

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INEQUALITIES,  
EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENTS'  
EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL  
ATTAINMENT**

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By

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to John Arhelger, whose unfailing love and support have allowed me to pursue my goals. I also wish to dedicate this effort to the memory of my parents, David and Virginia Gibbons, who gave me their most generous gifts: love and books.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INEQUALITY, EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

What is the relationship between inequality, expectations of significant others and students' educational and occupational attainment? I propose that there is a relationship between family socioeconomic status, gender and race of children, and their aspirations and the expectations of parents, teachers, and school counselors. This relationship extends to influence later educational and occupational attainment. Secondary analysis of National Education Longitudinal Study data reveals that expectations of parents and significant others are related to attainment for all groups, but White males benefit most. While Asian students receive lower levels of teacher interpersonal interactions, they ultimately surpass the other groups in income attainment. These results confirm that status attainment is a product of complex interactions of these factors, but the strongest correlation is between SES and aspirations and attainment.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for its children. Any other idea for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.” – John Dewey (1907 p.19)*

Society is shaped by the quality of schooling available to its citizens. In turn, citizens' contributions to society are a direct reflection of the quality of their learning and experience in the world. Individuals who bring a high educational attainment to the workplace can generally expect to be rewarded with high-status, high-paying careers. Knowledge and understanding of the historical context and governmental processes that regulate and control a society are also paramount to participation in a democracy (Dornbusch, Glasgow and Lin 1996). In a key manner, the quality and extent of a population's education has a direct effect upon significant future personal and societal outcomes in the meritocratic world of the United States, and other industrialized countries where educational credentials act as entrée to higher paying career fields (Brooks 2000; Dornbusch et al. 1996). Sociologists have long claimed that the education level of an individual is one of the most accurate predictors of economic and physical well being over the life span. A U.S. Census Bureau report (Day and Newburger 2002) stresses the value of education: High school dropouts have the lowest expected lifetime

earnings, professional degree holders, the highest. Simply stated, people with more education are wealthier, healthier and longer-lived than less well educated people. These differences are the starting point of the status hierarchies that structure social stratification within society.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Americans embrace the myth of equality in education. Compulsory free education with a generally common curriculum is available to all American children between certain ages — usually between 6- and 16- years of age in most states. Hypothetically, the availability of a free education for all removes the economic sources of inequality of educational opportunity (Coleman 1968). In reality, public school funding varies widely across the country and can differ from school to school within cities or school districts. According to Coleman (1968), the assumption of equal exposure by to a common curriculum places a great deal of responsibility for achievement upon individuals: children and their parents, rather than schools. This assumption permits society to maintain the uniquely American illusion of a *classless* society, while surreptitiously blaming individuals for failures precipitated by inbuilt structural barriers to success. Attitudes toward the poor are considerably more negative than attitudes toward the middle class (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson and Tagler 2001). Additionally, the United States has become more conservative in the last decade. Conservatives tend to long to preserve the status quo, assuring that higher SES groups will continue to thrive. By blaming the poor for their inadequacies and viewing their traits as negative and self-inflicted, affluent

individuals weaken the threats the poor present to an economic system that is advantageous to the affluent (Cozzarelli et al. 2001).

Schooling acts as the primary “sorting machine” for American society (Spring 1976). It is the fundamental institution responsible for status hierarchies and the creation of social inequality in the United States, as explained above. Society consistently rewards those with excellent credentials. The pathway to superior credentials is a complex mix of family factors, educational performance and the influence of significant others in the community (Collins 1979). Those members with the most resources, especially the support of family and significant others, fare better even at the beginning of the sorting process of public education.

Because education is vital to the well being of a society and its individuals, it is perpetually a subject of public discussion and planning. How do we best prepare the next generation to meet the demands of the future? How can we help students succeed? How do we impart important societal values? These are essential questions for the members of society to ponder. The family imparts its values to the next generation through an intricate system of resource allocation, rewards, standards and ideals. An outstanding education is valued as a precious asset in most upper and middle class families. While wealthy families have always had access to the best schools and learning experiences for their children (Veblen 1934), even middle class families, who are often not able to leave large inheritances, see a good education as a strong foundation for life and a valuable legacy to leave their children (Dornbusch et al. 1996). First-rate credentials pave the way for prestigious, high-paying careers while individuals with a high school diploma or less will flounder (Wheelock 1992).

Unfortunately, poor families, while realizing that their children need an education to get ahead, often cannot assist them in getting quality schooling. The reasons for this are individual and structural, including a lack of knowledge about educational standards and options, meager or nonexistent social networks to advocate for their children, lack of time or transportation to meet with teachers, or even a lack of concern due to the stresses of poverty (George 1992). Single parenthood, a frequent condition in indigent families, is thought to contribute to adverse educational outcomes, such as elevated rates of school dropout and lower achievement (Buchmann and Hannum 2001). The children of welfare recipients, particularly single mothers, fare worst of all because they have significantly lower educational attainment than other groups (Ku 2001). In addition to the individual deficiencies that poor families experience, structural barriers can contribute to educational problems. These families frequently live in poverty-stricken areas where the local school districts lack funding and resources to provide even the most basic level of comfort and instruction to students (Buchmann and Hannum 2001).

Dissimilarity in funding translates to great differences in educational resources available to schools. Most schools are funded by local property taxes – a sensitive political issue – and funding equity in education is unlikely without alternative funding approaches (Karp 1998). Wealthier schools — those with higher SES students — generally receive an abundance of resources (Kozol 1991). If they do not, in the face of budget cuts, parents will frequently provide better resources to their children's school through direct donations, gifts or fundraising activities. Schools with lower SES enrollments, in principle, receive comparable resources, but often these resources are only comparable on the surface: Poorer schools are often in undesirable neighborhoods,

maintenance is neglected, textbooks are old or inadequate, supplies are scarce or nonexistent, and teachers are less experienced than in wealthier schools. The result is an inhospitable learning environment. Impoverished parents are less able to make contributions to augment their children's school environments and less able to provide an enriched atmosphere at home.

As a final blow to families in poverty, there are fewer social resources available to them, such as mentors, role models and significant others who can encourage and support their children's aspirations. In studies of children living in public housing facilities, Dubrow and Garbarino (1989) found that housing project children are often physically and socially isolated in dangerous neighborhoods. Because of this isolation, they fail to learn to interact adequately with peers and teachers, and to develop common social skills. This seclusion results in negative academic consequences. Ineffectual social skills contribute to the low quality of education for disadvantaged children (DeMarrais and LeCompte 1995). Teachers tend to have lower expectations for lower SES students, seating them farther away, criticizing them more frequently, calling on them less often and limiting the number and quality of interactions with them (Schmitz 1992).

#### *Ability Grouping, Tracking and the Hidden Curriculum*

Other significant structural barriers to educational attainment are ability grouping, tracking and the hidden curriculum. These structural factors are important, often controversial, elements to consider in any examination of educational attainment because they are pervasive and sometimes subtle. *Ability grouping* has been used for years as a classroom management tool at the elementary level, allowing teachers to work effectively with students of varying abilities in individual classrooms. Students are assigned to

different instructional groups for specific subjects, such as reading or math, according to their individual capabilities at a given grade level. They rejoin the class for other instruction. Teachers have grouped children by ability for many years to facilitate the individual differences in learning skills within classes. Sometimes there are attempts to disguise this fact by the use of euphemistic group names (such as “Bluebirds” or “Cardinals” for reading groups, for instance). Some researchers argue that ability grouping results in labels that persist over a child’s lifetime, while others insist that it facilitates accommodation of a variety of learning styles in a classroom (Sleeter and Grant 1998). Lower ability students often are inattentive, have disruptive behavior problems, and require stricter management than higher ability groups. It is more difficult to learn in these groups. Placement in low-ability groups therefore becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for many students (Eder 1981).

Tracking is a method by which high school students are channeled into different educational experiences or levels, often based upon ability, but frequently based upon socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender or physical and/or emotional conditions (Jones, Vanfossen and Ensminger 1995). Children are usually aware of the differences between groups and often use this information to construct social hierarchies within schools, creating inequalities where none existed before (Lockwood 1996). Tracking is a controversial practice because school differences have effects upon track placement. Even schools within a district can vary greatly in the educational opportunities available to students in a specified track and in the flexibility of assignment to tracks (Hallinan 1994). Additionally, Hallinan notes that there is enormous variance in track characteristics, assignment criteria, instruction, and determinants of achievement from

school to school within a given track. Minority and female students assigned to honors classes in one school could be assigned to a lower track in another. Tracking advantages the already privileged; Native American, Hispanic, African American and low-income students are more than twice as likely to be enrolled in remedial math courses where a majority of the teachers have been teaching for less than five years (Wheelock 1992). Tracking is the genesis of social inequality (Spring 1976).

