The Intersections of Influence that Shape Educational & Occupational Aspirations in

Minority Youth

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Abstract

Intersections of race and socioeconomic status (SES), SES and parental environment, and the three in conjunction highlight the nuance of developing and cultivating student goals during the pivotal years of adolescence. This study examines the different approaches and attitudes towards parental involvement across racial lines and the student outcomes based on the contrasting strategies in Black versus White households. Taking into the historical context of Black parents and school as an institution, findings support how a tense relationship between minority parents and the school system has a ripple effect on behavior, aspirations, and achievement. For minority children, aspirations are influenced by the perceived level of parental involvement and support, in some cases actively combatting the cognitive dissonance and impostor syndrome minority youth encounter when defining their aspirations. The literature review conducted in this paper compares the confidence levels of parents in direct advocacy inside of the school, and the dependent relationship SES has on empowering or discouraging parental involvement. From this thorough review of parental involvement within a minority child's educational journey and its effects on their long-term goals, suggestions for ways to rebuild the relationship between the school and parent to encourage cooperation and trust are shared to empower both parents and youth, across racial and SES lines.

Understanding the Intersections of Influence that Shape Educational and Occupational Aspirations in Minority Youth

Adolescence is a key stage in one's development in further understanding and defining their identity. It is during these pivotal years of change that aspirations are developed and begin to take on a cemented form. A collection of influences, aspirations define one's goals and give meaning to one's educational trajectory (Hill and Wang, 2015, pp 226). Educational and occupational goals, in particular, lay the groundwork for how adolescents perceive the subsequent decades of their lives. A student's aspirations is a scholastic indicator, prone to trend in line with their academic performance and behavior. Research has shown a defined relationship between GPA, school engagement, and plans for the future (Hill et al. 2018). When comparing Black and White eighth-graders' aspirations to their eleventh-grade school engagement and higher education pursuits, there was a predictive element to aspirations identified in youth (Hill and Wang, 2015). Dreams can also be key indicators of lifelong performance, with many ambitious desires in some way predicting later performance outcomes.

A broad understanding of one's familial makeup, social class, and schooling environment can be suggested based on contextualizing the goals of adolescents. Racial backgrounds play a significant role in shaping aspirations, as cultural norms and generational expectations can influence attitudes towards education and further pursuits. Though one's race alone can not single-handedly determine how they will respond in school or beyond, it can provide critical context and predictive reasoning to further explain their actions and dreams. Race and socio-economic status (SES) are closely intertwined in this paper and concurrent research, due to the close interaction of the two identity factors. Children from racial minority groups are more likely to grow up in an economically disadvantaged environment than their white counterparts

(Kao and Thompson, 2003). Depending on the historical elements of institutionalized discrimination, certain racial groups are therefore predisposed to be placed in a higher or lower SES, affecting their access to resources and opportunities. This abundance or lack of resources in a community affects not only its members' development and socialization, but the quality of education in their schools. Parental engagement has a significant impact on the performance of a student as it has been found that parental involvement and priorities in regard to engaging the student outside of school take on different forms across racial and SES lines (Gerard and Booth, 2015).

This paper intends to examine how the intersections of race, SES, and parental involvement affect minority students' aspirations and their implications on long-term performance. Through a comprehensive literature review of existing research on this topic, this study will draw conclusions on the nuance of these intersections. Utilizing the conclusions as a basis, this paper will propose suggested solutions to optimize minority youth's personal environments in favor of transforming their plans into applicable futures. These endeavors aim to empower and transform their aspirations into actionable realities, fostering inclusive and supportive educational landscapes.

Methodology

The research referenced in this paper was sourced from large databases like EBSCOHost, JSTOR, Routledge, and professional research literature hosting sites by which the New Jersey Institute of Technology has licensing agreements. The search for literature was conducted in two manners. The first was by inputting keywords ("minority youth", "educational aspirations", "occupational aspirations", "race", "SES", etc.) into the database search functions and generating

a list of generalized papers to establish a background understanding of the topic and identify key points. From there, referenced literature and researchers were extracted from the reference page and further explored. Researchers like Nancy E. Hill and Jean M. Gerard specialize in the study of identifying predictors and influencers of young children's aspirations, so numerous works and findings of theirs were repeatedly referenced across multiple sources of literature. The secondary method by which sources were acquired was through searching through related psychology journals in which studies related to the topic of aspirations would likely be published. These journals included Child Development, Journal of Child and Family Studies, and Journal of Adolescence. This allowed for a narrowed scope and streamlined access to key literature sources. Utilizing this strategy to narrow down the topic and sources. The   sources cited in this paper either provided further understanding and context to synthesize the sources or were directly referenced because of their relevant findings

Discussion

It is widely accepted that during the adolescence stage of development, the two key influences in a young person are their family and school. The family is responsible for providing resources and instilling values while the school is responsible for social education and exposure to a wider knowledge base. It is imperative that the two spheres of influence overlap and collaborate in the development process to create a supportive environment that can stimulate a youth's academic growth (Gerard and Booth, 2015). It is critical that from an early point in the child's educational journey, the parent develops a mutual relationship with the school and is involved in the learning journey of the child. Parent academic involvement is defined as collaboration with schools to ensure the future success of a child ("parent academic"). This could take the form of

parent-teacher conferences, volunteering time or services for school events, or a sustained open line of communication between parents and the school. It also includes extending learning outside of the classroom and reinforcing recently taught concepts at home. Through this engaged relationship, trust is built and a routine assessment of a child's developmental and behavioral progress is performed. School behavior is therefore affected by the level of parental involvement in the school experience (Epstein, 1987).

