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THE ATTITUDE-ACHIEVEMENT PARADOX AMONG BLACK ADOLESCENTS

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Many black youths and adults express a high regard for education even though their academic performance is poor. Utilizing a sample of 1,193 high school seniors, this article resolves the attitude-achievement paradox by demonstrating that attitudes toward education are multidimensional. The first dimension is composed of abstract attitudes that reflect the dominant ideology. The second dimension is composed of concrete attitudes that inform achievement behavior. Unlike abstract attitudes, these concrete attitudes are rooted in life experience in which educational credentials may not be fairly rewarded by the opportunity structure. The paradox of poor grades but positive attitudes toward education among blacks vanishes when concrete, rather than abstract, attitudes are related to high school grades. Substantively, the study reported in this article illustrates how race and class, which are large components of the social context of achievement, influence school outcomes.

Education has had a special place in the hearts and minds of black Americans since the era of Reconstruction. Although public schooling was not widely available until over 100 years after the demise of slavery, blacks held fast to their faith in education as one of the few institutions that could lift them from poverty and oppression. Even so, the rhetorical importance that blacks place on education has rarely been matched by their scholastic performance. This research examines an important issue in the education of blacks, specifically the paradox of consistently positive attitudes toward education, coupled with frequently poor academic achievement.

In his 1966 report, Coleman and his colleagues noted that black students held highly favorable attitudes toward education irrespective of their performance: "Negroes . . . give a picture of students who report high interest in academic achievement, but whose reported interest is not translated through effective action into achievement" (p. 320). Since the Coleman report, numerous researchers have confirmed this paradoxical pattern of attitudes and behavior among blacks. Ogbu's (1978) ethnographic account of blacks and Chicanos in Stockton, California, described their deep and abiding belief in education as the crucial avenue for upward mobility and personal betterment. But this belief is held even by students with records of poor achievement and high rates of dropping out of school. Both Patchen (1982) and Mickelson (1984) found that blacks invariably express almost a reverence for education while consistently underachieving. Ethnographic work by Sleeter and Grant (1987) and Crichlow (1986) described the paradoxical faith in education held by black students who nevertheless fail to perform in school at levels expected of people who believe that education is important. The research reported in this article explored the social context of the academic achievement of blacks, especially this paradoxical aspect.

The conceptualization of the underachievement of blacks employed in this study is inspired largely by Ogbu, whose work examines the American opportunity structure and its possible influence on the scholastic performance of blacks. In *Minority Education and Caste* (1978), Ogbu argued that members of a social group that faces a job ceiling know that they do so, and this knowledge channels and shapes their children's academic behav-

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ior. The term *job ceiling* refers to practices that do not permit members of castelike minorities (such as blacks) to compete freely for the jobs for which they are qualified. Castelike minorities are either excluded from or not allowed to obtain their proportionate share of the most desirable jobs; as a result, they are confined overwhelmingly to the least desirable jobs, often in secondary labor markets. Because the job ceiling faced by black adults prevents them from receiving rewards commensurate with their educational credentials, education is not the same bridge to adult status for blacks as it is for whites. Black children see that efforts in school often do not have the same outcomes for members of their group as do similar efforts for members of socially dominant groups, such as middle-class whites. According to Ogbu, black youths, for quite rational reasons, perceive the opportunity structure differently from middle-class whites and consequently tend to put less effort and commitment into their schoolwork. Ogbu suggested that this is a major reason why black students perform less well, on the average, than do majority youths.

Support for Ogbu's thesis exists in several historical comparisons between the experiences of white European immigrants and blacks with education and opportunity (Lieberson 1980; Olneck and Lazerson 1974; Smith 1972). Lieberson, for example, contended that the employment and income possibilities that existed for educated members of certain immigrant ethnic groups affected the education attained by their children and that the diminished occupational rewards for blacks with a given level of education had a "feedback effect" on the incentives for education among later cohorts of blacks. These studies suggest the historical continuity of the proposition that the social structural context of achievement affects the scholastic performance of black students.

There is little disagreement that black students generally earn lower grades, drop out more often, and attain less education than do whites (Coleman et al. 1966; Gottfredson 1981; Kerckhoff and Campbell 1977; Ogbu 1978; Patchen 1982; Porter 1974; Portes and Wilson 1976). There is tremendous disagreement, however, about the reasons for these differences. The study reported here empirically tested Ogbu's thesis and demonstrated that the lower achievement of blacks is due, in part, to black students' accurate perception that for people like them, educational efforts and credentials are not rewarded in the opportunity structure in the same ways as for whites. The larger theoretical issue explored in the study concerns the ways in which the material realities of the opportunity structure, in the form of lower pay and fewer jobs and promotions for minorities, women, and members of the working class, shape adolescents' perceptions of the value of schooling for their future and how these attitudes, in turn, affect their academic behavior. The results demonstrate that academic achievement is linked to students' accurate assessments of the returns that their education is likely to bring them as they make the transition to adulthood. This article focuses on these assessments as they pertain to black youths.

The findings also unravel the attitude/achievement paradox of blacks and show that the root of the paradox is an inadequate conceptualization and measurement of students' attitudes toward education. This article presents evidence that all students, both black and white, hold two sets of attitudes toward schooling. One set is based on beliefs about education and opportunity, as found in the dominant ideology of U.S. society. These attitudes, which I call *abstract* attitudes toward education, embody the Protestant ethic's promise of schooling as a vehicle for success and upward mobility. These beliefs are widely shared and vary relatively little at this level of abstraction. Abstract attitudes, therefore, cannot predict achievement behavior. At the same time, students hold another set of beliefs about education: *concrete* attitudes, which reflect the diverse empirical realities that people experience with respect to returns on education from the opportunity structure. In this society, minorities, women, and members of the working class often fail to receive the same wages, jobs, and promotions that middle-class white men receive for similar educational credentials. Consequently, students' concrete attitudes vary in accordance with their perception and understanding of how adults who are significant in their lives receive more equitable or less equitable wages, jobs, and promotions relative to their educational credentials. Adults whose job returns are commensurate with their education, such as middle-class white men, generally have children who hold very positive beliefs about education and demonstrate high achievement to match. Con-

versely, children of working-class or minority adults have more pessimistic concrete attitudes toward schooling and earn lower grades. The paradox of positive attitudes and low achievement among blacks exists, in part, because researchers traditionally examine abstract attitudes in relation to students' performance in school. Evidence presented in this article shows that if *concrete* attitudes, which covary with scholastic performance, are examined in relation to high school grades, the paradox disappears because concrete attitudes toward education predict academic achievement among black students.[1]

ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE ATTITUDES

As noted earlier, Ogbu's thesis offers a compelling explanation for the lower achievement of black students reported throughout the literature. What remains unexplained is why blacks continue to say that education is important and then behave in ways that have little relationship to their stated attitudes. One way to approach this paradox is to conceptualize people's beliefs about education as multilayered. It is proposed here that students' attitudes toward education take two forms. The first, abstract attitudes, is based on the dominant American ideology that holds that education is the solution to most social problems: Education paves the road to social mobility and is the remedy for poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, according to this view, one's educational credentials are evaluated by the larger society according to merit. The second belief system, concrete attitudes, is class- and race specific. This subordinate system is grounded in the different material realities that people experience and can be identical to or quite different from the dominant belief system.

