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# An examination of the educational aspirations parents have for their children

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*University of Iowa*

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS PARENTS HAVE  
FOR THEIR CHILDREN

by  
Eric Jon Reed

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor David Bills

## ABSTRACT

Although parents' educational aspirations play important roles in shaping and influencing students' aspirations, achievement, and attainment, our understanding of the nature and formation of these important aspirations is limited. Researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations in order to explain variation in students' aspirations, achievement, or attainment. In other words, researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations as an independent variable, rather than a dependent variable. Thus, we have a relatively thorough understanding of the effects of parents' educational aspirations, but beyond standard demographic and socioeconomic factors we have a very limited understanding of what affects variation in parents' educational aspirations. In this study I use unique longitudinal data to examine variation in parents' educational aspirations. More specifically, I examine the effects of background characteristics (including demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic origin characteristics), socioeconomic status characteristics, such as education attainment and household income, and social-psychological characteristics, such as locus of control, job-satisfaction, and subjective well-being, on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children (i.e. wanting their children to attain a post-baccalaureate degree).

Abstract Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Supervisor  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Title and Department  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Eric Jon Reed

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at the May 2012  
graduation.

Thesis Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

David Bills, Thesis Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ernest Pascarella

\_\_\_\_\_  
Scott McNabb

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kevin Leicht

\_\_\_\_\_  
Brian An

To Tucker

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## ABSTRACT

Although parents' educational aspirations play important roles in shaping and influencing students' aspirations, achievement, and attainment, our understanding of the nature and formation of these important aspirations is limited. Researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations in order to explain variation in students' aspirations, achievement, or attainment. In other words, researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations as an independent variable, rather than a dependent variable. Thus, we have a relatively thorough understanding of the effects of parents' educational aspirations, but beyond standard demographic and socioeconomic factors we have a very limited understanding of what affects variation in parents' educational aspirations. In this study I use unique longitudinal data to examine variation in parents' educational aspirations. More specifically, I examine the effects of background characteristics (including demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic origin characteristics), socioeconomic status characteristics, such as education attainment and household income, and social-psychological characteristics, such as locus of control, job-satisfaction, and subjective well-being, on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children (i.e. wanting their children to attain a post-baccalaureate degree).

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Educational aspirations play important roles in education attainment, and, in turn, status attainment processes. Students' educational aspirations have strong positive effects on their educational achievement and attainment (Alexander, Eckland and Griffin 1975; Kao and Tienda 1995; Marjoribanks 2005; Mau 1995; Wilson and Wilson 1992), which, in turn, have strong effects on their earnings (Murphy and Welch 1989; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Perna 2003). Students with high educational aspirations are more likely than students with low educational aspirations to: do well in school, attain higher education degrees, and reap the economic rewards of higher education degrees in the labor market. Students' educational aspirations also mediate the effects of their socioeconomic origin (i.e. their parents' socioeconomic status) on their achievement and attainment (Garg et al. 2002; Marjoribanks 1995; Mau and Bikos 2000; Seginer and Vermulst 2002; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf 1970; Sewell and Hauser 1992). In other words, students' educational aspirations can strengthen or diminish the effects of where they come from on how well they do and how far they go in school.

Researchers have thoroughly studied students' educational aspirations and identified a number of factors that affect variation in these aspirations. Among the strongest predictors of students' educational aspirations are the educational aspirations students' parents have for them (Flint 1992; Okagaki and Frensch 1998; Peterson, Stivers and Peters 1986; Qian and Sampson Lee 1999; Teachman and Paasch 1998; Trusty 1998). In fact, students' educational aspirations, their achievement, and their attainment are positively affected by the educational aspirations their parents have for them (De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; Hanson, 1994; Marjoribanks, 1998, 2002a,

2002b; Mau, 1995; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Peng & Wright, 1994; Seginer, 1983; Wentzel, 1998). Parents who have high educational aspirations for their children are more likely than parents without high educational aspirations to have children who: have high educational aspirations, do well in school, and attain higher education degrees.

Although parents' educational aspirations play important roles in shaping and influencing students' aspirations, achievement, and attainment, our understanding of the nature and formation of these important aspirations is limited. Researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations in order to explain variation in students' aspirations, achievement, or attainment. In other words, researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations as an independent variable, rather than a dependent variable. Thus, we have a relatively thorough understanding of the effects of parents' educational aspirations, but beyond standard demographic and socioeconomic factors we have a very limited understanding of what affects variation in parents' educational aspirations. Over twenty years ago Seginer (Seginer 1983) concluded her review of literature on the effects of parents' educational aspirations for their children by suggesting that researchers begin to examine the "antecedents" (pg. 21) of parents' educational aspirations for their children. To date few examinations fitting this description have been made (Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan 2001).

Scholars have provided a variety of theoretical or conceptual explanations of the nature of the formation of educational aspirations. Most of these explanations fall within or between two theoretical camps. One group of explanations posits that educational aspirations reflect rational calculations. According to this position, individuals evaluate the feasibility and value of continuing their education or children's education, and their educational aspirations reflect the products of these evaluations. Stated simply, students' and parents' educational aspirations reflect the level of education students and parents think they can afford or should try to achieve, given their socioeconomic status (Alexander and Cook 1979; Becker 1993a; Goldthorpe 1998; Jencks, Crouse and Mueser

1983). This first group of explanations of educational aspirations includes human capital theory (Becker 1993a; Becker 1993b) and rational choice theories (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Breen and Yaish 2003; Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Goldthorpe 1998).

Another group of explanations posits that educational aspirations reflect actual desires or social-psychological orientations to achievement, success, or social mobility. According to this view, individuals' physical, emotional, and cultural environments, their observations of and interactions with significant others, their beliefs, and their feelings about themselves shape their desires to achieve and be successful, which their educational aspirations reflect. Individuals' socioeconomic status affects their educational aspirations, but not by directly determining what they can afford. Rather, individuals' socioeconomic status indirectly affects their educational aspirations through its effects on their environments, significant others, and social-psychological characteristics. Stated simply, educational aspirations are felt. This group of explanations of educational aspirations includes the culture of poverty thesis and more recent variations of the culture of poverty thesis (Auletta 1982; Baca Zinn 1989; Innis and Feagin 1989; MacLeod 1987; Steinberg 2001; Wilson 1987), "blocked-opportunity" interpretations of status attainment models (Kao and Tienda 1995; Kerckhoff 1976), Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) concept of "habitus" and social learning and motivation theories (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1978; Farmer 1985; Wilson and Wilson 1992; Woelfel and Haller 1971).

Research largely supports the view the students' educational aspirations are, in fact, social-psychological orientations, rather than economic calculations. Students' educational expectations and their actual enrollment choices may be products of economic calculations (Ayalon and Yuchtman-Yaar 1989; Beattie 2002a; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Breen and Yaish 2003; Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Manski 1993). However, students' educational aspirations are not confined exclusively to economic calculations. Students' educational aspirations reflect much more than their

socioeconomic status and their perceptions of the costs and benefits of education. Various non-pecuniary factors (e.g. social-psychological, interpersonal, and cultural factors) affect students' educational aspirations and mediate the effect of their socioeconomic status on their educational aspirations (Chen and Uttal 1998; Chenoweth and Galliher 2004; Cohen 1983; Garg et al. 2002; Hallinan and Williams 1990; Sewell and Hauser 1992; Trusty 1998; Wentzel 1998; Wilson and Wilson 1992). Students' educational aspirations are shaped by their socioeconomic circumstances. However, students' educational aspirations are also shaped by their personalities, their experiences in and out of school, their feelings about themselves, their families and friends, their beliefs, and the cultures to which they are exposed.

Students' educational aspirations have been studied thoroughly enough to inform broad theoretical debates regarding their nature and formation. Parents' educational aspirations, on the other hand, have not been studied well enough to inform the same debate. Researchers have examined the effects of demographic and socioeconomic factors on parents' educational aspirations (Cheng and Starks 2002; Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan 2001; Okagaki and Frensch 1998; Solorzano 1992). However, absent closer examinations the results of these studies can be incorporated into economic or social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations. Consequently, basic but important questions regarding the nature of parents' educational aspirations remain largely unaddressed. Which view of educational aspirations effectively characterizes parents' educational aspirations for their children? Are parents' educational aspirations relatively straightforward economic evaluations? Do parents' educational aspirations essentially reflect the education parents think they can afford to provide their children? Or are parents' educational aspirations desires they have for their children? Do parents' educational aspirations, like students' educational aspirations, reflect social-psychological orientations that cannot be fully explained as economic calculations or purely rational investment decisions? This study cannot provide conclusive answers to



these questions or the broad theoretical debate generating them. However, this study will address these questions in novel ways.

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to refine and expand our understanding of the educational aspirations parents have for their children and, in doing so, refine and expand our understanding of education and status attainment processes. I use unique longitudinal data to examine, with greater detail than previously achieved by quantitative researchers, variation in parents' educational aspirations. More specifically, I examine the effects of background characteristics (including demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic origin characteristics), socioeconomic status characteristics, such as education attainment and household income, and social-psychological characteristics, such as locus of control, job-satisfaction, and subjective well-being, on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children (i.e. wanting their children to attain a Graduate or Professional degree).

Given both the dearth of research on parents' educational aspirations and the conflicting views of educational aspirations outlined in previous paragraphs, this study's secondary purpose is to attempt to identify parents' educational aspirations for their children as social-psychological orientations or economic evaluations. If the social-psychological characteristics included in this study affect parents' educational aspirations or the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and their educational aspirations, the results of this study would tentatively support a social-psychological view of parents' educational aspirations. If, on the other hand, the social-psychological characteristics included in this study fail to affect parents' educational aspirations or the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and their educational aspirations, the results of this study would tentatively support an economic view of parents' educational aspirations.

### Justification of research

The educational aspirations parents have for their children are worth studying for a variety of reasons. First, examinations of parents' educational aspirations might improve our understanding of students' educational aspirations. For example, research indicates that high school students' educational aspirations can be unstable. That is, students' educational aspirations can change (Alexander, Bozick and Entwisle 2008; Alexander and Cook 1979; Eckel 1999; Hallinan and Williams 1990; Hanson 1994; McClelland 1990; Mickelson 1990). Scholars have provided various explanations for instability (more specifically, decreases) in students' educational aspirations (Kerckhoff 1976; Ogbu 1979; Ogbu and Simons 1998). However, given the largely structural nature of these explanations, few studies have been able to test them (Hanson 1994).

One explanation for instability in students' educational aspirations that scholars have generally overlooked is arguably the simplest explanation: instability in parents' educational aspirations. If parents' educational aspirations constitute economic calculations it seems unlikely that their educational aspirations would be that unstable (beyond, of course, changes in economic considerations). If, however, parents' educational aspirations constitute desires or social-psychological orientations it is reasonable to think that they would at least be vulnerable to instability in more ways than they would be if they were purely economic calculations. This study does not examine students' educational aspirations, instability in students' educational aspirations, or even instability in parents' educational aspirations. However, insofar as this study examines potential sources of instability in parents' educational aspirations its results may prove useful to those attempting to explain or examine instability in students' educational aspirations.

Examinations of parents' educational aspirations might also inform and improve various educational policies and practices. Parents' educational aspirations have strong positive effects on their involvement in their children's education (Carter and

Wojtkiewicz 2000; Chen and Uttal 1998; Flint 1992; Grolnick and Slowiaczek 1994; Hickman, Greenwood and Miller 1995; Trusty 1998). Research has also found that parents are more likely to be involved in their children's education when they understand how their children's education connects to desired future education and work opportunities (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Teachers, counselors, and other education professionals who can relate to, rather than simply acknowledge parents' educational aspirations might be able to communicate more effectively with parents and, in turn, increase parents' involvement in their children's education.

Finally, examinations of parents' educational aspirations might also inform longstanding scholarly and popular debates about social mobility, poverty, and inequality in America. A variety of theories and corresponding popular notions of social mobility, poverty, and inequality rely on (or, in the least, provide) largely unconfirmed views of parents' educational aspirations. For example, the culture of poverty thesis (Lewis 1966), one of contemporary social science's oldest and most regularly revisited explanations of persistent poverty, relies on a social-psychological view of parents' educational aspirations (Corcoran 1995; Solorzano 1992; Steinberg 2001). According to the culture of poverty thesis and more recent variations of it, such as the cultural underclass model or the cultural deficit model, intergenerational poverty is primarily the result of poor parents having and transmitting to their children values and attitudes that are dysfunctional and contrary to the values and attitudes in mainstream society (Baca Zinn 1989; Corcoran 1995; Lewis 1966; Solorzano 1992; Steinberg 2001). The culture of poverty thesis and its variations recognize that poverty and disenfranchisement may be the causes of poor parents' dysfunctional social-psychological orientations. However, they also make clear that the social-psychological effects of poverty and disenfranchisement, rather than actual poverty or disenfranchisement, drive intergenerational poverty.

On the other hand, the theories of maximally and effectively maintained inequality (Ayalon and Shavit 2004; Raftery and Hout 1993) arguably rely on an

economic view of parents' educational aspirations to explain the maintenance of socioeconomic inequalities. According to these theories, the maintenance of socioeconomic inequalities - even after the implementation of educational policies intended to alleviate such inequalities - is largely the result of calculated decisions families make seeking to improve or maintain their socioeconomic status. Parents' educational aspirations represent the levels and kinds of education parents believe will allow their children to achieve upward social mobility or, in the least, maintain their socioeconomic status or relative position in society.

The culture of poverty thesis and its many variations and the theories of maximally and effectively maintained inequality arguably rely on conflicting views of parents' educational aspirations. Actually examining variation in parents' educational aspirations may improve scholars' assessments and applications of these and other theories.

### Chapter summary

In this chapter I outline this study's purpose and research questions. I also provided theoretical and practical reasons for considering this study a worthwhile endeavor. In the following chapter I organize and summarize the literature that is relevant to this study. I describe conflicting theoretical explanations of educational aspirations, which include economic and social-psychological explanations. I also review the handful of recent studies that have examined variation in the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

In Chapter 3 I describe this study's data, model, and analytic procedures. The data for this study come from ACT and responses to the Appalachian Region Alumni Outcomes Survey (or ARAOS). After describing the design and distribution of the ARAOS, I describe the full sample of individuals represented by the ARAOS data and the sample of parents I select from the full sample to conduct this study. I describe my

conceptual and analytic model, which is based on economic and social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations. I also describe the statistical procedures I employ, over three analytic stages, in order to test my model and, in turn, address the theoretical debate and research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Finally, I describe the data and methods based limitations of this study.

In chapter 4 I systematically present the results of the analysis described in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5 I conclude this study by discussing the results presented in Chapter 4. First I discuss the results presented in Chapter 4 as they relate to the theoretical debate and research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Following this discussion I discuss the results presented in Chapter 4 as they relate to the current literature and our general understanding of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. I conclude Chapter 5 and this study by briefly discussing what I believe are worthwhile avenues for future examinations of the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter constitutes a review of the literature relevant to the nature and formation of parents' educational aspirations for their children. As I state in the previous chapter, our understanding of the nature and formation of the educational aspirations parents have for their children is quite limited, despite the fact that parents' educational aspirations play an important role in achievement and attainment processes. Scholars have generally examined or theoretically addressed parents' educational aspirations in order to explain variation in students' aspirations, achievement, or attainment. In other words, scholars have generally treated parents' educational aspirations as an independent variable (affecting student-related processes and outcomes), rather than a dependent variable (the outcome of its own process). Thus, we have a relatively thorough understanding of the effects of parents' educational aspirations, but beyond standard demographic and socioeconomic factors we have a very limited understanding of what affects parents' educational aspirations.

I organize this literature review into two parts. First I organize various theoretical explanations of educational aspirations. I classify theories as identifying educational aspirations as economic or social-psychological in nature. There are certainly other ways of organizing theories of educational aspirations. They could be organized with a structural versus individualistic approach. They could also be organized along cultural or socio-historical dimensions. Any of these approaches would reorganize, so to speak, theories of educational aspirations and would constitute a potentially useful framework for the study of parents' educational aspirations for their children. However, I believe that, for this study, organizing theoretical explanations of educational aspirations into economic or social-psychological camps is the most prudent approach. Given our very

basic understanding of parents' educational aspirations for their children I believe a basic framework is appropriate.

