

## **Enduring Postsecondary Divides: Gendered, Racialized, and Privileged Differences in Predisposition Influences and Aspirations**

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Extant educational research (e.g., Alexander, Holupka & Pallas, 1987; Cameron & Heckman, 1998; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1992; McDonough, Antonio & Horvat, 1996; St. John, 1991; Willis & Rosen, 1979) provides several models that describe and explain the processes associated with youth participation in postsecondary education. One model that is widely accepted is the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-phase college choice model, which divides the process into the phases of predisposition, search, and choice. Although this model is widely accepted, of the extant research informing our understanding of the model, much of it has concentrated on the stages of search and choice, rather than the first stage, predisposition.

This manuscript describes a study of secondary youth and the influences they understand to be most influential in the predisposition phase. In an effort to better understand the stage of predisposition, it elucidates some of the existing research on the college choice process, illuminating a framework currently lacking critical examination of predisposition. Through this description of the literature, several questions emerge that structured the design of the present empirical study of secondary youth. After a description of the research questions that guided the investigation, a summary of the empirical work and the results are presented. The results highlight differences in predisposition influences based on gender, racial-ethnic identification, and privilege. Based on the findings, the discussion section engages the implications these enduring divides have for the methods employed by schools and communities, and U.S. society as a whole, to assist students transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

### **Literature Review**

Among the models of the college choice process, the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-phase college choice model, which divides the process into the phases of predisposition, search and choice, has been the framework most widely used in the contemporary research. Much of this research unfortunately, has concentrated primarily on the stages that follow predisposition – search and choice (cf., Alexander, Holupka, & Pallas, 1987; Astin, 1980; Chapman, 1981; Dixon & Martin, 1991a; Gilmore, Spiro & Dolich, 1981; Hearn, 1984; McDonough, 1992; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Smith & Matthews, 1992; Willis & Rosen, 1979).

Chiefly, the contemporary empirical focus has been with understanding the institutional search and selection process for students based upon aspects of race, gender, and privilege<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, the literature provides an incomplete understanding of the influences that move students from predisposition through these subsequent phases of the model. The examination of the college choice process in this manner has led to the dismal conclusion that the structural mechanisms of race, gender, and privilege are continually intractable.

Decades of sociological research (e.g., Discenza, Ferguson, & Wisner, 1985; Dixon & Martin, 1991; Gilmor, Spiro, & Dolich, 1981; Horvat, 1996; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Thomas, 1998) have produced analyses of the significant influences upon the search and selection phases of the original Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. With few exceptions, much of this work continues to accept that family background has the greatest influence on students throughout the college choice process. The strong influence of family background is widely accepted because of the understood impact that one's family status has on the perception of one's own status and where one fits into the society – or one's habitus. Habitus establishes one's perception of appropriate and viable options and social activities (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Much of the work on college choice models and processes extend Bourdieu's theories regarding habitus, and the related concept of field, to focus on how students make sense of the set of possibilities and impossibilities that are discovered by individuals as they enter into various fields (Astin, 1980; Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Tierney, 1980).

Privilege is conceptualized theoretically as a composite variable indicative of human, cultural and social capital. When considering predisposition to college and its influence considering only income or socioeconomic status lacks analytic subtlety since both are episodic and do not capture the cumulative advantage of resources across time and social institutions. In order to attempt to overcome this issue, privilege in this study is operationalized as the mother's highest level of education<sup>2</sup>. This is justifiable since highest level of education is predicated upon and determines various levels of human, cultural and social capital throughout the lifecourse.

McDonough et al. (1997) highlight the influence of social relationships and the capital they generate on the college attendance of African American students. This influence is also highlighted by Thomas (1998) as it concerns Latino students, and by McDonough (1992) as it concerns working-class and low-income white students. The findings of these researchers clearly identify the need to adjust traditional college choice models to account for the habitus of minorities<sup>3</sup> and other distinct social, economic and/or racial groups; however,

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<sup>1</sup> An understanding of the work of Pierre Bourdieu leads to an acknowledgement that any of the factors included in an analysis based on parental educational achievement level or family income is a factor or variable that measures the influence of inherited social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital indicates how privileged an individual may be in her or his ability to be socially or economically mobile. For more on this conception of social and cultural reproduction see Pierre Bourdieu (1973) "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" in *Power and Ideology in Education* (Karabel & Halsey, Eds.).

