustice from the criminal justice system among African-American, inner-city men in our sample, may in part be attributable to the particulars of the local city ordinances. It would be interesting to determine if labor-class, African-American men from rural localities also expect differential justice from the courts and the police.

#### *Attitudes Versus Behavior*

Whereas there was no support for the proposition that our inner-city subjects have "bad attitudes" toward work, as a group, they do not have positive employment histories. The average longest period of employment was 52 months, with a range of 0 months to 360 months (N=41). The majority of the inner-city sample worked through labor pools and did not have regular jobs. The average longest duration of time spent without even submitting an application for a *regular* job was 84 weeks (N=41). Our findings offer no support for "attitude problems" being the reason for current unemployment. Indeed, the men in our inner-city sample were not indifferent to work. Attesting to the importance of work in the lives of inner-city men, self-esteem in the inner-city sample was associated with responding positively to the question, "Have you ever had a job which was so special that it hurt when you no longer had the job" ( $r=.4031$ ,  $N=40$ ,  $p=.01$ ).

If "bad attitudes" cannot account for the poor work records of the inner-city, subjects, an explanation for the poor work records of the inner-city men is needed. Some were chronically, mentally ill (22.4%); some were physically disabled (27%); some were retarded (4%). Examining the "reasons for homelessness" data, the inner-city men were most likely to attribute general homelessness to alcohol and drugs. Consistent with their views, 60% of the inner-city sample endorsed having a substance abuse problem.

Although not the initial intent of our study, mid-way through, we added some questions to our interview protocol to explore

how crack had affected work behavior. A sub-set of the sample who self identified as substance abusers indicated that, at some point on a job, they had failed to report for work the next day after using, or had not come in on time (42%, N=37). Twelve percent (N=34) had sold their vehicles for crack so they could no longer get to their jobs. As mentioned previously, most of the inner-city men worked through the labor pool. When asked about reasons for not looking for regular employment, some spontaneously remarked that they feared they could not sustain employment because of their drug use. Some spontaneously remarked that getting a regular job would be a futile endeavor because "all my earnings will go to the drug man". Thirty-six percent of those asked (N=22) indicated that they controlled their crack use by limiting the amount of money they earned. Approximately half (N=33) reported that their crack use had decreased with their homeless status relative to the amount they had been using in the context of conventional employment. In fact, the modal amount of cocaine (\$40) consumed per day in our sample was somewhat below the amounts (in excess of \$100 per day) which bring middle class, employed samples into treatment according to published clinical reports (Gawin & Kleber, 1985; Schnoll, Karrigan, Kitchen, Daghestani, & Hansen, 1985; Washton & Gold, 1987). Most of the men were not happy with their drug use, as evidenced by a 76% (N=30) endorsement of "wanting to quit" with 86% (N=23) indicating that they thought about quitting at least daily.

Despite the history of periodic unemployment and a tendency to eschew regular employment for intermittent work through a labor pool, our sample of African-American, inner-city subjects could not be depicted as indolent. Fifty-nine percent (N=32) indicated they reported for work early each morning regardless of their drug use the previous night. Seventy-one percent (N=45) were working at least three days per week. Thus, we believe the underemployment and poor work records of the inner-city men can best be understood in terms of the ravages of crack-cocaine and/or disabilities, and not "bad attitudes".

#### *Final Conclusions and Future Research*

In the course of our study, many of the inner-city subjects manifested confidence about their social skills. In the process of

evaluating Joe in the unfair working conditions narrative, subjects were asked what they would do under similar circumstances. A surprising number indicated they would continue to work hard and eventually they would succeed in convincing the boss that they should receive a raise. Another frequently voiced response was "I would talk to the boss and convince him that I should receive the raise." (Twenty-five percent of those in the unfair conditions, expressed such views.) Thus, many of the inner-city men exhibited confidence about their ability to persuade. Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) have shown, in a laboratory context, that when African-Americans are induced to attribute a negative outcome to discrimination a decline in self-efficacy in the domain of social functioning results. Perhaps the self-confidence in the domain of social functioning manifested by some of the inner-city men is related to the failure to perceive discrimination. This issue might be investigated further in the future.

In this study, there was no evidence that inner-city, African-American men differ from college men in the extent to which they believe prejudice exists, the extent to which they assume the world is just, the extent to which they blame homelessness on structural factors in the society, the extent to which they assume unfairness of bosses, or the extent to which they approve of quitting given unfairness. Moreover, inner-city men were more likely to subscribe to the belief that equal opportunity for children exists. These findings are generally consistent with Hochschild (1995, p. 57), who reports that African-Americans, undifferentiated by income, are as likely to attribute success to personal effort as are whites.

The purpose of this investigation was to examine whether African-American, inner-city men have "bad attitudes" toward work. The essential features of a "bad attitude" toward work were operationalized as a low threshold for the perception of unfairness/discrimination and approval of quitting under assumed unfairness. If a "bad attitude" can be operationalized as assuming that bosses are unfair, approval of quitting under unfair conditions, and blaming negative outcomes on discrimination, then our investigation yielded no support for the hypothesis that inner-city, African-American men harbor "bad attitudes".

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## APPENDIX: THE "JOE" NARRATIVE

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING STORY ABOUT JOE AND THEN RESPOND TO THE QUESTIONS ABOUT JOE AND HIS STORY.

Joe is a twenty-two year old male who has recently been released from prison. Upon release he was eager to get a job. He searched eagerly and found employment working as a machinist fashioning tools. He was pleased when he found a way to use the skills he had learned while in the prison. Joe quickly established a good work record coming early and never missing a day. He was recognized by the other workers as having exceptional skill. His production was better than three-quarters of the others in the shop, up to the standard of even more experienced workers.

Joe was satisfied with his job for the first six months of his employment despite the boss being more critical of the guys who were on parole. The boss acted like he just expected guys on parole, Joe included, to be bad workers. Then Joe was informed about what was really going on by one of his friends at the shop. After work one evening, Joe and his friend, Mike, who was also on parole, were talking. Mike mentioned how unfair it was that the boss had given two other workers who started at the same time as Joe and Mike a two dollar raise. Mike, who seemed to know how things really worked, told Joe that the boss knew that guys who were on parole needed the job. The boss believed that he and Joe would put up with anything.

Joe puzzled over what Mike said. He wondered what, if anything, he should do. He talked it over with Mike, and the two of them agreed to ask for the two dollar raise the other men

got. The boss said, "If you don't like the working conditions you can always quit." Joe thought it over and decided that his self respect was at stake. Joe felt he had to quit the job. It seemed to be the only thing to do.

