Culture and Class in Marginalized Minority Educational Attainment

Alan R. Takeall

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CULTURE AND CLASS IN MARGINALIZED MINORITY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

by

ALAN ROBINSON TAKEALL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Culture and Class in Marginalized Minority Educational Attainment

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

Culture and Class in Marginalized Minority Educational Attainment

by

Alan Robinson Takeall

Advisor: Juan Battle

Using a national sample of Black and Latino high school students, I ask: What is the relative impact of demographic factors, aspirations, adherence to an ideology of achievement, and sociocultural capital on future educational attainment? Additionally, how do poor students compare to their non-poor counterparts on these measures? Employing the Educational Longitudinal Study (2002 & 2012) and multivariate statistical techniques, this dissertation examines the role of cultural and other factors on the educational attainment of Black and Latino students and then explores the role of poverty on those outcomes.

In recent years educational reform efforts have placed considerable emphasis on reorienting minority students away from oppositional cultures and barren socioecological environments and toward modes of thought that are believed to produce better educational outcomes. Inadequate attention, however, has been paid to the degree that ostensibly positive sociocultural factors actually predict heightened educational attainment for marginalized minority students. As well, little attention has been paid to how socioeconomic status interacts with sociocultural factors and educational outcomes for those students. This longitudinal study questions the relationship between sociocultural factors, such as adherence to the achievement ideology, and future educational attainment of Black and Latino youth as well as the effects of class status on that relationship. The findings add to the current literature about race, class, culture, educational attainment, and the proper focus of educational reform efforts.
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Chapter One: Introduction and Background

Introduction

With the 2008 election of Barack Obama—a man whose personal accomplishments are undeniably impressive—national attention became even more fixated on the cultural dimensions of achievement among non-white youth. The popular refrain goes something like: Barack Obama’s ascension to the highest office in the land proves that there are no longer any insurmountable barriers to achievement for minority youth. Thus minority youth—Black and Latino kids in particular—have “no more excuses” for not graduating from high school and college and then moving into successful careers. As President Obama himself exhorted in a 2009 “back to school” speech to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, “Where you are right now doesn’t have to determine where you’ll end up. No one’s written your destiny for you. Here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future” (Obama, 2009). Such comments coming from a prominent Black man reflect the broad appeal of the achievement ideology in the contemporary United States. Young people of all races and ethnicities are socialized to believe that with the right attitudes, and, in turn, the right social and cultural influences, everyone can attain the American dream. Failure, if not attributed directly to an individual’s lack of drive, is typically blamed on the cultural deficits of her family and community.

For Black and Latino youth, the role of socio-cultural factors in the yawning achievement gaps that exist between these groups and white youth has been a source of constant debate within and without the academy. Eschewing direct racial discrimination explanations for the achievement gap in an era when such practices are officially outlawed and outwardly disavowed, scholars have turned to social reproduction theorists for their insight into the ways in which
social status is more rigid than the American dream rhetoric suggests. Many reproduction scholars have eyed the roles of external structures, institutions, and actors in sorting individuals in ways that ensure their social stations (Bowles & Gintis, 1969; Freire, 2000; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Orfield, Marin, & Horn, 2005; Willis, 1981). In the contemporary political climate, however, these political economy explanations have largely fallen out of fashion and given way to much less deterministic theories of social reproduction. According to culturalist scholars, poor people’s socioeconomic position, although structurally situated, is to a large degree reproduced by the poor people themselves either through their own sociocultural deficits or through their righteous rejection of the tenets of the achievement ideology (Taylor & Graham, 2007; Willis, 1981). Given the popularity of culturalist explanations within a moment of strident policy prescriptions—particularly for marginalized minority youth—it is important to look at the impact of sociocultural factors on the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. Further, it is equally important to recognize that Black and Latino youth are not a socioeconomic monolith. With that understanding, we may gain a more precise understanding of how the interaction between class and sociocultural factors influence Black and Latino youths’ educational attainment.

Statement of the Problem

The convergence of the election of an exceptionally well-educated Black president with the rise of neoliberal school reform efforts across the United States has produced a political environment where the educational attainment of marginalized minority youth is simultaneously heralded and threatened. Black and Latino youth continue to lag behind their white counterparts as then-Senator Barack Obama endorsed the controversial notion that Black students reject educational advancement for fear of being perceived as “acting white” by their friends. Today,
Black and Latino youth make up the majority of U.S. public school students, and yet national and state education policy is framed by popular perceptions that these students’ educational attainment is freighted with cultural barriers that transcend issues of economic wherewithal. Within this frame, questions arise. What are the so-called cultural factors that predict future educational attainment for Black and Latino students? Do the usual suspects—educational aspirations, achievement orientation, cultural capital, and peer influence—predict educational attainment? Do such cultural factors predict educational attainment for poor and non-poor Black and Latino students alike? In other words, to what degree does class matter when discussing the cultural dimensions of educational attainment among marginalized minority youth? This is a different question from whether or not Black and Latino youth value education as much as their non-poor counterparts. Rather, it is a question of whether valuing education predicts educational attainment equally for poor and non-poor Black and Latino students.

Contemporary education reform efforts such as President George W. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” and Obama’s “Race To the Top,” as well as influential education models used by Success Academy, Uncommon Schools, and the Harlem Children’s Zone insist that educational achievement among marginalized minority students is a function of cultural reorientation pushed by exceptionally motivated teachers. Ironically, such efforts sidestep issues of socioeconomic class by doubling down on the notion that educational attainment produces class mobility and not the other way around. To truly improve the educational attainment and attendant life chances of marginalized minority youth, we must test such cultural deficit assumptions and bring class back into the picture as a significant factor in determining whether cultural factors matter at all.
**Contribution to the Field**

Contemporary debates over the educational attainment of marginalized minority youth are typically centered on the presence of achievement gaps between those youth and their white counterparts. Such preoccupations tend to have three main effects on the trajectory scholarly and political discourses take: First, the existence of racial achievement gaps tends to justify discussions about cultural or even biological deficiencies among racial minorities. Second, such racial comparisons suggest that studying marginalized minority youth on their own terms is pointless since whites are almost always assumed to be the primary subject of all research. Third, focus on racial achievement gaps tends to distract us from the role of structural factors such as socioeconomic status and racism in determining educational outcomes. This dissertation distinguishes itself by studying not only the sociocultural factors influencing the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth but also by looking at how socioeconomic status interacts differentially with those sociocultural factors. This research moves us away from economically monolithic minority groups and glib cultural deficit conclusions suggested by comparative studies. Instead, subsequent educational attainment discourses will be better equipped to consider how class interferes with narrow culturalist conclusions about educational outcomes.

**Background**

This dissertation analyzes the degrees to which sociocultural and demographic variables influence the future educational attainment of Black and Latino high school students. An enormous body of scholarly literature from education, social psychology, and sociology delves into the role of cultural factors and demographics in influencing the educational outcomes of Black and Latino youth. The theoretical framework for this study draws upon the insights of
several overarching theories—Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory, intersectionality theory, social and cultural capital theories, and social reproduction theories to situate the study within the existing literature on the educational outcomes of marginalized minority youth.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study explores the relative impact of several sociocultural factors, such as achievement ideology, aspirations, and peer attitudes on the education attainment of Black and Latino youth. Those factors that are considered “sociocultural”—having to do with the social and cultural determinants that influence the development of youths’ personal attitudes—can be understood through a consideration of Bronfenbrenner’s early ecological systems theory. According to Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Rosa & T Judge 2013), human development takes place within several concentrically organized environmental subsystems. This model invites us to recognize not only that individual human development takes place within an expansive social and economic context but also that the different ecological spheres are inextricably connected to one another. The scope of this study deals with individual student attitudes and immediate cultural environments (e.g., home environment, peer groups). It is important, however, to recognize that these factors, and thus student educational attainment, regardless of *ex post facto* influences, are shaped by larger sets of institutions and socioeconomic structures. Bronfenbrenner’s model may be used as a framework for understanding that a relatively narrow conceptualization of influences on the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth is just a component of a larger social world.