There is abundant evidence that once tracked, children are trapped in a particular group for their entire public school interlude (George 1992; Lockwood 1996), which may significantly affect their future ability to gain admittance to colleges and certain career paths. Although choice in tracks may be self-selected during high school and college years, elementary students are tracked from the beginning of their educational careers, limiting future options for self-selection of courses and tracks. School may be inclusive or exclusive in track placement (Jones et al. 1995). Inclusive schools have a great variety of educational opportunities available to most of the students. Inclusive school students often aspire to higher levels of education because they are encouraged to do so. Exclusive schools are more determinant with student tracks and frequently place students in tracks according to SES, race, gender, or perceived achievement or ability. In some tracking programs, disadvantaged children are placed together in special groups, ostensibly for special assistance, but frequently because they do not exhibit the social skills to blend in with the majority students (Schmitz 1992). There they are further stigmatized and estranged by this special assistance. Records travel with children throughout their elementary tenure, and anecdotal evidence exists that teachers informally share information about students' abilities and performance in past years, thereby reinforcing a

child's permanent place in the tracking system. Tracks appear to be static in nature, and to persist over time. Tracking has lasting effects upon children: Once tracked, they are rarely re-tracked.

The term *hidden curriculum* refers to two related processes, according to Mickelson and Smith (1996). First, children's educational progression and the substance of their learning differ by race, gender and social status. These differences then help reproduce inequality based on race, gender and class in American society (p. 505). The hidden curriculum consists of the "implicit messages given to students about differential power and social evaluation as they learn how to work in schools, what kinds of knowledge exist, which kinds are valued by whom, and how students are valued in their own right." (DeMarrais and LeCompte 1995:207). In this way, children are socialized into future workplace roles by their experiences in school, where they learn skills that will help them cope. From early on they are taught the importance of such skills as accepting authority, learning to wait, learning to listen and follow directions, and to be obedient, clean, orderly, neat and prompt (Anyon 1990).

#### *The Importance of Teacher Expectations*

There are many ways in which teachers communicate their expectations of their students. Classroom discussions can communicate high expectations by actively involving students, building on earlier learning or experience with myriad approaches, and teaching students to think critically (Wheelock 1992). Everything children encounter in a school day, according to Wheelock (1992) has an impact upon their perceptions of expectations: from direct interactions with teachers and school personnel to classroom assignments, praise from teachers, and even embellishments such as posters and artwork.

Teachers are high-status sources to students. When teachers present positive assessments of student work, students are more likely to volunteer responses than those who have not received positive assessments (Cohen and Lotan 1997). Students who are perceived as having low ability by teachers often grow to expect less of themselves.

Teachers' expectations, career aspirations and job satisfaction needs can influence the continuance of tracking systems in some schools. Many teachers perceive high-ability students and prestigious high-level classes as more desirable, resulting in the tracking of teachers along with students (Finley 1984). Teachers who are tracked to the lower level classes within a school or district must have a great deal of passion for teaching in order to continue because their frustrations can be much higher than higher track teachers experience. Teacher expectations for students are critical to student educational accomplishment (Alexander, Entwisle and Thompson 1987), and there is evidence that teacher expectation fluctuates considerably in relation to group label and placement (Wheelock 1992). Teachers' expectations shape the culture of schools. Teachers of low-track students often have low expectations of their students, which affirm students' perception that they are incapable of academic success (Sleeter and Grant 1998).

*Race.* In many instances, lower family socioeconomic status negatively affects achievement and teacher expectations, particularly for African American male students (Rosignano 1998). Young African American males do not tend to receive approval for their academic work, even from African American teachers (Grant 2001). In many cases, it appears that they are actively discouraged to excel in school. In such antagonistic surroundings, they become alienated from school and ultimately from mainstream

society. This results in a higher than average dropout rate which effectively sentences them to low status positions (Grant 2001).

*Gender.* Gender is also a strong determinant of track placement. Although children do come to school as gendered beings, their experiences and the expectations of teachers and significant others shapes and structures their aspirations for themselves. Working-class girls are channeled or self-selected into clerical courses, even when they are capable of more demanding academic courses, because these courses offer opportunities for active participation in skill acquisition and relieve some of the boredom of lower level track courses (Gaskell 1985). Girls see these classes as helpful because they have learned that clerical work may be their lot in life. This choice reflects the cumulative results of low teacher and societal expectations for them. Schools are not the only trackers: Students who have experienced low expectations of teachers and significant others over a lifetime tend not to challenge themselves by the time they reach high school.

### *Sociological Theory*

Several theoretical paradigms, including structural functionalism, status attainment theory, conflict theory and critical theory, may help to explain the static nature of status hierarchies in American public schools. For Veblen (1934), the division between working and leisure class is one of occupation and interest. Lower classes must occupy themselves with manual labor while the upper classes are free to indulge in loftier pursuits. Veblen (p. 273-4) explains that in the lowest and highest brackets of the socio-economic hierarchy occupational activities are the most rigidly structured. Lower classes that perform the unpleasant but necessary jobs in a society are rarely well educated for

many excellent reasons. The pursuit of higher education in the lower class has customarily been seen as a waste of effort on the part of the education system and the learner. Higher education takes time and effort that detracts from earning a living. It also has the effect of increasing desire for unattainable leisure activities and wealth, which is undesirable in a worker who must ultimately accept subsistence wages. Lower class parents seldom aspire to raise children too many levels above themselves for fear of them becoming alienated from the family (Veblen 1934:274). Similarly, upper class families encourage children to pursue loftier employment goals unrelated to industrial production. They are encouraged to maintain the high standards of their families in leisure and employment (Veblen 1934:6). Kohn (1969:200) notes that “One implication of class differences in values and orientation is that they contribute to the perpetuation of inequality. Whether consciously or not, parents tend to impart to their children lessons derived from the conditions of life of their own social class and thus help prepare their children for a similar class position.” Veblen (p. 6) asserts that the only noble pursuits acceptable to the upper class are “war, politics, sports, learning and the priestly office.” In the meritocratic society of twenty-first century America, perpetuation of wealth depends almost entirely upon university credentials. Educational practices, such as tracking, assure that the path to these institutions is, in reality, quite narrow. From Veblen’s perspective then, examination of educational pathways is a justifiable endeavor.

The functionalist approach to status hierarchies also helps to explain some aspects of educational attainment and occupational status. Structural functionalism is a emphasizes maintenance of the social order. Functionalism characterizes society as organic: all elements work together to produce and maintain stability (Ruane and Cerulo

2000). Public education serves the function of preparing the future workforce for production (Dornbush et al. 1996). In the current technology economy there are tremendous demands for highly educated, technology-trained professionals; there are also high demands for workers who do the “dirty work,” in support the labor done by professional and white-collar workers. Lower-level workers are needed to work in factories, stores, restaurants, as custodians, truck drivers, and as caretakers for children, the disabled and the elderly, to name just a few. All of these activities are required in a complex society. In order to produce a diverse workforce, schools must distinguish between students who will fulfill the high-level positions and those who are less capable. The creation of status hierarchies is simply a by-product of the needs of society, and reflects its structure. On a larger scale, nations in industrialized countries structure the educational policy based upon the future workforce needs of prominent employers in the state (Buchmann and Hannum 2001).

According to Ridgeway and Walker (1995), status hierarchies serve to give necessary structure to individual and group decision-making processes. This structure depends upon rewarding the most competent members of a group with higher status, which results in higher efficacy to promote the groups’ goals. From a functionalist perspective, this is supportive of the goals of society. Stability increases because while all students have an opportunity to learn and develop vital leadership skills, only the exceptional students will acquire the skills to become the most productive members of society (Morrow and Torres 1995).

