

ASPIRATION DIFFERENCES IN FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BASED ON  
PARENTS' EDUCATION LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This study uses data from 61 in-depth interviews with high school junior and senior girls to examine differences in educational aspirations by parental education level. By examining how young adults' aspirations are shaped by the norms and values held by others in their social network, including their families and friends, the current study identifies and illustrates some of the obstacles disadvantaged young female students may face, and how they view their opportunities in higher education. Data for this study was collected in two schools in Southwest Ohio in the fall of 2008. Both schools possessed a similar make up in urbanicity and racial composition, and were economically disparate. With parental education level being the distinguishing factor, students were placed into one of two categories; potential first-generation students and potential continuous-generation students. Analysis reveals differences in their primary focus after high school graduation, how they view the idea of college, and their overall understanding of the college structure. In addition, this study illustrates some of the means by which these influences take place, such as the home environment, parental involvement, social and cultural capital, and available resources.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Aspiration Differences in Female High School Students Based on Parents’ Education Level,” presented by Asia Smith Orr, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

With love, this thesis is dedicated to my mother, Carlah D. Smith.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Can I go to college? Can I afford it? Is it worth it? These are questions that almost everyone has asked themselves at some point in their life, most right before high school graduation. Couple this with growing concerns over the income disparities between classes, unemployment rates, and rising costs of tuition, and this topic continues to grow in popularity. When we look at the debate over who has access to higher education it is educational and occupational goals that are found to be instrumental to eventual attainment (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Marjoribanks, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Because of this, more research has been devoted to not only exploring questions associated with educational attainment, but also in looking at the aspirations of students when they are in high school.

As the role of education grows larger with the progression of time, so does the amount of influence it has in determining the future of our young adults. We know that education levels are correlated with higher income, the type of possible careers, and the overall potential quality of life an individual may have (Garg, Lewko, & Urajnik, 2002). Since aspirations and expectations are often viewed as being influenced by societal factors such as the school and the family, much of the research conducted in this area has been by sociologists and psychologists (Mau & Bikos, 2000). By investigating how aspirations develop, how they are shaped, and how they are influenced, we are provided with assistance in understanding how individuals make decisions in regards to the educational and occupational fields. I aim to contribute to the understanding of this topic

by exploring the different educational aspirations among female high school students based on their parents' education level.

One interesting observation regarding aspirations and eventual attainment is that it is no longer just researchers that are interested in exploring the topic. All three levels of government--local, state, and federal--have gained a vested interest as well. Our country, along with many others, seeks to encourage and increase educational attainment as a way to reduce inequalities, especially for individuals coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. All three levels of government see more gains in their tax revenue from college graduates along with a lowering in the number of individuals dependent on income support programs (Baum & Ma, 2007). This fact means that the government has been added to the many voices attempting to guide our youth when it comes to them answering the question of "What's next?" These other voices also include closer individuals such as parents, school counselors, and teachers along with the self-placed pressure of students comparing themselves to one another. This fact is backed by research, such as that done by Choy, Horn, Nuñez, and Chen (2000) which found that the influence of peers was a strong predictor of attainment for students at moderate to high risk of dropping out of high school or not continuing on to college, and also found that if most of their friends had plans to attend college then they were much more likely to enroll.

Though most of our young adults are likely to be at least considering aspirations of college attainment, partly due to our relatively new culture of college for all, there still remains some other characteristics that research has found to potentially help to influence aspirations and eventual attainment. Before continuing I want to clarify that the focus of this paper is strictly on exploring the differences in aspirations. However, in looking at

those differences, differences in college planning comes up quite often due to the potential of it being a possible explanatory factor for any distinctions seen between future first-generation college students and continuous-generation students, or at the very least, for its potential as a mediating factor. Going back, one of those potentially distinct characteristics is family background, which includes socio-economic status and the education level of the parents. Choy et al. (2000) report that as risk factors in dropping out of high school increase, the student becomes less likely to remain on the path of completion for college attainment. However, they also find that providing assistance with the application process, along with providing aid with school selection and financial aid resources, is associated with a boost in college enrollment rates. It is also suggested that school personnel, peers, and parents can all make a significant contribution to increasing the college enrollment rates of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school or those students whose parents had no college experience (Choy et al., 2000). Knowing, understanding, and acknowledging that there is a difference between would-be future first-generation college students and continuous-generation college students despite the potential of them graduating from the same institution can help all individuals who hold an advisory position make an effective difference in helping students achieve their aspirations.

The purpose of this research is to explore the difference in aspirations of high school students by their parents' level of education attainment. More specifically, I want to explore the difference in aspirations between potential future first-generation college students and potential continuous-generation college students. Specifically, I will be comparing the aspirations of high school students whose parents did not attend college to

the aspirations of high school students whose parents did attend college. These terms (first-generation and continuous-generation) might normally invoke the idea that a parent has fully completed and graduated college with some sort of a postsecondary degree. However, for the sake of this research, use of these terms will be referring to if the parent *attended* college or not, completion is not a specific criterion. In other words, did at least one parent have some form of a college experience? The influence of actual college graduation will be noted when necessary.

Previous research has shown that parents who possess high levels of education or possess a high family income level greatly increase the probability of their children attending a four-year university and reduces the chances of their children not enrolling in post-secondary education at all (Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006). Furthermore, college educated parents are found to convey the value of education and indicate that their child is expected to follow in their footsteps and receive a college education compared to parents who possessed no college experience (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008).

This study is of unique value in the fact that the data was collected in 2008, at the height of the great recession. This was a time when the entire country was in economic shift, and many individuals' social class status shifted. In addition to comparing students' reported educational goals, I ask whether differences in parents' education explains: will also examine differences in a) what students say are their most important post-high school goals, b) how they view college as an institution, and c) their understanding of the higher education system. This paper is organized to answer these three questions and then examine the implications of the results.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background

Research into aspirations began in the early 1970s. The research was undertaken in an effort to determine and illustrate the connection between educational aspirations and educational attainment. We now know that expectations are predictive of eventual attainment (Boxer, Goldstein, DeLorenzo, Savoy, & Mercado, 2011; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Jacob & Linkow, 2011) and that this area of study has since progressed to including occupational aspirations and attainment. In today's time, expectations are found to hold less predictive ability than before; however, its predictive capabilities are still significantly strong (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). Many of the same factors that affect attainment also affect expectations. These factors largely consist of the characteristics of the family, the individual, and the environment (i.e., neighborhood). With that, this type of research allows us to somewhat predict the future, or at the very least predict an individual's most likely outcome. George Farkas (2011) states that in looking at different attitude variables, it is the expectations of education that consistently has significant effects on outcomes particularly when dealing with high school and post-secondary degree attainment. There are also other factors that explain adolescent aspirations and education attainment, such as neighborhoods, type of school, and the school curriculum (Ainsworth, 2002; Akos, Lambie, Milsom, & Gilbert, 2007). All of these factors aid in shaping the aspirations of adolescents.

The two terms aspirations and expectations are often mistaken to essentially have the same meaning but in fact have a distinct difference. In line with the dictionary definition, to aspire is to want to have or achieve something, to dream about a possible future for the self (Boxer et al., 2011; Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.). To expect comes with a sense of entitlement, it is "to think that something will probably or certainly happen" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.). Some researchers have pointed out trends, especially for students from lower resource neighborhoods, that indicate aspirations tend to be more ambitious than expectations (Boxer et al., 2011). For example, one could aspire to become a world-renowned surgeon who travels the globe. The expectation, however, may be to simply graduate medical school and work as a physician. Despite the known differences between expectations and aspirations this study will be using the words interchangeably. This is largely due to the combination of the research being informed from both literature and interview participants who simultaneously reported both their ideal and probable futures.

## Models

When dealing with aspirations, the discussion of mobility is always lurking in the background. Aspirations are what affect individuals' investment incentives (Genicot & Ray, 2014), which can include the decision to go to and complete college. When looking at mobility the focus is usually on intergenerational (between several generations of a family) or intragenerational (with in one's own lifetime) change. In social science, the idea of mobility is often connected to achievement--the measurement of it, and the status gained from it (Breen & Jonsson, 2005). Further, educational mobility specifically is defined as young people's education relative to that of their parents (Hout & Janus, 2011,

p.171). For that reason, one could say that while we may be examining the relationship of mobility, and therefore achievement (or potential achievement based on aspirations, in the case of this study) from one generation to the next, we are also examining the process of stratification and how it may occur from one generation to the next. One could argue that achieving social mobility can only begin with aspiration of social mobility itself.

Side stepping the argument of ascription versus achievement, which is important and plays a role in mobility, I turn to one of the most influential, and widely used theories to inform my research, the status attainment model. Blau and Duncan (1967) conceived the idea for the status attainment model, and at the time were specifically looking at the extent to which a father's level of occupational status is transmitted to his sons, along with the processes by which it occurs. This model comes from a socialization perspective and is about examining intergenerational status transmission.

The status attainment model was originally used with a focus placed on occupation, but, as the model demonstrates, there is an indisputable link between occupation, occupational hierarchy, and education. The goals of the model, as stated by Haller and Portes (1973), was to examine the extent to which inherited status determines the social fate of individuals and the extent to which earlier positions in status hierarchies affect later levels of attainment. The results indicated that the status level or position of the parent does have direct and significant impact on the child. However, what was found to be the primary influence of occupational attainment for the child is actually indirect and comes by way of education level, a key fact to the current research study. Nonetheless, a crucial weakness of this model was the lack of identifying the mediating processes by which parental status affects educational, and to a lesser extent occupational,

attainment (Haller & Portes, 1973). To that we turn to a second, similar model known as the Wisconsin model.