Previous social science research on the relationship between attitudes and behavior in schools failed to make the fine but necessary distinction between people's abstract attitudes, based on society's dominant ideology and their concrete attitudes, grounded in subordinate educational values that vary according to people's realities. Abstract attitudes are ideologically based and essentially reflect the belief that opportunity through education is a core component of the American Dream. In most cases, abstract attitudes take the form of general ideological beliefs, such as, "Education is the key to success in the future." In other instances, however, they enable individuals to refract their hopes for the future through the lens of the dominant ideology: "Young black [white] women [men] like me have a chance of making it if we do well in school." Uniting both examples of abstract attitudes is an underlying faith that education will bring opportunity.

Concrete attitudes differ markedly from abstract attitudes in that they display neither adherence to ideological shibboleths nor hopes for the future. Instead, they essentially reflect material realities in which education may or may not lead to social mobility. Concrete attitudes are derived from a person's experiences in her or his family and community ("People in my family haven't been treated fairly at work no matter how much education they have"). Thus, they offer insights into the ways in which class, race, and gender differences in the opportunity structure shape students' efforts in school and are expressions of students' lived culture. Apple and Weis (1983, p. 27) described lived culture as "culture as it is produced in ongoing interactions and as a terrain in which class, race, and gender meanings and antagonisms are lived out." Concrete attitudes reveal students' perceptions of their probable returns on education from the opportunity structure. Because concrete attitudes reflect

[1] The abstract/concrete attitude distinction appears similar to those proposed in previous research. Rosen (1969) distinguished between achievement motivation and value orientation as analytically distinct components of the achievement syndrome. Landis and Scarpitti (1965) identified a middle-class value orientation and feelings of limited opportunity as separate correlates of delinquency. Abstract and concrete attitudes are related conceptually to these previous works in that they, too, conceptualize achievement attitudes as multidimensional. Rosen and Landis and Scarpitti, however, write from a social psychological perspective while this study is macrotheoretical; it examines the opportunity structure's effect on achievement. Furthermore, these authors posit that achievement is shaped more-or-less simultaneously by all dimensions of achievement motivation. I argue, in contrast, that while people's attitudes toward education are multidimensional, one set of values, reflected in abstract attitudes, does not influence achievement behavior, but the other set expressed as concrete attitudes, does affect scholastic performance.

the material world in which students live, students' educational achievement is informed primarily by this set of beliefs. Concrete attitudes, therefore, are crucial for understanding *how* family background and race influence achievement in school.

The concepts of abstract and concrete attitudes are an attempt to apply Parkin's (1976) macrotheoretical constructs of dominant and subordinate value systems to the problem of attitude/behavior inconsistency regarding education among blacks. Parkin suggested that industrial societies contain dominant and subordinate value systems. He argued that people hold dual value systems, one reflecting society's abstract norms and another that is situationally specific to their lives. He noted that most social science surveys of attitudes tap primarily abstract beliefs, or what he called "dominant values." This approach often results in a mismeasurement of the attitudes that actually lie at the heart of behavior. As he explained (p. 95):

> Studies of working-class attitudes which rely on questions posed in general and non-situational terms are likely to produce findings which emphasize class consensus on values; this is because the dominant value system will tend to provide the moral frame of reference. Conversely, studies which specify particular social contexts of belief and action . . . are likely to find more evidence for class differentiated value systems . . . because in situational contexts of choice and action, the subordinate value system will tend to provide the moral frame of reference.

In a similar vein, Rodman (1963) proposed a "lower class value stretch," a subordinate belief system formed by the realities of working-class life, which is actually a negotiated version of the dominant system. Dillingham (1980) tested this notion precisely with regard to black youths' attitudes toward education and found support for the "value stretch." Mann's (1970) review of attitude-consensus research concluded that class-differentiated value systems exist in contemporary liberal democracies. Like Parkin, Rodman and Mann contended that behavior is based on class-specific beliefs.

LOCUS OF CONTROL AND ACHIEVEMENT

Readers will recognize similarities between Rotter's (1975) generalized expectancy measure "locus of control" (see also, Lefcourt 1976; Phares 1976) and this article's conceptualization of concrete and abstract attitudes. Although locus of control is one of the most heavily researched social psychological variables, social scientists disagree on the exact nature of the construct and how it affects achievement. Typically, they argue that the more internal a person's locus of control, the higher her or his achievement is likely to be. Early studies, like that of Seeman (1963) and Seeman and Evans (1962), linked locus of control and cognitive outcomes. The results of Seeman and Evans's study indicated that among sufferers of a disease, those with internal locus of control were more likely to avail themselves of information about the disease. Other studies confirmed the link between locus of control and cognitive activities. Yet locus of control is not the same thing as intelligence or the capacity to achieve. It seems, rather, to play a mediating role in determining whether a person will become involved in achievement behavior (Lefcourt 1976).

The relationship between locus of control and achievement, however, is more complex than merely a mediated relationship between intelligence and achievement. In a comprehensive review of previous research, Stipek and Weisz (1981) concluded that studies of locus of control vary greatly in content and form; therefore, it is difficult to obtain evidence that compares the relationship between achievement behavior and locus of control for *achievement* with achievement behavior and locus of control for *nonachievement* outcomes (such as athletic ability). This distinction is important because research has suggested that people can vary in internality and externality according to the domain or activity under consideration (Stipek and Weisz 1981). An individual may be internal with respect to sports ability, for example, but external with respect to schoolwork. Furthermore, Stipek and Weisz noted evidence that locus of control may differ according to the outcome of the event in a particular domain (failure or success in school, compared to failure and success in personal relationships). Failure may be regarded as being due to external forces, but success may be attributed to internal forces. A familiar twist to this idea is found among young girls, who are likely to attribute academic failure to internal forces (lack of ability) but success to external forces (an exceptionally easy test).