After I organize theoretical explanations of educational aspirations I organize the results of empirical studies that provide information on variation in the educational aspirations parents have for their children. This section of the literature clearly evidences the lack of attention that has been given to the nature and formation of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. Nearly thirty years ago Seginer (1983) concluded her review of literature on the effects of parents' educational aspirations by suggesting that researchers begin to examine the "antecedents" (pg. 21) of parents' educational aspirations for their children. To date few examinations fitting this description have been made (Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan 2001). The majority of empirical studies that provide information on variation in the educational aspirations have for their children are, in fact, studies of students' educational aspirations that happen to provide us with some small bit of information on those students' parents (or, in most cases, those students' perceptions of their parents).

### Theoretical Explanations of Educational Aspirations

In the following section of this literature review I outline and describe a variety of theories of (or related to) educational aspirations. I begin by outlining and describing social-psychological theories of educational aspirations, as they were arguably a part of scholarly and popular conversations regarding educational aspirations long before more purely economic theories. I conclude this section by outlining and describing economic theories of educational aspirations.

It should be noted that, within and between these theoretical camps there is a great deal of flexibility in terminology and in interpretation. One could argue, for example, that all of the social-psychological perspectives I outline (Social Learning, Culture of Poverty, Cultural-ecological, Structural/Blocked-opportunity) are complicated (or

gentrified) variations of the first or second perspective. One could argue that the last social-psychological perspective I outline is actually economic in nature. These and other possible areas of disagreement reflect, to some degree, the nature of academic language and the variety of academic disciplines that have engaged in the study of educational aspirations. They also reflect, however, longstanding and ongoing scholarly and popular debates about schools and success in American society.

### Social-psychological Theories of Educational Aspirations

Social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations take a variety of forms. However, they also share an important characteristic. Each theory identifies educational aspirations as dispositions (orientations, outlooks, desires, states-of-being, etc.), rather than purely economic calculations. In this view, educational aspirations are the product of beliefs and feelings (about the world and about one's self), physical, cultural, emotional, and formal and informal educational environments, and a lifetime of observations of and interactions with significant others, caregivers, peers, and strangers. In this view educational aspirations are not (not exclusively, at least) the product of completely conscious and completely rational economic considerations. In a manner of speaking, educational aspirations are felt.

### Social Learning

Social learning theory (also known as social cognitive theory or observational learning theory) (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986) has enjoyed a wide range of uses in educational and social-psychological research since its conceptualization. It is used as a theory of learning that incorporates interpersonal, educational, familial, and environmental factors. It is also used as a theory of motivation that accounts for an individual's contextually learned locus of control, sense of self-worth, and expectations of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and punishments. Social learning theory is based on the premise that most of our learning takes the form of observing the people and events



around us. We learn behaviors and are (or are not) motivated to engage in similar behaviors by observing the behaviors of others and observing the consequences (rewards and punishments) of their behaviors. In this view, educational aspirations reflect one's motivation to achieve or succeed, which is formed by a lifetime of observations and experiences. Social learning theory and variations of it constitute the theoretical foundation for numerous studies of students' educational aspirations and a variety of other educational outcomes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Farmer 1985).

### Culture of Poverty

The culture of poverty thesis or some descendent of it has been a part of social science and public policy discussions since the 1960's. In fact, one could argue that variations (predecessors) of the culture of poverty thesis have been around since the 1860's, when insidious misappropriations of Darwin's work dominated social science and public policy discussions regarding poverty (Steinberg 2001). According to the culture of poverty thesis or any of its variants, intergeneration poverty is primarily the result of adults developing and passing along to their children or the children in their community attitudes (and corresponding behaviors) that are dysfunctional to life or success in mainstream society (Lewis 1966; Solorzano 1992). Lowered aspirations, fatalism or passivity, and feelings of helplessness, which, according to the culture of poverty thesis, parents pass down to their children, are the primary mechanisms of intergenerational poverty. To be sure, poverty and the habits people acquire to survive in poverty may be what originally caused the dysfunctional attitudes parents have and pass to their children. However, according to the culture of poverty thesis, the attitudes themselves are primarily what facilitate intergenerational poverty.

Variations of the culture of poverty thesis include a variety of "underclass" or "deficit" models. Each of these models or theoretical explanations is unique with respect to identifying the cause of dysfunctional attitudes, values, or orientations among parents

and children. Welfare dependency models, for example, attribute lowered aspirations and other self-defeating attitudes to the reliance on public assistance programs (Auletta 1982; Murray 1984; Solorzano 1992). Some models point to different structural components, attributing negative orientations to macroeconomic trends, institutional and individual discrimination, and segregation or social isolation (Kozol 1991; Kozol 2005; MacLeod 1987; Wilson 1987). Some models point to a unique confluence of historical and geographic factors (Batteau 1979-1980; Chenoweth and Galliher 2004; Keefe, Reck and Reck 1983; Obermiller and Maloney 2002). However, each of these models ultimately identifies attitudes, values, or orientations as the primary mechanisms of intergenerational poverty.

### Cultural-ecological Perspectives

Cultural-ecological explanations of educational aspirations are similar to variations of the culture of poverty thesis and social learning theories. According to cultural-ecological theories (like social learning theories), educational aspirations are socially and contextually developed dispositions or orientations (Bronfenbrenner 1977; Bronfenbrenner 1979; Ogbu and Simons 1998). What's more, according to cultural-ecological theories (like variations of the culture of poverty thesis) there is a significant cultural component to the formation of educational aspirations. However, cultural-ecological theories distinguish themselves from variations of the culture of poverty thesis in a critical way. The culture of poverty thesis and its many variations propose that impoverished, isolated, or segregated people (that is, people living outside of a mainstream culture) develop a dysfunctional culture (including lowered aspirations) in order to survive. In other words, low educational aspirations are the result of how impoverished, isolated, or segregated people live and experience the world, regardless of how they became impoverished, isolated, or segregated. Cultural-ecological theories, on the other hand, propose that educational aspirations develop in response to a dominant

culture, which can be either supportive or hostile (Behnke and Piercy 2004; Ogbu 1979; Ogbu and Simons 1998). Educational aspirations do not reflect positive or negative self attitudes that develop within or outside of mainstream society. Rather, they reflect a trust in or skepticism of (positive or negative attitudes toward) parts of a dominant culture that saturates society. Educational aspirations are not the result of how people live or survive in the world; they are the result of how people feel they are treated by the dominant culture wherever they are in the world.

### Structural and Blocked-opportunity Perspectives

Cultural-ecological models identify educational aspirations as dispositions or orientations that develop largely in response to cultural forces. Structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives, on the other hand, identify educational aspirations as dispositions or orientations that develop largely in response to the presence or lack of structural and institutional forces, including structural and institutional inequalities (Corcoran 1995; Kerckhoff 1976). Rather than rely, as cultural-ecological models do, on amorphous, subjective, and difficult to define cultural forces to characterize the formation of educational aspirations, blocked-opportunity perspectives point to institutional and structural opportunities or inequalities and their many correlated advantages or disadvantages. In this view, a dominant culture might very well be messaging and shaping the experiences of students and parents. However, conspicuous and consequential differences in resources and in outcomes are what shape students' and parents' educational aspirations. In this view educational aspirations do not reflect positive or negative self attitudes that develop within or outside of mainstream society. Nor do they reflect positive or negative attitudes toward a dominant culture and its definitions of success. Rather, educational aspirations reflect positive or negative attitudes toward one's own chances of success, given the many individual, interpersonal,

and institutional inequalities (or barriers to success) one faces (Hanson 1994; Kerckhoff 1976; McClelland 1990).

Structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives distinguish themselves from the preceding perspectives by differentiating between educational aspirations and educational expectations or by disaggregating educational aspirations into credential, occupation, income, and prestige based aspirations (Ayalon and Yuchtman-Yaar 1989; Kerckhoff 1976). This, structuralists argue, enables us to better identify both class based differences in educational aspirations and the structural barriers that lead to those differences (without relying on ambiguous or subjective cultural or normative explanations). However, even those who do not employ or subscribe to structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives have benefited from these contributions. Studies of matched, realistic, or aligned (versus unmatched, unrealistic, or misaligned) aspirations, studies of “lost talent,” and a variety of studies of changes in aspirations over time arguably rely, to some degree, on the idea that structural and institutional forces are at work (Alexander, Bozick and Entwisle 2008; Ayalon and Yuchtman-Yaar 1989; Hanson 1994; Reynolds et al. 2006; Schneider and Stevenson 1999).

One could argue that structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives are more accurately categorized with purely economic explanations of educational aspirations. In fact, more often than not since the late 1970’s sociologists of education have referred to structural or blocked-opportunity interpretations of status attainment research as economic in nature (as opposed to social-psychological) (Kao and Tienda 1998). Emphasizing class based and structurally shaped inequalities in resources (including all theoretical forms of capital) and highlighting the difference between aspirations and expectations certainly distinguish structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives from other social-psychological perspectives. What’s more, it is accurate to say that structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives, unlike the preceding social-psychological perspectives, provide a view of educational aspirations that incorporates or is influenced

by economic barriers or considerations. All of the preceding social-psychological perspectives essentially consider educational aspirations a proxy for students' and parents' desires to succeed. Structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives, on the other hand, generally consider educational aspirations structurally shaped desires to succeed.

Despite the sound arguments that could be made for including structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives with economic explanations of educational aspirations, within the context of this study I believe they are more accurately categorized with social-psychological explanations. According to structural or blocked-opportunity perspectives, economic and other structural forces well beyond the scope or control of individuals largely determine their educational aspirations and educational outcomes. However, this involves far more than shaping individuals' conscious investment decisions. The effects of structural forces – especially structural inequalities, which can facilitate intensely bleak environments and experiences, most certainly extend to social-psychological processes and outcomes. “Ain't no makin' it” is more than a belief based on conscious, rational calculations. It is also an attitude, outlook, or feeling (MacLeod 1987). Structural perspectives minimize the role that individual social-psychological factors play in actually facilitating various socioeconomic outcomes. However, they do not exclude social-psychological factors. In fact, while structural perspectives minimize the role that social-psychological factors play in status attainment (or allocation) processes, a handful of structural perspectives rely on social-psychological factors to explain the peaceful maintenance of inequitable status allocation processes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Clark 1960; Kerckhoff 1976).

#### Economic Theories of Educational Aspirations

Economic explanations of educational aspirations take a few forms. However, they also share an important characteristic. Each of the following theoretical perspectives identifies or treats educational aspirations as products of conscious calculations

(deliberations, judgments, estimations, etc.). In this view, educational aspirations are the result of some kind of analysis of perceived costs, risks, and benefits of education.

Structural and cultural factors might play a role in arriving at educational aspirations.

However, compared to the role they play in social-psychological explanations, their role in economic explanations is extremely limited.

### Human Capital

Human Capital Theory has been widely used since its formalization in the mid 1960's and arguably represents an important early theoretical bridge between economists and sociologists. According to human capital theory, non-compulsory education is one a variety of options for investing in one's future. In choosing among various investment alternatives, individuals behave as if they perform an assessment of the returns associated with each alternative. Investment in education occurs if the expected returns compare favorably against existing alternatives, such as full-time employment (Becker 1993a; Schultz 1963). In this view, educational aspirations represent calculated investment goals. The level of education to which an individual aspires is the level of education that individual believes will provide him or her with the greatest economic returns, given his or her resources (e.g. intellectual ability, ability to pay tuition, etc.) and the perceived costs (e.g. tuition, time away from work) and benefits (e.g. credentials or skills that earn a higher income) (Beattie 2002a; Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Manski 1993).

### Rational Action / Choice

Originating in the field of economics, rational action or rational choice theories have been given considerable attention from sociologists over the last three decades. Thus, the theoretical field and subject areas related to rational action theories (much like the one related to the status attainment process) are both wide and deep. However, despite the many theoretical debates and many nuances that accompany such debates (Goldthorpe 1998), it would be fair to say that rational action or rational choice theories

are theories of action or choice that presume individuals make choices or act based on a rational (reasoned, coherent, measured, thought through, etc.) process of weighing the potential costs and benefits of each choice or course of action. In this view (like with human capital theory) educational aspirations represent calculated investment goals (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Coleman 1990; Goldthorpe 1998; Jonsson 1999).

If, at a first glance, rational action or rational choice theories sound very similar to human capital theory or other economic costs/benefits analyses, they should. Both characterize behaviors, action, or choices as products of conscious calculations. However, unlike human capital theory, rational action or rational choice theories do not limit themselves exclusively to the “economic imperialism” (Goldthorpe 1998) of considering only economic costs and benefits (or any assumptions about the objectivity, uniformity, or degree of rationality with which economic costs and benefits can and should be theoretically or empirically treated). Rational action or rational choice theories incorporate a variety of non-pecuniary “goods” and valuations of them. What’s more, unlike human capital theory, which focuses exclusively on the role individuals play in making investment decisions, rational action or rational choice theories attempt to address (to varying degrees) the role that structural forces (or locations within a structure) play in influencing the choices individuals make or actions they take. In a manner of speaking, rational action or rational choice theories attempt to participate (in ways that human capital theory and other economic theories do not) in broader sociological conversations regarding individual versus structural forces, social stratification, and the maintenance or consistency of social stratification (Coleman 1990; Goldthorpe 1998).

One of the ways in which scholars have further developed rational action or rational choice theories has been to establish specific theories of action or choice for specific domains, outcomes, and environments. Given the popularity of rational action or rational choice theories among sociologists in the late 1980’s and 1990’s, the range of specific action or choice theories is great. Included in this wide array is a rational action

theory of education (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Breen and Goldthorpe's rational action theory of education (the most well-known and most tested RAT theory of education) proposes that students and families establish educational goals and make educational decisions based on considerations of costs, potential benefits, and perhaps most importantly, risks associated with each decision. The consequences of failing to complete an educational endeavor (that is, incurring the costs and forgoing the benefits) can be lasting and severe for students and their families. What's more, the severity of those consequences will vary by class. The consequences, for example, of a bad educational decision (or failure to complete an educational goal) are far less severe for a family with the means to "re-invest" than for a family with the means to make one ("good" or "bad") investment. Thus, in order to account for class-based differences in various educational outcomes, Breen and Goldthorpe add what they call a class-based "relative risk aversion" hypothesis to their otherwise somewhat standard rational action theory.

### Parents' Educational Aspirations

In the following paragraphs I will organize the results of empirical studies that provide information on variation in the educational aspirations parents have for their children. This section of the literature will clearly evidence the lack of attention that has been given to the nature and formation of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. Nearly thirty years ago Seginer (1983) concluded her review of literature on the effects of parents' educational aspirations by suggesting that researchers begin to examine the "antecedents" (pg. 21) of parents' educational aspirations for their children. To date few examinations fitting this description have been made (Kaplan, Liu & Kaplan 2001). Thus, the majority of empirical studies that provide information on variation in the educational aspirations have for their children are, in fact, studies of students' educational aspirations that happen to provide us with some small bit of information on



those students' parents (or, more specifically, those students' perceptions of their parents).

## Demographic Factors

### Race/Ethnicity

Researchers have paid close attention, using a variety of the previously described theoretical approaches, to race/ethnicity based variation in students' educational aspirations for decades (Behnke and Piercy 2004; Cheng and Starks 2002; Kao and Tienda 1998; Ogbu and Simons 1998; Solorzano 1992). Thus, a variety of studies document race/ethnicity based variation in the educational aspirations parents have for their children (or, in the least, race based variation in students' perceptions of the educational aspirations their parents have for them.). One of the limitations of this study's sample is a nearly complete lack of racial/ethnic variation. Thus, this study will not be able to provide any insight into racial/ethnic variation in the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

### Sex

Researchers have thoroughly studied sex differences in students' educational aspirations (Daane 1993; Jonsson 1999; Marjoribanks 2002a; Marjoribanks 2002b; Mau and Bikos 2000; Qian and Blair 1999). Researchers have also studied sex differences in students' perceptions of the educational aspirations their parents have for them and the degree to which students view (or want) their parents involved in their education (Carter and Wojtkiewicz 2000; Chen and Uttal 1998; Cheng and Starks 2002; Okagaki and Frensch 1998; Parsons, Adler and Kaczala 1982). However, the basic question of sex differences in the educational aspirations parents have for their children – if, all things equal, men and women (within families or generally) have similar or different educational aspirations for their children – remains largely unaddressed in the literature

(Steelman and Powell 1991). This study will examine whether or not men and women (not within families, but within the sample) have similar or different educational aspirations for their children.