The Wisconsin model (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969), while similar to the first, attempted to be a little more specific and included additional psychological variables. While Blau and Duncan's status attainment model was specifically concerned with status transmission, the Wisconsin model was more concerned with status attainment. In other words it was designed to clarify the process of how the transmission occurs. To be more specific in regards to their differences, the status attainment model focused only on the father's education and occupation in examining transmission. In addition, these variables and their influence were examined separately. However, the creators of the Wisconsin model sought to identify the mediating variables and pathways of influence on later attainment that status attainment model could not address. To begin they combined the father's education and occupation with the mother's education, and family income into one variable- socioeconomic status.

Both models are in agreement that parental status has a significant effect on early occupation and even larger effect on educational attainment. That said, the variables of education and occupation in Blau and Duncan's status attainment model have been shown by the Wisconsin model to be completely mediated by the formation of educational and occupational aspirations and the impact of significant others influences (Haller & Portes, 1973).

The Wisconsin model found that the influence significant others may have on outcomes is stronger than parental status on later outcomes. Using this conceptual model, the researchers provided strong evidence on the extent to which significant others have

impact on the formation of attitudes and aspirations. In addition, this model depicted that all of the influence a family's socioeconomic status has on a person's educational and occupational attainment is actually due to the family's status being responsible for the type of attainment-related personal influences available to the adolescent (Haller & Portes, 1973). Note the impact of a family's status includes the parents' influence on the formation of status aspirations. In other words, all the influential power that the socioeconomic status of the family may hold doesn't necessarily impact a person's achievement in the way that the status attainment model found. Instead, that status determines the pool of would-be significant others in the life of the adolescent, and the influence of those significant-others in shaping status aspirations, along with the influence of the parents, are what influences eventual occupational and educational attainment. It is ascertained that students comply with the behaviors expressed by their peers and the educational expectations of adults (Lloyd, Leicht, & Sullivan, 2008), and suggested that both the parental expectations and peer group expectations are then incorporated into the individual's self-concept (Haller, 1982).

Both models draw the conclusion that there is a significant link with parental status and early occupational attainment (Haller & Portes, 1973). However, as mentioned earlier, while the parental status variables do have a significant influence, that influence becomes insignificant when the child's educational attainment is included. This fact highlights the importance of looking at students aspirations based on their parents' education level. The Wisconsin model arrived at the conclusion that early occupational attainment is primarily a function of prior education (Haller & Portes, 1973). It also goes one step further in finding that the effect of education is stronger than what the status

attainment model found, arguing that education has more than twice the effect than the gross parental effects. It should be made clear that the impact of aspirations is found to be so significant that even with educational attainment being accounted for, occupational aspirations were still found to have a significant and direct effect on occupational attainment (Haller & Portes, 1973).

The inclusion of aspirations was a key component of the Wisconsin model. However, the impact aspirations have on attainment does not mean that all specific goals will be realized, but that the initial plans made set limits to the range where eventual attainment levels are likely to be found. This fact, coupled with the relationship aspirations have to an individual making an investment into the future, allows us to see why aspirations are also such an important factor in explaining intergenerational mobility. This also highlights the significance of understanding what goes into aspirations and why it is important to recognize how the aspirations of a person may be limited by the socially structured boundaries already in place.

#### Gender Differences

One's gender identity is known to play a significant role in what one aspires to achieve. While this current study is not focused on gender differences specifically, the fact that all the participants were young women gives cause to review the literature on gender to potentially help inform the analysis of the interviews.

Gender can have a significant impact on educational and occupational expectations and aspirations (Mau & Bikos, 2000). Research conducted by Mau and Bikos (2000) found that after statistically controlling for other predictive factors such as school, family, and psychological variables, sex still remained a strong predictor of

educational and occupational aspirations. Some researchers have made the argument that the gender differences we see among young adults are strongly influenced by adults and our socio-cultural standards for gender identity (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Research conducted by Eccles (1994) demonstrates that gender differences seen in adolescents' and young adults' educational and occupational choices are in part, the consequence of ideas about the norms of careers in which men and women should aspire. Research has also supported the idea that young adults' gender beliefs about work-family were found to be statistically significant in regards to their educational aspirations (Davis & Pearce, 2007). It was found that for every one unit of increase in egalitarian work-family ideals, the individual was twice as likely to expect a higher level of education; this finding is stronger for females than it is for males (Davis & Pearce, 2007). This implies that mothers that have increased education levels may potentially socialize their children to be more egalitarian in regards to gender when it comes to ideologies on balancing work and family, which aids in leading their children to having higher educational expectations (Davis & Pearce, 2007). In other words, there is a positive relationship between having more gender equal ideals about work-family and the desired amount of higher education. Researchers also found that female students actually had significantly higher aspirations than what their male counterparts reported (Mau, 1995; Mau & Bikos, 2000). While both female and male students are found to want to attend, and/or complete college, females, specifically between the ages of 14-26 after controlling for academic achievement, were found to want to attain more professional occupations than their male counterparts (Mello, 2008).

## Social and Cultural Capital and Aspirations

When looking at aspirations and the ability to achieve those aspirations, the concept of capital becomes important, specifically cultural and social capital, which aid in the transmission process and act as a mechanism for the intergenerational replication of inequalities. Pierre Bourdieu (1985) first conducted analysis of social capital, which he defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”(p. 248). The understanding of social capital and how it works is important because it helps researchers understand the process by which social connections and relationships are used in the achievement of one’s goals in life. It is this theory that goes along with the popular saying, “It’s not what you know, but who you know.” The idea of cultural capital, also conceptualized by Bourdieu, was largely tied to education and academic attainment. To possess cultural capital according to Bourdieu’s argument (1985) is to possess a basic understanding or familiarity of the dominant culture and therefore the ability to use and appear educated or well informed. This understanding of cultural capital, like that of social capital, can then be used for the achievement of different goals. Cultural capital, which can be identified in three forms according to Bourdieu’s argument, conceives that the degree in which one may possess cultural capital varies between social classes, acting as a way to continue divisions and inequalities.

## Familial Influence and Aspirations

With discussion of the forms of capital, families are also instrumental in the eventual educational attainment of young adults through their provision of a variety of

resources (Sandefur et al., 2006). Specifically, parents are a resource in providing both social and cultural capital. In fact, when researchers discuss the effects of family background, it is common to find reference to parental involvement (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). In regards to college aspirations, college enrollment and academic preparation for college results have shown that they have a positive relationship with parental involvement (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). It was also found that family tradition plays a role. Many of the students in the research done by Daigneault and Wirtz (2008) followed the path of an older sibling or parent and reported never really considering anything else. For example, students that may have come from a military family stated always knowing that after graduation they would be joining the military. It has been suggested that to a certain extent, children actually inherit their parents' education level (Gofen, 2009).

Because parents are essentially a never ending source of influence for their children, a parent's behavior, parenting style, and level of involvement, along with their beliefs, goals, and aspirations for their children can have a significant effect on children's educational and career choices (Garg et al., 2002; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Research done on mobility shows the well-established link between the education level of parents and the education level of their children (Gofen, 2009). Further, some hold the belief that the children of parents that hold college degrees, on average, may have higher academic achievement than the children whose parents have lower levels of education with everything else being equal (Reardon, 2011). The agreed impact and influence of parental education is further demonstrated in the fact that several longitudinal surveys use parental educational attainment as a measure: the ECLS (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study), ECLS-B (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, birth cohort), the ECLS-K (Early

Childhood Longitudinal Study, kindergarten), the NELS (National Education Longitudinal Study), the NLSY (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the SECCYD (Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development), and countless more. Parental involvement, which is found to have a positive relationship with parental education level (Hill et al., 2004), has been found to be another extremely important factor in the predictive capabilities on aspirations and attainment (Fan & Chen, 2001; Froiland & Davison, 2014). Not only can it influence the aspirations of children, but depending on background and circumstances, involved parenting can potentially act as a mediating factor working to level the playing field for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### First-Generation College Students vs. Continuous-Generation Students

First-generation college students have a unique set of characteristics compared to their continuous-generation counterparts. First-generations are more likely be racial/ethnic minorities and are more likely come from lower socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds (Bui, 2002; McCaron & Inkelas, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Bui, 2002). They also often lack necessary knowledge about post-secondary education, have little familial support and little academic preparation in high school, and have minimal educational expectations and plans (Gofen, 2009). This can lead to there being a fundamental difference in cultural background and, therefore, a difference in the possession of cultural and or social capital.