A further refinement of the construct of locus of control comes from the work of Weiner (1977), who offered the concept of "attribution of causality," rather than locus of control, for understanding people's beliefs about personal actions and outcomes. Attribution theory is multidimensional, and Weiner identified three such dimensions: locus of control, causality, and stability. In a specific domain, such as academic achievement, an individual may be internal on the locus-of-control dimension and external on the causality dimension, and the attributions may change over time (that is, they are unstable).

Other work in this area suggests that locus of control is not only domain specific and outcome specific, but that it exists on both the personal and the general levels. The classic example of this view is presented by Gurin et al.'s (1969) study of black college students. The general level refers to beliefs about how the world operates, while the personal level refers to beliefs about how the specifics of the individual's life seem to be working. People can be internal on one level and external on the other; Gurin and her associates found black college students to be highly internal on the *general control ideology* (cultural beliefs rooted in the Protestant ethic) but external on the *personal control* level. They concluded that for minorities, externality may be seen as a reflection of their concrete, material realities in which powerful others (both institutions and individuals) often control or affect their lives irrespective of their efforts.

For these reasons, Stipek and Weisz (1981) concluded that Rotter's generalized expectancy measure (the traditional I-E Scale) is not adequate for measuring the full scope of students' attributions of causality. The research reported here addressed many of the issues raised in the previous paragraphs. It may be useful to view abstract and concrete attitudes toward education as domain-specific (education and opportunity) measures of both personal and general locus of control. The abstract beliefs are comparable to a domain-specific "control ideology" measure, whereas concrete beliefs are comparable to a domain-specific "personal control" measure. The theme underlying concrete attitudes—the notion that a job ceiling has a negative effect on the achievement of minorities—fits well within the framework which suggests that externality may be a reflection of powerful forces in the social environment that determine outcomes despite personal efforts.

THE ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOR LINK

The attitude/achievement paradox among black students is certainly not the only instance in which people say something quite different from what they do. The fit between measured attitudes and observed behavior has been notoriously poor since the days of La Piere's (1934) legendary trip across the United States. Yet, until recently, research on attitude-behavior relations has yielded contradictory and uncertain outcomes (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Bentler and Speckhart 1979; Liska 1975; Schuman 1972).

In trying to specify the theoretical factors that may yield a better fit between attitudes and behavior, Abelson (1982) suggested the importance of two factors. The first factor involves definitional specificity, typified by the work of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), who maintained that attitude object and behavior object must correspond on several dimensions to produce consistency. Second, Abelson argued that certain situational contextual factors can affect the consistency between attitudes and behaviors. Summarizing one avenue of investigation on contextual factors, he noted the utility of distinguishing between an academic and a practical attitude (pp. 132–133).

This distinction is similar to the concepts of abstract and concrete attitudes that were used in this study. Abstract attitudes are more global; they are based on cultural values that express the ideal connection between education and opportunity and are analogous to Abelson's academic attitudes. Concrete attitudes, on the other hand, are more situationally specific, like Abelson's practical attitudes. The latter are grounded in the different material realities that people experience with respect to the actual returns on education within the opportunity structure. Abstract and concrete attitudes represent refinements in conceptualizations and in the measurement of attitude/behavior relations along the lines proposed by Parkin (1976) and Abelson (1982) and in the locus of control measures suggested by Stipek and Weisz (1981) and by Gurin and her associates (1969).

Several hypotheses guided this study, as follows:

HYPOTHESIS 1. *Abstract and concrete attitudes toward education are held simultaneously by students.*

HYPOTHESIS 2. *Concrete, but not abstract attitudes will vary by students' race.*

HYPOTHESIS 3. *Concrete, but not abstract attitudes will vary by students' class.*

HYPOTHESIS 4. *Concrete attitudes will explain achievement better than will abstract attitudes.*

HYPOTHESIS 5. *Concrete attitudes but not abstract attitudes will contribute significantly to the explained variance in achievement among all students.*

METHODS

Sample

Data for this study came from a survey of high school seniors in eight public high schools in the Los Angeles area. These eight schools were chosen because their student bodies were composed of people with the targeted class and racial backgrounds necessary for this research. Although this purposive sample was not random, it allowed for the testing of the research hypotheses. The 1,193 respondents in the study were seniors who were enrolled in social studies courses during spring 1983. Approximately 51 percent of the sample was female, 59 percent (721) was white, and 41 percent (492) was black. (Data were collected but not analyzed for an additional 400 students who were Asian, Hispanic, or foreign born.) The students in the sample represented approximately 65 percent of each of the eight senior classes. The remaining 35 percent of the students at each school were not enrolled in a social studies class during the second semester of the school year or were absent on the day of data collection. This situation undoubtedly introduces selection bias into the sample, but whatever selection bias factors exist are uniform across all schools.

Variables

A questionnaire was developed specifically for the study. The instrument asked for information concerning students' abstract and concrete attitudes toward education, their family backgrounds, their peers, and leisure and work histories. The achievement data for each subject were taken directly from the school records.

The variables were drawn from several bodies of literature, as well as from the theoretical issues raised in the preceding pages. Certain elements of the Wisconsin model of status attainment were tested, specifically the notions of parental educational and occupational attainment and the influence of significant others on achievement (Hauser, Tsai, and Sewell 1983; Sewell, Hauser, and Portes 1969). Abstract and concrete attitudes, a traditional measure of locus of control were examined, as were class, race, gender, influence of significant others, and hours worked per week. A vector of dummy variables controlled for individual school effects because of the nonrandom selection of schools used in the sample. The operational definitions of the variables follow.

Three scales were used. The first is a traditional generalized expectancy or locus-of-control scale (IE score). The locus of control measure was adapted from various forms of the Rotter I/E Scale (Phares 1976). The form used in the study was chosen specifically to be general and nonspecific as to domain, rather than one of the domain-specific forms of general and personal locus of control found in concrete and abstract attitudes. The inclusion of the generalized expectancy measure, an adapted version of the Rotter I-E Scale, offers the possibility of examining and comparing the relationship among achievement, a general domain-specific measure of locus of control for achievement (abstract attitudes), and a personal domain-specific measure of locus of control for achievement (concrete attitudes) with a general domain-nonspecific measure of locus of control (the Rotter I/E Scale). IE score is based on eight forced-choice items in which an internal response is scored 2 and an external response is scored 1. Each respondent's locus-of-control score is the mean of the linear sum of all answered items.