### Family Composition

For decades researchers have examined effects of family characteristics (number of children, parents' marital status) on students' (and occasionally, parents') educational aspiration (DeCivita et al. 2004; Garg et al. 2002; Sewell and Hauser 1992; Teachman and Paasch 1998). The results of examinations of family characteristics on students' educational aspirations and the theoretical interpretations of these results vary a great deal. However, the results of the handful of examinations of family characteristics on the educational aspirations parents have for their children generally indicate that being married and having fewer children positively affect the educational aspirations parents have for their children (Becker and Tomes 1976; Blake 1989; Steelman and Powell 1991). Theoretical explanations of these relatively consistent findings vary. These positive effects have been attributed to social-psychological processes and rational calculations (Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Marjoribanks 2005; Steelman and Powell 1991). This study will examine the effect of marital status on the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

## Socioeconomic Factors

### Socioeconomic Status Characteristics

Parents' income and education (and combined socioeconomic status measures) have consistently been shown to have strong positive effects on students' and parents' educational aspirations (Beattie 2002b; Breen and Yaish 2003; Chenoweth and Galliher 2004; Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Garg et al. 2002; Kao and Tienda 1998; Marjoribanks 2005; Teachman and Paasch 1998). Of course, theoretical explanations of

these strong positive effects are as varied as the theoretical perspectives outlined in the first section of this chapter. According to many of the social-psychological perspectives, the effects of income and education on educational aspirations are largely indirect. That is, income and education affect educational aspirations through their effects on other factors that directly affect educational aspirations (e.g. living conditions, learning environments, role models, social capital, etc.). In fact, one could argue that a good deal of the variation among some of the social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations boils down to a dispute over what mechanizes or mediates the effects of socioeconomic status characteristics. According to the economic or rational theories, on the other hand, the strong positive effects of income and education on educational aspirations are largely direct. Quite simply, the more one has, the more one has to invest. This study will examine the effects of income and education on the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

### Employment Status

Studies (usually focusing on welfare, welfare reform, unemployment, or job loss) suggest that, among poor parents, being employed (versus unemployed) may positively affect parents' and students' social-psychological orientations (DeCivita et al. 2004; McLoyd 1989; McLoyd, Jayaratne and Ceballo 1994; Mead 1989). That is, homes with parents who are work-and-welfare dependent and homes with parents who are working and considered poor but not receiving welfare are, from a social-psychological perspective, healthier than homes with parents who are exclusively welfare dependent. However, excluding studies of poor families or families in economic crises, studies have not examined whether or not being employed affects parents' educational aspirations for their children (independent of household income). This study will examine the effect of employment status on the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

### Social-psychological Factors

Consistent with the social-psychological perspectives outlined in the first section of this chapter, researchers have identified the effects of a handful of social-psychological factors on students' educational aspirations (Kao and Tienda 1998; Kim, Rendon and Valadez 1998; Mau and Bikos 2000; Parsons, Adler and Kaczala 1982). Students' educational aspirations are influenced by their self-esteem, locus of control, and satisfaction with or sense of belonging at school. Research also indicates that students' social-psychological characteristics mediate the effects on their socioeconomic status characteristics on their educational aspirations (Garg et al. 2002; Looker and Pineo 1983; Marjoribanks 1998; Marjoribanks 2002a).

Despite the large literature that indicates students' social-psychological characteristics play an important role in shaping their educational aspirations, research has largely left parents' social-psychological characteristics unexamined. Kaplan (01) found that parents' "self-feelings" might have an effect on the educational expectations they have for their children (Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan 2001). However, the results of one study with the limitations of any one study hardly make a dent, so to speak, in a general or nuanced debate regarding the nature of parents' educational aspirations for their children. Given the significant role parents' and students' social-psychological characteristics play in many theoretical explanations of educational aspirations and other education based outcomes, further studies of parents' social-psychological characteristics are long overdue. This study will examine the potential effects of five social-psychological factors (job-satisfaction, life-satisfaction, locus of control, religiosity, and met personal aspirations) on the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I organize the literature relevant to the educational aspirations parents have for their children. I organize the theoretical explanations of educational

aspirations into social-psychological or economic categories, and I conclude the chapter by organizing the results of empirical studies of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. In the following chapter I describe this study's data, model, and analytic procedures. In the following chapter I also discuss this study's limitations. In chapter 4 I present the results of the analyses described in chapter 3, and in chapter 5 I discuss those results and outline ways of further examining the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe how I examine parents' educational aspirations for their children. I describe this study's data, model, analytical procedures, and limitations.

#### Data

The data for this study came from American College Testing and responses to the Appalachian Region Alumni Outcomes Survey (hereafter, ARAOS). The Mellon and Spencer Foundations funded the design and distribution of the ARAOS in order to better understand the effects of higher education institutions in the Central Appalachian Region (Wolniak and Pascarella 2007).

The entire Appalachian Region spans 13 states from New York to Mississippi and is divided into three sub-regions: the Northern Appalachian Region, the Central Appalachian Region, and the Southern Appalachian Region. Spanning parts of Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia and all of Appalachian Kentucky, the Central Appalachian Region is the smallest and most economically distressed Appalachian sub-region.

The Central Appalachian region has the highest percentage of counties with a per capita income of under \$18,800 (the U.S. average is \$30,000, and the average for the entire Appalachian region is \$25,500). The Central Appalachian Region has the highest percentage of counties with a poverty rate above 28% (the U.S. average is 12%, and the average for the entire Appalachian region is 14%). The Central Appalachian region also has the highest percentage of counties (and census tracts) with a high school completion rate below 60% (the U.S. average is 80%, and the average for the entire Appalachian region is 77%) (ARC 2005).

ACT designed the four-page, optically scanned ARAOS questionnaire, which was divided into the following six sections:

1. Background information (e.g., birth year, race, sex, marital status, work status, education attainment, college major, college grades, parents' education attainment).
2. Employment history and experiences (e.g., job field, measures of job satisfaction, salary/income).
3. Undergraduate educational outcomes (e.g., satisfaction with the undergraduate experience, contribution of college experience and importance of current endeavors along 28 dimensions).
4. Participation in activities and organizations outside of work (e.g., involvement in seven different community activities currently and while attending college, voting behavior, political involvement, charitable donations, percent of family income saved).
5. Lifestyle information (e.g., satisfaction with different aspects of life, involvement in continuing education and learning activities, sense of control over life, self-reported health status, health-related behaviors).
6. Geographic location (e.g., grew up in Appalachia, living in Appalachian). The ARAOS survey packet included a detailed map of the Appalachian Region.

The data for this study were collected during 2000 and 2001. Based on information provided to ACT from participating higher education institutions in the Central Appalachian region, ACT sent 45,000 college alumni a notification letter, followed four weeks later by a survey packet. The survey packet included a cover letter, the ARAOS, lists of college majors and occupations, a map of the Appalachian region, and a postage-paid return envelope to ACT. Three weeks after the survey packet had been sent, postcards were sent and telephone calls were made to non-responding alumni requesting that they complete and return the ARAOS. Finally, a second survey packet,

which was identical to the first survey packet, was sent to non-responding alumni approximately three months after the first survey packet had been sent.

ACT's data collection efforts ended with a total response rate of 27% (12,838 responses). Then, using respondents' social security numbers, ACT matched respondents' ARAOS responses to available ACT data (ACT scores, high school household income, and high school educational aspirations), which was collected when respondents took the ACT exam in high school. The final matched sample contains information on 7,083 college alumni. Pascarella and Wolniak report that ACT's figures and weighted sample estimates of the population means for race, sex, ACT scores, secondary school grades, and personal educational aspirations differ by less than two percentage points (Wolniak and Pascarella 2007). In other words, based on race, sex, ACT scores, secondary school grades, and personal educational aspirations, the sample of individuals who completed and returned the ARAOS is similar to the population of college alumni from which the sample was drawn.

#### Institutional Sample

Seventy-two percent of the sample (5,143 individuals) attended one of 25 private higher education institutions in the Central Appalachian Region, and twenty-eight percent of the sample (1,940 individuals) attended one of five public higher education institutions in the Central Appalachian Region.

The 25 private higher education institutions included in this study include one teachers college, one institution that focuses on business and management, and five work colleges that offer students on-campus work experiences in return for reduced tuition (WCC 2005). The remaining private higher education institutions included in this study are classified as either liberal arts baccalaureate college (because of their emphasis on baccalaureate programs), or master's colleges and universities (because of their commitment to graduate education through the master's degree) (Carnegie, 2001). All



of the private colleges included in this study are members of the Appalachian College Association (hereafter, ACA), which encourages its member institutions to “foster Appalachian history and culture; to share ideas, information, programs and resources; and to support the economic development of the region by serving as resources for agencies formulating regional policies” (ACA). The average enrollment at the 25 private institutions included in this study is 1,329 students (IPEDS).

The five public higher education institutions included in this study are regional institutions classified as master’s colleges and universities (Carnegie 2001). Four institutions offer students various masters’ degrees, and one institution offers students various masters’ degrees and a limited number of doctoral degrees. The average enrollment at the five public higher education institutions included in this study is 9, 291 (IPEDS).

#### Sample of Respondents

The alumni sample represents individuals who attended college in 1974-1976, 1984-1986, or 1994-1996. Twenty-nine percent of the sample (2,022 individuals) attended college between 1974 and 1976, thirty-four percent of the sample (2,435 individuals) attended college between 1984 and 1986, and thirty-seven percent of the sample (2,626 individuals) attended college between 1994 and 1996.

Like the Central Appalachian region and the population of college alumni from which the sample was drawn, the sample is overwhelmingly white (96.7%). Sixty-three percent of the sample is female, and seventy-five percent of the sample is married. Sixty-two percent of the sample grew up in Appalachia, forty-nine percent of the sample lived in Appalachia when the ARAOS was administered, and thirty-nine percent of the sample grew up in Appalachia and lived in Appalachia when the ARAOS was administered. Three percent of the sample has attained vocational certificates or Associates’ degrees, fifty-nine percent of the sample has attained Bachelors’ degrees, twenty-seven percent of

the sample has attained Masters' degrees, and eleven percent of the sample has attained Doctoral or Professional degrees.

### Weighted Sample

In order to ameliorate the effects of response bias, I weighted the data to better represent the population of alumni by sex and institution, and cohort. Using an algorithmically created raw weight based on ACT's figures for the population from which the sample was drawn, I created relative weights for the sample and various sub-samples by dividing the aforementioned raw weight by its sample or sub-sample mean. Although raw weights do not need to be adjusted when their respective samples are divided into sub-samples, raw weights produce underestimated standard errors (based on weighted sample sizes), which require adjustment. Relative weights produce accurate standard errors because they are based on actual sample sizes, rather than weighted sample sizes. Thomas and Heck (2001) write:

While the raw and relative weights yield the same point estimates for the mean in all software packages, in some packages analyses using the raw weight result in an effective sample size that is the same as the population N. This can seriously compromise calculations that are sample size specific, such as variances and covariances, and lead to incorrect results. The effects of this become an especially critical point when one wishes to test hypotheses using weighted data – most every difference or coefficient becomes significant as a result when using statistical packages that are blind to the actual sample size (Thomas and Heck 2001) (pg. 525).

### Final Analytic Sample

The analyses for this study were conducted on cases where respondents indicated they had dependent children. Excluding 182 cases lacking complete data (4.9% of the sample of parents), this criterion yielded a final sample size of 3,489.

There are a variety of strategies for addressing missing data. For two reasons I applied a list-wise deletion approach to the missing data. First, the number and percent of values missing within any given variable was very small. For example, 38 cases (1%

of the sample) lacked values for marital status, 29 cases (.7% of the sample) lacked values for sex, 35 cases (.9% of the sample) lacked values for work status, 45 cases (1.2% of the sample) lacked values for locus of control, and 53 cases (1.4% of the sample) lacked values for race/ethnicity. Research has shown that when an independent variable is missing less than 3% of its cases, various strategies for addressing missing data (e.g., deletion procedures, imputation procedures) produce similar results (Cohen et al. 1983). Second, the overall number and percent of cases missing data was low (182 cases, or 4.9% of the sample of parents). Ten percent of cases with missing data is generally considered the threshold for considering missing data a potential source of non-random bias (Cohen et al. 1983; Croninger and Douglas 2005).

#### Data Summary

As I discuss later in this chapter, this study has a handful of data-related limitations. However, ultimately I believe the benefits of this study's data outweigh the limitations.

Although they were collected as cross-sectional data, the ARAOS data, which contain information respondents provided when they were in high school and then 5, 15, or 25 years after attending college, are longitudinal. For various reasons, longitudinal data improve the internal validity of and strengthens causal inferences made with quantitative research (Menard, 1991; Fowler, 1995). Furthermore, not only does the ARAOS data contain longitudinal information for three cohorts of college alumni, it contains information pertaining to three generations of respondents' families. When respondents took the ACT exam in high school they provided information about their parents' education and income, and when respondents completed the ARAOS they identified the educational aspirations they had for their children. Given the goals of this study, which broadly include improving our understanding of the intergenerational

transmission of social status, this characteristic of the ARAOS/ACT data is particularly appealing and useful.

### Model

#### Dependent variable

The dependent variable in this study is parents' *educational aspirations for children*. ARAOS respondents were asked "If you have dependent children, what is the highest degree goal you have for any of them?" The nine possible responses included "no dependent children," "no specific goal in mind," "vocational or technical certificate or diploma," "Associate or other 2-year degree," "Bachelor's or other 4-year degree," "Master's or other 5-year degree," "Specialist or other 6-year degree," "Doctoral degree," and "Professional degree."

The distribution of responses to the aforementioned question is negatively skewed. Thus, I code parents' educational aspirations for their children as high or low. Respondents who indicated they had no specific educational goals for their children or wanted their children to obtain an Associate's degree or Bachelor's degree were identified as having low educational aspirations for their children. Respondents who indicated they wanted their children to obtain more than a Bachelor's degree were identified as having high educational aspirations for their children. Roughly fifty-eight percent of the parents in the final analytic sample had high educational aspirations for their children.

#### Independent variables

Three sets or blocks of independent variables are included in this study. Background variables consist of demographic variables, geographic variables, a socioeconomic origin variable, and an institutional variable. Socioeconomic variables consist of an income variable, education variables, and a work status variable. Finally,

social-psychological variables consist of measures of respondents' feelings about their education, their jobs, and their lives.

#### Background variables

Background variables include three *cohort* variables, *sex*, *race*, *marital status*, *ACT score*, and *high school household income*, whether or not respondents *grew up in Appalachia*, whether or not respondents were *living in Appalachia in 2000*, and whether the first higher education institution respondents attended was *public or private*. Excluding ACT score and high school household income, background variables, including race, are coded dichotomously. ACT scores are normally distributed in the sample, and thus, left unaltered. High school household income, which represents respondents' parents' income at the time respondents took the ACT exam, is standardized across cohort years and assigned a mean of 10.

#### Socioeconomic status variables

SES variables include four dichotomous *educational attainment* variables, *2000-2001 household income*, and a dichotomous *work status* variable. Research consistently indicates that parents' socioeconomic status characteristics are positively associated with the educational aspirations they have for their children (Beattie 2002a; Breen and Yaish 2003; Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Garg et al. 2002; Kao and Tienda 1998; Teachman and Paasch 1998). Indeed, one of the main goals of this study is to examine competing explanations for why this is the case.

The final analytic sample for this study consists of individuals who, in 2000-2001, had earned at least an Associate's degrees. Thus, respondents' educational attainment is represented by four dichotomous variables. One dichotomous variable indicates whether or not, in 2000-2001, respondents had earned an Associate's degree. One dichotomous variable indicates whether or not, in 2000-2001, respondents had earned a Bachelor's degree. One dichotomous variable indicates whether or not respondents had earned a

Masters' degrees or Specialist's degrees. Finally one dichotomous variable indicates whether or not respondents had earned a Doctoral degree or Professional degree.

The natural log of respondents' 2000-2001 household income, rather than some form of respondents' 2000-2001 personal income, is used in this study. This practice is common in studies of parents' educational aspirations for their children because, compared to personal income, household income arguably better represents both respondents' socioeconomic status and respondents' actual available economic resources.