Blau and Duncan (1967) proposed a social psychological theory of status attainment in which individuals’ educational attainment and future job prospects are

significantly influenced by their family's socioeconomic status. According to the Blau and Duncan basic status attainment model, educational attainment is first influenced by a child's family status (Kerckhoff 1995). In turn, an individual's ultimate status is influenced by multiple factors including educational attainment, first job and family status. The refinement of Blau and Duncan's theory is the Wisconsin Model (Sewell et al. 1969), presented in Appendix A, which suggests the importance of significant others' expectations on children's early educational achievement. Significant others are people in the child's social sphere, such as friends, extended family, teachers, school administrators and neighbors, who are in a position to exert positive stimulus upon the child. They serve as role models and mentors and contribute to the overall social capital, a principal resource in educational and occupational success. The influence of significant others is shaped by the structure and socioeconomic status of origin of the family and by the scholastic ability and performance of the child. The Wisconsin Model suggests that a complex interaction of family socioeconomic status, early academic performance, and the encouragement of significant others interact with the academic and vocational aspirations of students (Kerckhoff 1995). Numerous studies have found clear relationships between parents' educational and occupational aspirations for their children and the children's aspirations for themselves (Hanson 1994; Wilson and Wilson 1992; Trusty 1998). Families with higher SES are able to offer more resources to their children to assure their success in school. Better resources, in the form of above-average schools, may offer superior support from significant others. Higher SES families have access to richer social networks, which may also raise their children's levels of expectation. A consistent criticism of the Wisconsin Model is that it focuses too narrowly on class, ignoring race and

gender. It effectively explains the educational attainment of White males while overlooking differences in attainment in African Americans and White women (Alexander and Eckland 1974; McClendon 1976).

Conflict theory suggests that education does indeed have a function in society and that function is to transmit and perpetuate inequality (Ruane and Cerulo 2000). Early track placement presents potentially lifelong implications for alienation between children of different tracks, who must eventually interact socially and professionally in the school and in the workplace (Archibald 1976; Berger, Cohen and Zelditch 1972). While societies may become stratified based on class, gender, or race/ethnicity, occupational stratification begins as early as a child's entry into school (Collins 1961). Bowles and Gintis (1976) contend that schools essentially reproduce social class stratification by affording students from higher status families more opportunities and resources. This abundance helps the privileged maintain their status in society. In this manner, separation of children into tracks provides the nucleus for stratification within classrooms and schools and later in other life activities. This separation can become a factor in wider scale conflict within society, such as in the workplace, where low status workers may be hostile toward higher status workers perceived to have gained more from beneficial social networks than from hard work (Archibald 1976).

In public schools, students from enriched home backgrounds with high socioeconomic status (SES) are perceived by teachers to be more educationally gifted; these students are often more desirable to teachers than those who are low-track students (Finley 1984). Even high-track low achievers gain more social support to attain their educational goals than low-track high achievers. In this manner, the perpetuation of

educational tracks functions to advantage the upper classes, while keeping the lower classes available for eventual lower level labor. Because the parents of upper class children believe their children to be worthy of high-track placement, they are active advocates for high-track placement, and fight tenaciously to keep them there even when their achievement warrants a lower-track placement (Yonezawa and Oakes 1999). In many cases, high-SES, low achievers are given more opportunities to catch up because their families can afford tutors and other enrichments.

The first grade is considered a critical period in any child's education and Entwisle and Alexander (1993) propose that this period is the beginning of American educational stratification. Because poor children often enter school less prepared than children from upper- or middle-class families, they are frequently stratified into the lower tracks. There appears to be a strong relationship between family factors such as SES, race, ethnicity and marital status, and children's achievement and later educational attainment (Entwisle and Alexander 1993; Dornbush et al. 1996; Looker and Pineo 1983). In addition, family expectations and preparation prior to and during children's schooling can affect the success of children socially and educationally.

Finally, critical theory is concerned with power rather than structure, especially the effect of authoritarian leadership in the family and society. Critical theory explains education as part of a "state-organized process of bureaucratization and rationalization" (Morrow and Torres 1995:247). Authoritarian factions in society battle with democratic groups over the management of education. The goal of democratic educators and families is to develop self-mastery in children, and to foster participation, creativity, curiosity and originality. Authoritarians frequently decry the need to return to the basics in education.

This *return to the basics* has been thought by some as a coded message to spend less on education, according to Slater (1998). Authoritarians view the world as hierarchical, ranked by social or socioeconomic status and want children to learn — and keep — their *place* in society (Slater 1998). *Keeping place* suggests that maintaining the status quo of societal inequality is a desired goal.

The Wisconsin Model (Sewell et al. 1969) suggests a straightforward relationship of family SES, family structure, and ability of the child with interpersonal exchanges with significant others. Inherent factors in families can have a remarkable effect on communication with friends, teachers, peers and school personnel, who in turn shape the degree of encouragement and support of children's educational performance and ambitions. When the Wisconsin Model was developed in the late sixties, the main area of interest was in predicting or explaining the attainment of White males; other groups were not closely examined. There was probably not a conscious limitation to only White males, but most of the available subjects in the universities and workplaces surveyed were majority males. Many subsequent studies have focused on various dynamic permutations of the attainment of other groups, as does this one.

#### *Research Question*

The Wisconsin Model (Sewell et al. 1969) is useful in explaining the educational and occupational attainment only of the majority: White men. It does not adequately describe the diverse pathways that women and minorities follow to their ultimate educational and occupational outcomes. These groups face challenges unlike those faced by White men in the United States. The Wisconsin Model does not address the possible effects of discrimination against women and minorities, or the significance of differing

societal expectations for women compared to men. The research questions for this thesis address these inadequacies in the Wisconsin Model: What is the relationship between inequality, expectations of significant others and students' educational and occupational attainment?

### *Hypotheses*

- *Hypothesis 1:* Family socioeconomic status, gender and race are related to the educational aspirations of eighth grade children.
- *Hypothesis 2:* There is a relationship between interpersonal interactions with school counselors and educational aspirations according to SES, gender and race of eighth grade students.
- *Hypothesis 3:* There is a relationship between interpersonal interactions with teachers and educational aspirations according to SES, gender and race of eighth grade students.
- *Hypothesis 4:* Family socioeconomic status, gender and race are related to the educational attainment of students.
- *Hypothesis 5:* There is a relationship between interpersonal interactions with teachers and later educational attainment according to SES, gender and race of students.
- *Hypothesis 6:* There is a relationship between interpersonal interactions with school counselors and later educational attainment according to SES, gender and race of students.

- *Hypothesis 7: White males surpass all other groups in educational and occupational attainment.*

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

This paper employs secondary analysis of the *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988-2000* (NELS: 88/2000), a public use data file containing a nationally representative sample of 12,144 eighth-graders followed over a period of approximately twelve years. The study consists of student, parent, school administrator, and teacher surveys administered at two-year intervals by professional interviewers. NELS: 88/2000 was designed to study high school students. It uses the 1988 eighth grade cohort for a premeasure of achievement and status prior to entry into high school. Because it includes parent, administrator and teacher responses, NELS: 88/2000 is well suited to address student and parental aspirations, achievement, and attainment, as well as insight into the association between students and significant others in their lives, such as school counselors and teachers.

In four waves following the baseline data collection, students were examined in 1990 (tenth grade) and 1992 (twelfth grade). They were interviewed again in 1994, when many had graduated from high school and begun postsecondary education or entered the workforce and finally in 2000, when most were approximately 26 years of age. After high school graduation –1992 for most, and again in 1994, when many had begun postsecondary education, academic transcript results were added. In 2000, the respondents were queried about social issues, the labor market, job training, marriage and

family, and community integration. The 2000 wave also included results of post-secondary education, achievement and occupational attainment. As of the NELS: 88/2000 follow-up, most participants had evolved into their adult roles as workers, parents and community members.

Over 11,000 participants who responded to the baseline questionnaire and the 2000 follow-up are included in this analysis, regardless of their participation in the 1990, 1992 or 1994 waves. Variables include family socioeconomic status, race, and gender, as well as self-reported measures of student and parental educational aspirations in the 1988 baseline data and measures of educational and occupational attainment in the 2000 wave. Family socioeconomic status is a composite variable constructed from selected variables of the parent questionnaire: father and mother's education level, occupation and family income. In cases where the parent data were not explicit or were ambiguous, SES was inferred from the student data, including responses about the presence of household items that are indicative of socioeconomic status, such as amount of living space, number of people, appliances, vehicles and availability of newspapers and books in the home. The resulting range for SES is -2.97 through +2.56. This SES composite range represents a continuous measure of family socioeconomic status, from very lowest SES (-2.97) to very highest SES (+2.56).