The second and third measures are scales composed of 7-point Likert items that respectively tap abstract (A score) and concrete (C score) attitudes. The construction of the attitude scales began with the generation of a bank of prospective items. These items were adapted from key studies of minority and working-class achievement and included several existing measures of attitudes toward

education and certain targeted concepts, such as the job ceiling. This bank of items was piloted at a separate ninth high school, and the data from the pilot study were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. As hypothesized, two factors emerged from the exploratory factor analysis. The attitude items that loaded on the first factor share a common underlying faith that education will bring opportunity. Items on this factor form the A score, the scale that operationalizes the concept of abstract attitudes. The second factor is composed of items that all reflect the students' assessments of the role of schooling in their particular material reality in which education may or may not bring opportunity. The items on the second factor form the C score, the scale that operationalizes the concept of concrete attitudes.

Following the rationale suggested by Jöreskog (1971), I used the outcomes of the exploratory factor analysis as a model for a simultaneous multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), employing LACCI (Muthén 1982) to test the hypothesis that factor structures are similar across groups. This analysis was made for males compared to females, blacks compared to whites, and middle-class groups compared to working-class groups (see Table 1). The results of the CFAs show that similar factor structures exist across all groups and indicate that concrete and abstract attitudes were held by both black and white students in the sample (as well as by males and females and by working-class and middle-class students).

Table 2 presents the texts of the belief statements that make up each scale. Items on the questionnaire were worded alternatively in negative or positive terms to avoid a response set. The actual scale scores used in the data analyses are the mean linear sums of all answered items. I obtained estimated reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of .71 for abstract attitudes and .67 for concrete attitudes.

A good way to examine the contradiction between what black students say about education and what they do is to compare their abstract and concrete attitudes toward education. The discrepancy between these two sets of attitudes lies at the heart of the paradox of positive attitudes and poor performance among blacks. Students' discrepancy scores (DISCREP), a variable derived from the two attitude scales, measures the differences between a subject's abstract and concrete attitudes. Discrepancy scores cast into sharp relief many of the racial differences in educational beliefs, particularly, the attitudinal basis for the paradox of black attitudes and achievement. (This measure is not used as a predictor of achievement during the regression analysis; it is useful only as an illustration of the attitudinal basis of the paradox).

The effect of class background on achievement was explored in addition to the effect of

Table 1. Results of Multiple Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Racial Groups		Gender Groups		Class Groups	
	Factor		Factor		Factor	
Variable	1	2	1	2	1	2
1.	.558		.557		.590	
2.	.387		.338		.388	
3.	.600		.581		.594	
4.	.481		.492		.455	
5.	.439		.435		.437	
6.	.735		.735		.748	
7.	.818		.851		.876	
8.	.900		.889		.926	
9.		.560		.661		.606
10.		.864		.897		.891
11.		.499		.593		.574
12.		.783		.838		.740
13.		.382		.427		.404
14.		.841		.881		.896
χ^2		166.563		166.648		163.910
df		166		166		166
		$p>.10$		$p>.10$		$p>.10$

Table 2. Belief Statements that Form the Attitude Scales

Variables	Abstract Attitudes
1.	Education is the key to success in the future.
2.	If everyone in America gets a good education, we can end poverty.
3.	Achievement and effort in school lead to job success later on.
4.	The way for poor people to become middle class is for them to get a good education.
5.	School success is not necessarily a clear path to a better life.
6.	Getting a good education is a practical road to success for a young black [white] man [woman] like me.
7.	Young white [black] women [men] like me have a chance of making it if we do well in school.
8.	Education really pays off in the future for young black [white] men [women] like me.
	Concrete Attitudes
9.	Based on their experiences, my parents say people like us are not always paid or promoted according to our education.
10.	All I need to learn for my future is to read, write, and make change.
11.	Although my parents tell me to get a good education in order to get a good job, they face barriers to job success.
12.	When our teachers give us homework, my friends never think of doing it.
13.	People in my family haven't been treated fairly at work no matter how much education they have.
14.	Studying in school rarely pays off later with good jobs.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Kurtosis	Skewness
Abstract attitudes	.71	1.31	.51
Concrete attitudes	.67	−.32	−.25

socioeconomic status (SES). The rationale for this approach comes from the seminal work of Wright and Perrone (1977), who used Marxist class categories in quantitative research and showed the substantial interaction between class position and income returns on education net of socioeconomic background. Three dummy variables were created for middle, ambiguous, and working classes. Parental class location was determined by a schema involving the occupational categories used by the census, levels of education, and whether the parent worked for others or was self-employed. Generally, professionals, managers, traditional petty bourgeoisie, and technical workers are middle class. The "ambiguous" category was reserved for occupations that defy easy allocation to conventional class categories; it contains self-employed blue-collar and service workers, police officers and firefighters, and foremen and supervisors. Clerical, service, and all other blue-collar occupations are treated as working class. The class variable is used to make group comparisons and to tap differences in returns on education that are not embodied in traditional SES measures of parental occupational and educational attainment.[2] Students were assigned to one of the three classes on the following basis: First, the parent with whom the student lived most of her or his life was identified. If the student lived with both parents, the one in the higher class was designated the head of household. If the student lived with one parent, that parent's class was used.

Traditional indicators of family background were also examined. Mother's education (MOMED) and father's education (POPED) measured the parents' educational attainment and reflected levels of education ranging from less than high school (1) to a graduate degree (7). Mother's occupation (MOMOCC) and father's occupation (POPOCC) were indicated by the occupational prestige scores on the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (Duncan 1961). The gender, race, and ethnicity of the respondents were determined by self-reports. During regression analyses, race was dummy coded 1 for black and 0 for white. Gender was also dummy coded: male (0) and female (1).

The influence of significant others on students' achievement was ascertained by examining the post-high school plans of close friends. Respondents were asked to indicate how many of their close friends planned to

[2] The size of the ambiguous class ranged from 28 to 30 for each gender-race subgroup. Because there were so few students in each ambiguous subgroup, this class category was eliminated from multiple-group comparisons.

attend a two-year college, to attend a four-year college, to work full time, to go to a trade or technical school, to enter the military, or to become a homemaker after graduation from high school. PEERCOLL indicated the proportion of the total number of the student's close friends who planned to attend a four-year college.

Two other factors completed the independent variables examined in this study. Hours represented the number of hours per week the respondent worked in a paid job. This variable was included because it was expected that hours spent on a job would diminish the time and effort applied to schoolwork. The effects of attending a particular school were controlled by a vector of dummy variables for each of the eight schools.