A work status variable – dichotomously coded to represent whether or not respondents were working for pay in 2000-2001 – is included in this study for exploratory purposes and as a statistical control. Studies of welfare models and welfare reform suggest that, among poor parents, being employed might positively affect parents' educational aspirations for their children (DeCivita et al. 2004). That is, parents who are work-and-welfare dependent and parents who are working and considered poor but not receiving welfare might have higher educational aspirations for their children than parents who are exclusively welfare dependent. However, excluding studies of impoverished families, studies have never examined whether or not being employed affects parents' educational aspirations for their children.

#### Social-psychological variables

Personal variables include *locus of control*, *met aspirations*, *job-satisfaction*, *life-satisfaction*, and *religiosity*. Studies of parents' educational aspirations for their children have very rarely examined parents' social-psychological characteristics (Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan 2001; Seginer 1983). On the other hand, a large literature pertaining to students' educational aspirations indicates that social-psychological characteristics, such as self-esteem, locus of control, academic self-concept, and feelings about their teachers and peers, have strong effects on students' educational aspirations (Garg et al. 2002; Kao and Tienda 1995; Kim, Rendon and Valadez 1998; Mau 1995; Mau and Bikos 2000; Parsons,

Adler and Kaczala 1982). In fact, a large literature suggests that the effects of students' socioeconomic status characteristics on their educational aspirations are almost completely mediated by their social-psychological characteristics (Marjoribanks 1998; Marjoribanks 2002a; Wilson and Wilson 1992). Given the important role of social-psychological characteristics in shaping students' educational aspirations, examinations of parents' social-psychological characteristics and the educational aspirations they have for their children are well overdue.

Locus of control is a dichotomous variable representing whether or not respondents feel they have a high degree of control over their lives. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a five-point scale, how much control they felt they had over important events in their lives (1 = little or no control; 3 = moderate control; 5 = a great deal of control). The distribution of responses to this question is skewed, disallowing the responses to be analytically treated as continuous. Thus, responses are coded dichotomously (1, 2, 3, & 4 = 0; 5 = 1) to represent whether or not respondents felt they had or didn't have a high degree of control over their lives.

Met aspirations is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not, in 2000-2001, respondents had met the educational aspirations they had for themselves when they took the ACT exam in high school. Parents who, in 2000-2001, had achieved or exceeded the educational aspirations they had for themselves when they took the ACT exam in high school are identified as having met their educational aspirations. Parents who failed to achieve the level of education to which they aspired in high school are identified as having not met their educational aspirations.

Researchers have never examined whether or not meeting personal educational aspirations affects parents' educational aspirations for their children. However, various social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations or the intergenerational transmission of social status predict that personal failures or unmet aspirations negatively affect individuals' orientations to success and subsequent aspirations. The culture of

poverty thesis and many of its variations, for example, predict that a lack of success or opportunities to succeed leads to skepticism, fatalism, or feelings of powerlessness, which, in turn, lead to lowered aspirations (Lewis 1966). According to Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," personal failures or unmet aspirations lead to lowered aspirations by lowering the personal "probabilities for success" that individuals assign to various endeavors (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). "Blocked-opportunity" interpretations of the status attainment process provide differently worded but similar predictions (Kao and Tienda 1995; Kerckhoff 1976; MacLeod 1987).

Two satisfaction variables are included in this study. Job-satisfaction is a standardized continuous variable created from eleven different items measuring respondents' satisfaction with the jobs they had in 2000-2001. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a five-points scale (very satisfied to very dissatisfied), how satisfied they were with their job's salary, fringe benefits, support for continuing education, autonomy, intellectual challenges, advancement opportunities, decision-making authority, creative opportunities, intrinsic rewards, and social status. Life-satisfaction is a standardized continuous variable created from four different items measuring respondents' satisfaction with their lives away from work in 2000-2001. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a five-point scale (very satisfied to very dissatisfied), how satisfied they were with their family relationships, social relationships, recreational activities, and religious or spiritual lives.

Job-satisfaction, commonly defined as one's affective orientation or orientations to his or her job or, less technically, the degree to which one likes his or her job, has been thoroughly studied by social scientists (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman 1959; Spector 1996). Social scientists have studied job-satisfaction as an outcome (or set of outcomes) influenced by various working conditions and processes related and unrelated to work (Lee and Wilbur 1985; Mohr and Zoghi 2008; Smerek and Peterson 2007). Social scientists have also studied job-satisfaction as an independent variable affecting various



processes and outcomes at and away from work (Michalos 1980; Michalos and Zumbo 2002). Life-satisfaction, also known as subjective well-being (Diener et al. 1985; Mason and Faulkenberry 1978; Michalos and Zumbo 2002) or a component of overall well-being (Bradburn 1969), has also been thoroughly studied, as both a dependent and an independent variable.

Researchers have never examined the potential effects of parents' job-satisfaction and life-satisfaction on the educational aspirations they have for their children. However, studies indicate that both job-satisfaction and life-satisfaction positively affect motivation (Chui 2000), which is closely related to or implicit in social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations.

Religiosity is included in this study for exploratory purposes and as a statistical control. Researchers have never examined the potential effects of religiosity on the educational aspirations of parents or students. However, theoretical and empirical scholarly work identifies a relationship between religiosity and actual educational attainment (Schieman 2008; Uecker, Regnerus and Vaaler 2007). Research has also identified relationships between religiosity and various social-psychological factors, such as fatalism (Jacobson 1999; Schwarzwald and Leslau 1992). Of course, much like conversations about religion in popular culture, scholarly debates about the nature and causal ordering of this relationship are conflicted. Nonetheless, including religiosity in this study is warranted. Religiosity is a continuous variable created from two items measuring the amount of time respondents spend participating in religious activities.

Appendix B provides the operational definitions and, when appropriate, reliability estimates of the variables in the model, and Appendix C displays a correlation matrix for the variables in the model. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of the variables in the model, and Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for each cohort.

### Analytic Procedures

This study consists of three analytic stages. The first stage of this study is a descriptive analysis. I employ descriptive statistics to examine relationships among the model's independent variables and between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The second and main stage of this study is a logistic regression analysis. I employ logistic regression techniques to estimate the effects of the model's independent variables on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Finally, the third stage of this study is an analysis of each cohort, which aims to determine if the effects from stage 2 of this study are conditional by cohort.

#### Stage 1: Descriptive analysis

In order to complete this study's first analytic stage, I use cross-tabulations and chi-squared tests to explore and examine associations between the dependent variable and the dichotomous independent variables in the aforementioned model, and I use ANOVA to explore and examine associations between the dependent variable and the continuous independent variables in the aforementioned model. Chi-squared tests indicate whether or not two categorical variables are independent of each other by comparing observed frequencies with the frequencies one could expect assuming the two variables are independent of one another. ANOVA tests for mean differences between two or more groups (e.g. parents with low educational aspirations and parents with high educational aspirations) by comparing the variation (average squared deviation from the mean) within each group with the variation between groups.

Chi-squared tests and ANOVA identify whether or not two variables are independent of or associated with one another, which often proves useful for describing samples and identifying potential relationships between variables. However, these procedures do not allow researchers to control for the effects of variables that are

correlated with one or both of the test variables, which precludes the possibility of responsibly making generalizations.

### Stage 2: Logistic regression analysis

In the second and main stage of this study I use logistic regression techniques to estimate the effects of the model's independent variables on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Unlike the procedures in this study's first stage, regression techniques allow researchers to simultaneously examine and estimate the independent effects of multiple variables on a dependent variable, which arguably strengthens generalizations.

Logistic regression is one of a handful of regression techniques researchers employ when a model's dependent variable is dichotomous. Conceptually, logistic regression is analogous to linear regression. Both regression techniques provide researchers with coefficients that reflect the predictive power of independent variables. Logistic regression simply adjusts for the fact that dichotomous dependent variables violate the assumption of homoscedasticity (or the assumption of equal variance), which must exist to properly employ linear regression techniques (Allison 1999; Neter et al. 1996). Relying on the natural-log transformation of the odds of an outcome (defined by the dichotomous dependent variable), logistic regression provides researchers with estimated log odds, standard errors, and odds ratios, which can, with some calculations, be substantively interpreted like the coefficients and standard errors produced by linear regression techniques (Cohen et al. 1983; Meyers, Gamst and Guarino 2006).

The goals of this study include determining if social-psychological variables affect parents' educational aspirations for their children and determining of social-psychological variables affect the relationships between socioeconomic variables and parents' educational aspirations for their children. Thus, I enter independent variables into the logistic regression equation in blocks (background variables, followed by

socioeconomic variables, followed by personal variables). The blocked-entry approach to regression models allows researchers to easily calculate whether or not the addition of different groups of independent variables significantly improves the explanatory power of regression equations. This approach also allows researchers to identify changes in the effects of independent variables following the addition of new independent variables (Meyers, Gamst and Guarino 2006).

### Stage 3: Cohort Analysis

In the third and final stage of this study I examine whether or not the effects from stage 2 of this study vary by cohort. I separate the sample by cohort and estimated the full model for each cohort. Then I employ an incremental R-squared test to determine whether or not the model's explanatory power is increased by separating the sample by cohort. Incremental R-squared tests indicate whether or not there is an overall increase in a model's explanatory power when a sample is divided into sub-samples (such as cohorts) by comparing the variance explained for the whole sample with the variance explained for each sub-sample (after accounting for the loss of degrees of freedom that accompanies separating a sample into sub-samples).

### Limitations

This study employs unique longitudinal data and examines, with arguably greater detail than previous studies, the educational aspirations parents have for their children. However, this study has several limitations. In the following paragraphs I will outline these limitations.

### External Validity

A large literature indicates that demographic, socioeconomic, and social-psychological differences exist between individuals who pursue higher education (regardless of their attainment) and individuals who do not pursue higher education

(Astin, Pascarella). Research also indicates that differences exist between individuals who pursue higher education at four-year post-secondary schools (even if they do not complete a Bachelor's degree) and individuals who pursue higher education, but not at four-year post-secondary schools. This study's sample consists exclusively of parents who attended four-year postsecondary education institutions. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized to parents who have never attended four-year postsecondary education institutions.

This study attempts to control for and examine the effects of growing up in Appalachia and living in the greater Appalachian region. However, differences between higher education experiences in Central Appalachia and higher education experiences outside Central Appalachia (as well as differences between individuals who do and do not select higher education institutions in Central Appalachia) represent a threat to this study's external validity. Compared to Northern or Southern Appalachia (much less the rest of the country) Central Appalachia is an economically depressed area with a unique cultural and political identity and history (Chenoweth and Galliher 2004; Keefe, Reck and Reck 1983; Obermiller and Maloney 2002). What's more, all of the private postsecondary education institutions included in this study are members of the Appalachian College Association, which encourages its members to, among other things, "foster Appalachian history and culture" (ACA). Insofar as the ACA schools in this study accomplish this goal they foster higher education experiences that are distinct from higher education experiences in other areas of the country. Thus, the results of this study should be cautiously applied to parents with postsecondary education experiences outside the Central Appalachian Region.

#### Omitted variables

The data for this study do not include any information pertaining to respondents' children. The ARAOS/ACT data do not include the number of children respondents had

in 2000-2001. The ARAOS/ACT data also do not include the age(s) of respondents' children or the sex of respondents' children. Finally, the ARAOS/ACT data do not include any measures of ability, achievement, or attainment for respondents' children. Each of these omissions (or the combination of some of these omissions) constitutes a potential source of omitted variable bias.

Research has shown that parents' educational aspirations are negatively affected by the number of children they have (Becker and Tomes 1976; Davies, Heinesen and Holm 2002; Marjoribanks 2002b; Solorzano 1992; Steelman and Powell 1991), which suggests that parents' educational aspirations for their children are, at least in part, shaped by economic considerations. If parents' educational aspirations for their children are exclusively desires or orientations to success, the educational aspirations they have for their children might not be affected by the number of children they have. Parents would have high or low educational aspirations for their children regardless of the number of children or resources they have. If, on the other hand, parents' educational aspirations for their children are shaped by economic considerations, the number of children, and therefore, number of educational expenses parents have would likely affect the educational aspirations they have for their children.

An overwhelming majority of the studies of parents' educational aspirations have been conducted with parents of children roughly the same age (e.g. parents of high school students). Thus, research has never examined whether or not parents' educational aspirations vary by the age(s) of their children. However, it is reasonable to suspect that this is the case. The amount of information parents have about their children's abilities and interests certainly varies by the age(s) of parents' children. Parents of high school seniors, for example, have read more report cards and attended more parent-teacher conferences than parents of first-graders. If parents' educational aspirations are influenced by the information parents slowly accumulate and process regarding their children, parents' educational aspirations might vary by the age(s) of their children.

Closely related to the question of age is the question of attainment. If it is reasonable to suspect that parents' educational aspirations vary by the age(s) of their children, it is reasonable to suspect that parents' educational aspirations vary by the actual educational attainment of their children. Parents of college students, for example, are done worrying about their children obtaining a high school diploma and getting into college. Insofar as parents of college students are done with the concerns and considerations had by parents of high school students, parents of college students might be more likely than parents of high school students to want their children to obtain a graduate or professional degree.

If any of the aforementioned factors is correlated with variables that are included in this study, such as cohort membership or marital status, the estimated effects of these variables could be biased. For example, the average age of members of the 1970's is 49, the average age of members of the 1980's cohort is 40, and the average age of members of the 1990's cohort is 34 (with a modal age of 30). It is likely that, on average, members of the 1990's cohort have fewer children and younger children than members of the 1970's cohort or 1980's cohort.

### Bias

Using ACT's figures on the population of college alumni from which the sample was drawn, Wolniak and Pascarella (Wolniak and Pascarella 2007) report that ACT's figures and weighted sample estimates of the population means for race, sex, ACT scores, secondary school grades, and personal educational aspirations differ by less than two percentage points. However, as with almost every study based on survey data, sampling bias potentially limits the results of this study. Of the 55,910 individuals who attended one of the 30 higher education institutions in this study during the designated years, 45,000 had what ACT considered useable mailing addresses when the ARAOS was administered. If there are unrecognized or uncontrolled differences between individuals

who, in 2000-2001, did and did not have what ACT considered useable mailing addresses, sampling bias may affect the results of this study.

### Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I describe the data, model, and analytic procedures I employed to address the theoretical debate and research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. In the following chapter I present the results of the analysis described in this chapter. After presenting the results of the descriptive analysis, I present the results of the logistic regression analysis. The results of the logistic regression analysis include the predictive power or accuracy of the model, the contribution each set or block of variables makes to the model's predictive power, and the independent effects of each independent variable on the dependent variable (e.g. parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children). Finally, I present the results of the analysis of each cohort.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

In this chapter I organize the results of this study based on its three analytic stages. The first stage of this study was a descriptive analysis. I employed basic statistical procedures to explore and examine associations among the model's independent variables and between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The second and main stage of this study was a logistic regression analysis. I employed logistic regression techniques to estimate the effects of the model's independent variables on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Finally, the third stage of this study was a cohort analysis, which aimed to determine if the results from stage 2 varied by cohort.

#### Stage 1: Descriptive analysis results

In this study's first stage I used Chi-squared tests and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) to explore associations between the dependent variable and the independent variables in the model. Chi-squared tests indicate whether or not categorical variables are associated or independent of each other by comparing observed frequencies with the frequencies one would expect assuming the variables in question are independent of one another (Sprinthall 2006). ANOVA tests for mean differences between two or more groups (e.g. parents with low educational aspirations and parents with high educational aspirations) by comparing the variation (average squared deviation from the mean) within each group with the variation between groups (Sprinthall 2006).

The results of the Chi-squared tests indicate that, without controlling for other independent variables, there are statistically significant associations between parents' educational aspirations for their children and cohort membership, sex, marital status, graduating from high school in Appalachia, living in Appalachia, attending a public versus a private high education institution after high school, and education. There is no

statistically significant association between educational aspirations for children and race, being employed for pay, meeting personal educational aspirations, or locus of control.