For this research, the focal point of Bronfenbrenner’s model is the student. The innermost subsystem of the model, the microsystem, includes the student’s immediate social
surrounding, or the “pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the [student] in a given face-to-face setting” (1997, p.39) that mediate the student’s interactions with the larger environment. Factors including the home, family, neighborhood, and school social environments make up the student’s microsystem. It is within this microsystem of family, surrogate adults (teachers, mentors, etc.), and peer groups that the youth develops into a student whose actions are simultaneously influenced by and influence larger contexts. For example, a student’s friends heavily influence her attitude toward school and self-efficacy. The attitude she develops influences—but does not determine—her future educational attainment.

The second subsystem, the mesosystem, is the site in which various student microsystems, for example, peers and family, interact and where connections are established with the exosystem of institutional and economic structures that the student does not participate directly in but nevertheless affects his development. For instance, a student’s immediate peers may go to the same school and live in his same community, or a student’s parents may have salient interactions with her teachers.

In this study, the exosystem is the sphere of external institutions and structures that affect the student but are not directly affected by the student. This relationship makes the exosystem appear distant and disconnected from the student’s experiences. Nevertheless, the influence of government policy regarding education, zoning, and labor, for instance, weighs heavily on student life chances. Black students, in particular, confront a context in which a myriad of laws and institutions—from restrictive zoning laws that reinforce racial and economic segregation to discriminatory banking practices—have been erected that arrest educational attainment. Although the student does not interact directly with such affairs, he is nevertheless affected by them.
Finally, Bronfenbrenner describes the macrosystem as the realm of hegemonic culture and societal norms that is structured and influenced by the institutions of the exosystem. For example, this research is concerned with student adherence to the achievement ideology—the idea that life chances are determined by personal motivation and effort. The achievement ideology, an element of the macrosystem, is a dominant and widespread mode of thought in the United States. It is reinforced and justified through institutional mechanisms in the educational system, an element of the exosystem. The student, however, is not a passive receptacle of dominant social norms. Perhaps as a result of influence by his peer group (microsystem), he may reject the achievement ideology. In rejecting the achievement ideology, he may limit his educational attainment considerably, as high school and college completion are heavily dependent on the idea that such effort is necessary for social mobility.

Within Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological model of development, life chances are also heavily influenced by their relative structural positions and the unequal power relations that those different positions entail. Oftentimes, the life chances of people of a particular racial identification differ considerably because of their different class locations. Such insights are frequently lost by popular and scholarly tendencies to think, for example, of all Black people as poor. Black feminist intellectuals have often emphasized the intersectional nature of oppression where individuals sit at the intersections of multiple forms of structured power relations. The idea of intersectionality was first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Bartlett & Kennedy, 1991) in her work on the legal system’s seeming inability to consider the unique position of Black women. Since then, intersectionality has been used to describe the interlocking system of oppression that operates through institutions that curtail individual and group life chances. Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 2005) builds on intersectionality theory through her
articulation of standpoint epistemology, which suggests that society looks different from the structural standpoint of different individuals or groups. She further lays out a theory of the “matrix of domination” in which domination over oppressed groups is exercised through the reinforced integrity of interlocking structured inequalities—race, class, and gender. In this research, the educational outcomes for poor Black and Latino youth are compared to their non-poor counterparts. Contrary to popular conceptions about race and class, not all Blacks and Latinos are poor. Further, the research shows that there are significant attainment differences between Black and Latino boys and girls. Collins’ research allows us to imagine the structural constraints that may determine these different outcomes.

In their influential research on the role of education in social reproduction, Weberian theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990), argued that educational institutions embodied the values and cultural knowledge of economic elites, and school curricula and middle-class teachers reinforced this knowledge. Thus students with socioeconomic backgrounds that aligned with those of the schools are at an advantage compared to working-class and poor students who lack such “cultural capital.” Schools contribute to the reproduction of socioeconomic classes through the elevation of particular types of non-economic capital that, at some point, translate into material differentiation in the labor market. In his earlier empirical work on social reproduction in France, Bourdieu (1984) first described cultural capital as corresponding literally to the numbers of books and works of art in a family’s home. He noted that elites differentiated themselves from the poor and working class in the sheer amount of such items and in the particular tastes they implied. Bourdieu called the closed social world formed by these distinctions, a particular group’s habitus.
Bourdieu later expanded his theory of non-economic capital in “The Forms of Capital” (1986), where he describes three different forms: economic, cultural, and social capital. Social capital are resources accrued through group membership, social networks, and support. James S. Coleman (Coleman, 1988; Hemmings, 2007) built upon this notion of social capital and applied it to social reproduction through schools. Social capital, Coleman argued, is not only the purview of elites, rather, all groups possess types of social capital that are beneficial within particular contexts. For students, the types of networks that adults are connected to benefit from the sort of opportunities available to them. This may be best witnessed within job networks that rely heavily on nepotism, such as municipal labor markets. For my research, student social capital may be embodied in the quality of peer groups. Peer groups often reinforce not only particular values, but they are also crucial sources of knowledge through extended family networks.
Theoretical Model:

- **Social Ecology – Process, Person, Context, Time Model:** (Bronfenbrenner)
- **Intersectionality Theory:** (Collins and Crenshaw)
- **Social and Cultural Capital:** (Bourdieu and Willis)
- **Social Reproduction and Achievement Ideology:** (Macleod)
- **This Dissertation**

**Literature Review**

There is an enormous body of scholarly work dedicated to factors influencing educational achievement. Demographic analyses of educational achievement indicate that there are significant gaps between whites and Asians on the one hand and Blacks and Latinos on the other.
(Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Garibaldi, 2014; Jencks, 1972; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ogbu, 1992). Despite discrimination that lowers their overall lifetime earnings, females tend to have higher academic achievement in terms of grades and test scores than males, and they are more likely to attend and graduate from college than their male counterparts. This trend in girls’ overachievement, however, is mitigated by significant gender stereotyping in STEM subjects (Garibaldi, 2014; Malcolm, 1984; Meece & Scantleberry, 2005; Parsons, 1983; Swinton, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, & Okeke-Adeyanju, 2011). Owing to economic and racial factors, suburban students fair better than their rural and urban counterparts, while northern students graduate from high school and attend college at higher rates than Southerners. It is well known that students from higher income households tend to attend better-resourced schools, earn better grades and standardized test scores, and graduate at higher rates than poorer students. Wealthier students are more likely to attend and graduate from college and pursue post-graduate education than poor students. Social scientists have long paid attention to the powerful influence of socioeconomic status on educational outcomes, and much theorizing has occurred about the role of education in reproducing rather than eliminating class society.

Much of the literature on inequality and educational outcomes focuses on the yawning racial achievement gap between Black and Latino students and white and Asian students (Aud and Fox, 2014; Carnevale and Fry, 2000; Garibaldi, 1992; Garibaldi, 2014). Most intently focused on the gap between white and Black students, a number of factors have been explored. Institutional discrimination in the form of residential segregation (Anyon, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1993) figures prominently as school district funding tends to be tied to property taxes. Some scholars have looked at the effects of teacher discrimination against Black and poor students (Anyon, 1981; Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2008) and conclude that white, often
women, teachers judge Black children more negatively than their white children. Other researchers have concentrated on the ways in which racism undermines minority students’ self-efficacy. Claude Steele (2010) and others, for instance, in research on stereotype threat, have noted that marginalized students performed less well on standardized tests when confronted with the knowledge that members of their groups tended not to do well.

The bulk of scholarly production about the education of Black and Latino youth has tended, however, to betray a “Negro Problem” approach to such issues. In other words, much research tends to look for what is wrong with Black and Latino youth and their environments that negatively affects their educational outcomes. Do Black and Latino youth aspire to move up educationally? Have Black and Latino students abandoned the achievement ideology and adopted oppositional cultures (Mangino, 2013)? Do Black and Latino students lack the proper levels of cultural and social capital to do well educationally?