<sup>2</sup> Although traditional sociological studies of education and social mobility utilize father's highest level of education, research (for example, Hamrick & Stage, 2004) has shown that for communities of color modeling social capital and educational aspirations is most powerfully done using variables based on the educational and occupational background of the female guardian. This methodological and theoretical conclusion is logical due to an understanding of unstable patrilineal ties via the work of William Julius Wilson (1987; 1996) and Elijah Anderson (1990).

<sup>3</sup> The concepts of minority, youth/person of color and racial/ethnic minority are not used interchangeably. Concepts including the term minority are those that are from the perspective the institution, since the sociological conceptualization of minority status is dependent upon persistent historical structural oppression of a group. The concepts of youth or person of color are used when writing based on the intentionality or potential intentionality of the subject.

their research is concentrated heavily on the search and selection phases.

The existing literature has afforded the education community a wealth of information concerning the factors that influence students' decision during search and selection. Social and personal factors have been identified as critical to the choice of institution that a student decides to attend college (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Gilmour et al., 1981; Horvart, 1996; Martin; & Dixon, 1991; Smith & Matthews; 1992). These studies focus on the role that high school climate (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999), counselors and peers (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999), and parental and other family members (Gilmour et al., 1981; Horvart, 1996; Smith & Matthews, 1992) have on the potential college student's decision-making process. These factors individually or in various combinations impact college choice during the predisposition stage as well, but since little empirical work has focused on predisposition in a similar manner, it is not all together understood how important these factors are for students who are just beginning to consider postsecondary education. Furthermore, it is also unclear whether these various factors are equally important to female, racial-ethnic minority, and low-income students and their male, white or otherwise privileged counterparts.

The valuable, although disproportionate, attention given to the search and selection phases of college choice is problematic. While educational aspirations are high among all students, for low-income and minorities students the actual transition into postsecondary education is far less common than it should be based upon student aspirations (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; American Youth Policy Forum, 2000; National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001). Therefore, if increasing college attendance among all students is the goal of policymakers and practitioners, then empirical work must also focus on the earliest stage of college choice.

### **Interrogating Predisposition and its Influences**

This study endeavored to highlight predisposition and help further the understanding of how predisposition influences differ between various social groups. In order to do this, the study investigated which factors students perceive to be most influential in the predisposition phase of the college choice process. Additionally, the study sought to determine if there were any significant differences in the importance of these factors based upon students' gender, ethnicity, and privilege. The design of the study and the analysis of the survey data were guided by the following over-arching research question:

*1. What factors do students in the predisposition phase perceive to be most influential on the level of education to which they aspire?*

Based on previous empirical work (e.g., Pope & Fermin, 2003; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; NCES, 2005) it can be hypothesized that differences regarding the importance of the influences on predisposition and educational aspirations exist based upon gender, race, and privilege. Hence the study was designed so that within a particular high school context the following questions could be examined:

- 2. Are there differences in educational aspirations based upon ethnic identification?*
- 3. Are there differences in educational aspirations based upon gender identification?*
- 4. Are there differences in educational aspirations based upon privilege?*

## Method

### *The Instrument*

The instrument for this study is a variation of the survey used by Pope and Fermin (2003) (see Appendix). It was developed based upon literature related to college choice and the predisposition phase of that process (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Gilmour et al., 1981; Horvart, 1996; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Dixon & Martin, 1991; Smith & Matthews, 1992). Experts in the field were consulted regarding the instrument to assure content validity. These experts included a high school counselor, a faculty member whose research specializes in college student issues, a college admissions counselor, and an associate dean at a college of education. They eliminated some items due to duplication and relevance to the study and made suggestions related to wording of the remaining items.

For this study the demographic questions, which composed the first 11 items of the Pope and Fermin (2003) instrument were also modified. For instance, one question -- "What is your current college major" -- was removed because of its irrelevance. Additionally, based upon feedback from others in the field an additional response option, "Do Not Know," was added to the list of answer choices for seven of the 10 demographic questions. In total, the high school aged respondents who participated in this study were asked to complete a 40 item survey that required a commitment of ten to 15 minutes to complete.