The dependent variable used for the data analyses was the student's cumulative high school grade-point average (GPA). Several other measures of achievement were collected, including rank in graduating class, two normed test scores, and a self-reported GPA. Analyses preformed with all measures of achievement yielded similar results.[3]

Several important variables that are traditionally found in achievement research were not examined in this study: measures of intelligence, motivation, expectations, and aspirations. Although clearly important, they were not directly relevant to the central theoretical question of this article: How does the opportunity structure affect educational outcomes? The omission of these variables should not be interpreted as an indication that they are not important.

Analytic Steps

The data analysis proceeded in two phases. First, an analysis of variance was conducted to test for mean differences between blacks and whites on the measures of abstract and concrete attitudes. These ANOVAs used three-way factoral designs with race, class, and gender as the groups. I chose to use SAS's GLM procedure because this least-squares solution was appropriate for the unbalanced-cell design of these data (SAS 1982).

[3] The race-by-gender-by-class subgroup means were substituted for missing values when appropriate.

The second step in the data analysis was the estimation of a multiple regression equation to determine the relative contributions of different variables to the prediction of achievement. The student's GPA was regressed on abstract and concrete attitudes; structural variables of race, gender, and class; traditional family background measures of mother's and father's educational and occupational attainment; and various measures of significant others, hours worked per week, locus of control, and school effects. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie et al. 1975), I estimated hierarchical regression equations first for the entire sample and then for blacks and whites separately.

FINDINGS

The key to an explanation of the attitude-achievement paradox among blacks hinges on the coexistence of concrete and abstract attitudes toward education. The confirmatory factor analyses established that all students hold both concrete and abstract attitudes toward schooling. The next step in understanding this paradox requires identification of racial and class differences in concrete, but not in abstract, attitudes. The analyses of variance showed the hypothesized racial and class differences in attitudes toward education; the discrepancy scores illustrate the magnitude of the gap between abstract and concrete attitudes among blacks. The final piece of this puzzle must show that concrete attitudes, not abstract beliefs, predict achievement in school, and this is what the multiple regressions indicated. These findings will be discussed in the following sections.

Table 3 presents the means of subjects' abstract attitudes by their race-class-gender subgroup. As expected, there were no class differences. Differences between the attitudes of blacks and whites, however, are statistically significant ($p < .05$): blacks embrace the dominant ideology about the positive links between education and mobility even more strongly than do whites. It was hypothesized that abstract attitudes would be uniformly positive and that no significant differences would exist among the cohorts. The significant racial differences between all subgroups, however, do not undermine the basic argument of this research, namely, that people's abstract attitudes reflect the dominant ideology's account of the role of education in social

Table 3. Means of A Score, C Score, and DISCREP, by Subgroup (Frequencies in Parentheses)

	Black** Male	White Male	Black Female	White Female
*Middle Class**				
A Score***	5.50	5.06	5.27	5.09
C Score	4.38	4.90	4.43	5.00
DISCREP	1.12	.16	.84	.09
	(56)	(224)	(84)	(241)
Working Class				
A Score	5.28	4.99	5.34	5.21
C Score	4.19	4.54	4.19	4.81
DISCREP	1.09	.45	1.15	.40
	(138)	(110)	(140)	(93)

* Class differences for C Score and DISCREP, $p < .0005$.
** Racial differences for C Score and DISCREP, $p < .0001$.
*** Racial differences for A Score, $p < .05$.

mobility. Furthermore, that blacks embrace this ideology even more strongly than do whites helps explain the magnitude and the consistency of the gap between what blacks say about education and what they do. If blacks' abstract attitudes were less favorable than those of whites, it would be difficult to argue that two separate attitude systems exist. The direction of the racial differences does not contradict the proposition that all people in this society share highly positive attitudes toward education at this level of abstraction.

Racial and class differences in concrete attitudes also appear in Table 3; these differences are in the hypothesized directions. Recall that the more favorable the concrete attitudes, the more optimistic the student is about the occupational rewards that can be expected for greater educational efforts. In all comparisons of class and gender cohorts, blacks' concrete attitudes are more pessimistic about education than are those of similar whites ($p < .0001$). These findings also show that middle-class students in each gender and racial subgroup are more positive about education than are their working-class peers ($p < .0005$).

In view of the nature of students' concrete attitudes about education and the direction of the differences in their abstract beliefs, the distributions of students' discrepancy scores are not surprising. These scores shed additional light on the paradox of positive attitudes toward education, coupled with lower performance among blacks (see Figure 1). The gap between blacks' abstract and concrete attitudes is much wider than it is for whites ($p < .0001$). As Table 3 indicates, the discrepancy scores of the black students are strikingly different from those of the white students. Among the white students, the discrepancy scores follow class lines, with only minor gender variations: White working-class students have higher discrepancy scores than do their middle-class counterparts. Class differences overall are significant at the .0005 level.

For blacks, the results of the discrepancy scores are somewhat more complex and more interesting. All their discrepancy scores are very high, with little class variation. Only the scores of the middle-class black female

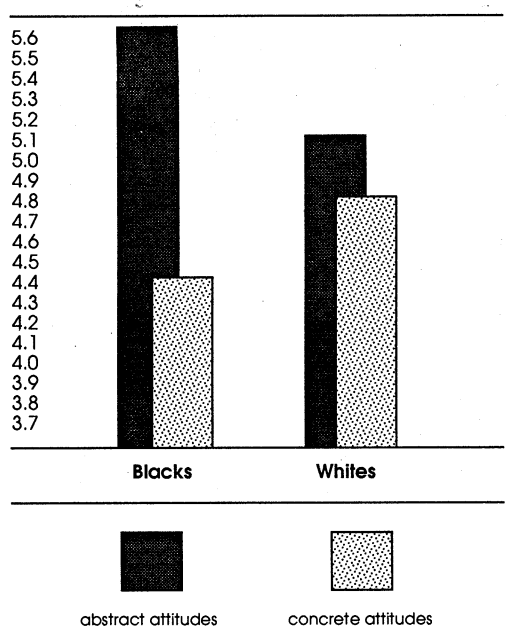

Figure 1. Means of the Abstract and Concrete Attitudes of the Black and White Respondents

students differ markedly—are slightly lower—from those of other blacks. Significantly, irrespective of class, the discrepancy scores of the black students are high and are *always* higher than those of any comparable white cohort ($p < .0001$). It is the size and the uniformity of the black students' discrepancy scores, reflecting the great difference between their abstract and concrete attitudes, that allow us to see why a paradoxical relationship exists between blacks' attitudes and achievement behavior. Traditional social research has measured blacks' highly positive abstract attitudes, but (as this study shows) it is their concrete attitudes that underlie their achievement. Figure 1 visually depicts the attitudinal basis of the paradox.