The variable race is divided into six categories: Native American, Asian and Pacific Islanders, African American, White, Hispanic and Multi-Racial. This variable was recoded in the fourth wave in order to include the multi-racial category choice. The fourth wave data for race are used because they reflect student composition more

accurately than the baseline data. Respondents who did not indicate a choice in this category are excluded from the analysis (n = 151).

In 1988, the students were asked, "How far do you think you will get in school?" While the resulting responses to this question were categorical in nature, they represent a hierarchy of responses, from "Won't finish high school," which is rated as "1," to "Higher schooling after college," which is rated as "6." Because of its hierarchical nature, this variable is considered an ordinal variable. Student reports of parental expectations are treated similarly. Non-respondents and otherwise missing information are excluded from analysis.

*Significant others* is defined in this analysis as school counselors and teachers. School counselors are representative of front-line school administrators in this paper, primarily because of the richness of the student responses in regard to their interpersonal interactions. Respondents were questioned about the quality and frequency of their interpersonal communication with counselors and teachers. These school personnel are in direct daily contact with students and have regular opportunities to affect students' educational aspirations and attainment.

Students in the 1988 baseline were questioned about the number of times they had contact with school counselors and teachers during the school year. Eight questions are taken into account for Hypothesis 2 and 3. These questions inquire if the student had talked to a school counselor or teacher about planning or getting information about high school programs, about jobs or careers after high school, to improve academic work, to select courses, about things studied in class, or about discipline or personal problems. Selection of these self-report items is based upon the sociological axiom of W. I. Thomas

(1928: 572), “If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

Responses are coded 0 = no, 1 = yes. Positive responses for each question are summed and represent the measure of counselor or teacher interactions.

Educational attainment, considered in Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6, is measured with two variables: the type of high school diploma received as of 2000, and the highest post-secondary education degree attained as of 2000. Hypothesis 4 relates to family SES, gender, race and educational attainment, while Hypotheses 5 and 6 evaluate these variables in conjunction with the counselor and teacher indexes.

Hypothesis 7 considers levels of educational attainment by race and gender, using the same two variables as above: the type of high school diploma received as of 2000, and the highest post-secondary education degree attained as of 2000. The variable for receipt of high school degree as of 2000 is recoded and is considered as a nominal measure, where 0 = no high school degree and 1 = has a high school degree. Hypothesis 7 also assesses occupational attainment of groups by gender and race. Germane measures of occupational attainment include occupational code, yearly earnings (a composite computed from the earnings rate period and income in 2000), and perceived job autonomy (four categories ranging from low = 1 to high = 4). Occupational codes have been recoded into hierarchical categories of major occupational groups (Buckley 2000) ordered from 1 = service occupations to 10 = professional specialty and technical occupations. The explanation of these occupational categories is in Appendix B. Respondents are grouped into traditionally high- and low-paying occupations, with the higher numbered categories representing higher-paying positions. Military personnel were excluded from analysis because rank was not explicit in the survey data and because

few respondents indicated the Military as a career field ( $n = 1$ ). Since only one of the 10,950 respondents was unemployed, that category was excluded from the analysis. All respondents worked at least part time by the year 2000. One respondent indicated that she was a homemaker and is included in the service category. In spite of receiving no direct monetary compensation, homemaker duties are appropriate in this group because they are service oriented. Actors and actresses are also coded as service workers because they most closely correspond to the service paradigm.

Hypothesis 7 required additional measures of occupational attainment. Buckley (2000) indicates that the hierarchical nature of occupational codes is based in part upon the ability to work autonomously, with highest levels of autonomy in professional and executive positions. NELS 88:2000 data offer information about job autonomy, ranked from lowest = 1 ("Someone else decides what and how I do my job.") to highest = 4 ("I am basically my own boss."). Hypothesis 7 predicts that White males will surpass other groups in level of job autonomy.

Since an evaluation of earned income is appropriate for this Hypothesis 7, a composite variable has been constructed to measure salary. NELS 88:2000 contain data about respondents' earnings rate and salary in two separate variables. According to the NELS electronic code book, these two variables must be considered together. Information was gathered by telephone interviewers and recorded exactly as reported by the respondent. Respondents were asked, "For your most recent job, about how much do you earn before taxes and other deductions?" These amounts were noted together with the stated earnings rate: hourly, weekly, twice monthly, monthly or annually. To construct the new salary variable, a 40 hour work week and 52 work weeks per year are

assumed in order to present an approximate annual salary for full time workers. Earnings rate categories are recoded as follows: hourly = 2080, weekly = 52, twice monthly = 26, monthly = 12, and annually = 1. The new variable, salary, is the product of the multiplication of earnings by earnings rate. Although the NELS 88:2000 codebook recommends analyzing these variables together, no specific instructions are given. This conversion is thought to be reasonable under the circumstances.

The variables used in this analysis are as follows: SES, race, gender, and educational aspirations. An index of teacher and counselor interpersonal contact is included in Hypothesis 2 and 3; this index consists of a summation of type and number of interactions that students have with these significant others. For Hypothesis 5, 6 and 7, educational attainment is considered in two variables: High school graduation and level of post secondary education as of the year 2000. Hypothesis 7 includes job autonomy, occupational code and earning rate.

Statistical analyses include descriptive statistics about the sample composition, Pearson correlations to discover whether relationships exist between SES, race, gender and student aspiration and Pearson correlations, split by race and gender, between SES aspiration and teacher or school counselor interactions. Educational attainment for high school and post secondary schooling is analyzed with Chi Square, as is occupational category and job autonomy. These are nominal variables and Chi Square is the appropriate statistical tool. Earnings are analyzed with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), a statistical test used when the dependent variable is a ratio or interval, such as income.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Table 1 contains characteristics of the sample. Responses of participants in both the 1988 baseline and the 2000 follow-up questionnaires were used in the analysis. The sample was composed with a disproportionate number of White students (68.9%), while Blacks comprise only about 8.4%, underrepresented according to their actual numbers in the population. Hispanics are overrepresented and comprise 13.1% of the sample. Other group memberships were very small, with only 0.9% Native Americans and 2.8% Asians. A small number of respondents designated themselves as multi-racial.

TABLE 1. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENT
Male	5349	47.0
Female	6035	53.0
TOTAL	11384	100.0

RACE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Native American	102	.9
Asian	586	5.1
African American	956	8.4
White	7668	67.4
Hispanic	1486	13.1
Multi-Racial	324	2.8
Not Indicated	262	2.3
TOTAL	11384	100.0

### *Educational Aspirations*

Table 2 shows the results for Hypothesis 1, which asserts that Family SES, race and gender are related to children's educational aspirations. Because this hypothesis suggests an association rather than a cause and effect relationship, two-tailed Pearson correlations were used in this analysis, with an alpha level of .05. The association between SES, gender and race, and children's educational aspirations, indicate a statistically significant, positive relationship between SES and educational aspirations of eighth graders of all racial groups. Family expectations are strong predictors of the aspirations male children of all races have for themselves, and they closely coincide with the aspirations of both parents. Even when the racial component is ignored, the correlation between SES and educational aspirations remains high. At the age of 26, males still display a strong correlation between family of origin SES and educational aspiration. This is especially true for White males, as predicted by the Wisconsin Model.

This correlation is also present in female eighth graders of all races. While the range of r-values is slightly different for females, they are still consistent with the findings for males. There is a slight, but significant, correlation for Native American females. White females' results were consistent with White males. By the 2000 data collection, females' educational aspirations had retained their strong correlation to family of origin SES. Family SES is a strong component of children's aspirations and expectation of educational attainment, as revealed by the literature. This hypothesis is supported by the data.

TABLE 2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SES, GENDER, RACE, AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	HOW FAR IN SCHOOL?	HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION EXPECTED
Male, Native American	.29*	.51*
Male, Asian	.32*	.33*
Male, African American	.39*	.39*
Male, White	.48*	.49*
Male, Hispanic	.28*	.31*
Male, Multi-Racial	.41*	.41*
Female, Native American	.41*	.49*
Female, Asian	.39*	.32*
Female, African American	.28*	.36*
Female, White	.46*	.46*
Female, Hispanic	.34*	.31*
Female, Multi-Racial	.26*	.30*

\*p < .05

Table 3 shows the results of a Pearson correlation run on the variables, SES, Gender and Aspirations with the variable, Race removed. This correlation suggests that gender is not correlated to aspirations, which would mean that SES is the most highly correlated factor with the educational aspirations of eighth graders.