Without controlling for differences in other variables, members of the 1970's cohort are more likely than members of the 1980's cohort or 1990's cohort to have high educational aspirations for children, and members of the 1980's cohort are less likely than members of the 1970's cohort or 1990's cohort to have high educational aspirations for their children. Over sixty percent of the members of the 1970's cohort have high educational aspirations for their children, while less than fifty-six percent of the members of the 1980's cohort and less than fifty-seven percent of the members of the 1990's cohort have high educational aspirations for their children. Men are less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for their children. Just over fifty-five percent of the men in the sample (compared to over sixty percent of the women in the sample) have high educational aspirations for their children. Married parents are less likely than unmarried parents to have high educational aspirations for their children. Nearly sixty-three percent of the unmarried parents in the sample (compared to under fifty-eight percent of the married parents) have high educational aspirations for their children. Respondents who graduated from high school in Appalachia are more likely than respondents who did not to have high educational aspirations for their children, and respondents who lived in Appalachia in 2000-2001 are more likely than those who did not to have high educational aspirations for their children. Nearly sixty-four percent of the respondents who graduated from high school in Appalachia (compared to less than forty-nine percent of the respondents who graduated from high school outside of Appalachia) have high educational aspirations for their children. Sixty-three percent of the respondents who lived in Appalachia in 2000-2001 (compared to less than fifty-three percent of the respondents who did not) have high educational aspirations for their children.

Without controlling for differences in other variables, respondents who attended public higher education institutions after high school are more likely than respondents who attended private higher education institutions after high school to have high educational aspirations for their children. Over sixty-one percent of the respondents who attended public institutions (compared to just over fifty-six percent of the respondents who attended private institutions) have high educational aspirations for their children. Finally, without controlling for differences in other independent variables, education is positively associated with having high educational aspirations for children. Nearly seventy percent of the respondents with terminal degrees (compared to just over sixty-one percent of respondents with Masters' degrees and just over fifty-four percent of respondents with Associates' or Bachelors' degrees) have high educational aspirations for their children.

The results of the ANOVA's indicate that, without controlling for differences in other variables, there are statistically significant mean differences in ACT scores and household income between respondents who have high educational aspirations for their children and respondents who do not have high educational aspirations for their children. Respondents who have high educational aspirations for their children average higher ACT scores (21.73 compared to 20.97) and a higher household income (11.24 compared to 11.1) than respondents who do not have high educational aspirations for their children. The results of the ANOVA's also indicate that there is no statistically significant mean difference between parents who have high educational aspirations for their children and those who do not in high school household income, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, or religiosity.

### Stage 2: Logistic regression results

The second and primary analytic stage of this study was a logistic regression analysis. I employed logistic regression techniques to estimate the effects of the model's

independent variables on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. I entered the independent variables into the logistic regression equation in blocks (background variables, followed by socioeconomic variables, followed by social-psychological variables) for two reasons. I wanted to determine whether or not adding social-psychological variables significantly improved the explanatory power of the regression equation. I also wanted to determine whether or not the effects of socioeconomic variables on the dependent variable changed following the addition of social-psychological variables.

Tables 3 and 4 display logistic regression estimates for background variables, background and socioeconomic variables, and the full model (background variables, socioeconomic variables, and personal variables). Tables 3 and 4 also display estimates of the variance explained (Nagle pseudo-R-squared values) by background variables, background and socioeconomic variables, and the full model. Finally, because estimates of explained variance for logistic regression equations are flawed and consistently underestimate the variance explained by logistic regression equations, Tables 3 and 4 provides the percent of cases and the percent of values of the dependent variable correctly predicted by background variables, background and socioeconomic variables, and the full model. In the following paragraphs I describe the results presented in Tables 3 and 4. First I describe the predictive power of background variables, the combination of background and socioeconomic variables, and the full model. Then I describe the estimated effects of each of the independent variables in the model.

#### Predictive Power

Estimates of explained variance consistently underestimate the variance explained by logistic regression equations. Thus, they are not effective tools for assessing the overall fit or predictive power of logistic regression equations. However, because they

are consistent they can be used to assess changes in the predictive power of logistic regression equations.

Background variables alone explain approximately 5.2% of the variance in respondents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Background and socioeconomic variables together explain approximately 9.1% of the variance in respondents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. These figures suggest that an improvement in explanatory or predictive power accompanies adding socioeconomic variables to background variables. Finally, the full model (background, socioeconomic, and social-psychological variables) explains approximately 9.2% of the variance in respondents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.

Overall, background variables correctly predict whether or not parents had high educational aspirations for their children for 61.15% of the sample. Background and socioeconomic variables correctly predict whether or not parents had high educational aspirations for their children for 62.7% of the sample. Finally, the full model correctly predicts whether or not parents had high educational aspirations for their children for 62.2% of the sample. Like the estimates of explained variance, these figures indicate that an improvement in predictive power accompanies adding socioeconomic variables to background variables. However, unlike the estimates of explained variance, which indicate show that adding social-psychological variables to the model slightly improves its explanatory power, these figures suggest that adding social-psychological variables to the model fails to improve its overall predictive power.

The breakdown of the percent of cases correctly predicted into the percent of each value of the dependent variable correctly predicted provides important and interesting information. Background variables alone correctly predict 81.03% of the cases where respondents had high educational aspirations for their children and 33.84% of the cases where respondents did not have high educational aspirations for their children. The combination of background and socioeconomic variables correctly predict 79.7% of the

cases where respondents had high educational aspirations for their children and 39.3% of the cases where respondents did not have high educational aspirations for their children. Finally, the full model (background, socioeconomic, and social-psychological variables) correctly predicts 79.1% of the cases where respondents had high educational aspirations for their children and 38.5% of the cases where respondents did not have high educational aspirations for their children.

These figures indicate that the improvement in overall predictive power that accompanies adding socioeconomic variables to background variables comes exclusively from an improvement in the ability to correctly predict cases where parents did *not* have high educational aspirations for their children. In fact, this improvement in overall predictive power comes despite the fact that the combination of background and socioeconomic variables correctly predicts slightly fewer cases of high educational aspirations for children than background variables alone.

#### Background variables

The background variables in this study included three *cohort* variables, *sex*, *race*, *marital status*, *ACT score*, *high school household income*, whether or not respondents *grew up in Appalachia*, whether or not respondents were *living in Appalachia in 2000*, and *institution type* (whether the higher education institution respondents attended directly after high school was public or private). ACT score and high school household income were continuous variables, and the remaining background variables were dichotomous. Column 1 in Table 3 provides the logistic regression estimates, in the form of adjusted odds ratios, for background variables alone. Column 2 provides logistic regression estimates for background variables and socioeconomic variables, and column 3 provides logistic regression estimates for the full model.

The results displayed in Table 3 indicate that sex, marital status, high school household income, growing up in Appalachia, living in Appalachia in 2000-2001, and

institutions type are all statistically significant predictors of having high educational aspirations for children. In the fully-controlled model, men are 19% less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for their children. Married respondents are 36% less likely than unmarried respondents to have high educational aspirations for their children. Respondents who attended public higher education institutions after high school are 22% more likely than respondents who attended private higher education institutions after high school to have high educational aspirations for their children.

In the fully-controlled model, respondents who graduated from high school in Appalachia are 60% more likely than respondents who did not to have high educational aspirations for their children, and respondents who lived in Appalachia in 2000-2001 are 24% more likely than those who didn't to have high educational aspirations for their children. Given the literature connecting Appalachia with the culture of poverty, and in turn lowered educational aspirations (Chenoweth and Galliher 2004; Keefe, Reck and Reck 1983), these results are particularly interesting. Of course, the sample for this study, which consisted exclusively of college alumni, does not represent Appalachia well enough for these results to refute the notion that there is an Appalachian culture antithetical to high educational aspirations. However, the relatively strong positive effects, as opposed to negative effects or no effects, of coming from and living in Appalachia certainly raises questions about the application of such notions.

Finally, in the fully-controlled model, high school household income, which was included in this study primarily as a statistical control, is negatively associated with parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Increases in respondents' high school household income are associated with slight decreases in the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children. Every standard deviation increase in the natural log of respondents' high school household income decreases the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children by 9%. This is a very small effect, but the fact it is negative is striking nonetheless. High school household income is

positively associated with education attainment and 2000-2001 household income, which both have strong positive effects on the odds of having high educational aspirations for children. However, after controlling for the effects of education attainment and 2000-2001 household income on the odds of having high educational aspirations for children, high school household income is negatively associated with parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for children.

#### Socioeconomic variables

SES variables included four dichotomous *education attainment* variables, *2000-2001 household income*, and a dichotomous *work status* variable. Column 2 in Table 3 provides the logistic regression estimates, in the form of adjusted odds ratios, for background variables and socioeconomic variables, and column 3 provides logistic regression estimates for the full model.

The results displayed in Table 3 indicate that both education and household income are statistically significant predictors of having high educational aspirations for children. In the fully-controlled model, respondents with Associates' degrees are 34% less likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. Respondents with Masters' degrees are 33% more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children, and respondents with Doctoral degrees are 65% more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. In the fully-controlled model, increases in respondents' 2000-2001 household income are associated with increases in the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children. Every standard deviation increase in the natural log of respondents' 2000-2001 household income increases the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children 97%.



Comparing the adjusted odds ratios in columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 suggests that socioeconomic variables may mediate or at least counteract the effects of certain background variables on the odds of having high educational aspirations for children. The absolute values of the adjusted odds ratios for sex, marital status, and living in Appalachia increase when socioeconomic variables are added to the model. In other words, differences in the odds of having high educational aspirations for children between men and women, married and unmarried respondents, and respondents who lived and didn't live in Appalachia in 2000-2001 become even greater when socioeconomic differences between men and women, married and unmarried respondents, and respondents who lived and didn't live in Appalachia in 2000-2001 are controlled.

Without controlling for socioeconomic variables, men appear less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for children. However, men in the sample average more education and a higher household income than women in the sample, and when these differences are controlled (by adding socioeconomic variables to the model) men appear even less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for children. In other words, men are less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for their children, despite the fact that men average more education and a higher household income than women.

Without controlling for socioeconomic variables married respondents appear less likely than unmarried respondents to have high educational aspirations for their children. However, married respondents average a higher household income than unmarried respondents, and when this difference is controlled married respondents appear even less likely than unmarried respondents to have high educational aspirations for children. In other words, married respondents are less likely than unmarried respondents to have high educational aspirations for their children, despite the fact they average a higher household income than unmarried respondents.

Finally, without controlling for socioeconomic variables respondents who live in Appalachia appear more likely than respondents who don't live in Appalachia to have high educational aspirations for their children. However, respondents who live in Appalachia average a lower household income than respondents who don't live in Appalachia, and when this difference is controlled respondents who live in Appalachia appear even more likely than respondents who don't live in Appalachia to have high educational aspirations for their children. In other words, respondents who live in Appalachia are more likely than respondents who don't to have high educational aspirations for their children, despite the fact they average a lower household income than respondents who don't live in Appalachia.

#### Social-psychological variables

The Social-psychological variables in this study included *locus of control*, *met aspirations*, *job-satisfaction*, and *life-satisfaction*. Locus of control is a dichotomous variable representing whether or not respondents felt they had a high degree of control over their lives. Met aspirations is a dichotomous variable representing whether or not, in 2000-2001, respondents had met the personal educational aspirations they had for themselves when they were in high school. Job-satisfaction and life-satisfaction are continuous are standardized continuous variables representing respondents' affective orientations to their jobs and lives away from work, respectively. Religiosity is a continuous variable representing the amount of time respondents spend participating in religious activities. Column 3 in Table 3 provides the logistic regression estimates, in the form of adjusted odds ratios the full model, which includes social-psychological variables.

Column 3 in Table 3 indicates that one of the four social-psychological variables included in this study – met aspirations – is a statistically significant predictor of having high educational aspirations for children. Locus of control, job-satisfaction, and life-

satisfaction are not statistically significant predictors of having high educational aspirations for children.

Respondents who, in 2000-2001, had met the educational aspirations they had for themselves when they were in high school are, in fact, 24% less likely than respondents who did not to have high educational aspirations for their children. What's more, comparing the adjusted odds ratios in columns 2 and 3 of Table 3 suggests that meeting personal educational aspirations may mediate or at least counteract the effects of education attainment on the odds of having high educational aspirations for children. The absolute values of the adjusted odds ratios for the three dichotomous education attainment variables increase when social-psychological variables, including met aspirations, are added to the model.

Without controlling for social-psychological variables, respondents with Associates' degrees appear less likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. However, respondents with Associates' degrees are also less likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have met their own educational aspirations, which negatively affects their odds of having high educational aspirations for children. Thus, when this difference is controlled respondents with Associates degrees appear even less likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. In other words, respondent with Associates' degrees are less likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children, despite the fact that respondents with associates degrees are more likely to have failed to meet their own educational aspirations.

Without controlling for social-psychological variables, respondents with Masters' degrees or Doctoral degrees are more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for children. However, respondents with Masters' degrees or Doctoral degrees are also more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have met their own educational aspirations, which negatively affects the odds

of having high educational aspirations for children. Thus, when these differences are controlled respondents with Masters' degrees or doctoral degrees appear even more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. In other words, respondents with Masters' degrees or doctoral degrees are more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children, despite the fact that respondent with Masters' degrees or Doctoral degrees are more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have met their own educational aspirations.

The results of this study's second and primary analytic stage indicate that various background and socioeconomic variables and one of the four social-psychological variables included in this study affect parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Men are less likely than women and married parents are less likely than unmarried parents to have high educational aspirations for their children. Parents who attended public higher education institutions are more likely than parents who attended private higher education institutions to have high educational aspirations for their children. Parents who grew up in Appalachia are more likely than parents who did not grow up in Appalachia to have high educational aspirations for their children, and parents who lived in Appalachia are more likely than parents who did not live in Appalachia to have high educational aspirations for their children.

Education and household income have strong positive effects on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Education and household income might also mediate the effects of sex, marital status, and living in Appalachia on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.

Parents' job-satisfaction, their life-satisfaction (or subjective well-being), their locus of control, and their religiosity do not affect their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. However, meeting personal educational aspirations affects parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Meeting personal

educational aspirations has a small negative effect on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. That is, parents who have met their own educational aspirations are less likely than parents who have not to have high educational aspirations for their children.

### Stage 3: Cohort analysis results

The third and final analytic stage of this study was an analysis of each cohort, which aimed to determine if the results of this study's logistic regression analysis are conditional by cohort. This study's descriptive analysis indicated that members of the 1970's cohort are more likely than members of the 1980's cohort or 1990's cohort to have high educational aspirations for children, and members of the 1980's cohort are less likely than members of the 1970's cohort or 1990's cohort to have high educational aspirations for their children. These findings were confirmed by this study's logistic regression analysis. However, this study's logistic regression analysis also indicated that, when socioeconomic variables are controlled, there is no statistically significant relationship between cohort membership and the odds of having high educational aspirations for children. Nonetheless, important differences may exist between cohorts with respect to the effects of specific variables on the odds of having high educational aspirations for children.

I conducted this study's cohort analysis by separating the sample by cohort and estimating the full model for each cohort. Then I employed an incremental R-squared test to determine whether or not the model's explanatory power is increased by separating the sample by cohort. Incremental R-squared tests indicate whether or not there is an overall increase in a model's explanatory power when a sample is divided into sub-samples (Cohen et al. 1983; Sprinthall 2006). Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 display the full model's logistic regression estimates, estimates of the variance explained, and percent of cases correctly predicted by the full model and for each cohort. In the following

paragraphs I describe the results of the incremental R-squared test, cohort based differences in the full model's explanatory or predictive power, and cohort based differences in the effects of specific background, socioeconomic, and social-psychological variables.

#### Predictive Power by cohort

The incremental R-squared test indicates that separating the sample by cohort increases the model's explanatory power a small but statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) degree. In other words, estimating the full model for each cohort separately has more explanatory or predictive power than simply controlling for cohort membership and estimating the full model.

The estimates of explained variance and percent of cases correctly predicted within each cohort, provided in Table 4, are consistent with the results of the incremental R-squared test. When all three cohorts are combined the full model explained approximately 9% of the variation in respondents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. However, when the sample is divided into cohorts the full model explains approximately 11% of the variation within the 1970's cohort, approximately 11% of the variation within the 1980's cohort, and approximately 12% of the variation within the 1990's cohort. When all three cohorts are combined the full model correctly predicted whether or not parents had high educational aspirations for their children for 62.6% of cases. However, when the sample is divided into cohorts the full model correctly predicts whether or not parents had high educational aspirations for 66.1% of the 1970's cohort, 63.7% of the 1980's cohort, and 62.8% of the 1990's cohort.