Full Model of Achievement

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis for the entire sample and for the black and white subsamples. As hypothesized, abstract attitudes have no effect

Table 4. Coefficients of the Full Model of School Achievement for the Entire Sample, Blacks, and Whites (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

	Metric Coefficients		
Variables	All	Blacks	Whites
A Score	30.273 (22.422)	13.734 (34.311)	33.641 (30.015)
C Score	109.711 (18.251)	65.075 (26.347)	137.794 (25.927)
Black	−381.107 (50.898)		
Working class	−38.862 (39.976)	−36.636 (58.207)	−19.012 (56.348)
Female	141.871 (33.183)	197.878 (52.499)	123.108 (42.791)
MOMOCC	.152 (.111)	.218 (.158)	.131 (.159)
POPOCC	.168 (.093)	.067 (.131)	.259 (.135)
MOMED	−1.913 (15.269)	−20.422 (24.314)	17.002 (19.795)
POPED	24.017 (15.082)	−12.501 (25.435)	31.568 (19.222)
IE Score	33.863 (80.630)	−61.815 (140.583)	47.043 (98.130)
Hours	1.539 (1.354)	−.475 (2.133)	3.822 (1.763)
PEERCOLL	743.337 (80.852)	702.388 (128.304)	765.399 (104.488)
School 1	83.792 (68.314)	86.801 (356.543)	139.159 (73.595)
School 2	200.664 (95.266)	108.985 (294.203)	
School 3	390.635 (69.809)	491.368 (303.557)	409.102 (78.595)
School 4	215.316 (81.625)	122.036 (289.162)	
School 5	−21.400 (65.824)	−72.582 (303.593)	16.557 (71.863)
School 6	289.825 (78.521)	282.663 (294.606)	209.463 (102.210)
School 7	318.095 (65.365)	158.201 (290.011)	436.515 (76.094)
R^2	.296	.156	.265
Constant	1164.172 N = 1,193	1471.387 N = 472	791.497 N = 721
	Standardized Coefficients		
A Score			
C Score	.162**	.111*	.190**
Black	−.281**		
Working class			
Female	.107**	.167*	.095**
MOMOCC			
POPOCC			
MOMED			
POPED			
IE Score			
Hours			.071*
PEERCOLL	.269*	.250**	.300**
School 1			
School 2	.073*		
School 3	.190*		.229*
School 4	.108*		
School 5			
School 6	.120*		.072*
School 7	.184*		.232*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

on grades, while concrete beliefs have a significant positive effect on performance in high school. The more optimistic students feel about the potential value of education for their future, the better their performance in school.

For the entire sample, the regression of GPA on the various attitudinal, structural, family background, and other variables yields few surprises. First, as hypothesized, concrete attitudes make an important contribution to GPA, while abstract attitudes make none. The traditional family-background predictors of achievement—mother's and father's educational and occupational attainment—fail to reach significance when concrete attitudes are present in the full regression equations because the effects of these predictors are expressed through concrete attitudes.

Support for this interpretation of concrete attitudes emerges from the regression analyses of the 13 submodels of achievement (see Table 5). Submodels 1–4 show the regression of attitudinal variables; traditional family-background variables; effects of significant others, and structural factors of race, class, and gender on achievement. Submodels 5–12 are various combinations of these predictors regressed on achievement. The last submodel, 13, includes attitudinal variables, family background, significant others, and structural variables regressed on achievement.

Although each of the 13 submodels suffers from specification error, the analyses taken together permit us to investigate how concrete attitudes transmit the effects of family background and class on achievement. All four sets of predictors are significant by themselves (Submodels 1–4). Note that at all times—no matter what other variables enter the regression equation—concrete attitudes predict achievement, while at no time do abstract beliefs affect grades (Submodels 1 and 5–13). Yet, the class variable and the four family background variables (father's and mother's education and occupation) fail to reach significance when concrete attitudes enter the equation along with significant others, race, and gender variables (Submodel 13). This pattern suggests that concrete attitudes express both class and SES processes in achievement.

The single most powerful predictor of GPA is student's race. Despite the partialing out of the effects of SES, gender, and other factors, black students are still more likely than are white students to achieve less in school. Similarly, being female has a positive effect on performance when one controls for other predictors. The importance of race and gender in predicting achievement in high school can be expected in view of the abundant research showing similar racial and gender patterns of achievement in the high school population.

Significant peer groups also have a strong impact on performance. The importance of significant others in the achievement process has been a recognized factor since Sewell and his colleagues (1969) presented their Wisconsin model of status attainment. Next to race, the proportion of a student's close friends who plan to attend a four-year college is the most powerful predictor of achievement.

Locus of control (IE score) does not contribute to the prediction of achievement in this sample. The predictive value of general, nondomain-specific locus of control measures, such as the IE score, has been

Table 5. Standardized Regression Coefficients of Selected Models of Achievement, Entire Sample (N = 1,193)

	Submodels												
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
A Score	−.002				−.009	.042	.015			.005	.041	.031	.031
C Score	.327**				.248**	.231**	.258**			.211**	.205**	.176**	.165**
MOMOCC		.092*					.082*	.074	.049	.068*	.049		.036
POPOCC		.184*					.137*	.137*	.079*	.105*	.060		.030
MOMED		−.024					−.028	−.043	.020	−.044	.009		−.005
POPED		.114*					.083*	.073*	.112*	.054	.087*		.061
PEERCOLL			.356**		.287**			.288**		.245**		.246**	.225**
Black				−.318**		−.266**			−.271**		−.234**	−.245**	−.226**
Female				.140*		.124*			.149*		.133*	.099*	.106*
Working class				−.086*		−.061*			.009		.011	−.034	.006
R^2	.107	.095	.126	.143	.183	.195	.157	.169	.172	.208	.212	.248	.255

*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

criticized roundly from a number of perspectives (Gurin et al. 1969; Stipek and Weisz 1981). This finding, along with the significant coefficient for concrete attitudes, suggests that abstract and concrete attitudes are a superior method for assessing attributions of causality regarding individuals' educational outcomes. Support for this interpretation comes from the work of Gurin and her associates (1969), particularly if concrete attitudes, which are predictive of achievement, are viewed as a domain-specific personal control measure.

The number of hours worked per week, although not influential in the complete sample, has a positive effect in the sample of white students. At first glance, this finding appears to be counterintuitive because students who work have less time to devote to their studies. D'Amico's (1984) study of work and achievement, however, yielded similar results. D'Amico speculated that capable, motivated, and responsible adolescents are likely to do well in school for some of the same reasons that they work.