TABLE 3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SES, GENDER, AND ASPIRATION

	SES	GENDER	ASPIRATION
SES	1.00	-.05	.42*
GENDER		1.00	.05
ASPIRATION			1.00

\*p < .05

Table 4 shows the results of Pearson correlations between SES, gender and race and eighth grader's perceptions of parental educational aspirations. From this data, it appears

that there is a moderate, positive relationship between perceived parental aspirations and SES, gender and race for most groups. Interestingly, Native American males display a negative—but non-significant—correlation between SES and parents’ aspirations for them. These findings are not unexpected because there are relatively few Native Americans included in the study (n=39 males) and SES for this group is generally low. These males could be influenced more by other people, such as peers or other adults, or could be explained by another unknown factor, such as their observations of high unemployment rates in the community or their perception of realistic opportunities. NELS 88:2000 is limited in its ability to explain this anomaly. Female Native Americans (n = 46) display a significant moderate correlation between SES and fathers’ aspirations, but not for mothers’ aspirations. Conversely, for Multi-Racial females, there is a mild correlation between SES and mother’s aspirations, but not for father’s aspirations. Again, the data are inadequate to address this inconsistency.

TABLE 4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SES, GENDER, RACE, AND PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	HOW FAR PARENTS THINK STUDENT WILL GO IN SCHOOL	HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION PARENTS EXPECT
Male, Native American	.13	.05
Male, Asian	.24*	.20*
Male, African American	.19*	.13*
Male, White	.33*	.31*
Male, Hispanic	.15*	.12*
Male, Multi-Racial	.20*	.18*
Female, Native American	.30*	.25*
Female, Asian	.28*	.26*
Female, African American	.12*	.17*
Female, White	.25*	.29*
Female, Hispanic	.12*	.14*
Female, Multi-Racial	.04	.16*

\*p < .05

Hypotheses 2 and 3 address the relationship between the interpersonal interactions of *significant others* (counselors and teachers) upon the educational aspirations of eighth graders. Table 5 exhibits the results of correlations between student SES, gender and race and counselors and teachers. Hypothesis 2 stated that there is a relationship between interpersonal interactions with school counselors and student educational aspirations according to SES gender and race of students. Counselors appear to have little connection to educational aspirations for most groups, male or female, except for African American males. There is a negative correlation between relationships with counselors and the aspirations of African American males. Counselors are not daily actors in the lives of most eighth graders. Students must make a special effort to see them, or are sent to see them because of problems at school – academic, personal or disciplinary, which would explain the negative relationship between African American males and school counselors. These results lend support to Grant (2001) and Roscigno (1998) in finding negative support for African American males in schools.

TABLE 5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT SES, GENDER, RACE, AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	COUNSELOR INDEX	HOW FAR IN SCHOOL?
Male, Native American	-.05	.29*
Male, Asian	-.11	.33*
Male, African American	-.12*	.39*
Male, White	-.05*	.48*
Male, Hispanic	-.09*	.28*
Male, Multi-Racial	-.05	.42*
Female, Native American	-.05	.41*
Female, Asian	.03	.39*
Female, African American	-.09*	.28*
Female, White	-.03*	.46*
Female, Hispanic	-.04*	.38*
Female, Multi-Racial	.01	.26*

\*p < .05

There is some evidence to support the impact of interactions with teachers on the educational aspirations of some groups of eighth graders. According to Hypothesis 3, there is a relationship between teachers' interaction and the aspirations; they should differ by SES, race and gender of the students. Table 6 shows the positive, significant results of Pearson correlations between teacher interpersonal interactions and the aspirations of White and Hispanic males, and African American, White, Hispanic and Multi-Racial females. There are small correlations of SES, gender, and race with the teacher index for African American and White females. Again there is an anomaly in the correlations for African American males: there is a negative – although not statistically significant – relationship between SES and the teacher index for this group. The Wisconsin Model (Sewell et al. 1969) suggests that the quality of interpersonal interactions with significant others (such as teachers and counselors) will have a positive effect upon educational

aspirations. This does not seem to be true for African American males, according to this sample, where the relationship to these significant others has a negative effect. This finding gives further support to Grant's (2001) and Roscigno's (1998) assertion of pervasive discouragement of African American males. Teacher interaction is greater with females and White males than with most other groups, as predicted. Hypothesis 3 is supported by the data.

TABLE 6. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT SES, GENDER, RACE, AND TEACHERS INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	TEACHER INDEX	HOW FAR IN SCHOOL?
Male, Native American	.07	.00
Male, Asian	-.06	.10
Male, African American	-.16*	-.04
Male, White	.04*	.13*
Male, Hispanic	.09*	.11*
Male, Multi-Racial	-.06	.01
Female, Native American	-.04	.12
Female, Asian	-.02	.09
Female, African American	-.02	.09*
Female, White	.05*	.11*
Female, Hispanic	-.03	.14*
Female, Multi-Racial	-.01	.19*

\*p < .05

#### *Educational Attainment*

Hypothesis 4 predicts a relationship between family SES, gender and race and educational attainment of students. There is a consistent positive correlation for most groups, lending support for Hypothesis 4. Table 7 shows that SES is an important factor in whether or not students finish high school. This is true for all groups except Asians. As a group, there appears to be no relationship between Asians' SES and high school educational attainment. Upon closer examination of the data, Asians of both sexes appear

to have higher high school graduation rates than other groups, suggesting that another dynamic influences this group.

There is a positive association between SES of most other groups and completion of higher levels of post secondary education, although another anomaly exists in the post secondary educational attainment of both male and female Native Americans, possibly because of their low participation in the survey.

TABLE 7. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SES, GENDER, RACE, AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE AS OF 2000	HIGHEST POST SECONDARY DEGREE AS OF 2000
Male, Native American	.44*	.10
Male, Asian	.08	.24*
Male, African American	.22*	.26*
Male, White	.20*	.37*
Male, Hispanic	.19*	.30*
Male, Multi-Racial	.32*	.25*
Female, Native American	.28*	.27
Female, Asian	.02	.32*
Female, African American	.18*	.35*
Female, White	.22*	.38*
Female, Hispanic	.25*	.26*
Female, Multi-Racial	.18*	.18*

\*p < .05

Hypotheses 5 and 6 address the relationship between interpersonal interactions with counselors and teachers on students' educational attainment. According to the Wisconsin Model (Sewell et al. 1969), SES should be positively correlated with support of significant others and educational attainment. Results for Hypothesis 5, which maintains that there is a relationship between interactions with school counselors and students' educational attainment, are shown in Table 8. Surprisingly, for males in all racial groups

there is a negative association between counselor interactions and high school graduation, refuting the model on this measure. Higher counselor contact could be an indication of discipline or behavior problems, rather than advice seeking or academic support from counselors by males. Females' correlations follow the same pattern, with the exception of Native American females, who exhibit a positive correlation with counselor interactions. Overall, this finding may be explained in the same manner as for Hypothesis 2:

Counselors appear to have a minor effect upon students because most students see counselors under special conditions (often upsetting circumstances for eighth graders), or must actively seek them out.

TABLE 8. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT SES, GENDER, RACE, AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS' INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	COUNSELOR INDEX	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE AS OF 2000	HIGHEST POST SECONDARY DEGREE AS OF 2000
Male, Native American	-.05	-.22	-.31
Male, Asian	-.11	-.01	-.03
Male, African American	-.12*	-.11*	-.01
Male, White	-.05*	-.03	-.05*
Male, Hispanic	-.09*	-.08*	-.04
Male, Multi-Racial	-.05	-.17*	-.10
Female, Native American	-.05	.22	-.09
Female, Asian	.03	-.13*	-.04
Female, African American	-.10*	-.12*	-.15*
Female, White	-.03	-.04*	-.06*
Female, Hispanic	-.04	-.09*	-.10*
Female, Multi-Racial	.01	-.06	.00

\*p < .05

As displayed in Table 9, the relationship stated in Hypothesis 6, between teacher interaction, SES, gender and race, and high school graduation, is consistent with other findings presented here: Higher SES White and Hispanic males are positively related to

interactions with their teachers, while African American males show a significant negative relationship with teacher interaction. The negative correlation with teacher interaction and male African Americans educational attainment further supports Grant's (2001) and Roscigno's (1998) contention of the active academic discouragement of this group. The relationship between teacher interaction and aspirations appears to have become a self-fulfilled prophecy of lower attainment for this group. White females are the only group whose high school attainment appears to be positively related to teacher interactions. A disproportionate number of teachers are White females, so respondents may view teachers as appropriate female role models. Once again, the predictions of the Wisconsin Model do not hold true for minority groups. According to these data, only White males and females reap the full benefits of quality interpersonal interactions with teachers.