Research suggests that educational aspirations are comparatively low among low-income youth. Within this group, however, non-white status, strong home academic environment, better academic performance, and higher levels of peer and parent support are associated with higher educational aspirations (Berzin, 2010). Another study found that although parental involvement in educational goals is a strong predictor of aspirations for college attendance among first generation college students, the main predictor is student attitudes toward getting good grades (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Berzin (2010) counsels, however, that student aspirations are influenced by a number of factors and theoretical frameworks. Outcomes are related to student self-efficacy, or students who do well believe that they will do well. At the same time, negative school experiences tend
to undermine aspirations. Thus, factors such as parent support and school engagement, the student’s own academic success and other social supports can influence aspirations. (2010)

The idea that high educational aspirations and academic success are strongly related to one another suggests that student aspirations are linked to the student’s adherence to the achievement ideology. The achievement ideology is the belief that success, or upward mobility, comes through hard work and education (MacLeod, 2009). It is a hegemonic idea in the United States, and it enjoys widespread validation through the education system. In his classic study of poor inner-city boys’ attitudes toward education and upward mobility, Jay MacLeod notes that it is the group of Black boys, the “Brothers,” that adheres to the achievement ideology and maintains an optimistic view of their futures, whereas the white boys, the “hallway hangers”—living in the same housing project but for a longer time—rejected achievement and such optimism.

Throughout their youths, it turned out that although class undermined the life chances of nearly all the boys in the study, race played a decisive role—stymying the efforts of the Black boys. Thus, despite the Brothers’ belief in the achievement ideology, they tended to have similar or worse outcomes than most of the white boys who had rejected the ideology. Neither group of boys, in the last analysis, achieved significant upward mobility. Thus their class status was largely explained by their working-class educations regardless of their aspirations or rejection of the achievement ideology.

Further research on achievement ideology among Black students indicates that although Black students adhere to the achievement ideology, there is a discrepancy between that and their actual academic behavior. This “attitude-achievement paradox” (Ford & Harris, 1996; Mickelson, 1990), has been variously attributed to an “unrewarding” curriculum that focuses primarily on white culture and peer pressure that promotes poor performance. Consistent with
MacLeod’s findings among the Brothers, Mickelson observed that Black students often hold abstract and idealistic beliefs regarding mobility that suggests a disconnect between aspirations and efforts to achieve. Their perspectives of African Americans “having come so far, some argue, fuels an undue optimism that may undermine Black student achievement relative to their stated aspirations (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

The research of prominent anthropologist, John Ogbu, and others on achievement among Black students suggests that Black students have rejected the achievement ideology prescribed to them by white society. According to Ogbu, “involuntary minorities” such as African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans (socially marginalized groups that have become part of the U.S. population through American imperial adventures) tend to develop cultural orientations that reject the values and conventions of mainstream society. This “oppositional culture” among Black students manifests itself in a generalized rejection of school achievement orientations and results in poorer education outcomes (Ogbu, 1978, 1991, 2003b). Going further, he and Fordham found that in integrated school settings, some Black students performed poorly as a result of peer cultures that associated academic achievement with acting white (Fordham and Ogbu, 1996). The oppositional culture thesis, however, has been challenged by researchers who have found that Black/white differences in educational attitudes are modest (Diamond & Huguley, 2014). These researchers suggest that cultural explanations for Black relative underachievement are generally wrongheaded, and they point to school environment, access to advanced courses, and other factors to explain the gap.

A large body of research suggests that educational attainment is linked to students’ possession of various non-economic forms of capital— in particular, cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Coleman, 1988; Kalmijin & Kraaykamp, 1996; Lareau,
In “Forms of Capital” (1986, p. 244) Bourdieu identified cultural capital in its objectified state, “objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc.” as a primary mode by which cultural capital is linked to capital in its material state. Thus, a student’s family may own paintings or books—objects in the home that cost money to obtain—that enhance her cultural knowledge and status.

The forms and amounts of cultural capital that a youth possesses form the contours of his habitus, and parents perform a key role in its formulation—a phenomenon that complicates chatter about parent involvement. Lee and Bowen (2006) note that whereas all children benefit from parent involvement in their education, white children show higher levels of achievement than their Black and Latino counterparts, largely because of differences in the quality of habitus created. In the education realm, middle-class teachers and mainstream curricula favor such knowledge and cultural proclivities, which advantage students with greater amounts of cultural capital.

Building on Bourdieu, Lareau (2003) identifies specific class cultures that inculcate particular types of cultural capital into their children. She notes that middle-class parents engage in the practice of “concerted cultivation” where they actively (and sometimes obsessively) place their children in extracurricular activities aimed at increasing their amount of cultural capital and social capital. Working-class and poor parents, on the other hand, adhere to “natural growth” where their children’s development is considerably less structured. Clearly, in school, middle-class children are advantaged. The amount and quality of the cultivation is a byproduct of the greater material resources enjoyed by the middle-class families over the working-class counterparts—a phenomenon that transcends racial categories.
Coleman’s (1988) research on social capital further expands on Bourdieu’s notion of non-economic forms of capital, this time as forms of capital that are inherent “in the structure of relations between actors and among actors” (1988, p.S98). This means that whereas other forms of capital are possessed by one actor and passed to another, social capital exists as the quantity and quality of relationships that an individual possesses that influence her life chances. In education, the quality of a student’s peer group may be seen as a form of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Dixon-Roman, 2013; Folk, 2015; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Research has revealed that factors such as a student’s likelihood to earn good grades and go to college are influenced by whether or not they are engaged with peers who share similar qualities and aspirations.

**Methodology**

This dissertation explores the relative influence of sociocultural factors on the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. For this purpose, the project will employ data from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002), a nationwide longitudinal study of high school students beginning with 10th grade in 2002 and continuing with periodic follow-up surveys through 2012—ten years later. OLS regression tests the relative impact of several categories of demographic and sociocultural variables on respondent’s educational attainment by 2012. A logic model illustrating the analytical trajectory of the study is provided.

**Procedures**

Data employed in this dissertation is drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study, 2002 and 2012 (ELS:2002, 2012). ELS:2002 is a nationally representative longitudinal study of 10th graders in 2002 and 12th graders in 2004. Students were tracked over the course of three follow-up surveys in 2004, 2006, 2012 to answer the following questions: (1) What are students'
trajectories from the beginning of high school into postsecondary education, the workforce, and beyond? (2) What are the different patterns of college access and persistence that occur in the years following high school completion?

This dissertation focuses on Black and Latino students from the base year (2002) and the third follow-up (2012). The sample size is relatively small given the national scope of the ELS:2002, which is due to large numbers of students who failed to provide answers for all of the variables used in the current study. A T-test and preliminary analysis indicated, however, that the Black and Latino students in the sample did not differ significantly from one another on most demographic measures, with the exception of geographic region. For that reason, Black and Latino students are combined to create a subsample of “marginalized minority” students with which conclusions might be drawn for such populations. In the base year, all of the students were in the 10th grade, and by the third follow-up, all had moved on from high school, perhaps through college, and into the adult labor pool.

A number of studies have used the ELS:2002 to look at race, education, and achievement. Rowley and Wright (2011) examined the relationship between race and composite reading and math scores among Black and white students. Paying special attention to race and ethnicity, Kim and Nuñez (2013) explored how student and family, high school, and state contextual characteristics are associated with high school graduates' college enrollment in 2- or 4-year higher education institutions. Underwood (2011) looked at the role of cultural capital in educational achievement, concluding that parental involvement mediated the effects of race even for student with high levels of cultural capital. And Spears (2011) examined the predictive strength of school and family on dropout and retention rates by race and class. Davis (2009)
used a sample of Black and Latino students from the ELS:2002 to examine the effects of social capital on student achievement.

A comparison of the effects of sociocultural factors on economically poor and non-poor Black and Latino students differentiate this dissertation. Whereas other studies have looked at sociocultural factors and race, few have focused specifically on Black and Latino students and none have compared the effects of socioeconomic class on the outcomes within these marginalized minority populations.

**Dependent Variable**

There is one dependent variable in this study: “What is the highest level of education earned as of the third follow-up (2012)?” It indicates the level of education attained by the respondents in the ten-year span between the base year (2002), when the respondents were in the 10th grade, and third follow-up.

**Analytical Plan**

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses is employed to determine which of the independent variables from the base year—indicating several sociocultural factors influencing the respondent in the 10th grade—best predicts the Black and Latino respondents’ education attainment by 2012. The original dissertation sample was then divided according to the respondents’ socioeconomic status into quintiles with the top 3/5ths labeled “non-poor” and the bottom 2/5ths labeled “poor.” For each subsample, I analyze three regression models (totaling nine models): (1) demographic variables, (2) variables assessing the respondents’ aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology, and (3) variables indicating the respondents’ level of sociocultural capital. Socioeconomic cohorts are then compared to one another to assess
differences in the relative effects of the sociocultural factors on future education attainment between poor and non-poor students.

