

# Inner-City “Schoolboy” Life

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## Background

Very early on, academically oriented young black males from low-resource urban communities must decide upon a strategy that will help them achieve some kind of balance between their life at home and at school.

- On one hand, they must convince their peers in the neighborhood that they are as masculine as the rest and they shouldn't be messed with.
  - On the other, they must convince school personnel that they are different from the rest and really want to do well academically.
  - Countless boys are deprived of meeting their potential because they are routed by circumstances largely beyond their control.
  - The behaviors that one generally must engage in to achieve academic success are not those that will tell other males that one is not to be messed with.
  - These young males are put in a position whereby they must make conscious, deliberate decisions about their life at home and at school that will have far-reaching ramifications for their educational outcomes.
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## The Author as an Example

In the author's working-class Bronx neighborhood in the 1970s, masculinity was measured by how well you could fight, how you did with girls, and your basketball skills.

- Adolescent males who chose to excel in school remained indoors, lived elsewhere, or tried to balance both worlds.
  - The author learned to box, developed a few key basketball skills, and managed to keep a few girls interested.
  - The balancing act required lots of energy and mental agility.
  - The author was guided into an attempt at an acting career, which taught him how to present himself in the way a situation demands for his benefit and survival.
  - He also had learned how to charm middle-class adults and teachers to gain an image of being a “good student” and the perks that go with that image:
    1. Extra help.
    2. Better grades by getting the benefit of the doubt on questionable test answers.
    3. Have some negative behaviors overlooked.
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**The Author's  
Research  
Criteria**

Although he did not have a well-thought-out research agenda, the author was clear about the type of environment and the types of participants desired for his research on how black males handle the balancing act between academic achievement and negative peer pressures.

- He chose a high school that accepted students who were high achievers and that had great diversity in the student body.
  - He was able to work with a handful of high-achievers, three of whom were black males. Two of the three were ranked fourth and seventh in their class.
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**High-Achieving  
Student  
Example**

One student who the author highlights as an example of the balancing act students must maintain is a black male ranked fourth in his class.

- This student wants to attend a top-tier university and he believes that to make his mark he needs to earn advanced degrees from prestigious schools.
  - He gets along best with the adults at the school.
    1. Adults like talking to him.
    2. He is described as thoughtful.
  - He is on the school track team and says he is left alone in his neighborhood because of the way he carries himself.
  - He balances his conflicting loyalties to his own goals and to his community in which he perceives himself as helping people and the other males see him as distancing himself from them.
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**Low-Achieving  
Student  
Example**

The author illustrates the life of another student who came to the school as a high-achiever, but no longer fits that image.

- He and his friends present themselves as tough.
  - They are frequently at odds with the adults in powerful positions in the school which often leads to them being sent back to their neighborhood school and academic obscurity.
  - These students then must reckon with the demands of hypermasculine images of urban black males that get wrapped up in a package of violence, sex, drugs, alcohol, and prison – all of which are negative factors for academic success.
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**The Research  
Outcomes**

The research suggests that a large part of the answer to whether magnet schools are positioned sufficiently to address the concerns of the black males from low-resource neighborhoods is in the way these schools practice diversity.

- It would appear that diversity is a double-edged sword whereby in the effort to attract a diverse student body, these schools also succeed in flattening difference among the students.
- The result is that the school is ill equipped to understand the unique choices that their black male students must make and the impact these choices have on their academic performance.
- The vast majority of their black male students either drop out or graduate at or near the bottom of their class.
- The few high-achievers make it by turning away from their community and peers. It is feared they then will forever turn their back on the communities they came from - communities that are in desperate need of their skills.