TABLE 9. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT SES, GENDER, RACE, AND TEACHERS INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

SES BY GENDER AND RACE	TEACHER INDEX	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE AS OF 2000	HIGHEST POST SECONDARY DEGREE AS OF 2000
Male, Native American	.07	-.06	.02
Male, Asian	-.06	.01	-.07
Male, African American	-.13*	-.04	-.06
Male, White	.04*	.06*	.01
Male, Hispanic	.09*	-.01	.02
Male, Multi-Racial	-.06	-.03	-.15
Female, Native American	-.04	.20	-.10
Female, Asian	-.02	-.04	-.06
Female, African American	-.02	.02	-.00
Female, White	.05*	.05*	.02
Female, Hispanic	-.02	.03	-.00
Female, Multi-Racial	-.01	.08	-.04

\*p < .05

Hypothesis 7 states that White males will surpass all other groups in educational and occupational attainment. On this variable, the data file was filtered by participation in the initial data collection wave and the 2000 collection wave. Only participants who responded to both waves were included in the analysis. Crosstabs with Chi Square tests were run in order to compare the educational attainment of respondents. Chi Square is appropriate because of the nominal nature of the data (George and Mallery 2000).

Table 10 shows the results of the crosstab and chi square analysis for high school diploma attainment. Over 11,000 participants reported on their high school attainment in 2000, with 94.3% of the respondents either graduating from high school, or earning a GED by this time. There are no statistically significant associations between race, gender and high school attainment for these groups (Chi Square = 9.058,  $p > .05$ ). Native American and African American males and Asian, White, and multi-racial females had a slightly lower observed graduation rate than other groups. White males did display a slightly higher graduation rate than expected which lends some slight support to the notion that white males surpass all other groups, but this was not statistically significant.

TABLE 10. HIGH SCHOOL ATTAINMENT BY RACE AND GENDER

		GENDER OF RESPONDENT				TOTAL N
		MALE		FEMALE		
		N	Expected	N	Expected	
NO DIPLOMA	NATIVE AMERICAN	11	7.8	5	8.2	16
	ASIAN	6	4.4	3	4.6	9
	AFRICAN AMERICAN	49	50.7	55	53.3	104
	WHITE	170	160.9	160	169.1	330
	HISPANIC	78	91.6	110	96.4	188
	MULTI-RACIAL	16	14.6	14	15.4	30
	HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	NATIVE AMERICAN	44	46	53	51
	ASIAN	313	305.9	332	339.1	645
	AFRICAN AMERICAN	424	462.9	552	513.1	976
	WHITE	3682	3638.9	3990	4033.1	7672
	HISPANIC	680	697.7	791	773.3	1471
	MULTI-RACIAL	156	147.5	155	163.5	311
TOTAL		5629	5629	6220	6220	11849

Table 11 displays results for Crosstabs and Chi Square analysis for highest level of post secondary education by race and sex. Chi Square analysis revealed statistically significant associations between race, gender and those who earned Associate's (Chi Square = 13.89) and Master's degrees (Chi Square = 12.60). Analyses of other categories were not noteworthy. Interestingly, the most notable discrepancies occurred between White and African American males. White males exceeded other groups in all measures of post secondary educational attainment, while African American males revealed more disappointing results than would be expected. African American males again lag behind other groups in educational attainment at the post secondary level giving support to Grant's (2001) and Roscigno's (1998) assertion of institutionalized discouragement of

educational progress for this group. From this data, it appears that White males did go beyond other groups in educational attainment, but not significantly in most categories, with the exception of earned Associate's and Master's degrees.

TABLE 11. POST-SECONDARY ATTAINMENT BY RACE AND GENDER

		GENDER OF RESPONDENT			
		MALE		FEMALE	
	RACE	N	Expected	N	Expected
SOME PSE	N. AMER	19	21	23	21.0
	ASIAN	93	77.6	62	77.4
	AF-AMER	172	183.8	195	183.2
	WHITE	1115	1105.9	1093	1102.1
	HISPANIC	298	303.5	308	302.5
	MULTI	59	64.1	69	36.9
	TOTAL	1756	1756.0	1750	1750.0
CERT.	N. AMER	4	4.1	6	5.9
	ASIAN	11	12.6	20	18.4
	AF-AMER	39	49.5	83	72.5
	WHITE	249	233.2	326	341.8
	HISPANIC	62	68.5	107	10.5
	MULTI	17	14.2	18	20.8
	TOTAL	382	382.0	560	560.0
ASSOCIATE	N. AMER	4	4.1	5	4.9
	ASIAN	23	14.2	8	16.8
	AF-AMER	27	30.7	40	36.3
	WHITE	259	270.3	330	318.7
	HISPANIC	67	64.2	73	75.8
	MULTI	16	12.4	11	14.6
	TOTAL	396	396.0	467	467.0
BACHELOR	N. AMER	4	5.4	8	6.6
	ASIAN	149	154.4	194	188.6
	AF-AMER	86	99.5	135	121.5
	WHITE	1211	1184.6	1421	1147.4
	HISPANIC	114	117.9	148	144.1
	MULTI	27	29.3	38	35.7
	TOTAL	1591	1591.0	1944	1944.0
MASTER	N. AMER	1	.4	0	.6
	ASIAN	17	13.9	21	24.1
	AF-AMER	2	6.2	15	10.8
	WHITE	116	110.4	185	190.6
	HISPANIC	7	9.9	20	17.1
	MULTI	0	2.2	6	3.8
	TOTAL	143	143.0	247	247.0
Ph.D/PRO	N. AMER	—	—	—	—
	ASIAN	3	6.2	10	6.8
	AF-AMER	1	1.9	3	2.1
	WHITE	28	25.5	25	27.5
	HISPANIC	2	1.9	1	2.1
	MULTI	2	1.4	1	1.6
	TOTAL	37	37.0	40	40.0

### *Occupational Attainment*

Occupational attainment was analyzed in three separate steps: occupational code participation, job autonomy, and annual salary. Hypothesis 7 alleges that White males will exceed other groups in occupational attainment because of their privileged status in the United States, and in all analyses, they do indeed.

*Major occupational categories.* Crosstab analysis of the major occupational categories reveals more White males than expected in the higher-level categories, such as professional/specialty/technical (Chi Square = 25.14), executive/managerial, sales and precision production/craft. White males also appear to be over represented in the handlers/helpers/laborers category, which means that even low-ability White males are able to find jobs and earn a living whereas African American males are under-represented in this category. Conversely, the observed counts for African American males are lower than expected in all categories except service. Most categories in which discrepancies occur between males appear to be positive for White males and negative for most other groups. White and Hispanic women are over represented in the administrative support category, which is predicted by Gaskell's (1985) study which revealed that working-class high school girls were channeled into clerical classes. This evidence also supports the claim that White males enjoy the privileges of majority and are able to find and maintain jobs, even at lower occupational levels, more often than other social classes. These results are presented in Table 12.