In addition to the 10 demographic questions, the survey used in this study included 28 items related specifically to college choice. The 28 items represent six subscales, which include factors that influence college choice such as family, peers, civic personnel, community involvement, high school/college personnel, and possible economic gain. Each of the six subscales yielded reliabilities ranging from .721 to .956, with the overall scale yielding a total reliability of .93. Respondents answered the 28 items based upon a Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Very Important), with 3 being neutral. Two additional open ended items were also included to inform the future creation of related survey instruments.

### *Sampling and Data Collection*

The study was conducted at a moderate sized exurban<sup>4</sup> high school on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area in the southern United States. The sample pool included 644 students enrolled in 9th and 10th grade English courses, either at the general education or pre-Advanced Placement<sup>5</sup> level. At the time of the study the total enrollment for the school was 1,168 students, with 378 freshman, and 266 sophomore students. The high school's student composition in terms of ethnic identification included 274 black students, which constitute about 24% of the school population; 747 white students, about 65% of the school's population; 129 Latino/a students, about 11 % of the population; and an Asian student population which constituted less than one percent of the total school population.

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<sup>4</sup> Exurbs are a spatial pattern of settlement located at greater distances from urban centers than suburban developments and are comprised of a different mix of land uses and populations. For more on economic, spatial and social aspects of exurbia please see Tom Daniels (1999) *When City and Country Collide* or Arthur C. Nelson (1992) *Characterizing Exurbia*.

<sup>5</sup> The Advanced Placement (AP) program was started in 1955 and is administered by the College Board. Students can potentially earn college credit by taking an AP exam because many colleges will give credit if a student gets a high enough score. In 2000, 760,000 students took over one million AP exams (The College Board, 2001).

Table 1 displays the demographic information for the school and survey respondents, which are proportionally similar. An examination of Table 1 shows that in terms of racial-ethnic identification of respondents, 18.6% of the students were Black; 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander; 56.5% White; 9.1% Latino/a; 1.2% Native American; and finally 12.3% were categorized as “other,” which includes students who identified themselves as multiethnic. In comparison to the entire school population, a student who identified her- or himself as black, white or Latina/o were underrepresented in the study sample and students who classified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander were overrepresented. Some respondents chose to not fill in a gender or ethnic identification category.

**Table 1: Demographic Comparison of School Population and Study Sample**

|  | Asian/<br>Pacific<br>Islander | Latina/o | Other <sup>6</sup> | Black | White | Female      | Male        |
|--|-------------------------------|----------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------------|-------------|
| Study Sample<br>(N=253)                    | 1.2%                          | 9.1%     | 12.3%              | 18.6% | 56.5% | 49.4%       | 50.2%       |
| Secondary School<br>Population<br>(N=1168) | 0.5%                          | 11.1%    | N/A                | 23.5% | 64.9% | Unavailable | Unavailable |

From the surveys included in analysis, 49% of the respondents were female; approximately 44% of the respondents indicated that they were 10th graders (sophomores), and approximately 53% indicated that they were ninth graders (freshmen). It is important to note that this was only the third full day of classes for the school year; therefore, it is possible to consider these students to be eighth and ninth graders. Although developmentally they are ninth and tenth graders, when considering the processes of socialization and enculturation at the secondary school level the students in the sample would more appropriately be considered eighth and ninth graders (Table 2). This psycho-social categorization allows for a better understanding of predisposition behavior within the Hossler and Gallagher model, by instituting the boundaries for the three stages as described by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) (see Table 2). An understanding of the model indicates that administering the survey later in the semester would have plausibly captured the predisposition influences of the 9th graders and search influences of the 10th graders rather than the predisposition influences of both groups.

In order to recruit students within the stage of predisposition for the survey a list of all ninth and tenth grade English classes was obtained from the secondary school principal. This list included the number of students enrolled in each class and the curriculum orientation of the class - general or pre-advanced placement. The 644 students in the sampling pool were enrolled in 29, ninth and tenth grade English classes. The survey was completed and returned by 258 these students, aged 14 to 18 years; 253 of these surveys were suitable<sup>7</sup> and included in analysis.