For each socioeconomic grouping, the first domain (Models I, IV, and VII) examines the impact of demographic variables on the respondent’s 2012 education attainment. There are many demographic variables in the ELS:2002; however, for this study, sex, region, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, the percent of the respondent’s school that qualifies for free lunch (an assessment of school SES), the perception of neighborhood crime, and a scale of academic risk factors are used to account for salient differences which may account for significant variance within the sample.

The second domain for each socioeconomic cohort (Models II, V, and VIII) examines the impact of the respondent’s aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology. In the ELS:2002, this category includes variables such as whether the respondent plans to attend a four-year college and whether he or she plans to attend college at all. The variable measuring the respondent’s adherence to the achievement ideology is a composite composed of several variables that indicate the degree to which the respondent believes that individual hard work (in school) will result in future achievement.

The third domain for each socioeconomic cohort (Models III, VI, and IX) analyzes the influence of “sociocultural” variables on the educational attainment of the study respondents. “Sociocultural capital” is a domain that combines two primary forms of non-economic capital (cultural capital and social capital) as theorized by Bourdieu and later Coleman (See Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). The ELS:2002 is surprisingly short on discrete variables that might be used to measure cultural capital. For this study then, cultural capital is operationalized as a composite variable composed of objectified cultural capital.
signifiers: books owned and home computer and internet access. Following Coleman (1988), whose research on social capital emphasized the quality of social networks, this study operationalizes social capital for the student respondents as several variables measuring peer influence on the respondent.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter two will outline the literature on the educational attainment of marginalized minority youth. The chapter will focus on the theoretical framework, demographics of Black and Latino student attainment, student aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology, and social and cultural capital. Chapter three will discuss the methodology for the study including an outline of the ELS:2002 survey, the independent and dependent variables, and the design of the nine regression models. Chapter four will present the statistical findings produced by the implementation of the methodology, specifically pertaining to the interaction effect of socioeconomic status quintiles on the relationship between the independent variables and the respondents’ future educational attainment. Chapter five will provide a thorough discussion of the relevant findings presented in chapter four with regard to the scholarly literature and theoretical framework outlined in chapter two. Finally, chapter six will discuss the ways in which the results of this study might inform educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders regarding the factors that influence the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth, as well as the limitations of this study and directions for future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter one presented an overview of the contemporary issues surrounding the educational attainment of Black and Latino students. Much scholarly and popular attention has been focused on its role as an engine of social and economic mobility in the new globalized high-tech economy. Even as the importance of education has risen, however, Blacks and Latinos consistently lag behind their white counterparts at all stages of attainment (Fordham & Ogbu, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu, 2003a; Ogbu & Simon, 1998; Orfield, Marin, & Horn, 2005). Whereas some scholars emphasize the effects of structural and external factors on marginalized minority students’ ability to graduate from high school and eventually post-secondary school (Emdin 2015; Noguera, 2008), others employ cultural and deficit perspectives that focus on the influence of student aspirations, attitudes toward school, and forms of non-economic capital to explain the educational attainment of marginalized minority students.

Although cultural deficit explanations for the lag of marginalized minority students are popular among some scholars, policy makers, and the broader public, a crucial need to test the relative influence of such factors on future educational attainment remains. There are significant gaps in understanding the influence of socioeconomic status on the cultural factors that may affect their educational attainment. This dissertation addresses those gaps by testing the relative impact of sociocultural factors on the future educational attainment of Black and Latino students and comparing socioeconomic cohorts within the same population. The “Theoretical Framework” section of this chapter will narrow the focus from an ecological framework for understanding the ever-widening social contexts in which young people develop to intersectional perspectives that position the marginalized minority students within a “matrix of domination” that shapes (distorts) their ecological development contexts. Following the discussion of the theoretical
framework, subsequent sections will delve into the educational attainment of marginalized minority youth, the influence of social and cultural capital, educational aspirations, and demographic factors characterizing educational attainment.

**Theoretical Framework**

This section explains the four primary theories used as a general framework for this research. (1) Bronfenbrenner’s influential social ecological systems theory will first locate the Black and Latino students within their larger social environments to emphasize that student development is the result of social arrangements and forces operating well beyond their purview or control. (2) Intersectionality theory will position the marginalized minority students within structures of domination that serve to constrain their agency and shape their perspectives. (3) Theories of social reproduction offer important insights into the ways in which sociocultural attitudes and deficits reproduce categorical inequalities. (4) And finally, theories of social and cultural capital will show how class position is reproduced through the marginalization of social out-groups.

**Situating the Study: Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Systems Theory**

The sociocultural factors that influence student educational attainment are not confined to the school setting; rather they extend from the youth’s immediate primary social interactions through her family, neighborhood, and larger social environment, which include school and other institutional settings that indirectly affect her development. The combination of social factors that influence the individual student development may be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological systems theory of human development, which situates the individual person within an extended social context. This conceptualization of child development rejects biological determinism, the assumed primacy of the parental role, and singular
environments (e.g., home or school). His perspective will be used to focus this study simultaneously on the attitudes and desires of individual students and the familial, institutional, and structural contexts in which those attitudes and desires are formed in dynamic fashion.

The foundation of Bronfenbrenner’s “mature” bioecological model is the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model, a schema in which he emphasizes the role of processes and biological development as elemental to any subsequent consideration of social context. In the PPCT model, he moves from a consideration of the “proximal processes” of interaction and development between a child and his immediate environment (e.g., play as a form of learning) to the individual characteristics (age, physical appearance) of a person, which reciprocally influence how the environment reacts to his presence, and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner 1997).

Within the PPCT model, Bronfenbrenner describes human development as taking place within several concentrically organized environmental subsystems—the context of the model. This concentric model invites us to recognize not only that human development takes place within an expansive socioeconomic context but also that the different ecological spheres are inextricably linked to one another. This suggests, as Bronfenbrenner warned in subsequent explications of his theories, that the bioecological system is fragile and precarious in its interdependence. Political or economic breakdowns at higher levels can have profound effects on the ability of institutions and individuals to function. Conversely, when microsystems (systems that directly engage the child) are unable to properly attend to the developmental needs of children, kids are left without the tools necessary to function effectively as they get older. This crucial insight led to the creation of the Head Start program in 1965. This dissertation engages marginalized minority students as developing within a structured context of institutions, economies, and ideologies that shape their perspectives and life chances.
Microsystems:

Bronfenbrenner refers to the contexts of structured social interaction closest to the child as microsystems. They consist of the relationships and social interactions in the child’s immediate surroundings. For instance, a child interacts directly with her family, school, and neighborhood. Each of these contexts forms a semi-independent environment of child development. The child, however, is not a passive agent. As different microsystems influence development, the child’s unique biological or genetic traits also influence the nature of those interactions, and in turn, her development. For this study, home environment, parents, peer groups, and school settings are all microsystems within which youth develop and hypothetically influence future educational attainment. As part of a peer group, for instance, attitudes toward school are influenced by the group, and vice versa. Just one of many microsystems, peer groups may reinforce or undermine other perspectives that youth encounter.

Mesosystems:

Bronfenbrenner’s second layer of social interaction, labeled the mesosystem, involves the interactions between different microsystems that affect the child’s development but do not directly involve the child. When a child enters school his parents or guardians (microsystem a) may interact directly with teachers and school administrators (microsystem b). Although this interaction between different microsystems does not directly involve the child, the nature of the parent-teacher relationship—which would not occur if not for the child—affects the child’s total experience at school and at home, thus influencing her development.

Bronfenbrenner argues that the child benefits from a web of support that extends beyond any particular microsystem through the strengthening of the interactions within the mesosystem. An overarching concern for this study is the relative and combined influence of multiple
microsystems on student educational attainment. For students from marginalized groups, such mesosystem relationships may be weakened by biases, mistrust, and inequalities among the actors in different microsystems. For instance, African American parents may have little faith that their children’s teachers are interested in their education. This perception has been strengthened in recent years by increased public attention on “zero tolerance” discipline policies within schools, which appear to construct a “school to prison pipeline” for marginalized minority kids. For their part, teachers frequently perceive Black parents as inadequate—either ill-equipped for proper child rearing or broadly inattentive—by virtue of assumptions they have made about the cultures of different racial and ethnic groups.