Cultural capital is also important, specifically in the area of first-generation college students, because it is how one learns about the expected campus-wide values and environment. It is how one gains familiarity with college specific terminology and the

overall functioning of the higher education setting (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). This type of knowledge, which would more than likely be passed down by parents (McDonough, 1997), is lacking by students who are or would be first-generation college students (Ceja, 2006). The lack of this knowledge can have an effect on a student knowing which type of school would suit them best, fitting in socially and academically at that school, and can contribute to the degree one may experience culture shock. Studies show that first-generation students experience a strong “culture shock” upon entering college since for them college life is fundamentally a different culture compared to that of their parents’ way of life (Gofen, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Findings indicate that first-generation students depend on their parents being involved and their parents’ support, precisely because their move to college is not as straightforward as it may be for others and involves major difficulties (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Studies also suggest that parents who have a college degree are more likely to impart the value of higher education to their children through knowledge-based resources such as providing assistance with SATs and aid in completing college applications (Hout & Janus, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). First-generation students on the other hand, were reported to be less likely to take the entrance examinations required for college admittance (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). With all this, one can see why parental involvement is found to be a strong predictor of educational aspirations for both continuous-generation students and first-generation college students.

Connecting back to the social and cultural capital a family may provide, it should be known that not everything is destined to be gloom and doom for future first-generation students; there are things that can help mediate the differences found between first

generation students and continuous-generation students. For example, it has been shown that the children of parents who remain firm and communicate their expectations for their children to go to college from an early age are more likely to enroll in college and more likely to attend a four-year institution (McDonough, 1997; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Sandefur et al., 2006).

Another significant factor found was parental involvement with the school. It was found to have a positive effect in regards to college enrollment (Sandefur et al., 2006) and suggested that the more information parents have about the different types of resources, as well as activities available from the school, the better able they are to facilitate in college enrollment. Students whose parents had no type of college experience were less likely than their peers with more educated parents to participate in planning activities that lead to college enrollment (Choy et al., 2000). Also highlighting the importance of looking at family and parental involvement is the fact that research has shown that parents who were frequently in contact with the school in regards to academic matters and participated in school activities increase their child's expectations (Froiland & Davison, 2014; Jacob & Linkow, 2011) and had the same probability of their children attending a four-year institution as a parent who attended graduate school (Sandefur et al., 2006).

#### Role and Resources of the Education System

In the discussion of social and cultural capital and its importance, the process of its replication is important and should be looked at as well as determining why such a difference remains between social classes and in turn between potential first-generation and continuous-generation students. We have seen from earlier discussion some of the

ways in which cultural and social capital appear and are involved in the lives of youth. However, what should also be examined are the ways in which schools, specifically our education system contribute to the reproduction of inequalities by providing or failing to provide useful forms of capital, as well as their involvement in making distinctions between classes that consistently favor a certain group of people. To address this issue I draw heavily on the arguments made by Bourdieu. When I refer to the “education system,” reference is given to the vast institution that, in addition to parents, is responsible for the transmission of accumulated knowledge from generation to generation. Bourdieu (1973) wrote: “By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture, which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture” (p.80). Bourdieu believed that by not preparing students with the information the educational system will require of them, schools should not hold the expectation that all students will be on equal footing in those areas, such as language and an understanding of culture. Because different classes of people and different racial groups adhere to different norms, to hold that expectation would only be possible if a student is raised following the dominant middle class norms. This would be due to the middle class norms most likely being what teachers and administrators can identify with.

Schools may very well be the largest source of information and resource many students have access too. Families, especially from the poor and working classes, often rely on them to guide their children when it comes to academics (Lareau, 2011; Reay,

2004). In expanding on why the norms and values a child is raised with are crucial in regards to the school system, that reliance the parents have is what allows, as Bourdieu (1973) argues, the dominant culture's beliefs to be reproduced within the schools. In other words, schools transmit and reproduce dominant cultural norms and values more easily because of the reliance that many poor and working class individuals have on them.

In order for all students who are a part of the public education system to remain on equal footing, they all would need to already possess a basic familiarity with the dominant culture. Therefore, students from other backgrounds may have to work harder at retaining, and applying the information taught to them. They are on their own in trying to navigate the conveyance of information that is based on normative standards different than their own (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). These students may share a lack of understanding in the shared experiences of middle class students, and also lack the ability to recall similar situations to apply the lesson too. This is not to say that all middle class individuals are the same, but more so, what they have in common is enough to outweigh their differences (Phelan et al., 1991).

This idea may initially appear to not make sense because all children start school at the same age; however, due to children having different competencies and support in linguistic and cultural norms, different teaching practices can begin to create gaps for a child in their understanding of any particular lesson. This will only lead to them falling further and further behind. The degree of effectiveness in which a student is able to fully function and actually learn in an educational setting is related to the degree of consistency between not only the home environment, but also the school (Pai, Adler, & Shadiow, 2006).

## Resources and Aspirations

In addition to being one of the primary reproducers of cultural divisions among classes due to its vast and influential reach (McLaren, 1998), the education system also provides knowledge of potential pathways for students to attain their desired educational and occupational levels (Rafee, 2003). A student's expectations for their eventual educational attainment goal becomes progressively more meaningful in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and the time between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, is considered to be a critical time frame in the growth of aspirations (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Jacob & Linkow, 2011). In agreement with this, Mau and Bikos (2000) found a statistically significant trend in the increase of educational aspirations occurring between the grades of 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> and the gap between 12<sup>th</sup> grade and the post graduation follow-up that was done. If schools are designed in a way in which students must already possess certain tools in order to succeed instead of them being provided, those who are outside of the dominant culture automatically start and remain at a severe disadvantage.

Examination into the different resources available and provided by the education system aids in the attempt to explain the potential difference in aspirations between students from a structural level. Many first-generation college students come from backgrounds of either economic disadvantage or are part of an ethnic minority group (Bui, 2002; McCarron & Inkleas, 2006). In addition, it is widely known that the economically disadvantaged and ethnic minorities tend to be geographically concentrated (Duncan & Murnane, 2011) With that, there have been numerous studies that have shown the existence of unmistakable differences by social class in the access to resources (Hout & Janus, 2011), often associated with class, such as receiving college counseling and

participation in a college preparation curriculum. Studies show that desired educational aspirations are correlated to information about applying and financing college (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2011). When neighborhoods and subsequently area schools end up being segregated along the basis of economic factors and subsequently race, students in these areas can have a lowering of their college aspirations and often achieve lower educational and occupational attainment (Stewart, Stewart, & Simmons, 2007); this is largely due to what they are exposed to (or not exposed to), perceived or real barriers, and the lack of necessary information to succeed (Jacob & Linkow, 2011; Reardon, 2011). The type of school they attend is one of the strongest predictors of educational and occupational aspirations (Mau & Bikos, 2000).

In following what has been illustrated, one can see how a students' potential lack of access to resources can have an affect on their aspirations. Just to clarify, the current study is not necessarily focused on the differences between and within schools; however, due to the school system being in a position of being a large resource for academic information for many students and parents (especially for first-generation students) these differences are important.

An examination of high school aspirations not only allows a glimpse into what prospects students perceive to be available to them, but it also demonstrates the disconnect between those opportunities and what is actually available. Families' economic backgrounds, social status, and the amount of parental involvement, all mediated by differences in social class, play a major role in the aspirations, and eventual attainment of adolescents. However, even with that, there is still limited knowledge on the context behind the forming of educational aspirations, something much of the

literature, such as, the previously mentioned attainment models have found to be important mediating factors. With much of the research on this topic being quantitative in nature, this study will not only aid in adding more qualitative work to the literature, but also in understanding some of the context that goes unseen behind all the numbers. Analysis could potentially provide at least one explanation for the continued gaps we see amongst class lines in educational and occupational attainment.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The data for this study was collected in two schools in Southwest Ohio, Copperfield High School and Townsley High School, in the fall of 2008, at the beginning of the Great Recession. Both schools possessed a similar make up in urbanicity and racial composition. Copperfield's demographics were 74% White, 15% Black, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 4% two or more races. Townsley's demographics were 66% White, 18% Black, 6% Hispanic and 10% Asian. Townsley high school had slightly higher percentages of the non-white racial categories measured and also reported having 60% of its students being enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program, compared to Copperfield reporting only 26 % of its students enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program, with their state average being 47 % (Great schools.org). The most crucial distinction between the two schools is the graduation rate. The 2012-2013 Ohio school report card showed Copperfield was given an A for their four-year graduation rate. This means that students who entered in 2009 and were scheduled to graduate in 2012 had a 93.2 percent graduation rate and a 93.7 graduation rate (B) for a five-year completion. In contrast, Townsley received an F for achieving a 78.6 percent four-year graduation rate and a D for their five-year graduation rate of 82.9 %.

My research is of a qualitative study design consisting of in-depth interviews. By using a qualitative approach I have gained insight into the context of each individual's situation. Using a qualitative method not only allows for the insight into situational contexts, but also the ability to identify certain behavioral trends between the first-generation and continuous-generation groups. The ability to gain more in-depth

information about the personal experiences of the individual and to identify any sensitive issues that may affect the context is a crucial component for this research.

The study population for the interviews consisted of 61 high school girls at the junior and senior level, 30 from Townsley and 31 from Copperfield. A survey to gain initial information about them was conducted before interviews took place. These surveys were disseminated in English classrooms at Townsley and in homerooms at Copperfield. All selected participants indicated some interest in obtaining an occupation in the field of healthcare, which aided in reducing inconsistencies between the samples to allow for a more streamlined analysis of the data later. For example, interviewing students with a wide range of differences in their occupational aspirations would make it more difficult to analyze smaller distinctions such as comparison of the students' desired hierarchy placement within the medical field (e.g., L.P.N. vs. R.N.) and the potential reasons behind those choices. For the purpose of my research, the students' interview transcripts were divided into two main categories, those who had at least one primary parent/guardian that had enrolled and attended college and those whose parents had no college education. Those who had a parent receive some type of vocational education were counted as attending college but were listed in a sub category. In the table below I list the overall demographics of the participants.