<sup>6</sup> There are several possible reasons the over sampling of respondents who identify themselves ethnically as other. These possibilities range from particular cultural nuances (e.g. West Indian v. Black American) to the limitations of the social categorization of race and ethnicity in survey research (do I choose an ethnicity if I am multiethnic or do I mark myself as other?).

<sup>7</sup> Several surveys were excluded because the respondents were outliers based upon age (older than 16 years) and others were excluded because they were incomplete or completed in an invalid manner.

**Table 2: Boundaries of Three Phase College Choice Model**

| Model dimensions              | Factors  | Student Outcomes   |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Predisposition:<br>Grades 7-9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental encouragement and support</li> <li>• Parental saving for college</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Parental collegiate experiences</li> </ul>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills</li> <li>b. Career and occupational aspirations</li> <li>c. Educational aspirations</li> <li>d. Enrollment in college-bound curriculum</li> </ol>   |
| Search:<br>Grades 10-12       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental encouragement and support</li> <li>• Educational aspirations</li> <li>• Occupational aspirations</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Saliency of potential institutions</li> <li>• Student ability</li> <li>• High school academic resources</li> </ul>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Listing of tentative institutions</li> <li>b. Narrowing list of tentative institutions</li> <li>c. Securing information on institutions</li> </ol>   |
| Choice:<br>Grades 11-12       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational aspirations</li> <li>• Occupational aspirations</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Student ability</li> <li>• Parental encouragement</li> <li>• Perceived institutional attributes (quality, distance, campus life, majors, availability)</li> <li>• Perceived ability to pay (perceived resources, perceived costs)</li> </ul> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Awareness of college expenses and financial aid</li> <li>b. Awareness of institutional attributes and admission standards</li> <li>c. Attaining scholastic aptitudes and attitudes</li> <li>d. Perceived support from family and friends</li> <li>e. Institutional commitment</li> <li>f. Submission of applications</li> <li>g. Preregistration</li> <li>h. Attendance</li> <li>i. Application for financial aid</li> </ol> |

Source: Table Adapted from Cabrera & LaNasa (2000).

### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the importance of the 28 influences measured in the survey. These influences were then ranked based upon the mean scores for each of the responses overall and for groups of students based on gender, race and privilege, and significant differences between the influences and among the groups were determined. A univariate analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) was conducted to determine how well the perceived influences predicted student's educational aspirations (highest level of education the student reported as a goal to attain) when coupled with the variables ethnic identification, gender identification, and highest level of education reported for the respondent's mother. Additional analysis with all variables for gender, race/ethnicity, and privilege was also conducted in order to determine main and interaction effects of gender, racial-ethnic identification, and privilege on the level of education aspired to by respondents.

### **Results**

The major hypothesis underlying this study is that the transition from high school to college is an unsuccessful one for many students when gender, racial-ethnic identity, and privilege are considered. The results of this study illuminate some of the differences in

predisposition influences among students based on these student characteristics. By closely attending to differences in predisposition influences based upon differences in the gender, ethnicity, and privilege, the findings highlight some implications these differences have for the way that schools, communities, and U. S. society as a whole help students transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

*The Top Overall Influences for all Students Surveyed*

The first major question shaping the analysis of the data was: *What factors do students perceive to be most influential in the predisposition phase of the college choice model?* Table 3 displays the means for the top ten responses from participants regarding what they perceived to be the most influential factors. Factors that measure two of the six sub-scales appear to be the most attention grabbing: factors measuring career and personal goals; and high school personnel and support. Factors within the sub-scale measuring career and personal goals are ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th. The factors within the sub-scale of high school personnel and support are ranked 7th and 9th. Additionally, factors ranked 4th, 6th, and 10th were from the sub-scale measuring the influence of *family and friend support*.