The breakdown of percent of cases correctly predicted into the percent of each value of the dependent variable correctly predicted by the full model, within each cohort, provides a small insight into why separating the sample by cohort improves the model's predictive power. For all three cohorts the full model predicts having high educational

aspirations for children better than it predicts not having high educational aspirations for children. However, the full model predicts having high educational aspirations in the 1970's cohort better than it does in the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort, and it predicts not having high educational aspirations within the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort better than it does in the 1970's cohort. Within the 1970's cohort the full model correctly predicted 84.3% of the cases where respondents had high educational aspirations for their children and 38.2% of the cases where respondents did not have high educational aspirations for their children. Within the 1980's cohort the full model correctly predicted 75.5% of the cases where respondents had high educational aspirations for their children and 48.8% of the cases where respondents did not have high educational aspirations for their children. Finally, within the 1990's cohort the full model correctly predicted 77.1% of the cases where respondents had high educational aspirations for their children and 44.3% of the cases where respondents did not have high educational aspirations for their children.

Columns 2, 3, and 4 of Table 5 indicate there are cohort based differences in the effects of individual background, socioeconomic, and social-psychological variables on respondents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. In the following paragraphs I describe these differences.

#### Background variables

The results of this study's logistic regression analysis indicates that sex, marital status, high school household income, growing up in Appalachia, living in Appalachia in 2000-2001, and institutions type are all statistically significant predictors of having high educational aspirations for children. However, the results of this study's cohort analysis indicate that, excluding marital status and growing up in Appalachia, the effects of the aforementioned background variables on the respondents odds of having high educational aspirations for their children are conditional by cohort.

In the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort men are less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for their children, but in the 1970's cohort there is no statistically significant relationship between sex and the odds of having high educational aspirations for children. In the 1980's cohort high school household income is negatively associated with the odds of having high educational aspirations for children, but in the 1970's cohort and 1990's cohort there is no statistically significant relationship between high school household income and the odds of having high educational aspirations for children.

In the 1980's cohort respondents who attended public higher education institutions after high school are more likely than respondents who attended private institutions to have high educational aspirations for children, but there is no statistically significant relationships between institution type and the odds of having high educational aspirations for children in the 1970's cohort or 1990's cohort. Finally, in the 1990's cohort respondents who lived in Appalachia in 2000-2001 are more likely than those who didn't to have high educational aspirations for their children, but there is no statistically significant relationship between living in Appalachia in 2000-2001 and the odds of having high educational aspirations for children in the 1970's cohort or 1980's cohort.

#### Socioeconomic characteristics

The results of this study's logistic regression analysis indicate that education attainment and 2000-2001 household income are statistically significant predictors of having high educational aspirations for children, and working for pay is not a statistically significant predictor of having high educational aspirations for children. However, the results of this study's cohort analysis indicate that the effects of all three of the aforementioned socioeconomic variables on respondents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children vary by cohort.



In the 1970's cohort education attainment is not a statistically significant predictor of having high educational aspirations for children, and every standard deviation increase in respondents' 2000-2001 household income increases the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children 145%. Also, in the 1970's cohort respondents who were working for pay in 2000-2001 are less likely (75% less likely) than respondents who weren't to have high educational aspirations for their children.

In the 1980's cohort respondents with Associates degrees are less likely, respondents with Masters' degrees are more likely, and respondents with Doctoral degrees are much more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. Every standard deviation increase in respondents' 2000-2001 household income increases the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children 71%.

Finally, in the 1990's cohort respondents with Associates degrees are less likely and respondents with Doctoral degrees are more likely than respondents with Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. However, there is no statistically significant difference in the odds of having high educational aspirations for children between respondents with Masters degrees and respondents with Bachelors' degrees. In the 1990's cohort every standard deviation increase in respondents' 2000-2001 household income increases the odds they have high educational aspirations for their children 56%.

#### Social-psychological characteristics

The results of this study's logistic regression analysis indicate that respondents who, in 2000-2001, had met the educational aspirations they had for themselves when they were in high school are, in fact, less likely than respondents who didn't to have high educational aspirations for their children. Also, the results of this study's logistic regression analysis indicate that locus of control, job-satisfaction, life-satisfaction, and

religiosity are not statistically significant predictors of having high educational aspirations for children.

The results of this study's cohort analysis largely confirm these findings. In the 1970's cohort and 1980's respondents who, in 2000-2001, had met their own educational aspirations are less likely than respondents who did not to have high educational aspirations for children. In the 1990's cohort, however, the relationship between meeting personal educational aspirations and the odds of having high educational aspirations for children approaches, but fails to meet statistical significance. While this finding may be the results of a conditional effect, it also may simply be a result of the fact that a large percentage of members of the 1990's cohort are still actively pursuing, as full-time or part-time students, higher education degrees.

#### Chapter conclusion

Altogether, this study produced a variety of both predictable and unexpected findings. Table 9 provides a summary of these results, which include:

- Household income has strong positive effects on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.
- Growing up in Appalachia has strong positive effects on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.
- Despite the fact that married parents average a higher household income than unmarried parents, married parents are less likely than unmarried parents to have high educational aspirations for their children.
- Parents who failed to meet their own educational aspirations are more likely than parents who actually met their educational aspirations to have high educational aspirations for their children.

- Parents' job-satisfaction, their life-satisfaction (or subjective well-being), and their locus of control do not affect the educational aspirations they have for their children.
- The effects of a handful of the model's variables are conditional by cohort.
  - In the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort men are less likely than women to have high educational aspirations for their children.
  - In the 1980's cohort parents who attended public higher education institutions are more likely than parents who attended private higher education institutions to have high educational aspirations for their children.
  - In the 1990's cohort parents who live in Appalachia are more likely than parents who do not live in Appalachia to have high educational aspirations for their children.
  - In the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort there is a positive relationship between education attainment and the likelihood that parents have high educational aspirations for their children.
  - In the 1970's cohort education attainment does not affect parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children, but the positive effect of household income on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children is roughly twice as strong as it is for members of the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort.
  - In the 1980's cohort parents' education attainment and household income positively affect their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children, but parents' high school household income negatively affects their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. In other words some parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children are affected by their socioeconomic status and socioeconomic origin.

In this chapter I present the results of the analysis described in Chapter 3. In the following chapter I discuss these results as they pertain to the theoretical debate and research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. I also discuss these results as they pertain to the current literature and our general understanding of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. Finally, I conclude the following chapter and this study by briefly discussing what I believe are worthwhile avenues for future examinations of the educational aspirations parents have for their children.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Educational aspirations play important roles in education attainment, and, in turn, status attainment processes. Students' educational aspirations have strong positive effects on their educational achievement and educational attainment (Alexander, Eckland and Griffin 1975; Jencks, Crouse and Mueser 1983; Marjoribanks 2005; Seginer and Vermulst 2002; Wilson and Wilson 1992), which, in turn, have strong effects on their earnings (Murphy and Welch 1989; Perna 2003). Students with high educational aspirations are more likely than students with low educational aspirations to: do well in school, attain higher education degrees, and reap the economic rewards of higher education degrees in the labor market. Students' educational aspirations also mediate the effects of their socioeconomic origin (i.e. their parents' socioeconomic status) on their achievement and attainment (Seginer & Vermulst, 2002; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969; Wilson & Wilson, 1992; See Sewell & Hauser, 1993 for review)(Garg et al. 2002; Seginer and Vermulst 2002; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf 1970; Sewell and Hauser 1992; Wilson and Wilson 1992). Students' educational aspirations can strengthen or diminish the effects of where they come from on how well they do and how far they go in school.

Researchers have thoroughly studied students' educational aspirations and have subsequently identified a number of factors that affect variation in these aspirations. Among the strongest predictors of students' educational aspirations are the educational aspirations students' parents have for them (Flint 1992; Okagaki and Frensch 1998; Peterson, Stivers and Peters 1986; Qian and Blair 1999; Teachman and Paasch 1998; Trusty 1998). In fact, students' educational aspirations, their achievement, and their attainment are positively affected by the educational aspirations their parents have for them (DeCivita et al. 2004; Garg et al. 2002; Marjoribanks 2002b; Marjoribanks 2005).

Parents who have high educational aspirations for their children are more likely than parents without high educational aspirations to have children who: have high educational aspirations, do well in school, and attain higher education degrees.

Although parents' educational aspirations play important roles in shaping and influencing students' aspirations, achievement, and attainment, our understanding of the nature and formation of these important aspirations is limited. Researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations in order to explain variation in students' aspirations, achievement, or attainment. In other words, researchers have generally examined parents' educational aspirations as an independent variable, rather than a dependent variable. Thus, we have a relatively strong understanding of the effects of parents' educational aspirations, but beyond standard demographic and socioeconomic factors we have a very limited understanding of what affects variation in parents' educational aspirations. Over twenty years ago Seginer (Seginer 1983) concluded her review of literature on the effects of parents' educational aspirations for their children by suggesting that researchers begin to examine the "antecedents" (pg. 21) of parents' educational aspirations for their children. To date few examinations fitting this description have been made (Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan 2001).

The primary purpose of this study was to refine and expand our understanding of the educational aspirations parents have for their children and, in doing so, refine and expand our understanding of education and status attainment processes. I used unique longitudinal data to examine, with greater detail than previously achieved by quantitative researchers, variation in parents' educational aspirations. More specifically, I examined the effects of background characteristics (including demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic origin characteristics), socioeconomic status characteristics, such as education attainment and household income, and social-psychological characteristics, such as locus of control and subjective well-being, on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for any of their children (i.e. wanting any of their children to

attain a Graduate or Professional degree). Given the dearth of research examining parents' educational aspirations as an outcome and conflicting views of and theoretical explanations for parents' educational aspirations, this study's secondary purpose was to try to begin to identify parents' educational aspirations as economic evaluations or social-psychological orientations.

In Chapter 1 of this study I outlined this study's purpose and research questions and some theoretical and practical reasons for conducting this study. In Chapter 2 I summarized the literature relevant to this study. In Chapter 3 I described this study's data, model, and analytic procedures, and in Chapter 4 I systematically presented the results of the analysis described in Chapter 3.

In this chapter I discuss the results of this study as they pertain to: the theoretical or conceptual debate about the nature of parents' educational aspirations, previous research on and our general understanding of parents' educational aspirations, and future research endeavors.

### The nature of parents' educational aspirations

What is the nature of parents' educational aspirations? Are parents' educational aspirations economic evaluations? Or are parents' educational aspirations desires or social-psychological orientations that cannot be fully explained as economic evaluations?

Although the results of this study expand our general understanding of parents' educational aspirations for their children, they fail to conclusively answer the preceding questions. The results of this study provide a modicum of potential support for a social-psychological view of parents' educational aspirations. This modicum of support provides reason to suspect purely economic views of parents' educational aspirations, but it certainly fails to justify making any conclusive decisions regarding the nature of parents' educational aspirations.

Parents' household income or the combination of their education and their household income play a significant role in determining whether or not parents have high educational aspirations for their children. In the 1980's and 1990's cohort education attainment and household income have strong positive effects on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. In the 1970's cohort education attainment does not affect parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children, but the positive effect of household income on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children is roughly twice as strong as it is in the 1980's and 1990's cohort.

While socioeconomic status characteristics play significant roles in determining whether or not parents have high educational aspirations for their children, parents' job-satisfaction, their life-satisfaction (or subjective well-being), their locus of control, and their religiosity do not. Job-satisfaction, life-satisfaction (or subjective well-being), and religiosity, which were included in this study for exploratory purposes, had no effects on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Being satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs or lives did not affect parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Locus of control also had no effect on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Parents who feel they have a high degree of control over their lives are not more (or less) likely than parents who feel otherwise to have high educational aspirations for their children. These findings are particularly noteworthy given the relatively large body of literature identifying students' satisfaction with school and locus of control as having significant effects on their own educational aspirations (Garg et al. 2002; Kao and Tienda 1995; Kim, Rendon and Valadez 1998; Looker and Pineo 1983; Marjoribanks 2002b; Mau and Bikos 2000).

Still, the effect of meeting or failing to meet personal educational aspirations on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children – after controlling for parents' actual attainment – suggests there may be a small social-psychological



component to parents' educational aspirations. Among members of the 1970's cohort and 1980's cohort parents who failed to meet their personal educational aspirations are more likely than parents who met their personal educational aspirations to have high educational aspirations for their children. For example, parents who have Bachelors' degrees but wanted Masters' degrees are more likely than parents who have Bachelors' degrees and only wanted Bachelors' degrees to have high educational aspirations for their children. This is even true for members of the 1970's cohort despite the fact that their actual education attainment does not affect their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.

The negative effect of meeting personal educational aspirations on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children can be interpreted in two ways. It is possible that meeting personal educational aspirations negatively affects parents' educational aspirations for their children. Perhaps meeting personal educational aspirations feels anticlimactic or fails to provide parents with the sense accomplishment or economic returns they expected. It is also possible that failing to meet personal educational aspirations positively affects parents' educational aspirations for their children. Perhaps parents who fail to meet their personal educational aspirations are left feeling unsatisfied or want their children to accomplish more or "go farther" than they could. In either case, there seems to be a small social-psychological component to parents' educational aspirations for their children.

Ironically, the modicum of support this study provides for a social-psychological view of parents' educational aspirations also calls into question the utility of some existing social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations or the intergenerational transmission of social status. The notion that parents want their children to have better lives or more success than they could achieve is commonplace in American society. However, various explanations of educational aspirations or the intergenerational transmission of social status – including all of the social psychological

theories or perspectives outlined in chapter two of this dissertation - predict that personal failures or unmet aspirations negatively affect individuals' orientations to success or future aspirations.

On the other hand, it is possible that the effect of meeting or failing to meet personal educational aspirations is not a social-psychological effect. It could, in fact, be a part of parents' economic calculations. Parents who met the educational aspirations they had for themselves may be disappointed in their economic returns. All things considered, higher education is a sound economic investment. However, the relative economic returns are shrinking (Collins 1979; Collins 2002; Labaree 1997a). Oppositely, parents who failed to meet the educational aspirations they had for themselves may view that failure as a source of their economic challenges.

### General findings

A handful of this study's findings improve our understanding of parents' educational aspirations without helping to adjudicate debates regarding their nature. The effects of background characteristics included in this study on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children can be incorporated into or interpreted by economic or social-psychological explanations of educational aspirations. Nonetheless these findings either provide us with information we previously didn't have or raise questions about the conclusions drawn from previous studies.

Researchers have found that parents' educational aspirations for their children can vary by the sex of their children (Carter and Wojtkiewicz 2000; Chen and Uttal 1998; Cheng and Starks 2002; Okagaki and Frensch 1998; Parsons, Adler and Kaczala 1982). That is, researchers have found that parents can have different educational aspirations for their sons and their daughters. The results of this study indicate that parents' educational aspirations for their children can also vary by parents' sex. All things considered, among

members of the 1980's cohort and 1990's cohort fathers are less likely than mothers to have high educational aspirations for their children.

Given that this study did not include matched parents, it is unclear whether or not this is the case within families. That is, it is unclear whether or not the fathers included in this study are less likely than their wives (or the mothers of their children) to have high educational aspirations for their children. Nonetheless, differences between fathers and mothers included in this study warrant attention.

Again, this finding could be incorporated into or interpreted by social-psychological or economic explanations of parents' educational aspirations. The difference between men and women in the odds of having high educational aspirations for their children could be the result of differences in the social-psychological value orientations of men and women. Many believe that gender role socialization, biology, or some combination of nature and nurture leads men and women to have different social-psychological value-orientations (Beutel and Marini 1995; Marini et al. 1996). In other words, for some reason(s), men and women differ in the relative value they assign or priority they give to different life goals, such as achieving material success, caring for or improving the well-being of others, and having what they consider a meaningful life. It could be that men and women differ in the relative value they assign to learning or being educated (at least compared to other activities, adjectives, or states of being).

On the other hand, the difference between men and women in the odds of having high educational aspirations for their children could be the result of differences in the economic calculations men and women make regarding their children's education. It could be that men and women have different perceptions of or views on the costs, risks, and potential benefits associated with investing (or not investing) in their children's education. In other words, it could be that men and women simply "crunch the numbers" in different ways.