The final group of dummy variables reveals positive effects for several high schools, suggesting that mere attendance at five of the eight schools influenced the students' grades. In other words, certain schools have inflated grading practices. Gordon and his colleagues (1968) reported a similar finding with respect to schools in the Los Angeles area. This interpretation arises from several facts. First, the school omitted from the regression analysis and used as the comparison category is the academic star of the eight schools. Its student body is overwhelmingly affluent and white; many of its students are National Merit Scholars, and a large number of its graduates attend prestigious universities. In contrast, the five schools with significant positive coefficients are either solidly working class, highly heterogeneous as to race and class, or a segregated minority school—all profiles associated with lower academic achievement. The five significant coefficients for school effects must be interpreted in light of the academic standing of the comparison school. Either these five schools give inflated grades or their students, on average, are better than the ones who attend the prestigious, prosperous all-white suburban school. The latter simply is not the case. Furthermore, the school that comes closest to the comparison school in social-class composition and rigorous academic reputation has a negative, although nonsignificant, coefficient. Working-class and minority high schools are faulted frequently for having lower academic standards than middle-class schools, thereby handicapping those of their students who go on to college. This may be one reason why minority college students who attended integrated middle-class high schools fare better than those who went to segregated high schools.[4]

A comparison of the metric coefficients from the regressions in the subsamples of black and white students reveals that the same factors affect GPA, but that certain variables are more powerful for each group. Being female is much more important in determining achievement for blacks than for whites. This finding is not surprising in view of the historical tradition among blacks in which women tend to achieve and attain more education than do men. In addition, concrete attitudes are more important for the achievement of whites than for the achievement of blacks. The very small positive effect of employment on the achievement of whites is the only variable that affects one group of students but not the other. In the analysis conducted on the subsample of blacks, none of the school effects coefficients reached significance because the comparison school (the affluent white suburban school) had too few black students with whom to compare the blacks in the other seven schools.

DISCUSSION

With one interesting exception, the findings reported in the previous section support the hypotheses of this study. This exception, significant racial differences in abstract attitudes, actually accentuates the paradox that this article explains. All other differences in abstract and concrete attitudes and the other predictors of achievement reveal a theoretically predictable pattern. In addition, the presence of both abstract and concrete attitudes and the nature of their distributions

[4] Normed test scores do not have the significant school effect found for GPA, self-reported GPA, and rank in graduating class. By definition, these measures of achievement are more independent of school effects than are the first three. The absence of school effects for normed test scores supports this interpretation of the school effects findings for GPA.

Table 6. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for Selected Variables in a Model of Academic Achievement (N = 1,193)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
GPA	1.00																							
A score	.014	1.00																						
C Score	.327	.049	1.00																					
IE Score	−.007	.189	.038	1.00																				
MOMOCC	.163	−.043	.138	−.017	1.00																			
POPOCC	.267	−.075	.266	−.051	.298	1.00																		
MOMED	.111	.021	.140	−.038	.320	.283	1.00																	
POPED	.233	.002	.243	−.053	.276	.574	.462	1.00																
Hours	.043	−.062	.017	−.012	.052	.064	−.012	.026	1.00															
PEERCOLL	.356	.040	.275	−.047	.170	.297	.206	.291	−.052	1.00														
Middle class	.227	−.046	.221	−.035	.400	.586	.341	.435	.080	.228	1.00													
Working class	−.190	.042	−.185	.015	−.321	−.447	−.286	−.343	−.107	−.186	−.833	1.00												
Black	−.339	.158	−.283	.074	−.212	−.394	−.012	−.202	−.159	−.172	−.340	.306	1.00											
White	.339	−.158	.283	−.074	.212	.394	.012	.202	.159	.172	.340	−.306	−1.00	1.00										
Male	−.134	−.043	−.058	.000	.021	.048	.001	.002	.010	−.120	−.047	.048	−.032	.032	1.00									
Female	.134	.043	.058	.000	−.021	−.048	−.001	−.002	−.010	.120	.047	−.048	.032	−.032	−1.00	1.00								
School 1	−.139	.021	−.106	.051	−.092	−.158	.045	−.107	−.071	−.063	−.142	.164	.317	−.317	.000	.000	1.00							
School 2	.202	−.076	.207	−.064	.221	.443	.202	.378	.042	.465	.385	−.333	−.362	.362	−.052	.052	−.120	1.00						
School 3	.108	−.086	.004	−.028	−.036	−.102	−.149	−.113	.034	−.093	−.132	.143	−.136	.136	.033	−.033	−.094	−.172	1.00					
School 4	−.177	.132	−.163	.044	−.096	−.214	−.026	−.130	−.111	−.065	−.210	.167	.475	−.475	−.039	.039	−.099	−.181	−.140	1.00				
School 5	−.057	.003	.071	.014	.045	.033	−.021	−.046	.084	−.017	.030	−.014	−.166	.166	.030	−.030	−.096	−.175	−.136	−.143	1.00			
School 6	−.008	.073	−.055	.017	.002	−.054	−.021	.033	−.057	−.033	−.065	.040	.132	−.132	.026	−.026	−.076	−.140	−.109	−.115	−.111	1.00		
School 7	.021	−.017	−.021	.022	−.065	−.060	.056	−.016	−.040	−.093	−.008	.023	.142	−.142	.002	−.002	−.120	−.220	−.171	−.180	−.175	−.140	1.00	
School 8	−.021	−.018	−.002	−.034	−.029	−.001	−.123	.083	−.093	−.184	.032	−.088	−.269	.269	.013	−.013	−.097	−.177	−.138	−.145	−.141	−.113	−.177	1.00
$\bar{X}$	2.504	5.18	4.61	1.46	503	535	3.09	3.54	11.9	.375	.507	.403	.395	.604	.486	.513	.062	.181	.118	.129	.122	.082	.180	.124
SD	.663	.759	.978	.207	162	241	1.27	1.46	12.3	.241	.500	.490	.489	.489	.500	.500	.241	.385	.323	.335	.327	.274	.384	.330

among black and white students have implications far beyond the resolution of the paradox of positive attitudes and low achievement among blacks. The presence of both sets of attitudes suggests a potentially critical deficit in the conceptualization and measurement of the relationship between attitudes and behavior by previous survey researchers. Furthermore, the findings support those who argue that contemporary U.S. society is characterized best by a diverse rather than a unitary value system (Abelson 1982; Hochschild 1981; Mann 1970; Parkin 1976; Rodman 1963). Finally, concrete attitudes shed needed light on the process by which the structure of opportunity (in terms of both race and class) shapes academic achievement and thereby help explain why so many black students do not do well in school.