**Table 3: Top 10 Influential Factors in Predispositional Phase of College Choice**

| Influential Factors   | Overall Mean |
|---|--------------|
| To earn a college degree is a personal goal of mine                                 | 4.37         |
| The possibility of getting a better job upon completion of college                  | 4.29         |
| The possibility of making more money upon completion of college                     | 4.27         |
| Parents encouragement to attend   | 4.24         |
| Possibility of achieving a career goal upon the completion of college               | 4.22         |
| Parent's willingness to provide financing   | 3.70         |
| Being enrolled in a high school program that prepared me for college                | 3.69         |
| Opportunity to participate in other extracurricular activities due to a scholarship | 3.67         |
| Teacher's support and encouragement   | 3.62         |
| Other relatives' (other than parents) encouragement to attend                       | 3.56         |

Whether separately or in concert, privilege, race and gender are understood to shape the set of choices of minority students possess by providing group relevant priorities, decision frameworks, and preferences that are unique from those of their privileged white peers during the search and selection stages of the college choice process (Bourdieu & Passeron; 1970/1977; McDonough, 1992; McDonough et al., 1997; Thomas, 1998). Hamrick and Stage (2004) found that for Latina/o and African American students, gender had a significant impact on predisposition influences, resulting in disparate educational aspirations. Analysis of the data from this study also found differences in the mean level of educational aspirations based upon gender, with females possessing slightly higher levels of aspiration. There are noticeable, but not significant, differences in the mean levels of aspirations between female and male respondents in all subgroups. These differences were not present only for Latina and African American students. This gender gap appears to cross ethnic boundaries with the exclusion of those respondents who identified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander and Non-

U.S. citizens or non-permanent resident, all of whom were female.

*Educational Aspirations: Gender, Ethnicity, and Privilege*

When gender identification, racial-ethnic identification, or privilege was used in this study to predict educational aspirations, neither gender nor ethnicity proved a significant predictor on their own. In further analysis employing all three variables as predictors, gender ( $F = 7.06$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and privilege ( $F = 4.37$ ;  $p = .001$ ) were significant, while ethnic identification still appeared as an insignificant predictor ( $F = .445$ ;  $p = .873$ ). Across all sub-groups the mean level of education aspired to by students did not fall below  $\mu = 4.29$ , meaning that on average students planned to complete at least some college. Table 4 shows the mean level of education respondents aspired to by gender and ethnic identification. Table 5 shows the mean level of education respondents aspired to by mother's education level (used in this study to represent privilege). An educational aspiration mean of four would indicate a goal of "some college," a mean of five would indicate a goal of a "bachelor's degree," and a mean level of 6 would indicate a goal to attain a master's degree or higher.

**Table 4: Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Gender and Ethnicity**

| Demographic Group      | Mean Educational Aspiration |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5.66                        |
| Latina/o               | 4.56                        |
| Other                  | 4.74                        |
| Black                  | 4.89                        |
| White                  | 4.85                        |
| Female                 | 4.87                        |
| Male                   | 4.85                        |

**Table 5: Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Mother's Level of Education**

| Mother's Education Level  | Mean Educational Aspiration |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Less than high school     | 4.294                       |
| High school graduate      | 4.9385                      |
| Vocational/Trade School   | Unavailable*                |
| Some College              | 4.847                       |
| Bachelor's degree         | 5.280                       |
| Master's degree or higher | 5.640                       |

\* Data unavailable because of small N

The information contained in Table 4 highlights that educational aspirations do not differ much by students' ethnic and gender identification. The relatively high levels of aspirations found in this study's participants is not uncommon among students in general

(Adelman, 1999; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). An examination of Table 5, illustrates that the level of education to which a student aspires increases with privilege. This is consistent with extant literature, including Hamrick and Stage (2004), which found that mother's level of education was an indirect influence on the predisposition decisions of Latina and African American male and female students who attend low-income secondary schools.

When comparing Table 4 to Table 5, students possessing different levels of privilege appear to be aspiring to different levels of education, more so than students who differ in gender and ethnic identification. The fact that educational aspirations are so differentiated by level of privilege helps to explain the dilemma that many postsecondary institutions are currently facing regarding socio-economic homogeneity, while concurrently celebrating acceptable levels of gender and ethnic diversity.

### **Study Limitations and Areas for Further Inquiry**

The use of one particular high school, while contextualizing the data and influencing factors, does limit the generalizability of the findings of this study to a moderate sector of communities and high school settings. Cultural and social factors of gender identity, racial-ethnic identity, and privilege vary tremendously based upon context. As a result, although the study's findings may only be applicable to a particular sector of students within the predisposition phase, similar studies within different contexts in the future will continue to add to our understanding of what influences are important to youth during predisposition.