Exosystem:

Enveloping the mesosystem, the exosystem is the constellation of institutions that the child does not directly interact with, but those institutions indirectly affect the child himself and the microsystems that the child inhabits. In this study student educational attainment is hypothetically affected by socioeconomic status (SES), a measure combining parent income, occupation, and education. The student does not typically interact with her parents’ place of employment, but she is nevertheless affected by what happens there. Does the parent make enough money, or is she stressed by workplace pressures? Perhaps being stressed undermines the parent’s ability to help his daughter with homework.

Macrosystem:

The macrosystem is composed of cultural values, laws, economic structures, and other external systems over which the child has little or no influence, but nevertheless they exercise considerable power over development and life chances. According to Bronfenbrenner, social policies such as welfare or practices upholding racial and economic residential segregation create
a context in which children develop. Such aspects of the macrosystem, which are structured and influenced by the institutions of the exosystem, can enable or detract from overall wellbeing and life chances.

Chronosystem:

Bronfenbrenner later added the chronosystem to his bioecological system theory to account for the dimension of time. The chronosystem permeates the entire model and simultaneously reflects the physical growth of the child as well as the effects of history on the ability of the family to respond to different types of stress.

The chronosystem is particularly relevant to this dissertation for two reasons: First, since the study uses longitudinal data for predicting educational attainment outcomes for youth, the contexts of their social lives changed over the ten years from base year (2002) to the third follow-up (2012). In that time, the tenth graders are necessarily no longer in high school. By 2012, they may be in the workforce or unemployed; they may have completed bachelor’s degrees or higher. Their microsystems—including their relationships with their parents—change over time, reflecting maturity and changing public perceptions and relationships to institutions and labor markets. As this is not a life course study, this dissertation does not look at the intervening circumstances that may influence educational outcomes; thus it is necessarily limited. Nevertheless, to the degree that some base-year factors reliably predict educational attainment outcomes ten years later, therein lies the power of context at all stages of development.

Second, since the study sample is composed entirely of Black and Latino students, a history and memory of collective oppression and struggle weighs heavily on all aspects of their
development and certainly distorts the circumstances under which their future education attainment is achieved and evaluated.

**Intersectionality Theory**

Within Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of development, peoples’ life chances are also heavily influenced by their relative structural positions and the unequal power relations that those different positions entail. Oftentimes, the life chances of people of a particular racial identification differ considerably because of their different class locations. Such insights are frequently lost by popular and scholarly tendencies to think, for example, of all Black people as poor. Black feminist intellectuals have often emphasized the intersectional nature of oppression where individuals sit at the intersections of multiple forms of structured power relations.

In April 1977 the Combahee River Collective, an organization of socialist, Black, lesbian feminists, released a statement articulating their core ideology and goals, which would become a key statement in Black feminist and Black radical thought. Perhaps the key intellectual insight of the Collective’s statement was the assertion that their primary commitment was to the struggle “against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression,” [and we] see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives” (Combahee River Collective, 2014, p. 271). The recognition that racial oppression, gender oppression, and class oppression are interlocking and mutually reinforcing systems that shape the lives of those so ensnared is a foundational component of the theory that would later be coined “intersectionality” for the notion that multiple social structures similarly intersect in ways that shape the life experiences of those in similar structural positions. In other words, poor Black women students, for instance, experience the world in similar ways to one another that are
different from and less privileged than their middle-class, white women counterparts. In this dissertation, all students are marginalized minorities. Some, however, are poor while others are well-off. Similarly, the proportion of male and female students in the study are evenly divided. The intersections of class and gender render some students in the study structurally disadvantaged compared to others, which hypothetically influences their educational attainment.

The idea of intersectionality was first fully articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Bartlett & Kennedy, 1991) in her work on the legal system’s seeming inability to consider the unique position of Black women as distinct from all women or all Blacks. According to Crenshaw, a prominent legal scholar and early proponent of critical race theory, the law tended to handle cases of discrimination as either gender-based or race-based but rarely confronted gender and race discrimination simultaneously. As a result, Black women plaintiffs were unable to bring lawsuits in which they alleged discrimination as Black women. Crenshaw cites DeGraffenreid v General Motors in which five Black women brought a lawsuit against General Motors alleging that GM’s senior management perpetuated the effects of past discrimination against Black women. According to the lawsuit, GM simply did not hire Black women prior to 1964 and the Black women who were hired after 1970 were typically first fired due to seniority-based layoffs. The court found, however, that the women had not cited any court decisions that expressly recognized Black women as a class entitled to be protected from discrimination. As it turned out, GM did hire women—white women—and thus the Black women could not sue on the basis of sex discrimination. The court then dismissed the plaintiffs’ racial discrimination complaint urging them to combine theirs with another case involving Black men against GM. Such a case that combined the Black women’s complaint with those of Black men erased the particularity of Black women’s discrimination as Black women.
Intersectionality theory was pushed forward in the work of Patricia Hill Collins. Rather than focusing specifically on the erasure of Black women from legal frameworks ostensibly intended to address discrimination, she focused on the intersecting nature of multiple forms of oppression—race, class, gender, etc.—that work together as a “matrix of domination” to reinforce durable social hierarchies. In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), Collins explains that in the United States structural domination occurs through schools, government, and other social institutions that serve to regulate the patterns of intersecting oppressions that we tend to see as normal and intractable. Thus for marginalized minority students, gender, race, economic class, and other structural factors constitute an intersecting web of domination that cannot be teased apart.

**Achievement Ideology**

A key component to the American dream is the belief that success is reached through hard work and education. Indeed, the gospel of hard work is baked into the national psyche through the doctrines of New England Puritans such as Cotton Mather, the pronouncements of “Founding Fathers” like Benjamin Franklin, and the popular immigrant bootstrapper writings of Horatio Alger. The “achievement ideology” suggests that structural factors such as race, gender, and class are secondary to hard work in determining who achieves success—largely understood to be synonymous with upward mobility and economic security within capitalism. Schools are one of the primary institutions in which young people are socialized into the achievement ideology. With meritocratic pretenses, schools are typically charged with assigning skill and knowledge building tasks and evaluating student progress. Thus, a notion that hard work is rewarded with social honor is inculcated through the structure of American education. In that vein, sociologists of education have explored the achievement ideology as a factor in explaining
differences in educational outcomes for different socioeconomic classes and racial/ethnic groups. Such scholarly analyses have been based on the idea that success and upward mobility are predicated on the degree to which a particular group has accepted or rejected the achievement ideology. For groups that have fared more poorly in educational achievement, such as African Americans and the poor overall, it is often hypothesized that their social marginalization has led many of them to reject the achievement ideology and thus reject traditional education as a facilitator of upward mobility. In their research on the achievement perspectives of gifted Black students, Donna Y. Ford and J. John Harris (1992, 1996) note that gifted Black students are more likely to adhere to the achievement ideology than non-gifted Black students.

**Cultural Capital**

In their research on the role of education in social reproduction, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), argued that educational institutions embodied the values and cultural knowledge of economic elites, and school curricula and middle-class teachers reinforced this knowledge. They built upon earlier statements on education and inequality from various scholars, notably that of Brazilian Marxist, Paulo Freire (2000) and the materialist research of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976). In their research, these Left intellectuals emphasized the role of educational institutions in socializing poor and working-class youth into working-class labor pools, accomplished primarily because poor kids attended poor schools that had markedly different curricula than the schools of wealthier kids. For poor children, according to Freire, education comes as rote learning in which students are assumed to know nothing of value and therefore knowledge must be imparted to them as passive receptacles whose job is to submit simply to the teacher’s authority.
Students with socioeconomic backgrounds that aligned with those valued by the schools were at an advantage compared to working-class and poor students who lacked cultural capital. Schools contributed to the reproduction of socioeconomic classes through the elevation of particular types of non-economic capital that, at some point, translated into material differentiation in the labor market. In his earlier empirical work on social reproduction in France, Bourdieu (1984) first described cultural capital as corresponding literally to the numbers of books and works of art in a family’s home. He noted that elites differentiated themselves from the poor and working class in the sheer amount of such items and in their particular tastes. Bourdieu called the closed social world formed by these distinctions, a particular group’s habitus.