Explaining the Paradox

The paradox that guided the study centers on the positive attitudes toward education that blacks embrace in the face of their all-too-frequent underachievement, as reported widely in the literature. The study indicates that the paradox rests on both a conceptual and a measurement problem in attitude-behavior research. First, it is better conceptually to propose that people hold dual value or belief systems. As Abelson (1982), Hochschild (1981), Mann (1970), Parkin (1976), and Rodman (1963) argued, people do not adhere to simple, unidimensional belief systems. Rather, belief systems are often multilayered and contradictory; they reflect academic or abstract values and beliefs about society, as well as practical or concrete levels of experience. Second, if this view is accurate, the measurement of attitudes must take into consideration the dual nature of people's beliefs. The present research demonstrates that if concrete attitudes, rather than abstract beliefs, are correlated with achievement behavior, a relationship does exist between what black youths say about schooling and what they do about it. Understood this way, the attitude-achievement paradox disappears.

Dual Attitudes toward Education

The finding of dual attitudes toward education supports the argument that Western industrialized societies are characterized better by a class-differentiated than by a unitary value system (Han 1969). Although research, such as Mann's (1970) study of class-linked belief systems in liberal democracies, indicates support for this contention, Davis (1982) argued as recently as 1982 that there is no evidence that class differences in achievement attitudes exist in the United States. However, Davis used data from the NORC General Social Survey (GSS) to support this contention; the questions on the GSS do not distinguish between abstract and concrete attitudes. The existence of both abstract and concrete attitudes toward education shows, as Parkin (1976) proposed, that members of society may share a pervasive value system that is grounded in the hegemonic ideology of the dominant group, but also possess a subordinate value system based on the exigencies of day-to-day living. Abstract attitudes reflect the societal consensus about the ideal role of education as a bridge to adult roles; concrete attitudes exist because on another level there is social conflict over the value of education for people from minority and working-class backgrounds. Critical sociology of education, exemplified by the work of Apple and Weis (1983), Crichlow (1986), Giroux (1983), and Willis (1977), demonstrates how schooling, marked by rebellion, contestation, and resistance, is one terrain in which this conflict is played out.

Concrete Attitudes, Social Structure, and Achievement

For black youths, the issue of poor scholastic performance is especially troublesome, particularly because the many policy interventions of the last 20 years have failed to solve the problem. One of the most enduring findings of social science research is the relationship between family background and academic achievement, yet most research has not revealed clearly *how* a person's race and class influence his or her achievement in school. Concrete attitudes provide some insight into this process because they show how students' grades are influenced by the social context in which achievement occurs.

Discrepancy scores illustrate this point. The middle-class white male and female students obtained the lowest discrepancy scores (.16 and .09, respectively). Their scores are so low because they evaluated schooling positively on both the abstract and

the concrete levels. Substantively, this finding means that what middle-class whites perceive in the material world of family life and community history is close to what the dominant ideology professes is the role of education in granting access to occupational and social mobility. The parents, older siblings, and neighbors of middle-class whites are living proof that, just as the American Dream claims, success in school is rewarded by good jobs, higher salaries, and promotions.

The discrepancy scores of the middle-class black female students illustrate further the contention that the opportunity structure shapes concrete attitudes and that concrete attitudes reflect the relationship between perceived opportunity and academic achievement. Middle-class black women receive the best returns on higher education of *any* black cohort, according to Carrigan (1981) and Rosenfeld (1980). Therefore, the lower mean discrepancy scores for the black middle-class female students relative to the other subgroups of blacks can be interpreted as a reflection of the empirically better occupational returns on education that they enjoy. Taken together, however, the overall high discrepancy scores among all the black respondents indicate substantively that the material realities experienced by black youths challenge the rhetoric of the American Dream. Working-class and minority youths have parents, older siblings, and neighbors whose real-world experiences challenge the myth that education equals opportunity for all. A story that a former student told me illustrates the skepticism of blacks about education and opportunity:

> Larry, a young black man enrolled at UCLA, walked into a local bank and spotted Antoine, a friend from high school, who was working as the security guard. They exchanged greetings. Antoine asked Larry how he was doing. Larry complained that he was exhausted from working full time to support himself while carrying a full load at UCLA.
>
> "Why are you working so hard?" laughed Antoine. "You're gonna end up as a security guard like me, but you'll just lose your hair sooner."

CONCLUSION

The study suffered from several limitations, primarily those related to the nature of the sample. Although the eight high schools that the students attended were purposively chosen to reflect the class and racial diversity of the greater Los Angeles community, only seniors in social studies classes actually were surveyed. Because this was not a random selection of either high schools or seniors, much less the overall adolescent population, the generalizability of the results is limited. Nevertheless, the research reported here sheds light on two related issues in the education of black students. One is the paradox of positive attitudes toward education coupled with low performance in school; the other is the critical issue of the pervasive underachievement of black youths. The explanation of the underachievement of blacks begins with the rather straightforward proposition that the social context in which learning takes place contributes to educational outcomes. Certainly, individual competencies and the quality of schooling are influential components in the learning and achieving process and should not be overlooked in any analysis of the underachievement of minorities. The poor quality of schooling that many blacks, particularly those in inner-city schools, continue to receive certainly contributes to their academic performance. For example, the work of Dreeben and Gamoran (1986) illustrates how specific aspects of segregated minority schooling in the Chicago area can lead to lower outcomes. Yet, as argued in this article, an often-neglected but critical factor in the level of achievement may well be the student's perceptions of what her or his efforts and accomplishments in school ultimately will bring from the larger society. The information conveyed to students about potential returns on education is not only what parents, teachers, and the dominant ideology expound, but what the students' daily realities show them. Adolescents see their parents' experiences in the labor market, in which class, race, and gender also influence returns on educational credentials. Young blacks are not bewitched by the rhetoric of equal opportunity through education; they hear another side of the story at the dinner table.

The relationships among family background, race, class, and school outcomes are well established. Although a great deal remains to be learned about the dynamics of these relationships, the notion of concrete attitudes contributes to this literature by its explication of one way in which these factors

influence performance. Material reality, whether in the form of the fairly close match between the promise and the reality of opportunity through education that middle-class whites experience or the substantial contradiction between the promise and the reality that working-class blacks experience, provides the social context for every child's achievement behavior in school. In a reasonable and rational process, material realities are the foundation of concrete attitudes toward education. This is the logic and the structure of the often-reported lower performance of black and working-class youths. The implications of this argument are clear: Without fundamental change in the larger opportunity structure, the underachievement of minority and working-class students is likely to persist even in the face of the best-designed and most lavishly funded educational reforms.

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