The quantitative design of this study helped to further the understanding of which of the various student characteristics impact the influences perceived to be important to students' predisposition behavior and decisions. The design leads us to support extant evidence regarding the importance of mother's education. Concomitantly, this study sheds light on how some social categorizations of students have less power in impacting or predicting student predisposition behaviors and decisions. However, it does not further our understanding of why or how predisposition is influenced by various factors or student characteristics. Future research designed to focus on questions regarding *how* and *why* are needed.

### **Discussion**

From internet and television ads, to billboards and unsolicited postal and electronic mailings, it seems that information about postsecondary education is ubiquitous. However, even those students privileged by highly involved and knowledgeable parents with high levels of social, cultural, and human capital often find themselves lost when it comes to navigating their way through the college choice process. In a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (15 February, 2005), the U.S. Secretary of Education spoke candidly regarding both her professional and personal opinions regarding the needs of students and parents while navigating through the college choice process saying, "I don't think higher education institutions mean for this to occur. It's a hard process to navigate...you just sort of grasp and grope – maybe you go to a bookstore and buy what you can. I think we can do better." Dr. Spellings is not alone. Many others believe we can and should do better, and have called for better coordination of activities, curriculum, and services between high schools and colleges (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; American Youth Policy Forum, 2000; National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001; National Governors' Association, 2004).

Since the social movements of the 1960s in the United States, minority, socially and economically underprivileged youth have relied upon higher education as the shrewdest nomic pathway to the socioeconomic mobility systemically denied them in prior generations. However, current group comparisons indicate that a far higher proportion of high-income, non-minority students enter postsecondary education than their low-income, non-minority peers. The statements of Dr. Spellings and the work of some current researchers (e.g., Perna, 2006; Kim & Schneider, 2005) indicate that information may be one of the most significant factors influencing predisposition; however, additional empirical evidence is still needed. It is unlikely that individuals are decisively choosing to remain poor and uneducated despite the reduction in institutional barriers. Current educational trends therefore indicate the continuing need for additional interrogation of the underlying forces influencing the predisposition of students to participate in postsecondary education.

Coordinating programs and services that help students move from the predisposition phase of the college choice process and subsequently begin to consider the academic and social decisions associated with the transition from secondary to postsecondary education is no small feat. It will not happen simply by deciding that coordination is necessary. Policy and program initiatives based solely on recruiting students' from racialized groups are not going to benefit students in the ways necessary to increase successful transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Support for this assertion comes from my findings (see table 5), as based on this analysis race was only a significant student characteristic when it was used in concert with gender and parental education to predict the level of education to which a student aspired. Additionally, since gender only becomes a significant predictor of educational aspirations when considered in conjunction with mother's level of education and/or ethnic identification it would seem prudent to reconsider the way in which programs and policies solely target females (in the case of recruiting science and technology majors) or males (in the case of recruiting nursing and teaching majors), and people of color based upon the respective group's under-representation in the field, with the hope that these programs will provide the panacea for disparate secondary to postsecondary transitional ails.

### *Conclusion*

This study illustrated that educational aspirations are better predicted when the gender, racial-ethnic identification, and preexisting privilege of students are taken into consideration. To this end, programs and activities working to shape aspirations and impact influences are better coordinated when these student characteristics are considered. Three main points emerged from this study's findings. The first point is that economic factors are the most important influences for all students, but only the "possibility of achieving a personal career goal upon the completion of college" was found to be significantly influential for predicting educational aspirations when gender, ethnicity, and privilege are considered. The second point that emerged is that educational aspirations are high among all groups of students, but the influences that prove to significantly shape these aspirations differ when gender, ethnicity, and privilege are considered either separately or in concert. Finally, the third point is that differences in aspirations and influences are more strongly impacted by privilege than by gender or ethnic identity.