Bourdieu later expanded his theory of non-economic capital in “Forms of Capital” (1986), where he describes three different forms: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Social capital are resources accrued through group membership, social networks, and support. Coleman built upon this idea of social capital and applied it to social reproduction through schools. Social capital, Coleman argued, was not only the purview of elites, rather, all groups possessed types of social capital that were beneficial within particular contexts. For students, the types of networks that adults were connected to benefitted the sort of opportunities available to them. This may be best witnessed within job networks that rely heavily on nepotism, such as municipal labor markets. For this research, a student’s social capital may be embodied in the quality of his peer group. Peer groups often reinforce not only particular values, but they are also crucial sources of knowledge through extended family networks.
Review of Literature on Dependent and Independent Variables

In this review, I will provide an overview of the scholarly literature attendant to the independent variable (educational outcomes) and each of the independent variables, categorized into three domains (demographics, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital), in this study. There are three primary areas relevant to this dissertation. First, I will discuss research on each variable as it pertains to the entire population of students. Second, I will report what the literature reveals about socioeconomic differences likely to influence the outcomes for the phenomenon being studied. Finally, I will outline the literature on racial differences in the presentation of each variable, in particular, as it pertains to Black and Latino youth.

Since school desegregation legislation, and especially since the 1970s emergence of globalization discourse, a wealth of social science and educational research has sought to determine the factors that contribute to the educational attainment of U.S. students. As upward mobility became more closely linked to educational attainment, most of these studies have focused on the ability of youth to reach credentialed milestones: high school graduation, college graduation, and terminal graduate/professional degree attainment. Further, the lower educational attainment of Black and Latino students has come to the fore as researchers turned their attention to educational “achievement gaps” between those marginalized minority students—often residentially segregated and poorly resourced—and their wealthier white counterparts. Whereas dual discourses emerged on the familiar culture versus structure axis, cultural deficit theories of Black and Latino student achievement have predominated in both conservative and liberal circles. What are the sociocultural factors that undermine educational outcomes for marginalized minority youth: student aspirations and attitudes toward school; student level of social and
cultural capital? While much research asks such questions, usually with the goal of ameliorating those deficits, few studies employ longitudinal data to actually test the relative impact of the cultural deficit explanations. Further, fewer studies compare poor marginalized minority youth along those lines with their non-poor counterparts. The remainder of this chapter will describe the major scholarship that informs the design of this dissertation and will outline the role of socioeconomic class in influencing the sociocultural factors that explain educational outcomes among Black and Latino students.

**Educational Attainment and Marginalized Minority Youth**

In this segment, I will outline the literature on the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. Inevitably, the education outcomes of marginalized minority students are compared to those of their white counterparts. What causes Black and Latino underachievement? According to Coleman (1988), minority youth lack the social capital that their white peers take for granted. Other researches point to an oppositional culture among colonized minorities that rejects white schooling. There is tension between these theories; one emphasizes social deficits that must be overcome and the other, while highlighting student agency, suggests that marginalized minority students actively reject school.

Coleman’s landmark *Equality of Educational Opportunity* study (Coleman et al., 1966), the “Coleman Report,” was the first large-scale sociological study of educational inequality in the United States. Commissioned by the 1964 Civil Rights Act and with a sample of over 600,000 students, the study noted significant gaps in educational achievement between Black and Latino students and white students while suggesting that unequal school funding had little to do with those disparities. Further, Coleman found that while Black students might benefit psychologically from school integration, those efforts were not strongly related to improved
educational achievement for Blacks. School integration efforts had largely failed due to white flight, and this left Black youth in a significant lurch. Overall, however, the primary factor, according to the study, explaining the achievement gap was family background, which was primarily linked to parent’s income. Unsurprisingly, poor students had considerably lower levels of achievement than wealthier students, regardless of race, even though most of the Black students tended to be poor and concentrated in the South.

By recognizing “family background” as a key factor in educational outcomes, Coleman, in subsequent work (1988), articulated a conceptualization of social capital—a set of family and community resources from which children are able to draw for the purpose of positive cognitive and social development. Of course, social capital does not exist in a vacuum; it is supported by significant economic resources. Unlike other forms of capital—human and physical—in Coleman’s schema, social capital is not easily accumulated since adding to the store of social capital involves an investment in the social structure that sustains social relations.

In subsequent years, much scholarship has pulled away from the Coleman Report's broader conclusion that educational achievement gaps are largely due to the direct social effects of income inequality. Researchers—including Coleman himself—developed theories of various forms of non-economic capital (see Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988) that complicated deterministic economic understandings of educational achievement gaps. In their important research, anthropologists Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu (2008) developed one of the most influential theories of achievement disparities between whites and marginalized minority groups. In their formulation, Fordham and Ogbu built upon Ogbu’s earlier work (1992, 2003a, 2003b) that emphasized social withdrawal as a consequence of ethnic minority groups that had been incorporated into the United States involuntarily. Groups such as African Americans, Mexicans,
and Puerto Ricans—all of which were incorporated into the United States as subjects of enslavement and colonial expansion—tend to develop skepticism and an oppositional orientation to the tenets and institutions of the dominant culture. This oppositional culture, which is reinforced by continued marginalization, contributes to the educational achievement gap between white students and marginalized minority students. In this frame, the educational outcomes for Black and Latino youth are not simply the result of direct discrimination. Rather, the comparatively depressed outcomes are due to those minority students’ development of a culture that rejects schooling because it views schools as mere extensions of an oppressive state apparatus.

Ogbu’s formulation, already controversial for its implication that minority kids rejected schooling, drew even greater scrutiny when Ogbu co-authored a study with Signithia Fordham in which they noted that some Black students in the Washington, DC high school they observed associated high educational achievement among their Black peers as “acting white” (2008). Fordham and Ogbu argued that their oppositional identity adopted a mechanism for salvaging self-esteem within an apparently hostile society by looking down upon those who acted white. Because the students associated high educational achievement—the purview of “geeks” and “nerds”—with white students, some of the Black kids deliberately underperformed in fear of being perceived as acting white. The acceptance within their immediate peer group, according to Fordham and Ogbu, was more important to the Black students than was educational achievement, regardless of the future consequences of such behavior.

Ogbu took the acting white thesis even further in a 2003 book based on his research on a middle-class African American community in Shaker Heights, Ohio. For that study, Ogbu was commissioned by African American parents in Shaker Heights who were concerned by the
revelation that their children had lower GPAs, lower test scores, and lower participation in advanced placement classes than their white counterparts despite that the Black children were comfortably middle class. Ogbu concluded that parents had taken their middle-class status for granted, assuming that material resources and successful role models would be enough to produce academically high achieving kids. Instead, he claimed, the kids did not think like their striving parents. Not only were they spoiled, but they had also adopted the same oppositional culture and “acting white” attitudes that he and Fordham had observed among the students in the Washington, DC study. For Ogbu, then, Black (oppositional) culture was partly to blame for Black educational underachievement. Further, this phenomenon apparently transcended class lines among African Americans—middle-class Black high school students were similar to their poorer counterparts in their attitudes toward schooling. This oppositional culture manifested itself in similar Black/white achievement disparities.

Although Fordham and Ogbu’s “acting white” oppositional culture thesis was quickly adopted into popular culture by politicians and other pundits, a number of researchers challenged their conclusions on several fronts (Carter, 2003; Noguera, 2008; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). A 2003 study of eleven North Carolina schools by Tyson, Darity, and Castellino concluded that Black students possessed similar attitudes toward education and achievement as their white counterparts. Based on their research, education sociologist, Prudence Carter, moved to challenge the “acting white” thesis by introducing a conceptualization of “Black cultural capital,” which she defined as a form of non-dominant cultural capital among Black students which provides the cultural codes for maintaining status and in-group affiliation. Unlike Ogbu’s oppositional culture frame, however, Black cultural capital is not oppositional to white culture. Black students, in Carter’s understanding, have the same sorts of aspirations as white students,
but the cultural codes of Black in-group identification are typically regarded as deviant and dysfunctional; this, for Carter, was Fordham and Ogbu’s error. Similarly, although adopting the primary thrust of Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, Carter moved to challenge Bourdieu’s implication that cultural capital is (1) a universal formulation that one either possesses or lacks, and (2) a largely class-based phenomenon. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), schools, which propagate the values of elites, reward students who possess sufficient amounts of cultural capital with advancement, and they punish students who lack cultural capital with poor evaluations. This process of sorting students creates an illusion of meritocracy when, in reality, cultural capital itself is obtained by elites within their elite milieus.