Using a large number of interviews helps in the understanding of the context surrounding these young women's lives and their preparation for college. It should be made clear that another researcher collected the interviews used for the current study. I was later given access to all the data in order to re-analyze the interviews to explore this specific research question. This data was obtained upon the signing of a data-use

agreement and obtaining IRB approval. While new data would have normally been collected, the original interview questions asked were already appropriate for this new topic interest. Because this data was previously collected I was not present at the time that the interviews were given. In addition to being allowed access to the original data I worked closely with the original researcher to ensure that nothing of contextual importance or minor nuances were overlooked.

### Analysis

All interviews were previously transcribed and de-identified for use in this study. Every transcript was given an identifying number known only to the researchers. To begin I first compiled a preliminary code list along with creating a codebook (see Appendix A) to use in the analysis. I coded about three interviews from this preliminary code list at which time, previously unconsidered codes were added and I removed any irrelevant codes. Once I was satisfied with the updated code list I then began again with the coding process. There were still times that I went back and added more codes as developments were made throughout the coding process, a copy of the final code list can be found under appendix A. I used both inductive and deductive approaches. Some of the codes were derived from literature on similar topics; others were inductive, based on things read in the transcripts that were not previously considered. I created a total of 24 codes that were used in the analysis process, all numbered to help me with labeling the actual code on the transcript. For example, code 20 was “parental/guardian support,” defined as any mention or indication of parental support. Code seven was “educational aspiration origin,” defined as any mention of when the subject knew how much education they wanted to obtain. On the occasions new codes were formed, any transcripts

previously coded had to then be re-coded to ensure that they included the new codes. Since my research question focused on two specific groups of people, those whose parents had some form of college education and those whose parents did not, the transcripts were placed into separate files once coding was completed. Since each of the codes used were assigned a number, through the use of Track Changes in WORD processor, I was able to highlight the relevant section then make a number notation out to the side. This allowed me easy access later on when looking at how a particular code showed up throughout all of the interviews.

After the initial coding was done I then grouped all the relevant codes into bigger categories for a total of seven. Those seven categories became four themes later reduced to three (see Appendix B). This allowed me to streamline the process in determining which categories had the most appearances throughout the different interviews. Once these categories were in place I then looked to see if there were any differences in which categories appeared most often between my two subset populations, those whose parents attended college and those whose parents had not. The sections of the transcripts that related to each of the more common themes were then reviewed again to aid in the process of providing contextual background to formulate overall themes and trends.

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

<b>PARENTAL EDUCATION LEVEL OF PARTICPANTS</b>				
	<b># IN CLASS</b>	<b>AT LEAST SOME COLLEGE (Total-33)</b>	<b>VOCATIONAL (Total-3)</b>	<b>NO COLLEGE (Total-25)</b>
<b>Copperfield</b>	<b>JUNIOR</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>11</b>
	<b>15</b>			
	<b>SENIOR</b>			
	<b>16</b>			
<b>Townsley</b>	<b>JUNIOR</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>15</b>			
	<b>SENIOR</b>			
	<b>15</b>			
<b>RACE/ ETHNICITY</b>	<b>WHITE (Total-37)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>BLACK (Total-14)</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>5</b>
	<b>LATINO (Total-2)</b>			<b>2</b>
	<b>MIXED (Total-4)</b>	<b>4</b>		

\*Those who were listed as junior/senior due to trying to graduate early were grouped in as seniors

\*Those who were unclear if their parents had any college experience were listed as no college

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

All of the girls in the current study had at least some desire to obtain additional education after graduation; this was due in part to the selection criteria requiring interest in joining the medical field. That said, there were still differences in the amount of education they wanted to obtain. Out of the 61 participants a total of nine girls knew they wanted to go to college, but were unclear about how far they actually wanted to go. 10 wanted a two-year degree, 17 wanted a four-year degree, and 25 wanted to attend graduate or professional school. The level of parental education was almost split in half. There were 36 parents between the girls who were listed in the some college category, and 25 parents listed as having no college experience. Table 2 illustrates how the students' educational aspirations fell in line with their parents' education level. Of the students who were unclear, only three parents attended college. Students who wanted a two-year degree also had three parents between them that attended college. Then there is a shift, those who wanted a four-year degree had 12 parents that attended college and those who wanted some type of graduate or professional schooling had a total of 18 parents between them that attended college.

It was interesting, and yet expected, that the more ambitious the desired level of education was for the student, the higher the increase in parents that attended college. In addition, other distinct differences between those who would be first-generation students (also referred to as FG students) and those who would be continuous-generation students (also referred to as CG students) could be seen in three primary areas. These areas

consisted of the girl's primary focus after graduation, their overall view of college, and their level of understanding about the higher education process.

TABLE 2

Students' Educational Aspiration vs. Parents' Educational Attainment

<b>Students' College Aspiration</b>	<b>Parents' Education Level</b>	
	<b>College</b>	<b>No college</b>
<b>College-but Unclear</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Two Years</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Four Years</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Graduate or Professional School</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>

## Primary Focus

### First-Generation Students

The differences between FG students and CG students in their primary focus, or what the students' thought was most important, appeared to be influenced by the overall home environment, which was generally connected to the income level of their families. When looking at their primary focus I was looking at what was most important to them, and what their priorities were for the future. I found this to be connected to their family backgrounds and income levels because consistent day-to-day pressures or difficult situations seemed to influence what they felt their priorities for the future should be. Many of the potential first-generation students lived in homes that did not provide a stable environment, was chaotic in nature, or was struggling with the amount of income coming into the home. These issues aided in making it difficult for bills to be paid, and more difficult for them to be paid without a lapse in service. These girls often mentioned how the stress of their home life affected them, and discussed the amount of responsibility they had to take on in order to help the household function. This is in line with the literature that states FG students are more likely to be poor and live in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Bui, 2002; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Twenty-five of the 61 girls were classified as potential FG students, meaning they did not have at least one primary parent that attended college. These girls appeared to be more likely to indicate a focus other than college after graduation. Most often, this vacillated between moving out and working. There were several cases in which college was directly stated as their primary aspiration, but the overall content of their interviews

indicated otherwise. A total of 24 girls mentioned something other than, or in addition to, college being what was most important to them at the time of the interviews. There were 11 girls who had no mention of college in regards to what was most important, and 12 girls that had statements that directly mentioned moving out or working as being important. To help illustrate I will talk about Brit.

Brit, is a white, low-income, junior, whose primary guardian is her mother, who was unemployed at the time of the interview. Brit is classified as having no parent that attended college, making her part of the FG category. She had aspirations of obtaining two-year degree, and becoming either a dental hygienist or the owner of a tattoo shop. However, what was most important to her after graduation was moving out of her parents' house, then after a possible year off from school, attending college. Brit explained:

Because I hate everyone in my house, and I have no privacy whatsoever. And I barely get to sleep because everyone stays up late, and they're so loud and disrespectful, and [pause] I just can't stand it.

Brit also said that if she went to college, whether or not she went part time and worked or went full-time would depend on if her mom was doing well, and had a steady job. Her household consisted of anywhere from five to eight people at a time. Out of the eight people in the home only three were actually from her immediate family. In addition, when thinking more long term she reported that at the age of 30 she wanted to have a stable household. She described this as “no chaos, no drugs, no [pause] problems with paying the bills, just easy [laughs]”. It was clear that her life lacked stability, and it was reported that bills often went unpaid. Much of Brit's environment and lack of income can be attributed to her mother not having some form of higher education. Brit's home life

affected her so much that it not only aided in shaping her post-graduation aspirations, but also her overall view of what she wants out of life by the age of 30.

In regards to college, Brit mentioned that she had briefly taken some time to look into a few universities that she may want to attend. However, her criteria for choosing between them were solely based on liking their basketball teams. Her focus on the arguably more unimportant college attributes coincide with the literature that says knowledge about the higher education system is often lacking by those who would be FG students (Ceja, 2006; Gofen, 2009).

We also know from published literature that FG students depend on their parents' support and involvement in the transition into college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). In Brit's case, she reported how her mother would not care if she did not attend college, as long as she was happy. She did mention her dad (who had attended college) would be upset, but he is not the primary guardian and also was not listed as the parent she was closest too. Also of note, was that Brit did not mention any instances of encouragement for her to actually continue on to college. She stated her mother had not helped her with anything college related, and that she had not asked for help.

For another example I look at Margret. Margret is a Cuban, 16 year old, junior. Her primary guardian is her mom who was unemployed at the time of the interview. She knew that she wanted to go to college, but was unclear as to how long that would be. Her occupational aspirations included becoming a doctor or a singer. When discussing her primary aspirations after high school she was adamant on attending college. When asked to explain why she responded,

Um, I think it's a chance to ... get out of the life I'm living now. I think it's a big opportunity for me to become someone important, someone that maybe my own kids can rely on when I get older. I just think that, I don't wanna be living in the same situation that I am right now, so, I have to take the initiative and do something to become better. Something, not just to be a statistic, basically.