Among the parents included in this study, those who grew up in Appalachia are more likely than those who did not to have high educational aspirations for their children. Given the relatively large literature identifying Appalachian culture as problematic to the status attainment process, this finding is noteworthy (Chenoweth and Galliher 2004; Keefe, Reck and Reck 1983; Obermiller and Maloney 2002). Given this study included only parents with higher education experiences (presumably excluding individuals who were products of a culture problematic to education attainment), this finding does not contradict previous research. However, it does raise questions about the generality of various cultural and social-psychological explanations of motivation, education, and intergenerational social mobility.

Again, it is also possible that the positive effect of growing up in Appalachia has nothing to do with culture. By various socioeconomic measures, the Appalachian region, compared to the rest of the United States, is a distressed area. What's more, large areas within the Appalachian region, such as the entire Central Appalachian sub-region, are particularly distressed. It could be that growing up in Appalachia affects individuals' perceptions of the costs and benefits of higher education in ways that reduce the "relative risk aversion" they experience when it comes to investing in their children's education. It could be that parents from Appalachia are more willing than parents not from Appalachia to invest in their children's education because the risks of not investing seem greater for parents from Appalachia than for parents not from Appalachia.

The results of this study indicate that unmarried parents are more likely than married parents to have high educational aspirations for their children, despite the fact that unmarried parents average a lower household income than married parents. This finding is relatively novel, despite the fact that a handful of studies have examined the effect of marital status or family structure (e.g. "intact" versus "non-intact" families) on parents' educational aspirations for their children. Previous studies have found either that there is no relationship between parents' marital status and the educational aspirations

they have for their children or that being unmarried (or in a non-intact family) negatively affects parents' educational aspirations for their children (DeCivita et al. 2004; Garg et al. 2002; Steelman and Powell 1991; Teachman and Paasch 1998).

Comparing the results of this study with those of previous studies suggests that the effect of parents' marital status on the educational aspirations they have for their children may vary or be conditional by their education or factors related to education. Previous studies, which have found that being unmarried either does not affect or negatively affects the educational aspirations parents have for their children, are based on samples of parents that largely consist of parents without postsecondary education experiences. This study, which finds that unmarried parents are more likely than married parents to have high educational aspirations for their children, is based on a sample of college alumni. Future studies of parents' educational aspirations – especially those that include parents with postsecondary education experiences or degrees and parents without postsecondary education experiences or degrees – should consider the possibility that the effect of parents' marital status on the educational aspirations they have for their children varies or is conditional by their education (or factors related to their education).

Finally, though small and isolated to parents who attended college in the 1980's, the effect of parents' high school household income on their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children is one of this study's most interesting findings. Among members of the 1980's cohort parents' high school household income is positively associated with their education attainment and 2000-2001 household income, which have strong positive effects on their odds of having high educational aspirations for children. However, after controlling for the effects of parents' education attainment and 2000-2001 household income on their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children, parents' high school household income negatively affects their odds of having high educational aspirations for children. In other words, among parents who attended college in the 1980's, parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for

their children are influenced by where they are located and where they started on the social ladder. What's more, all things equal, parents who started relatively high on the ladder are less likely than parents who started relatively low on the ladder to have high educational aspirations for their children.

The effect of parents' high school household income on their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children is one of this study's most interesting findings, despite the fact that it is relatively small and limited to one cohort of parents, primarily because it suggests that social mobility (or a lack of social mobility) may affect parents' educational aspirations for their children. In other words, parents' movement or lack of movement on the social ladder, rather than simply their placement on the social ladder, may affect the educational aspirations they have for their children. The negative effect of some parents' socioeconomic origin on their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children - after controlling for their socioeconomic status - could be evidence that upward social mobility positively affects or downward social mobility negatively affects some parents' educational aspirations for their children.

Again, the effect of parents' high school household income on their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children could be evidence of a social-psychological process or economic evaluation. It could be that parents' socioeconomic origin, in conjunction with their socioeconomic status, shapes their motivation or orientations to success and mobility. It could also be that parents' socioeconomic origin, in conjunction with their socioeconomic status, shapes their perceptions of the economic benefits of education or the risks involved in investing in education. In either case this finding is novel and warrants attention.

#### Cohort effects

Differences between cohorts in the effects of background and socioeconomic status characteristics on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their

children might be the result of differences between cohorts in the process by which parents' educational aspirations are formed. It might be that the process by which parents' educational aspirations are formed is different for parents who attended college in the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's. However, the data for this study did not include the number of children the parents in this study had in 2000-2001. The data for this study also did not include the age(s) or educational attainment of parents' children. Thus, differences between cohorts in the effects of background and socioeconomic status characteristics on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children might also be the results of differences between cohorts in the number of children parents have or the age(s) or educational attainment of parents' children. It might be that parents' educational aspirations or the effects of background and socioeconomic status characteristics on parents' educational aspirations change as parents have more children or as their children approach the ends of their high school careers.

Given the data based limitations of this study, it is not possible to determine why there are differences between cohorts in the effects of background and socioeconomic characteristics on parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. However, regardless of the reasons these differences provide some useful information about parents' educational aspirations.

For example, the results of this study indicate that single measures of parents' socioeconomic status may not be as effective at explaining or predicting parents' educational aspirations as distinct measures of parents' income and education. Many studies of parents' educational aspirations rely on single measures of parents' socioeconomic status (Ayalon and Yuchtman-Yaar 1989; Marjoribanks 2002a; Marjoribanks 2002b; Trusty 1998). However, the results of this study indicate that the effects (or relative effects) of parents' education and household income on the educational aspirations they have for their children vary in ways that single measures of parents' socioeconomic status would fail to identify. Among members of the 1980's

cohort and 1990's cohort parents' education and household income positively affect their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. Among members of the 1970's cohort, on the other hand, parents' household income has strong positive effects on their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children, but their education attainment does not affect their odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.

Had I used in this study a single measure of parents' socioeconomic status, rather than distinct measures of parents' education and household income, I would not have discovered these differences. Again, it is not possible, using this study's data, to determine why there are differences between cohorts in the effects (or relative effects) of parents' education and household income on the educational aspirations they have for their children. However, regardless of the reason(s), these differences call into question the utility of using single measures of socioeconomic status to study parents' educational aspirations.

With respect to this study's analysis of each cohort, it is also worth noting that, after controlling for differences in socioeconomic status characteristics, there were no cohort based differences in parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children. This finding is noteworthy because it may evidence a trend in parents' educational aspirations that diverges from trends in students' educational aspirations.

Consistent with theoretical predictions of the consumption of credentials, research indicates that students' educational aspirations have been steadily rising in recent decades (Collins 2002; Labaree 1997b). For at least thirty years the percentage of American high school students who aspire to postsecondary education and the percentage of American high school and college students who aspire to graduate and professional degrees have been steadily rising. If parents' educational aspirations for their children, like students' educational aspirations, have been or are steadily rising, one would expect cohort based differences in parents' odds of having high educational aspirations for their children.



More specifically, one would expect members of the 1990's cohort to be more likely than members of the 1980's cohort and members of the 1980's cohort to be more likely than members of the 1970's cohort to have high educational aspirations for their children.

If this study's results indicate anything about a trend in parents' educational aspirations for their children, they indicate that parents' educational aspirations for their children are stable. That is, the results of this study indicate that parents' educational aspirations for their children are neither rising nor falling. Of course, it is possible that parents' educational aspirations for their children are, in fact, rising (or, I suppose, falling). This study's data contained three cohorts of parents, but the data only contained parents' educational aspirations for their children at one point in time (2000-2001). What's more, as I have previously stated, this study's data did not include the number of children parents had in 2000-2001, the age(s) of parents' children, or the educational attainment of parents' children, which almost certainly vary by cohort. Thus, it is possible that members of the 1990's cohort will eventually be more likely than members of the 1980's cohort and members of the 1980's cohort will eventually be more likely than members of the 1970's cohort to have high educational aspirations for their children. However, there is no support in this study for the notion that parents' educational aspirations, like students' educational aspirations, have been or are steadily increasing.

### Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to contribute to our understanding or knowledge of the educational aspirations parents have for their children and, in doing so, contribute to our understanding or knowledge of education and status attainment processes. Given the relative lack of attention that researchers have paid to the formation of parents' educational aspirations and the uniqueness of this study's data, this goal was easily accomplished.

Some of this study's findings are novel. For example, we have long known that parents' location on the social ladder affects the educational aspirations they have for their children. The results of this study indicate that, at least for some parents, the educational aspirations they have for their children are shaped by where they are located and where they started on the social ladder. That is, social mobility experiences affect the educational aspirations some parents have for their children. More specifically, either upward social mobility experiences positively affect or downward social mobility experiences negatively affect the educational aspirations parents have for their children. Given the duration and intensity of academic or popular culture debates in America regarding the legitimacy upward intergenerational social mobility via education, this finding is noteworthy.

This study's finding – that meeting or failing to meet personal educational aspirations affects the educational aspirations parents have for their children – is also novel and noteworthy. Contrary to a number of cultural and social-psychological theories of aspirations, the parents in this study who failed to meet their personal educational aspirations are more likely than the parents who met their personal educational aspirations to have high educational aspirations for their children. It is, of course, possible that this finding represents the effects of a cultural or social-psychological process (and, in turn, represents a possible revision of various cultural or social-psychological theories of motivation). However, it is also possible that meeting or failing to meet personal educational aspirations simply colors the economic calculations parents are making with respect to the educational aspirations they have for their children. Either way, this finding warrants attention.

Some of this study's findings are novel compared to the findings of previous studies. Quantitative researchers have not found growing up in Appalachia to have strong positive effects on parents' or students' educational aspirations. In fact, more often than not researchers have found that the educational aspirations Appalachian

parents and students are below those of non-Appalachian parents and students. Researchers have also not found unmarried parents to be more likely than married parents to have high educational aspirations for their children. Again, more often than not researchers have found that parents in non-intact traditional families have lower educational aspirations for their children than parents in intact traditional families. The results of this study indicate that growing up in Appalachia *positively* affects and being single *positively* affects the educational aspirations the parents in this study have for their children.

Given that this study only included parents with higher education experiences, this study's findings on growing up in Appalachia and being divorced do not contradict previous research (which focuses largely on parents who do not have higher education experiences). However, they do raise questions about the generality of various cultural and social-psychological explanations of motivation, education, and intergenerational social mobility. These findings also represent potential ways of expanding the study of higher education. Though higher education researchers have spent the last decades producing an enormous literature on the effects of higher education, the field itself is still relatively new to the academy (especially compared to some of the disciplines from which it draws).

The more interesting, secondary goal of this study was to identify parents' educational aspirations for their children as social-psychological orientations or economic evaluations. Given the dearth of previous research on the educational aspirations parents have for their children and this study's limitations, this goal was left unfinished. The results of this study provide a modicum of potential support for a social-psychological view of parents' educational aspirations. This modicum of support provides reason to suspect purely economic views of parents' educational aspirations, but it certainly fails to justify making any conclusive decisions regarding the nature of parents' educational aspirations.

Leaving this study's secondary goal unfinished should not be considered a failure. Interpretations of the status attainment process have been a source of theoretical conflict for the last sixty years, and in that time almost every major component of the status attainment process has been thoroughly studied and subjected to diverse theoretical interpretations. Compared to other components of the status attainment process, parents' educational aspirations for their children have not been given the empirical or theoretical scrutiny that is justified by their role in the overall status attainment process (or any theoretical interpretation of that role). Students' educational aspirations, for example, have been thoroughly studied and theoretically interpreted – both as part of the processes of achievement and attainment and as the outcome of a complex processes. Despite their relatively well-documented effects on students, parents' educational aspirations for their children, on the other hand, have been largely ignored as a dependent variable.

Given the important role parents' educational aspirations play in education and status attainment processes and the dearth of research examining parents' educational aspirations as an outcome, the list of ways in which researchers could continue to examine these important aspirations is enormous. Status attainment research for the last fifty or sixty years has been facilitated largely by attempts to expand and refine Blau and Duncan's basic status attainment model, and in that spirit this study represents a relatively novel and important yet relatively unrefined contribution to that field. Thus, this study's limitations alone provide researchers with a variety of ways for continuing the study of educational aspirations parents have for their children. Simply adding a few basic demographic variables (e.g. number of children, ages of children) to this study's model would almost certainly improve its predictive power. Refining some of the variables that were included in this study (e.g. growing up in Appalachia) would also prove useful. Replicating this study with matched parents or parents who lack higher education experiences would help to address theoretical questions this study could not answer.

Continuing the tradition of status attainment research by adding to or refining the status attainment model (or some section of it) would certainly help scholars better understand the educational aspirations that parents have for their children. However, scholars must also recognize that contemporary America is, in many ways, a more diverse and more complicated society than the one studied by Blau and Duncan (or even many of their scholarly descendants). Thus, future studies of educational aspirations parents have for their children would also be well-served by considerations that go beyond revising the status attainment model. For example, contemporary American families are far more diverse in their structure than American families of previous generations. For example, how many of the parents included in this study are actually step-parents or have, through marriage, created a step-parent? What kind of economic, emotional, and practical relationships exist between their step-children's biological parents? These questions do not necessarily go beyond the capabilities of status attainment research. However, they do, in fact, complicate status attainment research, which has arguably relied for decades on the premise that a traditional family unit (or even a "broken" traditional family unit) is the basis for intergenerational mobility or the study of it (Steelman and Powell 1991).

Today's educational and economic markets also serve to complicate examinations of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. For previous generations of Americans, it was relatively safe to assume that more education would translate into higher income (Labaree 1997a). While it is still true that, all things considered, increases in education lead to increases in income, the economic returns to educational investments are shrinking. What's more, Americans are increasingly aware of what researchers have been noting for a few years – that people are acquiring credentials at rates that our economy cannot sustain (Collins 1979; Collins 2002; Labaree 1997b). These trends present profound challenges for status attainment researchers and, more generally, sociologists of education, who have long enjoyed the luxury of basing their theoretical

debates (regarding motivation and culture, among other things) on the certainty of education's economic value. It may have been unfair to women, people of color, or the poor (i.e. people who have had legitimate reasons to believe that the educational deck was stacked against them) that scholars have spent the last few decades assuming that educational aspirations were a decent proxy for motivation or culture. However, it was, in a sense, justifiable and somewhat useful, given both the economic returns to education and the difficulty in measuring motivation or culture in other ways. Increasingly (as the economic returns to education continue to shrink) such assumptions are neither justifiable nor useful. Increasingly status attainment researchers may have to rely on theoretical and empirical treatments of educational aspirations that have actually been presented as criticisms to the economic, social-psychological, or cultural assumptions underlying the status attainment model (Ayalon and Yuchtman-Yaar 1989; Hanson 1994). Multi-dimensional approaches to students' aspirations, for example, which disaggregate aspirations into educational, occupational, and economic aspirations, are not the product of scholars attempting to address shrinking economic returns to education. They are, rather, the product of scholars attempting to address the effects of differential returns understanding that discrimination (or perceived discrimination) in educational and occupational settings might cause students' to direct their motivation or ambitions away from educational attainment and toward other means of achievement. Nonetheless, these sorts of approaches may prove useful to status attainment researchers who increasingly must acknowledge that educational aspirations are neither a proxy for anything nor a comprehensive measure of what students or parents want out of life.

Like quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers have given little attention to the formation and nature of the educational aspirations parents have for their children. However, scholars with qualitative research skills might be particularly well-suited for contemporary examinations. Do (or how do) parents consider the various non-pecuniary effects of higher education when they consider how much education they want their

children to acquire? There are a number of non-pecuniary (social, social-psychological, & physical) benefits of higher education (Crosnoe 2007; Dooley, Prause and Ham-Rowbottom 2000; Miech and Shanahan 2000). Do parents consider at least some higher education a sort of rite of passage? Do parents, like many education scholars, differentiate between being “educated” (i.e. well-read, well-rounded, etc) and being “trained” (i.e. having specific skills for which there is a supply and demand)? Currently, none of these questions have been substantively addressed by researchers. Ultimately, skilled researchers stand a good chance of making a contribution as long as they keep in mind a basic fact: as important as parents’ educational aspirations are to student-related outcomes, they are themselves outcomes of a process, whether that process is an economic evaluation or the formation of a social-psychological orientation.