TABLE 12. OCCUPATION CATEGORIES BY RACE AND GENDER

		GENDER OF RESPONDENT				
		RACE	MALE		FEMALE	
			N	Expected	N	Expected
SERVICE	N. AMER	7	5.9	7	8.1	
	ASIAN	27	20.8	22	28.2	
	AF-AMER	56	55.1	74	74.9	
	WHITE	363	386.4	549	525.6	
	HISPANIC	91	83.5	106	113.5	
	MULTI	25	17.4	16	23.6	
	TOTAL	569	569.0	774	774.0	
LABORERS	N. AMER	6	6.5	3	2.5	
	ASIAN	21	17.4	3	6.6	
	AF-AMER	94	97.2	40	36.8	
	WHITE	455	452.8	169	171.2	
	HISPANIC	102	101.6	38	38.4	
	MULTI	23	25.4	12	9.6	
	TOTAL	701	701.0	265	265.0	
TRANSPORT	N. AMER	4	3.7	0	.3	
	ASIAN	13	11.9	0	1.1	
	AF-AMER	36	39.4	7	3.6	
	WHITE	309	309.6	29	28.4	
	HISPANIC	83	77.9	2	7.1	
	MULTI	13	15.6	4	1.4	
	TOTAL	458	458.0	42	42.0	
CRAFT & REPAIR	N. AMER	14	13.5	3	3.5	
	ASIAN	11	16.7	10	4.3	
	AF-AMER	62	77.0	35	20.0	
	WHITE	527	513.4	120	13.6	
	HISPANIC	97	91.3	18	23.8	
	MULTI	19	18.3	4	4.8	
	TOTAL	730	730.0	190	190.0	
ADMIN	N. AMER	6	4.3	8	9.7	
	ASIAN	33	28.1	59	63.9	
	AF-AMER	67	63.0	139	143.0	
	WHITE	421	425.8	971	966.2	
	HISPANIC	108	115.6	270	262.4	
	MULTI	22	20.2	44	45.8	
	TOTAL	657	657.0	1491	1491.0	
SALES	N. AMER	3	2.0	1	2.0	
	ASIAN	23	23.5	23	22.5	
	AF-AMER	13	13.8	14	13.2	
	WHITE	145	140.8	131	135.2	
	HISPANIC	17	19.4	21	18.6	
	MULTI	0	1.5	3	1.5	
	TOTAL	201	201.0	193	193.0	
EXECUTIVE	N. AMER	7	8.2	12	10.8	
	ASIAN	53	53.6	71	70.4	
	AF-AMER	57	66.2	96	86.8	

	WHITE	615	590.3	750	774.7
	HISPANIC	126	137.1	191	179.9
	MULTI	22	24.6	35	32.4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>880.0</b>	<b>1155</b>	<b>1155.0</b>
Ph.D/PROF	N. AMER	3	8.5	18	12.5
	ASIAN	116	97.0	124	143.0
	AF-AMER	62	82.9	143	122.1
	WHITE	837	827.0	1209	1219.0
	HISPANIC	102	111.6	174	164.4
	MULTI	38	31.1	39	45.9
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1158</b>	<b>1158.0</b>	<b>1707</b>	<b>1707.0</b>

*Job autonomy.* Job autonomy is another chosen measure of occupational attainment.

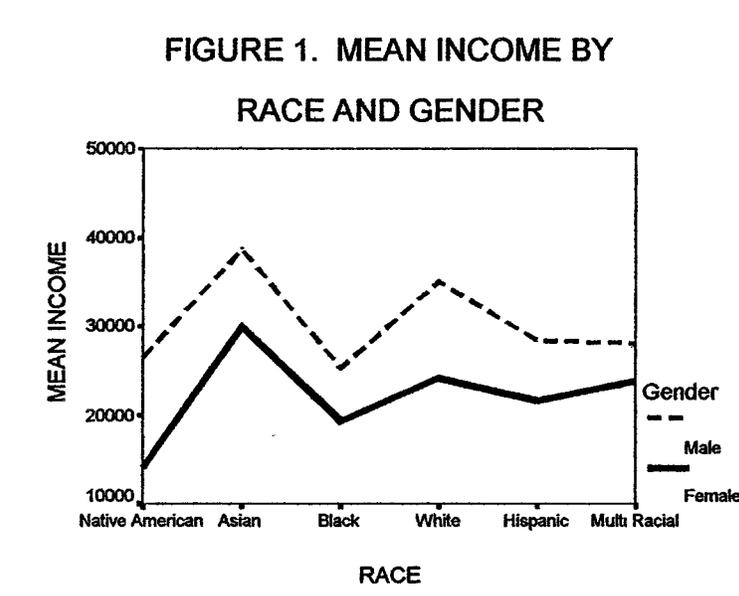
Independence in the work place increases at the upper echelons of occupational attainment. Subordinate workers are subject to more stringent controls upon their production than higher-ranking workers, ranging from virtually zero at the lowest levels to maximum autonomy at the highest. As Table 13 shows, White males show more autonomy, while results are mixed for most other groups. Women experience lower levels of autonomy overall. African American males surprisingly report slightly more often the highest level of independence, an inexplicable inconsistency given the limits of the survey data.

TABLE 13. PERCEIVED JOB AUTONOMY BY RACE AND GENDER

		GENDER OF RESPONDENT			
		MALE		FEMALE	
		RACE	N	Expected	N
Someone else decides what and how I do my job	N. AMER	7	7.1	10	9.9
	ASIAN	33	24.5	26	34.5
	AF-AMER	54	62.4	96	87.6
	WHITE	255	264.5	381	371.5
	HISPANIC	80	76.9	105	108.1
	MULTI	26	19.5	21	27.5
	TOTAL	455	455.0	639	639.0
Someone else decides what, I decide how	N. AMER	16	11.3	8	12.7
	ASIAN	101	94.5	100	106.5
	AF-AMER	96	118.0	155	133.0
	WHITE	924	911.0	1013	1026.0
	HISPANIC	204	208.3	239	234.7
	MULTI	45	42.8	46	48.2
	TOTAL	1386	1386.0	1561	1561.0
I have some freedom in deciding	N. AMER	23	21.1	22	23.9
	ASIAN	143	143.2	162	161.8
	AF-AMER	224	235.6	278	266.4
	WHITE	1870	1852.2	2076	2093.8
	HISPANIC	337	349.2	407	394.8
	MULTI	71	66.7	71	75.3
	TOTAL	2668	2668.0	3016	3016.0
I am basically my own boss	N. AMER	7	11.4	14	9.6
	ASIAN	38	41.9	39	35.1
	AF-AMER	96	88.7	67	74.3
	WHITE	787	777.0	641	651.0
	HISPANIC	131	138.2	123	115.8
	MULTI	27	28.8	26	24.2
	TOTAL	1086	1086.0	910	910.0

*Income.* Finally, income is considered as a measure of occupational attainment. A two-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there is statistically significant interaction between gender and race and income ( $F = 4.776, p < .01$ , two tails). Results

are displayed in Table 14. A Dunnett T3 *post hoc* test was run to determine which categories differed significantly. Post hoc tests were run on the race variable, but not on the gender variable because it contained fewer than 3 categories. Dunnett T3 is a post hoc test that adjusts for unequal variances. There are significant differences in income between Whites and all other racial groups, although it appears from this data that Asians earn more overall than other groups, an unanticipated outcome. Further examination of the mean income levels reveals that males outperform females in earnings. Asian females earn more than females of other races, followed by White females. Results are displayed in Figure 1.



This study did not investigate the achievement data available in NELS 88:2000, which could detect evidence of higher grades overall for this group. The results of this income analysis refute the prediction of Hypothesis 7 on the occupational attainment element, which predicted White males would earn more. Blair, Blair and Madamba (1999) explain that Asian-American families reported high income levels along with high

levels of academic achievement, and propose that various cultural-based characteristics might account for the performance of this group.

TABLE 14. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE, ANNUAL INCOME BY RACE AND GENDER

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F
Main Effects	3.605E+11	11	32776591041	67.22*
Gender	3.622E+12	1	1.5122E+12	3101.76*
Race	9.471E+10	5	763219448066	74.29*
Gender X Race	1.164E+10	5	18941118504	38.85*
Error	5.439E+12	11156	2328369124	4.77*
Total	5.800E+12	11167		

\*p < .05

Overall, SES is an important dynamic in educational aspiration and attainment and is positively associated with both. Further educational inequality research is needed to expand the focus to other contributors, such as political ideologies (conservative or liberal), policy mandates and funding through sources other than local property taxes.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The goal of this thesis was to examine the relationships between inequalities, the expectations of parents and significant others, specifically teachers and school counselors, and the aspirations and eventual attainment of students who participated in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988-2000 (United States Department of Education 2002). Previous researchers have noted that the education system in the United States markedly advantages those who are already privileged. This imbalanced structure assures that those at the highest levels of society will remain there. Even as Americans view themselves as a classless society where virtually any child can grow up to become president, structural barriers inherent in the education system contradict this myth. According to Spring (1976), school is the institution where status hierarchies originate.

Higher education is traditionally seen as a way to maintain one's place in the social order, or if that place is undesirable, to improve it. While an education is generally seen as essential to further this goal, many studies have found that family characteristics such as SES, single parenthood, geographic location, race and gender can have a bearing upon an individual's ability to succeed in this ambition (Dornbush et al. 1996; Collins 1979). The poor are negatively affected by education funding inequities, while the

affluent reap the benefits of these disparities (Karp 1998; Kozol 1991; Dubrow and Garbarino 1989).