Despite her resolve to go to college Margaret expressed her doubts when discussing potential obstacles she may face. She believed that "every time you try to do something good there's always something getting in the way". She continued with references to her mother and lack of income. While she did recognize that her mother has had a positive influence on her life she also reported that her mother has been a negative influence as well. For example she says,

I try to come every day to school. But sometimes I have to miss a school day, or something, because I have to translate for my mom. And, doctor's appointments or whatever. Sometimes my health is sometimes an issue, 'cause I have stomach issues.

Margret went on to provide other examples such as when her mom gets really nervous or depressed. When these episodes occur she gets scared that something may happen to her and she will choose to stay home from school on those days as well. With all this, what really stood out to me in showing how her home life has affected her is that at the end of the conversation she seemingly dismissed the amount of time she is away from school. She ended by saying, "it's just high school". While I am not making any judgments as to whether or not Margret should stay home to care for her mother instead of attending class, getting to the point where you say "it's just school" in a dismissive tone, whether it be to help you cope with your situation or because you truly believe it, could potentially have a negative influence. While it may not be the case with Margret, if that ideology is said often enough to where it is believed a student could lose the motivation to finish high school and not even begin college.

Both Margret's and Brit's home environments seem to have acted as an influencer in determining their focus after graduation. For Margret, college was the focus because it was her way out of her current way of living. For Brit, moving out was the focus, but also because she saw moving as her way out of her current situation. In the end, both of their priorities were on escaping their current living situation and their method to do so just differed. The primary problem with students' who have a home life such as theirs is illustrated best by Brit's statement: "... I get so caught up with things that I'm doing now, that I forget about things that I need to be worrying about for later." While not all potential FG students come from a home life like Margret and Brit, those who indicated a focus other than college (be it directly or through context) were often a FG student, coming from a disadvantaged background and having a less than stable home life.

#### Continuous-Generation Students

Eighty-two percent of the girls interviewed reported education or college as at least one of their most important goals. Out of the 82%, 66% of them were from the CG category. For comparison, out of the 82% of girls who reported college as at least one of their most important goals, only 36% of the interviewees belonged to the FG category. The remaining 18% of total interviewees who did not include college as an important goal was made up of 55% FG students, and 45% CG students. In addition, analysis of the transcripts revealed that the girls who had a parent attend college often came across as very resolute in their college aspiration. A potential explanation for this can be seen in literature that has found that parents who have a college degree are more likely to impart the value of higher education to their children (Hout & Janus 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). While not all of the parents in the current research hold a degree,

they all have college experience, and therefore higher education knowledge to pass on to their daughters. Also of note is that in addition to their focus being to attend college, their home life was less likely to be chaotic, and encouragement from their parents to attend college was more likely to be reported. To help illustrate the perspective of a CG student we will talk about Susanne.

Susanne was a white female in her senior year of high school whose mother did graduate college. Her educational aspiration consisted of going to college, but she was unclear on how long she would need to go. Her occupational aspiration was to become a personal trainer or a police officer. When asked about what was most important after graduation, Susanne explained, “Going to college, is the most important to me [laughs]. ... Not that many people in my family has went to college...”

Susanne’s home life was stable, and included living with her mom, younger brother and older sister. Susanne reported that she had looked into colleges, but had yet to make a choice because: “I’m not really sure, ... what schools would be better for those [career aspirations], ‘cause I wanna go to the best one, you know”. Not only does Susanne aspire to attend college after graduation, but her concern about which college to attend is based on how it will aid her in her occupational aspirations. This, is in contrast to the case of Brit, and helps lends support to the idea that parents who have attended college pass down information about higher education to their children.

While the only adult Susanne reported knowing that had attended college was her mom, she received encouragement to go to college from both her mom and grandmother. Susanne also mentioned that she and her mother discussed college often, and that her mother frequently discussed the hardships of going back to school later in life. This was

in addition to Susanne witnessing first hand the hardships her mother faced in returning to school.

In another case, I look at Shana. Shana is a Black, 17-year-old junior. Having at least one parent graduate from college she was placed in the CG group. Shana aspired to get at least a four-year degree, but had plans on going further and becoming a psychologist. She mentioned how her mom was the one who actually brought up and discussed the idea of a psychology degree with her, and at the time of the interview her mom was currently helping her search for potential schools to attend. In addition, she also knew the potential specialties she wanted to go into, stating either becoming a clinical psychologist or a school counselor. Knowing and understanding the distinctions with in a particular job field was not a common occurrence found in the FG group. Shana also mentioned that she has discussed college with both parents and they have been specific in the type of support that they will provide her, such as tuition assistance, a car and a laptop, as well as discussing the things that she will need to provide for her self.

Discussions of college, and encouragement to go after high school was a common thread found throughout the interviews of those who had at least one parent attend some form of higher education compared to those whose parents had not. Also found between the two groups was the difference in the motivation behind college. While for the FG group the goal was to primarily escape or change their style of living, for the CG group it was to obtain a specific career. While it is true that in the end both groups would potentially gain a career, the motivations behind achieving those career aspirations are different. Last, the interviews demonstrated the influence the home life plays, along with the role parental encouragement plays. While what has been illustrated can not

definitively point to one thing causing another to become true. The commonalties within the two groups and the differences between the two groups were seen throughout the interviews helping to solidify the importance both home life and parental involvement as factors in the students educational pursuits.

#### How College is viewed

Trying to decide what to do after high school is one of the most important and yet most difficult undertakings for a young adult. Students are getting advice and pressure from almost all areas of their life and thinking about college can bring on a roller coaster of emotions. Because the interviews did not consist of a question that specifically addressed how college was viewed, the analysis for this section was based on the information gleaned from the students' answers to several other questions, and the overall context of the interview

When considering college after graduation, a students' social and cultural capital- individuals they know have gone to college and the knowledge they have about the education system- plays an important role in helping them decide if they will "fit" what they believe the college life to be. It also aids them in determining what college will suit them best should they decide to go. One of the themes found among the CG students in this study is that college was viewed as a family requirement. To be more specific, there was a sense of expectation of college attendance from their families, and not going was either not an option, or greatly looked down upon. This does not mean that the students would not have otherwise wanted to attend college, or that they did not recognize the merit of college on their own, just that they believed they did not really have choice in the matter.

In contrast, those who were regarded as FG students also sensed an expectation to go to college. However, it differed in the fact that their expectations were grounded more in hope for the family overall, and not as a general family requirement. These students tended to feel, either from the parents stating so, or from a responsibility they placed upon themselves, that they had to change the pattern of their families by often being the first to attend or graduate college. In addition to holding the responsibility of starting a new family path, many of those students felt it was the only way for them to get not only themselves out of a life of economic uncertainty, but also to help their parents later on.

#### Continuous-Generation Students

For an example of continuous-generation students we can look to Chelsea. Chelsea was a black female in her senior year of high school that lived with her mom, dad, sister, and brother. Both of Chelsea's parents attended college. Her dad holds a doctorate degree and her mom holds a bachelors degree. Her future aspirations include receiving a doctorate degree and becoming a psychologist. Chelsea reports, "Everybody in my family ... know you have to go to college.' I think in my family that's a requirement to go to college". Chelsea did state that she believed it has always been her desire to go to college, but from the above statement it is clear that Chelsea has been receiving either subtle or overt messages that going to college was expected of her. With this illustration we see that college is viewed as an unofficial requirement in her family, however since it has been expected of her all her life there is no way to discern if her strong desire to attend college would still remain, as she believes it would, if her family did not expect it of her. In addition to the perceived requirement of college attendance,

both of Chelsea's parents took an active role in the type of colleges she was looking to apply to. For example,

Um, at first, like my junior year, I was looking at black colleges, but then I talked to my mother, and she said, 'Well, a black college is good, but you're not gonna get the exposure you get from a regular four year university. Instead of just, because you just gonna know, network with just black only.' And there's nothing wrong with that, but I'd rather, you know, get exposure from every culture, and every diversity person, instead of just one minority.

Another example would be that of Sarah, a white, female, junior. Both of her parents also attended college along with many of her family members. Sarah aspired to obtain a four-year degree and become an x-ray technician. When asked about who has encouraged her to go to college she states "Every single person in my family [laughs]". She goes on in her explanation stating:

A lot of my grandma, definitely, and uh, my dad a lot too. My mom does, but she hasn't enforced it like a ton like they have, but she just makes sure that I know. She knows that my grandma pounds it into my head, so she knows that I know.

Sarah, like Chelsea along with most of the members in this group have several people listed who drilled the importance of college, and made sure they understood the expectation. While it can be assumed that many parents and/or families take on at least some role in helping their children decide on a college to attend, those who feel the "requirement" of higher education may also receive strong suggestions of additional requirements aiding in them building up their capital. In the case of Chelsea, her parents were concerned about her receiving enough cultural exposure and building her network. In other cases the concern could be trying to ensure a certain outcome occurs such as selecting a specific college to increase the chances of being hired by a specific company. Contrary to expectations, the addition of specific request from parents were only seen

occasionally within the overall group of girls however, there were several mentions of parents making certain suggestions because, unbeknownst to them, it would build on the students capital, or make things just a bit easier because of the capital they already possessed.