The definition of academic involvement differs greatly across SES lines due to a discrepancy in the perception of a parent's role in the child's educational journey. In comparing the attitudes of higher versus lower SES parents, higher SES parents viewed themselves as "collaborators" in the educational process, working alongside the teacher and therefore retaining a right to influence the educational directive set for their child (Lareau, 1996). Lower SES parents, on the other hand, often encounter a greater number of barriers in getting involved in the educational process of their children, with financial stressors and school-side institutional blocks preventing their access to the education plans for their children. (Reynolds, 1991). A study conducted in 1986 found that the educational level of a mother was an indicator of their engagement in the child's level of participation in the school environment. Advanced degree and above yielding mothers were more likely to actively advocate for their child and track the child's developmental and educational progress than their less educated peers (Baker and Stevenson, 1986). These findings highlight not only how crucial parental involvement is in engaging a child in school, but also how the familial educational background factors into the level of parental involvement.

It can be dangerous to assert that SES, and by logical connection race, influences how involved a parent is in their children's educational outcomes. Parents across racial and SES lines

are invested in their child's academic performance, however, the intersection of race and SES defines how that investment manifests itself. Black American parents were more prone to engage in academic involvement in the context of the home environment, extending the school curriculum and engaging in educational activities. White parents, by comparison, were more prone to visit the school or volunteer at school programming (Eccles and Harold, 1996). These approaches in involvement produce differing outcomes on the children they impact. For Black children, additional educational activities improve the child's skills which improves academic performance. For White children, the physical parental presence at school promotes improved social competence which in turn improves academic performance as well. The difference in approaches and results describes the differences in attitudes regarding what parental involvement means, partly due to the relationships between racial groups and institutions. Black Americans have been identified to be less trusting of schools due to historical educational disenfranchisement. According to Lareau (2003), the attitude towards schools in some cases is to monitor rather than collaborate with the school. This defensive stance creates unease in the parent-teacher relationship and partially explains why an alternative involvement approach is taken, rather than the approach of White parents.

For lower SES families, parental involvement is key in stimulating youth's aspirations. There is a greater desire to "move up the ladder" and work hard to go further than their predecessors had the opportunity to. Hill (2004) established that parent involvement can influence educational and occupational aspirations while simultaneously not influencing the behaviors or performance needed to achieve the set goals. Due to parent advocacy taking different forms depending on familial background, sometimes the investment in improving academic skills is not enough without improving the relationship with the school. Black

American students were found to have the highest direct relation between parental involvement and achievement, compared to their white counterparts, suggesting that parental involvement functions and motivates differently across racial lines, but more research must be done surrounding this topic to make conclusive claims.

Another angle of parental involvement is a child's perception of parental support, involvement, and achievements. In the contexts in which college or alternative life goals are perceived as out of reach for a student, parental encouragement can be a "protective" function in transitioning aspirations to achievements (Gerard and Booth, 2015). As adolescents grow in their identity and move towards understanding their identity in the social context of the world, they may experience cognitive dissonance and the resignation of their dreams after comparing their own educational and occupational aims to the achievement rates of the social group(s) they are a member of (Ceballo et al., 2010). If adolescents, especially lower SES youth, feel supported and encouraged by their immediate environment, parental influences, and school connectedness, they are more influenced than their White peers (Spera et al.,2008).

Conclusion

Minority youth's educational and occupational aspirations are shaped by their family and schooling environments. From this, collaboration between the two groups is needed to ensure developmental progress and the sustainment of said intentions. Due to historical, SES, and attitudinal factors, parental involvement with their child's school manifests differently across lines of racial backgrounds. This intersection of SES and race highlights how parents' perceived place in their child's educational plan, the methodology of extending educational stimulation outside of the classroom, and the subsequent results from those methods affect children of

different racial groups. The active engagement of parents significantly influences and upholds adolescents, playing a crucial role in fostering diverse aspirations and academic achievements. To do this, schools must be willing to rebuild the relationship between minority parents and the institution, taking the first step to foster an open relationship between the two parties. Extra care must be applied to the parent-teacher relationship, tailoring support and trust-building to calm a minority parent's fears or uncertainties and build confidence in their ability to take a more active role in advocating within the school for their child. The topic of long-term goals for minority youth is multifaceted and cannot be observed solely within one lens, but rather must be understood through a socioeconomic and racial lens in regards to understanding the role parental involvement has. Further research needs to be conducted at the intersections of gender and sexuality as well, to break down how internalized gender roles, taught from the parental and school side, create and eliminate certain barriers. When further studies work to understand how these intersections disrupt the social fabric of society, minority youth can be empowered to achieve their educational and occupational goals.

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