**Demographic Variables**

This section on demographic variables explores the scholarly literature on the structural and institutional predictors of educational attainment for Black and Latino students. It is already understood that race is a significant predictor of educational attainment for all students, but since the dissertation sample consists of only Black and Latino respondents, I am more concerned with the predictors of attainment among students who are already racially marginalized.

In recent decades, women have surpassed men in educational attainment. Since educational attainment is highly correlated with educational expectations, as expectations have risen considerably for women, attainment has risen accordingly. It was predicted several years ago that women would comprise about 60 percent of all college students by 2016—a phenomenon that has largely been borne out. In a recent longitudinal study of gendered educational outcomes, Wells et al. (2011) call attention to several factors contributing to the apparent reversal in women’s educational outcomes. First, it was noted that expectations are significantly influenced by the educational attainment of the same-sex parent. For instance, the
expectations for girls correspond with their mothers’ educational level, and the same is true for boys. Thus as women’s education levels have risen incrementally in the past couple of generations, their daughters’ reap the benefits exponentially. Whereas the same phenomenon can be observed with boys and their fathers, the effects may be offset by a higher incidence of absent fathers. Wells and his team also noted a significant “social capital gap” between men and women where women benefit from higher levels of social capital—parental involvement, peer influences, etc.—than men. Finally, the authors noted that there is a significant gap between the educational expectations and the educational attainment of African Americans. Unlike with respondents overall, and white respondents in particular, the expected strong relationship between Black respondent aspirations and their attainment is mitigated by issues linked to race.

Among Black students, educational attainment is heavily gendered, with girls having a distinct advantage. In their research, Wood et al. (2007) reported that among Black youth there were significant gender disparities between male and female students on several axes of educational expectations. To the degree that educational attainment is predicted by expectations, they demonstrate that Black boys face considerably lower self-expectations than Black girls, as well as from their parents and teachers. That Black girls enjoy higher attainment expectations across the board than boys can be understood to be reinforced by prevailing negative attitudes toward Black boys, which certainly contribute to their comparatively depressed educational attainment.

Researchers have also investigated regional differences in educational attainment. Whereas there are extensive data on high school graduation, much of the data are presented in the form of regional disparities in education funding per district and student. Despite pockets of affluence, the South as a region, has higher levels of poverty and lower educational attainment
than other regions—particularly the Northeast and the Midwest. A 2010 report from the Educational Law Center showed that “even after adjusting for regional wage variation and population density, low-funding states predominate in the South and West regions, while the highest-funding states are in the Northeast and Midwest” (Baker, Sciarra, & Farrie, 2010). A recent U.S. Department of Education report revealed that states in the Deep South generally had the lowest rates of high school graduation. This was the case for white as well as Black students. Coupled with historically lower wages, it is apparent why education attainment is lower in the South than elsewhere.

While this dissertation focuses on urbanicity as a factor in educational attainment, studies of residential location tend to focus on rural versus not rural (urban and suburban) comparisons. The literature on educational attainment and urbanicity has highlighted that students in large urban and suburban settings have significantly higher educational outcomes than those in rural areas. These studies tend to frame such disparities in a rural deficit model that centers on what rural areas lack to explain different educational outcomes (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012). Comparative studies, however, have generally concluded that large urban and suburban areas see higher rates of educational attainment because people with higher education tend to migrate to large cities that provide more economic opportunity. This places rural areas at a disadvantage with regard to producing and sustaining educated workers. Sander (2006) noted, though, that the advantages of the urban setting tended to decline for students at about age 16. He observed that for older respondents, the urban over rural advantage was greater than for younger respondents. This trend plays out in a familiar pattern reflecting the decline of large cities after the 1960s and the corresponding rise of suburban and exurban areas at the same time. This phenomenon remained present even when controlling for race and socioeconomic status.
The literature on the influence of socioeconomic status on educational outcomes is expectedly broad, but findings of a positive correlation remain largely unchanged. The strength and character of that relationship, however, has changed over time. Sirin’s (2005) meta-analysis of the literature on SES and educational achievement noted that many factors combined to complicate the contemporary relationship between SES and educational achievement. Sirin’s meta-analysis is an update of White’s (1982) SES meta-analysis of literature from 1990 to 2000. Since White’s study, there has been a slight decrease in the strength of the correlation between SES and educational outcome. Although factors such as methodological changes (in measuring SES and educational attainment) were evident in the studies surveyed, Sirin found that increasing numbers of minority student in subsequent studies weakened the relationship. This is because minority students’ academic achievement is less likely to be influenced by SES than that of their white counterparts. As the representation of minority students increased since White’s study, the general strength of the SES-educational achievement relationship weakened (Sirin 2005).

In their recent *The Condition of Education 2016* report, the National Center for Education Statistics (Kena et al., 2016), using the ELS:2002 dataset, observed that SES is a major factor in educational expectations and achievement where SES predicts educational achievement and achievement predicts future SES. Further, SES was a significant predictor of student expectations and vice versa. Since this dissertation also uses the ELS:2002, the relationship between educational attainment and SES is likely to hold despite the role of race as a mitigating factor, as pointed out in earlier studies.

Concomitant with socioeconomic status, the percentage of students within a particular school or district who receive “free lunch” through the National Free Lunch Program is often used by researchers as a proxy for poverty (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015). In reality, though,
poverty and eligibility for free lunch are distinct factors that do not absolutely correspond. Snyder and Musu-Gillette observe that throughout the country, a significant number of students who qualify for free lunch in their schools actually exceed the poverty line. This is largely a function of policies that declare particular student profiles as eligible for free or reduced lunch, such as children in foster care or in migrant learning programs. Further, many districts, for administrative efficiency, allocate free and reduced price lunch funding on a per-school as opposed to a per-student basis. Not only do such practices reduce bureaucratic stresses, they also alleviate the stigma of poverty within schools. Overall, broad eligibility requirements weaken the reliability of free lunch eligibility as a proxy for poverty (Cruse & Powers, 2006).

Despite the general unreliability of free lunch eligibility as a proxy for poverty, free lunch programs are associated with increased educational attainment. In a review of the effects on health and education outcomes of NSLP (National School Lunch Program), which was created in 1946 after nearly 16 percent of Selective Service registrants during World War II were disqualified from service due to malnutrition, Hinrichs (2010) observed that NSLP had no lasting effects on health outcomes for adults who had taken part in the program. NSLP, however, was possibly associated with better educational outcomes. Hinrichs opined that whereas the free lunch might have had some positive health effects, those effects did not necessarily persist into adulthood, when participants were no longer eligible. Further, the increase in educational outcomes suggested that access to free lunch increased school attendance for vulnerable students. Hinrichs concluded, free meals at school rather than augmenting nutrition from meals at home actually replaced meals from home. This would explain why, over time, educational outcomes improved but health outcomes did not.
The literature on the relationship between neighborhood crime rates and educational attainment sometimes focuses on the role of improved school environments as bulwarks against youth criminalization, particularly relevant in the era of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and the Harlem Children’s Zone (Noguera, 2008). The logic, according to education reformers, is that high neighborhood crime undermines educational outcomes among urban youth. Thus better school environments, along with improving educational outcomes generally, would also have the effect of reducing crime. A growing body of scholarship emerging from work on “neighborhood effects” has begun to focus on how neighborhood crime influences educational outcomes (Sharkey, Schwartz, Ellen, & Lacoe, 2013). Sharkey et al. note the lengthy scholarly debate on the degree to which outside factors influence educational performance within the school environment. Looking at data from the Moving to Opportunity experiment in which poor families living in public housing received vouchers allowing them to move into higher income areas, researchers zeroed in on the finding that student test scores increased the most in cities in which participants’ residential changes resulted in the greatest decline in exposure to neighborhood crime. This finding corroborated earlier neighborhood effects research (Harding 2003, 2009) that points out that neighborhood violence is the primary mediator between neighborhood disadvantage and low high school graduation rates. This finding was particularly robust for Black youth, accounting for nearly half of that conditional association and about a fifth of conditional association regarding teen pregnancy for both boys and girls.