#### First-Generation Students

As previously mentioned, girls from the FG group also wanted to go to college. They aspired to college not only to better themselves, but for their family, usually to end up being the first one to go. For example, Neke was a Black female in her senior year of high school that lived with her mom and sister and was part of the FG category. She aspired to earn a professional degree and become an ER physician. When asked why she wanted to go to college and why it was important she explained, “I think going to college makes life easier, to get a good job and stuff. No one in my family has been to college”. When she was later asked when she decided to go she reported, “I’m not sure. But at some point, I decided that if I wanted a better life than my family, I would need to go to college”. In common with Sarah, Neke reported that everyone in her family had always wanted her to go to college, but when she was little she decided she wanted to go any way so it didn’t matter. In another case, a girl name Alice who was also a potential FG student reported, “My mom would like me to go to college, but she wouldn’t pressure me”. A final example is from a student named Shantel who said her reason for going to college was “Cause beside my sister, like, nobody else went”.

Like the students from the CG group, there was always some expectation of college placed on them by their families, but all of the girls make an attempt to dismiss this fact by saying they wanted to go anyway. While looking at how college was viewed

between the two groups, I found the way they described their idea of success to be interesting. I believe it more than likely has to do with how the idea of college is communicated to the students as illustrated above. In the CG group, there was a tendency for the girls to make a strong connection between what they defined as being successful to the obtaining of a degree. While FG students did recognize that an individual tends to be considered successful after obtaining a degree, their self-worth, and what they defined as successful was not solely tied to the holding a degree. Some recognized that simply having a stable home, and a loving family could also be seen as successful. If they did tie a degree to success it was only to achieve the goal of stable home. To illustrate this point we can look again to Alice. She is a white female junior, and a member of the FG group. Alice explains:

Only one person in my entire family has gone to college. I feel like, in this time period, if I want to have a good job, I'll need college. I've seen my mom, my aunt, my grandma, everybody in my family struggle to put food on the table, pay bills. I don't want to do that. Going to college means that I will be successful

In a similar case we can look at Kim. Kim was a white, female, in her junior year of school and also a member of the FG group. While Kim did not specifically use the term "successful", in describing why she wanted to go to college she made a connection between college and success. She explains, "I always just wanted it. I wanted to make something of myself, and basically, I want to get out of this town because I don't like it. The only way to do that is to go to college, and make something of myself so I don't have to live the life I've lived, I guess". Later in the conversation when describing the life she wants to get away from, she mentions the embarrassment she has about bringing friends to her house. She describes her house as not being nice and always dirty. Her friends

however, have big two story houses and them coming over makes her feel bad. This was another reason why she aimed to “... make something of myself and be proud of my life”. She concludes this section of the conversation by stating that no matter what she got her degree in, as long as she graduated she would be proud of herself.

For Alice, college is tied to being successful, but successful in the fact that unlike her mother and grandmother, it will allow her to be stable and not struggle to put food on the table. Similarly, Kim ties her success to having a life that does not look like she has to struggle. I use the word look since she never indicates that bills go unpaid or that there is a struggle for food, most of her complaint is in the aesthetics of her life.

In contrast we can go back to Chelsea, a member of the CG group. She was one of the more extreme cases who made the connection between going to college and feeling competent, and successful. This was done numerous times throughout her interview.

Chelsea reports:

Um, I wanna get my doctorate, you know? I think that's where I can succeed. ... 'cause today's world, you can't just have a bachelor's and be successful. You have to just keep pushing to succeed. And I think with a doctor ... it would be hard, but, um, I just feel that ... I would succeed at that point, like I would finally be content with everything.

Later in the interview Chelsea again reported, “It is just like, with a doctor, I can, I can do more things ... I would better strive for what I need”. Chelsea not only ties being successful with holding a degree, but interestingly with holding a doctoral degree. She made it very clear that she does not feel like she will be okay until she obtains that level of education. Looking a little deeper it becomes clear that though both group of girls attach success to a degree, it is not actually the degree that they are tying success to. It is

more so, the expected income that comes with that degree. This was true for not only these two illustrations but for many of the girls who attributed success to a college degree.

With looking at how college is viewed overall, unlike the CG students, college is not drilled in as a family requirement for FG students, but more so just mentioned several times in conjunction with being the first to go. In other words, the families of the FG students place their hope and pride in the prospect of their student being the first to attend. There are many possible implications of this fact. Depending on the personality of the individual student, the families placing so much faith in their student being the first to go can act a sort of motivating factor to help them along in the process. However, because they would be the first to go they also have “a way out”, by this I mean a way to justify whatever reasons they may be having for not attending college. For example, it could provide justification for fears they may have of going, or justify their feelings of never having wanted to go. CG students may feel they have less of an excuse to not attend college since many members of their family went, as well as them often having the full support and combined higher education knowledge of their families. They also have the fear of seeing their family members disappointed or displeased with them acting as a motivator. The FG students do not have any of this. In fact, because it is often the case that almost no one in their families has attended college they could find a justification for not going. As well, the FG students do not have the cultural capital that the CG students have in regards to their families being able to act as a resource in navigating the higher education system. So, while parents in both groups want a good education for their children there is a clear difference in how the parents communicate this want to their children and how the expectation of college is rooted with in the family overall.

## Understanding the College Structure

Unlike students with parents that have attended college, students without college-educated parents must possess a certain initiative or self-motivation to seek out and access the resources available to them. While all students, when starting college, often need to already possess certain know-how skills and a basic understanding of how it all works, if your parents have gone to college more than likely you will be provided the necessary information about college, its value, and how it works (McDonough, 1997), whether it is solicited or not. The students whose parents have attended college have someone familiar that they can fall back on when additional help is needed, or at least someone who can tell them where to go to get the help needed (Hout & Janus 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). On the other hand, students who do not have a parent that has attended college start at a disadvantage unless they took it upon themselves to figure everything out. In addition, these students do not have someone familiar to guide him or her. Use of counselors, advisors or any one else must be student-initiated, which in itself can be an intimidating task.

When reading these interviews it became clear that many of these young girls, most originating from the FG group, did not understand the college structure or application process which could have a direct impact on not only achieving their aspirations, but in understanding what their aspirations really were, and what all they entailed. By this I mean some of the girls may not have actually known the job duties of their desired occupation, or the level of education desired did not match what was required for their aspired occupation. I found that overall, the girls were almost split in half between their understanding of education levels and associated degrees. A total of 29

girls were found to not have a clear understanding of the education level required to obtain the associated degree and/or occupation. Of those 29 girls, 55% were FG students, and the other 45% was made up of CG students. When looking at those who did hold an understanding, there were a total of 32 students, and only 28% were from the FG group. The remaining 72% were members of the CG group. It should also be mentioned that if a student correctly associated education level with appropriate degree they were counted as having a basic understanding. However, there were many students that seemed to not take into account the requirement of pre-requisite courses before the actual degree program could begin. While I could not be sure of this because no direct question was asked, from the context of the interviews I think it would be safe to assume that the number of students who did not fully understand would increase. My major concern with this area of findings is the fact that the girls who fit the above description did not appear to recognize that their understanding of college overall and their desired occupations was limited. Leaving potential room for a lot of preventable consequences and hardships in the future.

The concerns that I developed for the girls who lacked understanding between trade programs, certifications, and actual degrees are because of the potential difference it could have on their aspirations and the possible implications of not understanding the differences before starting school. There was a lack of understanding in the hierarchy of degrees (associates, bachelors, masters, doctorates) and the associated amount of education that went along with them. This is arguably the most crucial because everything they aspire for, invested amounts of time, and the amount of money it will cost, is tied up in having a clear, if not at least a basic understanding in the previously stated areas. Of interesting note is that while this was most often found in the FG group it

was also found in the CG group, an unexpected finding. As stated, it was not as common in the CG group, but did still occur.

For example we can look to Kate, a white, female in her junior year of high school with at least one parent receiving a college education placing her in the CG group. Kate lived with her mom and two sisters and has an older sister that was attending college in another state. Kate aspired to obtain a four-year degree in physical therapy. When Kate was asked about the qualifications for becoming a physical therapist she said she didn't know, but thought that she needed four years of college and didn't need a medical degree. Physical therapy is actually a professional degree that cannot be obtained in four years. While it is not a doctor of medicine degree (M.D), it is still considered a medical degree. At one time the education required was at least a master's degree which is still higher than her aim, but even that is currently no longer available in the United States. This occupation now requires a DPT or Doctor of Physical Therapy degree (apta.org). Kate did say that she knew a physical therapist that in fact worked at the school, but has never talked to her about the work she does.

Continuing with more untapped resources, besides her mother she also has a sister who is in college that could help her, and during the interview she reported that most of the adults she knew had gone to college. Besides not utilizing her familial resources, Kate also admitted that she has not attended any of the college fairs or meetings that could have given her information. In regards to her desired occupation, Kate knows someone in her desired field, but again has taken no initiative to talk to her and utilize her as a resource for information.

For another illustration I bring in Abby, a white, female, senior in high school. Abby is in the FG group and aspires to become an occupational therapist or a dental hygienist. Abby says, “To be an occupational therapist, you have to have a bachelor’s, but just to be an assistant to the occupational therapist, you just need your associate’s... if I was the dental hygienist, I would just go to ... a two year program. While Abby is correct that you can become an occupational assistant after obtaining an associate’s degree, becoming an actual Occupational therapist requires one to have at least obtained at least a Masters degree (aota.org). As for her alternate occupation of becoming a dental hygienist her information is only partially correct. Most dental hygiene programs are only two years however, to gain admission there are about two years worth of prerequisite science courses required along with a certain G.P.A. (ada.org). The understanding of prerequisites with many of these two-year degrees was something that often went unknown to many.