APPENDIX A  
TABLES

Table A1 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. dev.
1970's cohort (1 = member)	0.4	
1980's cohort (1 = member)	0.35	
1990's cohort (1 = member)	0.25	
Race (1 = white)	0.96	
Sex (1 = male)	0.49	
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia (1 = yes)	0.6	
H.S. household income	10.1	0.95
ACT score	21.41	4.34
Institution type (1 = public)	0.29	
Marital status (1 = married)	0.9	
Living in Appalachia in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.5	
Associate's degree (1 = highest degree)	0.05	
Bachelor's degree (1 = highest degree)	0.55	
Master's or Specialist's degree (1 = highest degree)	0.32	
Doctoral or Professional degree (1 = highest degree)	0.08	
2000-2001 Household income	11.18	0.53
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.95	
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	0.7	
High locus of control (1 = yes)	0.62	
Life-satisfaction	0	1
Job-satisfaction	0	1
Religiosity	5.96	1.98
Ed. aspirations for dependent children	0.58	
N = 3489		



Table A2 Descriptive Statistics, by Cohort

	1970's cohort	1980's cohort	1990's cohort
	Mean (Std. dv.)	Mean (Std. dv.)	Mean (Std. dv.)
Race (1 = white)	0.96	0.96	0.95
Sex (1 = male)	0.5	0.5	0.46
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia (1 = yes)	0.56	0.59	0.68
H.S. household income	10.12 (.98)	10.16 (.88)	9.99 (.98)
ACT score	21.53 (4.58)	21.35 (4.18)	21.32 (4.17)
Institution type (1 = public)	0.29	0.26	0.33
Marital status (1 = married)	0.9	0.92	0.88
Living in Appalachia in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.47	0.45	0.61
Associate's degree (1 = highest degree)	0.05	0.05	0.06
Bachelor's degree (1 = highest degree)	0.45	0.58	0.69
Master's or Specialist's degree (1 = highest degree)	0.39	0.3	0.21
Doctoral or Professional degree (1 = highest degree)	0.12	0.07	0.03
2000-2001 Household income	11.33 (.51)	11.21 (.5)	10.91 (.49)
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.97	0.94	0.94
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	0.76	0.7	0.6
High locus of control (1 = yes)	0.59	0.62	0.67
Life-satisfaction	0 (1)	0 (1)	0 (1)
Job-satisfaction	0 (1)	0 (1)	0 (1)
Religiosity	5.90 (1.99)	6.02 (1.97)	5.96 (1.98)
Ed. aspirations for dependent children	0.6 (.49)	0.56 (.5)	0.57 (.5)
N	1393	1229	866

Table A3 Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Whether or Not Parents Have High Educational Aspirations for Their Children

	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
1980's cohort	0.83*	0.93	0.93
1990's cohort	0.76**	1.04	1.03
Race (white = 1)	0.79	0.76	0.78
Sex (male = 1)	0.85*	0.81**	0.81**
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	1.7***	1.61***	1.6***
H.S. household income	0.96	0.92*	0.91*
ACT score	1.05***	1.04**	1.04**
Institution type (public = 1)	1.19*	1.18*	1.22*
Marital status (married = 1)	0.82*	0.63***	0.64**
Living in Appalachia in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	1.18*	1.27**	1.24**
Associate's degree		0.77*	0.66*
Master's or Specialist's degree		1.28**	1.33***
Doctoral or Professional degree		1.49**	1.65***
2000-2001 Household income		1.84***	1.97***
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)		0.99	1.05
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)			0.76**
Locus of control (1 = high)			1.01
Life-satisfaction			0.92
Job-satisfaction			0.94
Religiosity			1.05*
Constant	0.99*	0***	0**
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.05	0.09	0.09
Overall % of cases correctly predicted	61.15	62.7	62.2
% with high aspirations correctly predicted	81.03	79.7	79.1
% with low aspirations correctly predicted	33.84	39.3	38.5
N = 3489			
* = $p < .05$ ; ** = $p < .01$ ; *** = $p < .001$			

Table A4 Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Whether or Not Parents Have High Educational Aspirations for Their Children, Part 2

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
1980's cohort	-0.08	0.08	0.93
1990's cohort	0.03	0.1	1.03
Race (white = 1)	-0.25	0.18	0.78
Sex (male = 1)	-0.22	0.07	0.81**
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	0.47	0.09	1.6***
H.S. household income	-0.09	0.04	0.91*
ACT score	0.04	0.01	1.04**
Institution type (public = 1)	0.17	0.08	1.22*
Marital status (married = 1)	-0.42	0.13	0.64**
Living in Appalachia in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.22	0.08	1.24**
Associate's degree	-0.42	0.17	0.66*
Master's or Specialist's degree	0.29	0.08	1.33***
Doctoral or Professional degree	0.52	0.15	1.65***
2000-2001 Household income	0.64	0.08	1.97***
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.02	0.17	1.05
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	-0.28	0.09	0.76**
Locus of control (1 = high)	0.01	0.08	1.01
Life-satisfaction	-0.05	0.04	0.92
Job-satisfaction	-0.08	0.04	0.94
Religiosity	0.05	0.02	1.05
Constant	0.99*	0***	0**
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.05	0.09	0.09
Overall % of cases correctly predicted	61.15	62.7	62.2
% with high aspirations correctly predicted	81.03	79.7	79.1
% with low aspirations correctly predicted	33.84	39.3	38.5
N = 3489			
* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001			

Table A5 Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Whether or Not Parents Have High Educational Aspirations for Their Children, by Cohort

	all 3 cohorts	1970's cohort	1980's cohort	1990's cohort
		Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
1980's cohort	0.93			
1990's cohort	1.03			
Race (white = 1)	0.78	0.78	0.6	0.98
Sex (male = 1)	0.81**	0.92	0.74*	0.74*
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	1.6***	1.85***	1.31*	1.74**
H.S. household income	0.91*	0.98	0.86*	0.89*
ACT score	1.04**	1.04**	1.05**	1.04
Institution type (public = 1)	1.22*	1.25	1.47*	1.01
Marital status (married = 1)	0.64**	0.6*	0.65*	0.63*
Living in App in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	1.24**	1.2	1.01	1.55*
Associate's degree	0.66*	1.09	0.71*	0.33***
Master's or Specialist's degree	1.33***	1.23	1.5**	1.33
Doctoral or Professional degree	1.65***	1.11	2.81***	2.65**
2000-2001 Household income	1.97***	2.45***	1.71***	1.56**
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	1.05	0.25**	1.87*	1.02
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	0.76**	0.85*	0.7*	0.76
Locus of control (1 = high)	1.01	0.89	1.02	1.03
Life-satisfaction	0.92	0.89	1.03	0.91
Job-satisfaction	0.94	0.92	0.93	0.93
Religiosity	1.05	1.08	1.06	1.02
Constant	0**	0***	0**	0.01*
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.09	0.11	0.11	0.12
Overall % of cases correctly predicted	62.2	66.1	63.7	62.8
% with high aspirations correctly predicted	79.3	84.3	75.5	77.1
% with low aspirations correctly predicted	38.7	38.2	48.8	44.3
N	3489	1242	1368	879
* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001				

Table A6 Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Whether or Not Parents Have High Educational Aspirations for Their Children, 1970's Cohort

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Race (white = 1)	-0.24	0.28	0.78
Sex (male = 1)	-0.08	0.12	0.92
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	0.62	0.14	1.85***
H.S. household income	-0.02	0.06	0.98
ACT score	0.03	0.01	1.04**
Institution type (public = 1)	0.23	0.13	1.25
Marital status (married = 1)	-0.51	0.21	0.6*
Living in App in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.19	0.14	1.20
Associate's degree	0.08	0.30	1.09
Master's or Specialist's degree	0.20	0.13	1.23
Doctoral or Professional degree	0.11	0.21	1.11
2000-2001 Household income	0.90	0.14	2.45***
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	-1.39	0.45	0.25**
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	-0.17	0.16	0.85*
Locus of control (1 = high)	-0.12	0.13	0.89
Life-satisfaction	-0.11	0.06	0.89
Job-satisfaction	-0.09	0.06	0.92
Religiosity	0.07	0.03	1.08
Constant			0***
Nagelkerke R-squared			0.11
Overall % of cases correctly predicted			66.10
% with high aspirations correctly predicted			84.30
% with low aspirations correctly predicted			38.20
N			1242
* = $p < .05$ ; ** = $p < .01$ ; *** = $p < .001$			

Table A7 Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Whether or Not Parents Have High Educational Aspirations for Their Children, 1980's Cohort

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Race (white = 1)	-0.51	0.34	0.6
Sex (male = 1)	-0.29	0.13	0.74*
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	0.28	0.14	1.31*
H.S. household income	-0.15	0.07	0.86*
ACT score	0.05	0.02	1.05**
Institution type (public = 1)	0.39	0.14	1.47*
Marital status (married = 1)	-0.44	0.23	0.65*
Living in App in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.08	0.14	1.01
Associate's degree	-0.35	0.30	0.71*
Master's or Specialist's degree	0.41	0.14	1.5**
Doctoral or Professional degree	1.03	0.29	2.81***
2000-2001 Household income	0.58	0.14	1.71***
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	0.63	0.26	1.87*
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	-0.35	0.14	0.7*
Locus of control (1 = high)	0.02	0.13	1.02
Life-satisfaction	0.03	0.07	1.03
Job-satisfaction	-0.08	0.07	0.93
Religiosity	0.06	0.03	1.06
Constant			0**
Nagelkerke R-squared			0.11
Overall % of cases correctly predicted			63.70
% with high aspirations correctly predicted			75.50
% with low aspirations correctly predicted			48.80
N			1368
* = $p < .05$ ; ** = $p < .01$ ; *** = $p < .001$			

Table A8 Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Whether or Not Parents Have High Educational Aspirations for Their Children, 1990's Cohort

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Race (white = 1)	-.025	.354	0.98
Sex (male = 1)	-.299	.154	0.74*
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	.558	.183	1.74**
H.S. household income	-.112	.076	0.89*
ACT score	.037	.019	1.04
Institution type (public = 1)	.004	.157	1.01
Marital status (married = 1)	-.464	.248	0.63*
Living in App in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	.436	.179	1.55*
Associate's degree	-1.110	.322	0.33***
Master's or Specialist's degree	.281	.182	1.33
Doctoral or Professional degree	.974	.469	2.65**
2000-2001 Household income	.442	.169	1.56**
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)	.263	.314	1.02
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	-.269	.160	0.76
Locus of control (1 = high)	.211	.164	1.03
Life-satisfaction	-.100	.081	0.91
Job-satisfaction	-.070	.080	0.93
Religiosity	.019	.040	1.02
Constant			0.01*
Nagelkerke R-squared			0.12
Overall % of cases correctly predicted			62.8
% with high aspirations correctly predicted			77.1
% with low aspirations correctly predicted			44.3
N			879
* = $p < .05$ ; ** = $p < .01$ ; *** = $p < .001$			

Table A9 Summary of Findings, by Cohort

	1970's cohort	1980's cohort	1990's cohort
Race (white = 1)			
Sex (male = 1)		(-)	(-)
Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	(+)	(+)	(+)
H.S. household income		(-)	
ACT score			
Institution type (public = 1)		(+)	
Marital status (married = 1)	(-)	(-)	(-)
Living in Appalachia in 2000-2001 (1=yes)			(+)
Associate's degree		(-)	(-)
Master's or Specialist's degree		(+)	
Doctoral or Professional degree		(+)	(+)
2000-2001 Household income	(+)	(+)	(+)
Working for pay in 2000-2001 (1 = yes)			
Met personal ed. aspirations (1 = yes)	(-)	(-)	
Locus of control (1 = high)			
Life-satisfaction			
Job-satisfaction			
Religiosity			



APPENDIX B  
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Dependent Variable	
Educational Aspirations for Children	
	A categorical variable coded: 1 = above a Bachelor's degree, 0 = up to and including a Bachelor's degree.
Independent Variables	
Graduation Cohort	
	Three dummy variables (coded 1 or 0) representing the 1994-96 graduation cohort, the 1984-86 graduation cohort, and the 1974-76 cohort. Information provided by each institution participating in the study.
Race	
	A categorical variable taken from the ARAOS, and coded: 1 = white person, 0 = person of color.
Sex	
	A categorical variable taken from the ARAOS, and coded: 1 = male, 0 = female.
Lived in the Appalachian Region When Graduating from High School	
	A categorical variable taken from the ARAOS where alumni were asked to refer to a provided map of the Appalachian Region and to indicate whether or not they were living in the region when they graduated from high school. Coded: 1 = yes, 0 = no.
High School Household Income	
	Average of mother's and father's income taken from the ACT Assessment, standardized across ACT Assessment years (1969/70 – 1992/93), and assigned a mean of 10.
ACT Composite Score	
	The combination of scores on the ACT English and Mathematics Test. Taken from the ACT Assessment.
Institution Type	
	A categorical variable taken from the ARAOS, and coded: 1 = public institution, 0 = private institution.
Marital Status	
	A categorical variable indicating current marital status. Taken from the ARAOS, and coded: 1 = currently married, 0 = not currently married.
Living in the Appalachian Region	

	A categorical variable taken from the ARAOS that asked alumni to refer to a map provided of the Appalachian Region and to indicate whether or not they were currently living in that region. Coded: 1 = yes, 0 = no.
Education	
	Four categorical variables representing respondents to indicate their highest level of education (Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, or terminal degree).
Household Income	
	The natural log of respondents' 2000-2001 household income.
Met Personal Educational Aspirations	
	A categorical variable representing whether or not respondents met (1) or failed to meet (0) the educational aspirations they had for themselves when they took the ACT exam. Created using ACT data and ARAOS responses.
Locus of Control	
	A categorical variables representing whether or not respondents' sense of control over their lives (1 = yes, 0 = no).
Life-satisfaction	
	A four-item scale (alpha reliability = .709) measuring respondents' satisfaction with life (excluding work).
Job-satisfaction	
	An eleven item scale (alpha reliability = .653) measuring respondents' satisfaction with work.
Religiosity	
	A two item scale (alpha reliability = .871) measuring the amount of time respondents spend participating in religious activities.





	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1) 1970's cohort	.078**	.111**	-.056**	.019	.003	-.024	.043*
2) 1980's cohort	-.053**	.003	.001	-.024	.027	.023	-.030
3) 1990's cohort	-.030	-.129**	.063**	.005	-.034*	.001	-.015
4) Race (white = 1)	-.021	.024	.019	.006	.009	-.004	-.008
5) Sex (male = 1)	.164**	-.001	.051**	-.038*	.129**	-.060**	-.052**
6) Graduated H.S. in Appalachia	.025	-.040*	-.008	.005	-.031	-.010	.149**
7) H.S. household income	-.027	-.005	.056**	.014	.064**	-.024	-.026
8) ACT score	.021	-.047**	-.009	-.059**	.089**	-.057**	.087**
9) Institution type (public = 1)	.014	-.019	-.001	.019	-.006	-.147**	.049**
10) Marital status (married = 1)	-.044**	.014	.007	.152**	.061**	.076**	-.034*
11) Living in Appalachia (1 = yes)	.041*	-.046**	-.043*	.034*	-.110**	.051**	.103**
12) Associate's degree	-.018	-.334**	-.014	.012	.009	.017	-.038*
13) Bachelor's degree	-.080**	-.145**	-.015	-.025	-.020	-.052**	-.081**
14) Master's or Specialist's degree	.061**	.202**	.005	.024	-.061**	.040*	.065**
15) Doctoral/Professional degree	.056**	.194**	.031	-.004	.134**	.013	.068**
16) 2000-2001 Household income	.110**	.042*	.094**	.079**	.294**	-.122**	.130**
17) Working for pay in (1 = yes)	1	.030	.033*	.026	.081**	-.072**	.027
18) Personal aspirations (1 = met)	.030	1	.029	.036*	-.010	.022	-.026
19) Locus of control (1 = high)	.033*	.029	1	.303**	.214**	.034*	-.006
20) Life-satisfaction	.026	.036*	.303**	1	.145**	.178**	-.025
21) Job-satisfaction	.081**	-.010	.214**	.145**	1	.026	-.003
22) Religiosity	-.072**	.022	.034*	.178**	.026	1	.006
23) Aspirations for kids (1 = high)	.027	-.026	-.006	-.025	-.003	.006	1
* = p < .05; ** = p < .01							

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