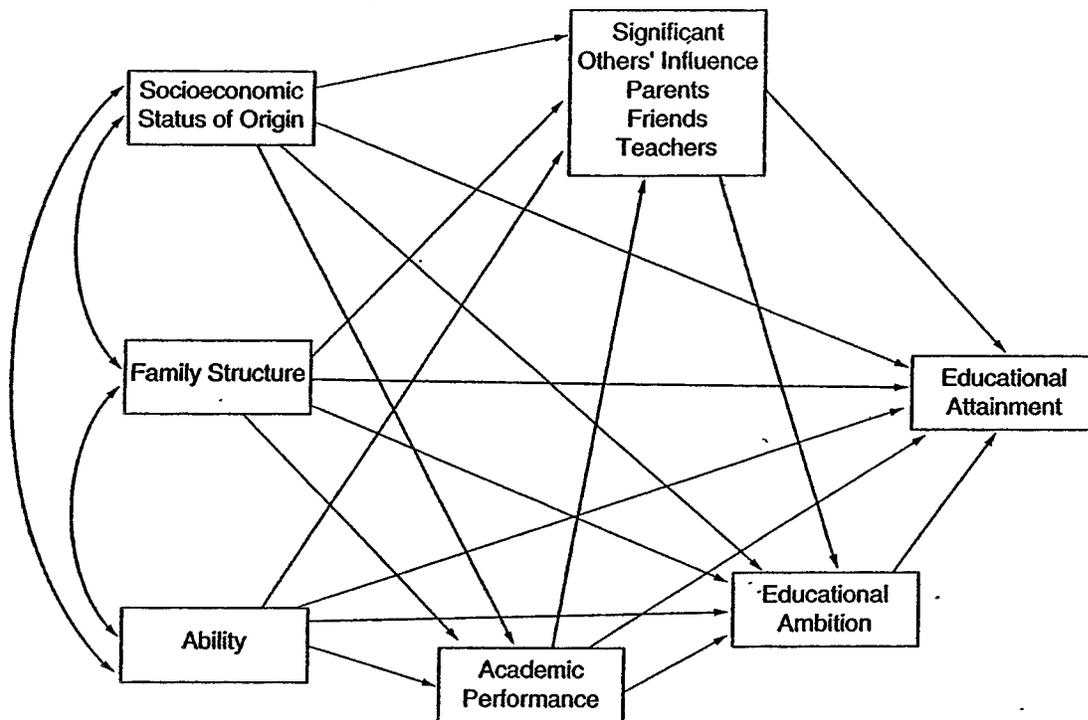
The Wisconsin Model of status attainment (Sewell et al. 1969) attempts to explain educational and occupational attainment, but works best to explain the attainments of the group most advantaged in this country: White males. Other groups' attainment, particularly African American males and women of all racial groups must compete with the traditionally overshadowing success and power wielded by this group. While the resources afforded by high family SES are factors in educational and ultimately, occupational attainment, as suggested by the Wisconsin Model, I propose that other phenomena may mediate this effect for minorities and women. The model implies that the expectations of significant others play a smaller role in eventual job-related attainment. For women, who are socialized to be relationship-centered, the influence and support of teachers, mentors and other supportive adults may be as important as family SES.

It is impossible to overlook the far-reaching effects that SES has upon inequality in educational and occupational attainment. The results obtained here clearly indicate that SES is still the strongest predictor of ultimate attainment. Although 92% of this sample graduated from high school, far fewer went on to receive Bachelor's degrees or above, a virtual requirement in our meritocratic society. Trusty, Robinson, Plata and Ng (2000) found that SES is the strongest predictor of post secondary attainment for women and minorities, who consistently lag behind White males in income equity. SES is strongly correlated with the quality of support available for all students because higher SES groups tend to have richer social networks to contribute to their ongoing vigor.

Researchers often struggle with appropriate variable selection in the secondary analysis of government study data. Perhaps different variable selection would have yielded different results in this project. Thesis production represents the culmination of a long-term learning experience in which students are given opportunities to develop the necessary skills to complete projects such as this one. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from others in this process.

Sociologists and educators have just started to focus on the complexities of educational achievement and attainment. While there is evidence that the support of significant others has a bearing on ultimate attainment, this is a complicated subject, teeming with an array of intricate interactions between SES, gender, race and unknown elements which affect the life chances of students. NELS 88:2000 is a rich source of data that will generate an abundance of knowledge in this area.

**APPENDIX A. THE WISCONSIN MODEL OF STATUS ATTAINMENT**



Source: *Sociological Perspectives on Social Psychology*. Edited by Karen S. Cook, Gary Alan Fine and James S. House. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

## **APPENDIX B. MAJOR OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS**

- **Professional specialty and technical occupations.** This major occupational group includes occupations concerned with the study, application, and/or administration of physical, mathematical, scientific, engineering, architectural, social, medical, legal statute, biological, behavioral, library and/or religious laws, principles, practices, or theories. Some occupations are concerned with interpreting, informing, expressing, or promoting ideas, products, and so forth by written, artistic, sound or physical medias. Certain occupations that provide support in all the above fields are included in the professional groups. Most professional occupations require educational preparation.
- **Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations.** Managers plan, organize, direct, and control the major functions of an industrial, commercial, or governmental establishment or department through subordinates who are at the managerial or supervisory level. Managers make decisions and establish objectives for the department or establishment; they are generally not directly concerned with the fabrication of products or with the provision of services. They possess knowledge of the day-to-day operation of the organization, but do not necessarily have the detailed knowledge required of a first line supervisor. Most managers are classified in this major occupational group. This group also includes management-related workers who implement the establishment functions in support of management at the operational level. Examples of these specialized functions are analyzing financial records and policies, reviewing organizational structures and methods, purchasing goods for internal organizational use, enforcing standards and regulations, and so forth.

- **Sales.** Included in the sales major occupational group are occupations concerned with the selling of goods and services or property, purchasing goods and services for resale, or conducting wholesale and retail business. Sales representatives or agents and sales workers require knowledge of the goods or services sold, along with the ability to demonstrate product(s), receive payments, and perform other sales-related activities. Supervisors who coordinate the activities of workers who buy and sell goods and services are included. Sales clerks and cashiers who are primarily concerned with receiving and disbursing funds, and require no special product knowledge, are also included in this major occupational group.
- **Administrative support occupations, including clerical.** This major occupational group includes all of the broad groups of occupations performing activities relating to preparing, transcribing, systematizing, and preserving written communications and records; collecting accounts; gathering and distributing information; operating office machines and electronic data processing equipment; storing, distributing and accounting for stores of materials; operating telephone switchboards, distributing mail, and delivering messages; and performing other administrative and clerical support.
- **Precision production, craft and repair.** This group includes occupations involved in the fabrication, processing, inspecting, or repairing of material, products, or structural units. Incumbents must have a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of processes involved in their work, usually acquired through apprenticeship or intensive training. Workers must exercise considerable independent judgment and must usually display a high degree of manual dexterity. Helpers are excluded from this major occupational group, unless specifically included. However, apprentices who are learning a craft or trade through on-the-job training and a formal apprenticeship-training program are included, unless specifically excluded.

- **Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors.** Workers in the major occupational group set up and operate machinery, perform repetitive manual or machine operations, or tend and control machines as part of a fairly well-defined work routine where some independent judgment or skill may be required.
- **Transportation and material moving occupations.** This major occupational group covers workers concerned with activities that are in immediate support of the operation and performance of transportation vehicles used to transport people or material. It includes workers involved in the operation of material moving equipment that is stationary or has limited range. It also includes the supervisors of these workers.
- **Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers.** Workers in this major occupational group perform unskilled, simple duties, primarily manual, that may be learned within a short period of time and that require little or no independent judgment. These occupations ordinarily require little or no previous experience. Duties may require moderate to strenuous physical exertion.
- **Service occupations, except private households.** This major occupational group includes occupations concerned with preparing and serving food and drinks in commercial, institutional, or other establishments, providing lodging and related services, providing grooming, cosmetic, and other personal health care services for children and adults, providing protection for people and property, attending to the comfort or requests of patrons of amusement and recreation facilities, and performing cleaning and maintenance services to interiors of buildings. Workers in these occupations provide personal and protective services to individual and commercial entities.

Source: Buckley, John E. 2002. "Rankings of Full-time Occupations, by Earning, 2000." *Monthly Labor Review*. 125: 46-57.

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