As previously discussed, students need to possess a certain level of initiative to aid them in gathering college information. Some need it more than others depending on how involved their parents are, but it is still needed nonetheless. Kate illustrates a problem that I occasionally saw with CG students in the current study and frequently saw with the FG students. When there are opportunities to access information about college it goes un-used. Both Kate and Abby represent students who don’t understand the amount of education required for a certain occupational aspiration. While there is always time to learn and catch up, students run the risk of figuring it out too late. The problem with the amount of misinformation is the implications it can have later on. After time and a lot of money has already been invested, potentially pressuring them to finish something they no

longer want to do or dropping out of college with a debt load that does not fit the occupational status they will hold. This is even more troublesome for future first generation students who will already have a more difficult transition into life in college.

We can also discuss their involvement in the overall preparation for college. In regards to college preparation in the FG category we can look to Terry, a white female, junior. Both of Terry's parents received a high school diploma and neither continued on in their education. Terry wanted to go to college, but was unclear for how long and aspired to become a massage therapist or an architect. When asked about whom she can go to for help with planning for college she says that she feels that she is on her own, "... I don't know about my parents 'cause they wouldn't know ... 'Cause they didn't go to college. Maybe my counselor or somebody like that". This is not an unusual statement, and it is a completely understandable one. The problem with this however, is that Terry and students like her were often found to either not know where else to go for information or knew places such as the counselors office, but admitted that they had yet to talk them and didn't know when they would. They did not attend any of the provided college fairs and if they knew some one already in their desired occupational field they rarely took the opportunity to talk to them about it.

Another example in the FG group is Jennifer, a black, female senior, who tried to take initiative in receiving help. Jennifer aspired to obtain a four-year degree and become a psychiatrist. Note, Jennifer is also another good example of the students' whose occupational aspirations are not in sync with the required amount of education needed. You would need at least eight years of school to become a psychiatrist. Placing focus back on initiative, Jennifer initiated conversations with her primary parent about college,

but found that they were not of much help. She mentioned that the discussions were “little and brief” and she believed it was because her mom did not have the same opportunities when she was younger and simply did not know what to say when the conversations came up.

Another example is Tonya who is a white, female senior in high school from the FG group. She aspired to attend college but was unclear as to how long. For her occupation, she vacillated between a doctor, nurse, x-ray technician or a creative writer. She says:

... college has always been in the future, and ... like my family doesn't have much to do about it; it's all me. I didn't hear really about college until school... just somehow I figured out what it was. Because nobody else had went to it. I didn't even know it existed, you know?

With Tonya's interview she talks about how college was something she learned about during school. This implies it was something never mentioned amongst her family and subsequently never discussed in the home. For both Terry and Jennifer, they felt that their parents could not really provide assistance, and, though they appeared to understand why, they felt that, like Tonya, it was all on them to figure out.

In contrast, students who have parents that have attended a form of higher education not only have someone that they can go to for assistance, but have parents that can actually have detailed discussions with, because they possess knowledge about the college process. Kris, for example, is a member of the CG group who wanted a graduate or professional degree and aspired to become a pharmacist or financial analyst. In regards to receiving parental assistance from her mom with college she reports,

She wants me to go in the state, because, I guess, it's cheaper if you go in state. And... if I need help, 'cause she said the first year of college is like a culture shock or something, and she wouldn't want me to be so far away if I needed her... And ... I guess the size is important, 'cause she said she doesn't want me to go to, like, a really big school... She said, like, most kids feel lost when they go to a big school or something.

Another example would be Christina, a white 17-year-old senior. Christina is also in the CG group and aspired to obtain a two-year degree with the hopes of becoming a photographer or an x-ray technician. Christina talked about how her dad had taken her to college fairs and pointed out schools that were acceptable in cost and would also allow her to minor in photography. Their research yielded only one school nearby that offered classes for x-ray technicians and on inspection of the required courses she thought they may be difficult. Because of this, she also mentioned majoring in business as something she can fall back on. She explains that she became settled with the idea when her dad was discussing different degrees with her and suggested it. Note, this is one of those instances where a parent is attempting to push their child into something that would help expand their social capital. Part of her fathers' argument for a business degree was because it is a versatile degree that would allow her to work in many different fields. The ability to transplant her self into different occupational fields increases her social capital because it increases her options and therefore her potential network of people

Kris has a parent who helped her understand how to compensate for high college tuition costs by staying close to home, who could explain the culture shock that she may experience in her transition to a college, as well as explain how being closer to home allows her mom to help her navigate through the entire process. Christina had a parent that helped her research colleges for her desired program, develop a backup plan, and

look at the courses she would eventually have to take as well as considering cost.

Another benefit of having specific information is the ability to change and adjust you plans sooner.

For example, Kris previously wanted to be a doctor. She changed her mind after researching it because in addition to the long hours it required investing 11 years of school. “Four years for pre-meds, and four years of medical school. Then one to three years of internship”. By understanding her occupation and how it intersected with the amount of time she needed to invest in her education, she was able to identify that that was something she would not be interested in and changed her projection accordingly. Without this information, Kris may have invested into money into the wrong career path for her. Note how all these three trends are intersecting. Kris changing her career path is not only due to her parents assistance in researching the career but also in understanding the type of degree she was aiming for, but also the associated amount of time and education it required. All of these are things FG students would have a more difficult time receiving from their parents and requires them to seek out a counselor/mentor. On top of that they would need to know the right questions to ask during meetings.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Summarizing Findings

The framework of this study is highly influenced by the Wisconsin Model of Status Attainment. The focus was on high school girls in their junior and senior year. The findings and discussion of this study are aimed at illustrating the influence of parents' education level and the connection that has with the differences seen between future first-generation students and continuous generation students. This study illustrates three main findings in the exploration of female, high school students' college aspirations based on their parents' education level. The different factors that have been discussed and found to help influence and shape aspirations offer a more in depth picture of the relationship between college aspirations and the social environment of the female adolescent.

The first theme, primary focus, was operationalized as what future goal the students said was most important to them, either through direct statements or context. Their primary focus appears to be influenced by both the home environment and parents' education level. Findings indicate that for many potential first-generation students the stress of home life and the amount of responsibility they often have to take on to assist in keeping the household running could be found to directly tie in with their primary focus. Their focus was usually on moving out in order to escape their situation or working in order to help the other members of their family. For the potential continuous-generation group, the focus was primarily on attending college, which was an expected finding.

Within this trend it was also found that there was a difference in the discussion of college and encouragement to go. Those in the continuous-generation group often stated

that they had discussions about college with their parents, while those without a parent that had attended college only had occasional discussions, if any. This fact was largely due to the first-generation students either not feeling that their parents could offer them help, or from the discussions with their parents being very brief because they actually could not provide help. I combined this information with the theme of primary focus because I felt it was important to see what the primary focus the student was in correlation with the way higher education was discussed in the household. As we saw in the findings, even though two students are from similar difficult home environments, their method of changing their circumstances differed. For those where college was discussed, attending college was seen as their mode of change. For those where college was rarely, if at all, discussed moving out and or working was their mode of change.

The second theme was exploring how college was viewed. The findings under this theme brought to light very distinct differences between the potential first-generation students and the potential continuous-generation students. For those classified as continuous-generation, college was viewed more as a family requirement. Many felt that they either did not have a choice but to go to college, or they recognized that they did have a choice however; not going would be a big disappointment to the family. On the other hand, those in the first-generation group had to deal with their families' hope and pride being based on them attending. While it was not seen as a family requirement like the continuous-generation group, many had family members place the mantle of being "the first" on their head. There was either a self-placed or perceived responsibility to change the family pattern. While this fact could be a motivator it could also potentially cause great psychological stress. Despite this, what was clear was that most of the parents

listed under both groups wanted their student to attend college, however it was in the way it was communicated that the differences were seen.

Another interesting finding within this theme was the students' idea of success. The students who were in the continuous-generation group were more likely to correlate being successful with the attaining of a degree. The students in the first-generation group recognized that success could be in the attaining of a degree, but also correlated it with having a stable home and a loving family. I believe this finding was likely due to the way college and its expectation was communicated, as well as the influence their home environments had on them. I argue that those who come from a stable home expect that type of home life in their future; therefore they see no reason to use it as a defining factor of success. However those who are in an unstable environment have to deal with that fact everyday. Therefore, their immediate idea of success is achieving the opposite, gaining stability. While a college degree is seen as a bonus or as a way to make that particular idea of success possible it is not necessarily what is defined as being a success.

The final theme was understanding the college structure. Within this theme it was found that between both groups there were girls who did not fully understand the amount of education associated with a particular degree, as well as not understanding the amount of education that would be associated with their desired occupation. While this was found in both groups it was more common in the first-generation group. Findings showed there were 29 girls overall who did not correctly associate education level with associated degree or occupation. Of these 29 girls, 55% were potential first-generation students and 45% were potential continuous-generation students. On the other hand, there were a total of 32 girls overall that associated the correct education level with the desired degree and

or occupation. Of those who understood the correct education levels only 28% were potential first-generation students. The remaining 72% were all potential continuous-generation students.