It should not be surprising that educational aspirations are more accurately predicted when the gender, ethnicity, and parental education level of the student are taken into account. However, rarely do high school curricula, supplemental or enrichment

programming, or educational policies target the whole student in this manner. Those secondary schools, postsecondary schools, and community programs that enter into partnerships with a mission to coordinate services and move students from predisposition into the search and selection processes have difficulty providing both the academic and social services necessary to support all students. Many programs specifically aim to target students within gendered, racialized and underprivileged groups who traditionally often decide that college is not for them and consequently do not enter the search and selection processes in a normative fashion. These programs must go beyond simply creating program structures for these students and contentiously work more diligently in recruitment and retention efforts (e.g., not simply creaming the most academically talented students from these groups).

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8. What is the highest level of formal education attained by your mother/legal female guardian?

- \_\_\_ (1) Less than high school
- \_\_\_ (2) High school graduate
- \_\_\_ (3) Vocational/Trade school

- \_\_\_ (4) Some College
- \_\_\_ (5) Bachelor's degree
- \_\_\_ (6) Master's Degree or higher
- \_\_\_ (7) Do Not Know

9. What is the highest level of formal education attained by your father/legal male guardian?

- \_\_\_ (1) Less than high school
- \_\_\_ (2) High school graduate
- \_\_\_ (3) Vocational/Trade school

- \_\_\_ (4) Some College
- \_\_\_ (5) Bachelor's degree
- \_\_\_ (6) Master's Degree or higher
- \_\_\_ (7) Do Not Know

10. What is your parents' gross annual household income?

- \_\_\_ (1) Below \$25,000
- \_\_\_ (2) \$25,000 – \$45,000
- \_\_\_ (3) \$45,000 – 65,000
- \_\_\_ (4) above \$65,000
- \_\_\_ (5) Do Not Know

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO SECTION II**

## II. RELATED ATTITUDES

This section of the survey is designed to assess the level of importance that each of the listed factors had on your decision to attend college. Use the following scale for rating each item: 1=Not important; 2=Of little importance; 3=Neutral; 4=Important; or 5=very important.

|   | Not important | Of little importance | Neutral | Important | Very Important |
|---|---------------|----------------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. Parents' willingness to provide financing                              | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 2. Parents encouragement to attend  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 3. Older brothers or sisters' encouragement to attend                     | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 4. Other relatives' (other than parents) encouragement to attend          | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 5. Other relatives' (other than parents) willingness to provide financing | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 6. Classmates' encouragement to attend                                    | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 7. Friends who are attending/ have attended college encouragement         | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 8. Friends providing information about college                            | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 9. Opportunity to participate in college athletics due to a scholarship   | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |

|  | Not important | Of Little Importance | Neutral | Important | Very Important |
|--|---------------|----------------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| 10. Opportunity to participate in other extracurricular activities due to a scholarship  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 11. Teacher's support and encouragement  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 12. High school counselors' support and encouragement                                    | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 13. An admission counselor from an institution of higher education encouragement         | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 14. An admission counselor from an institution of higher education providing information | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 15. Field trips to college campuses  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 16. Advertisements of college in your school or community                                | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 17. Encouragement from members of your church or religious group                         | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 18. Information about college gained at church or through a religious group              | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 19. Financial support from your church or other religious group                          | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |

|  | Not Important | Of Little Importance | Neutral | Important | Very Important |
|--|---------------|----------------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| 20. Information gained through a community/civic organization (Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Kiwani's Rotary Club, Jack & Jill, etc.) | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 21. Financial support gained through a community/civic organization  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 22. Encouragement of a community/civic organization or it's members  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 23. Possibility of getting a better job upon the completion of college   | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 24. Possibility of making more money upon the completion of college  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 25. Possibility of achieving a career goal that upon the completion of a college   | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 26. To earn a college degree is a personal goal of mine  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 27. Being enrolled in a high school program that prepared me for college   | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |
| 28. Information about college gained from a college recruiter  | 1             | 2                    | 3       | 4         | 5              |

29. Are there other factors that were not included in this survey which you felt were important in your decision regarding college attendance?

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30. Do you have any additional comments regarding your decision concerning college attendance?

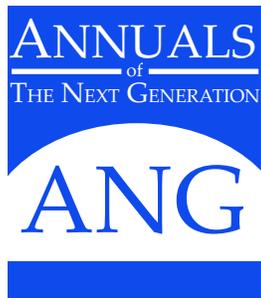
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