Social and cultural capital and how it differed between the two groups was permeated throughout all three themes and provided more support to Bourdieu's ideas of social, and cultural capital and how they are used. With the analysis of the interviews, we were able to see a clearer picture as to how using these two forms of capital allows an individual to achieve goals or how they can become a mechanism to continue the replication of inequalities between classes.

A large part of the cultural capital displayed was based on the resources and assistance a student's parents could provide. This included parents, primarily from the continuous-generation group, making suggestions for the student to chart a path that would be made easier due to the social and or cultural capital they already possessed, or because it would expand and increase either form of capital. On the other hand, the lack of students utilizing available resources, as seen in this study, is in line with one of the more notable areas of contention that was previously identified by Bourdieu; the lack of a shared language and cultural understanding. In addition, because the school system works on an assumption of shared cultural values, students that have been raised by parents who vary from the dominant norms by way of their parenting styles, ideas, and beliefs do not share some of the personality characteristics that their counterparts may have. For example, being self-motivated and resilient. Knowing this, concentration should be placed on ways to shore up cultural capital both between and within the groups by ensuring resources are available and more importantly, accessed by all youth.

Further, while the language differences could most certainly be a result of child rearing, the implications must still be discussed. Part of the ability to utilize available resources, is having the ability to confidently speak to all necessary parties. While more of those in the continuous-generation group seemed to know more about the higher education system and process (either because of their parents or their own research), many of those in the first-generation group knew very little and therefore would more than likely lack the skills and terminology needed to begin a discussion. Because of this, a way to educate potential first-generation students, and continue the development of continuous-generation students' soft skills should be looked at. A way to address things such as how to approach individuals both inside and outside of ones network to garner information, as well as how to recognize potential allies in achieving ones goal.

#### Further Study

This study is meant to explore and suggest, not to determine, the influences on college aspirations, as well as to help identify some of the distinctions that exist. Future research could be conducted looking at male students' college aspirations using the same parameters of this study to see if a difference can be found. This would let us know if there are specific gender distinctions and aid us in determining the best way to communicate information about college in a way young men can more readily accept. Within this study we saw that while all the students wanted to attend college their motivations for doing so differed. This also led to seeing a difference in the way they went about achieving their college aspiration. Some wanted to move out first then attend college, some wanted to try to work full time while attending college, and some wanted to do the quickest program they could find so they could be self-sufficient. With this, one

could also explore whether a student's motivation behind obtaining a college degree has any correlation with college drop out rates.

#### Why it Matters

This study offers insight into how the college aspirations of female adolescents are shaped or guided by different societal factors. By exploring the different contexts behind aspirations, a snapshot of why certain differences still exist based on parents' education level is given. This study is unique from others because it is exploring both the different contextual, and societal influences on aspirations, as well as how they can lead to distinct differences between potential first-generation and continuous-generation students. My intentions are to help reduce the differences between students based on their parents' educational attainment. By identifying some of the major influences that can cause distinctions, we as a community, as teachers, and school counselors can identify those students most at risk of not continuing on in their educational pursuits. At the very least, it allows us the opportunity to help ensure that those students most at risk are making well-informed decisions, and not getting caught in the unfortunate web of simply not knowing what they don't know.

One of the biggest offerings this research can provide is a new way to approach how college information is provided. Many of the organizations and programs that address this issue target either students or parents in providing information about higher education. I propose that no program should separate parents and students, but instead recognize and help aid in the development of a symbiotic flow of information between parents and students not rife with misinformation. In addition to how the information is conveyed, the type of information conveyed should be addressed. As stated by the

popular quote from Perry Paxton, “excellence is in the details”. Existing programs and organizations that do attempt to educate both parties simultaneously should ensure that they go into detail with the information being given. Provided by this study, there is evidence that the students knew basic information. Things such as, they should apply to college, that college was one of the best pathways to better life circumstances, and that money would probably be their main obstacle. However, that is where most of the information the possessed ends. It was seen that both potential first-generation as well as potential continuous-generation students had a clear lack of understanding of how the higher education system was structured, exactly what their occupational aspirations required, and how that correlated with specific attainment levels. By targeting both students and parents simultaneously with detailed information we can begin a decrease of this problem and hopefully help aid in more successful attempts of earning a higher degree. By approaching the distribution of information in this way we also address some of the concerns discussed earlier. We could potentially begin to see potential first-generation students who in the past were unable to have detailed conversations about their aspirations with their parents -as was illustrated in the findings- diminish.

Despite all this, plans can and will change, that is simply a fact of life. However, arming our students as well as their parents with the right information necessary to ensure the best chance of success saves time, money, and could possibly open up more opportunities. The simultaneous distribution of information would help to guarantee an overall shared understanding of college related terminology, aid in parents bridging the gap of understanding between themselves and the next generation, and allow both generations to work together in mapping out a future. A future forged by the aspirations

of adolescents, designed by the real world understanding of parents and realized by a true understanding in how to navigate it all.

APPENDIX A

CODE BOOK

(1) Level of parental education	Any mention of how far either parent or guardian made it in their education
(2) Similar aspiration to parent	Similar educational or occupational aspiration to the parents current occupation and/or achieved level of education
(3) Similar aspiration to close friend/relative	The students educational or occupational aspiration is the same or very similar to very close friend of family or relative current occupation or achieved level of education
(4) Parent pushed students aspiration	Mention that desired aspiration was pushed/emphasized by parent/guardian
(5) Institutional support	Mention of support/or lack of from (1) administration or (2) educators (3) programs
(6) Siblings	Number of siblings living at home and number of siblings total
(7) Educational desire origin	Any mention of when educational aspiration started
(8) Self-initiated planning	The student has started planning/research for future by themselves
(9) College prep	Any mention of college prep organizations or activities (upward bound, A.P classes etc.)
(10) Career knowledge	i.e what a L.P.N does vs. a R.N, how much education is needed
(11) Like minded peers	Do the friends they identified have similar aspirations
(12) Extra-curricular	Mention of outside activities i.e work, sport etc.
(13) Reason for career aspiration	Mention of reason for choosing aspiration
(14) Connections made through use of kin-network use	Any mention of connections made through the student networking. (i.e aunt getting student a lawyer to shadow etc.)
(15) Connections made through	Such as school counselors, a

institutions	professional recommending someone to talk to or writing a recommendation letter etc.
(16) Education aspiration	the level of education they aim to have
(17) Career aspiration	The career that they aim to have
(18) Reason for educational aspiration	Reason behind wanting desired level of education
(19) Education knowledge	Knowledge of what it would take to obtain desired educational outcome. i.e Any mention of the students awareness of what their aspired educational goal takes. i.e level of work, things needed to help them succeed etc.
(20) Parental support	Mention or indication of parental support
(21) Close friend/relative support	Mention or indication of support coming from close friend or relative i.e pastor, friends parents, mentor
(22) Knowledge of capital use (intentionally or unintentional)	is the student aware of processes and importance of things such as social networking etc.
(23) Career aspiration origin	Any mention of first wanting desired career
(24) Most important life event	The life event the student deemed most important to achieve

## APPENDIX B

### ILLUSTRATION OF CODING STAGE TO ANALYSIS STAGE

**(1)**

Codes 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 16, 17, 18,23



Category: Aspirations (education and occupation), •Parental Resource,

Category: Program/Degree Differentiation,

Category: Potential Obstacles



Theme 1: Understanding the Education System

**(2)**

Code: 1

Code: 5,6,20,21

Code: 11,14,15,22



Category 2a: Parents' education

Category 2a: support

Category 2a: Networking



Category 2b: Capital

Category 2b: Perceived Correlation to Success



Theme 2A: How college is perceived (i.e family requirement, family hope, needed for success)

Theme 2B: Relationship proximity to college attendee impacts aspiration



Theme 2: How College is viewed

**(3)**

Codes 1,7,8,9,10,12,19



Category: Demonstration of participants' want to achieve aspirations directly

Category: Demonstration of participants' want to achieve aspirations indirectly



Theme 3: primary focus of student

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## VITA

Asia Smith Orr was born on March 14, 1990, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She graduated one year early from the locally well-known high school of Booker T. Washington in May, 2007. She started her college career at Tulsa Community College. During this time Mrs. Orr worked as a bank teller for a local credit union, and worked as a resource teacher for a local early childhood learning center. May of 2010, she received her Certificate of Mastery, and in May of 2011 she graduated with an Associate of Science degree in Early Care.

After graduation Mrs. Orr transferred out of state to attend Pittsburg State University, and became a student of their Sociology program. While there, she maintained all A Scholastic Honors and joined Alpha Kappa Delta Honor Society. In attending this university she was afforded the opportunity to gain pedagogical study abroad experience in Russia. With a 4.0 academic major grade point average, she was awarded the Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology, July of 2012.

In August of 2012, Mrs. Orr was accepted and began work as a student in the graduate sociology program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Here she assumed the duties of a graduate research assistant, and a graduate teaching assistant and became a member of the Midwest Sociological Society and the Missouri Sociological Association. March of 2013, Mrs. Orr was awarded a grant from the School of Graduate Studies to attend, and present her work at the annual Midwest Sociological Society conference. Upon completion of her degree requirements, Mrs. Orr plans to actively

commit to staying informed in the field of sociology while pursuing a career that will let her actively share the knowledge she has gained.