Aspirations and Achievement Ideology Variables

This section will survey the relevant literature on student educational aspirations and acceptance of the achievement ideology. For this dissertation educational aspirations indicate a student’s desire to complete high school and college. Contemporary labor market demands
practically require students to complete post-secondary educational milestones. It is also recognized, however, that structural factors influence student aspirations and their adoption of the achievement ideology (Barnes, 2002; Berzin, 2010; MacLeod, 2009; Willis, 1981). Rather than rejecting achievement due to some innate or cultural aversion to education, research suggests that Black and Latino students develop attitudes toward educational institutions that mirror their deep sense of rejection and their attempts to create affirming identities that typical school environments deny them (see Carter, 2003; Ogbu & Simon, 1998; Willis, 1981).

The body of literature on the relationship between educational aspirations, the achievement ideology, and educational attainment is broad. It is generally assumed that high educational attainment is, to a large degree, associated with the aspirations and achievement orientation of students who see a connection between educational attainment and enhanced life chances (MacLeod 2009). This relationship between educational attainment on the one hand and economic opportunity on the other has only become stronger since the mid-20th century in the United States as industrial production has been exported to low wage zones abroad, internal job ladders have given way to technical expertise, and political economic shifts have exacerbated domestic and international labor competition. Social scientists have focused on the effects of the nascent economic restructuring through the lens of Marxist analyses. In their classic study of U.S. schooling in the midst of upheaval, Bowles and Gintis (1978) laid out a somber overview of the ultimately deterministic function of schooling within the capitalist order. For Bowles and Gintis, schools serve less as meritocratic sorting machines that give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed than they do as mechanisms that justify socioeconomic inequality by making it look meritocratic. Thus, working-class kids go to working-class schools where they are socialized as working-class citizens who will join the working-class labor force. Although
they and their families are told that educational attainment is the key to upward mobility and the American dream, nothing about the working-class schools actually facilitates mobility for the vast majority of students. Economic elites send their children to entirely different, usually private, schools where their socialization is commensurate with their class status. In reality, there is relatively little class mobility even as working-class students are increasingly told that they are in competition with one another and with their counterparts in other countries. In the era of global capitalism, just as in the earlier industrial era, Bowles and Gintis argue, schooling functions to create the appropriate citizen-workers for the current mode of production. The researchers’ deterministic portrayal, however, has tended to ignore the role of human agency in social reproduction. In *Learning to Labour* (1977), Paul Willis examines how “working-class kids get working-class jobs” through a deep ethnographic study of a group of working-class boys in an industrial British town. The “lads,” according to Willis, end up reproducing their own class status through their rejection of the dominant precepts of the achievement ideology—that one will succeed through hard work and education. Growing up in a working-class context, the lads experienced a sort of dissonance regarding the achievement messages being propagated by their school and the social messages propagated by their external social environment. The lads are not less talented than the other students, but they have developed a counterculture built around resistance to the discipline imposed by the school. The counterculture develops out of a host of working-class cultural tropes such as the glorification of machismo and manual labor. In that way, where school achievement focuses on upward mobility through socialization into white-collar office work, characteristic of the emerging postindustrial economy, the lads reject such trappings as “feminine” and unrewarding. Part of this rejection of middle-class school values, Willis explains, is the lads’ awareness and resignation that they are not ultimately in control of
their fate, and where they end up is primarily a function of the labor market and not their individual skills or desires.

Willis suggested that the lads’ rejection of the achievement ideology resulted in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy whereby their working-class habitus served to socialize them into their working-class adult lives. While ultimately, the educational system reinforced labor market demands, the lads’ resignation served to justify their fate and reinforce the meritocratic pretenses of the school. In another classic of Marxist education literature, *Ain’t No Makin’ It* (2009), Jay MacLeod complicated Willis’ narrative by looking at two different groups of boys living in a low-income housing project in a U.S. northeastern city. The two cliques: the mostly white “hallway hangers” and the all Black “brothers” problematized the achievement ideology narrative with a racial overlay in which the hallway hangers, like Willis’ lads, developed an oppositional culture to their schools and the brothers largely accepted the achievement ideology. The Black boys, despite apparent racial barriers and being equally as poor as the hallway hangers, embraced the achievement ideology. Ultimately, MacLeod demonstrates that by and large the hallway hangers still managed to attain more lasting upward mobility than the brothers, even though the brothers’ had struggled to follow the rules. MacLeod does not argue that race trumped class since neither clique experienced significant mobility. Rather, he found that the race of the brothers effectively undermined their ability to transform their achievement orientation and aspirations into educational and material success.

Research on youth aspirations and educational attainment can be traced back to William Sewell and others’ influential work with the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study of 1957 (Sewell & Hauser, 1993; Sewell, Hauser, Springer, & Hauser, 2001), a large longitudinal study of aspirations among Wisconsin high school students that continued through 2002. In his research,
Sewell initially found that youth aspirations for higher education significantly predicted educational outcomes. Further, Sewell found that other social factors influenced students’ aspirations. For instance, at the time he found that women had lower aspirations than men and that rural youth ranked lower than their urban counterparts. Whereas it was commonly accepted among sociologists at the time that aspirations were linked to differing school and neighborhood contexts, following the release of the Coleman Report, Coleman, Sewell, and others found that school and community contexts were remarkably homogeneous regarding factors such as funding and educational outcomes. The major differences, once SES and other demographic factors were controlled, in aspirations and outcomes, according to the Wisconsin researchers, occurred within schools and neighborhoods rather than between them. Rather than contexts, the researchers noted that social (family and peer groups) and psychological factors were better predictors of aspirations. They theorized that even SES differences in student aspirations that had been observed earlier could be largely explained by SES-influenced psychological differences. Moreover, these positive psychological factors, according to Sewell and his collaborators were the result of enhanced cognitive skills derived from the students’ parents’ desires born of their own educational attainment. In other words, much research on student aspirations suggests that although variables such as socioeconomic status and neighborhood differences matter, they fade away when more intimate psycho-social variables are brought into play.

For marginalized minority students, two seemingly contradictory phenomena have been identified in the research. On the one hand, marginalized minority students lag behind their white counterparts in educational achievement. On the other hand, when controlling for socioeconomic status, Black youth consistently express higher educational aspirations than their
corresponding counterparts. Conventional wisdom and much research suggest that educational achievement is strongly associated with high aspirations and that it is a central tenet of the achievement ideology. There are two broad but intersecting explanations in the research for the mismatch between African American students’ high aspirations and their comparatively low educational achievement. The first explanation, emerging from the bulk of liberal educational research argues that Black students want to succeed but their efforts are thwarted early on by hostile and deficient school environments. Education theorists such as Jean Anyon (1997) and Pedro Noguera (2008) have focused on the siphoning of resources from urban schools and communities that undermine educational opportunities in spite of student aspirations.

Afrocentric and nationalist-minded scholars such as Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) and Christopher Emdin (2015) have highlighted the many ways in which white educators are either ill-equipped or hostile to Black students. Recent work from scholars and activists have focused on the excessively punitive nature of schools educating Black children that pushes them out before graduating—what has become known as the “school to prison pipeline” (Morris, 2016; Rios, 2011). Certainly, the life chances of Black students are overdetermined by racial discrimination through white organizing against Black students in suburban districts (Lewis-McCoy, 2014) and the holistic effects of segregation and “neighborhood effects” (Sharkey, 2014).

Michael Dumas (2007) has championed a second line of thought on the relationship between aspirations and educational attainment among Black youth. In his research, Dumas identifies “the Black educational imagination,” a constellation of ideologies and Black discourses centered on how education figures into the freedom dreams of Black people. The role of education in Black freedom is unimpeachable, but the mechanisms through which that interaction occurs—the type of education and the setting in which it occurs—is vague, and often
regarded with suspicion. Like Paul Willis’s lads, marginalized minority students enter heavily anti-Black (and anti-Latino) educational spaces full of warranted anxiety and suspicion even as they profess high educational aspirations. Thus, the educational aspirations of marginalized minority students are not fully aligned with the dominant modes of education to which they are exposed. This ambiguity about the practical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic implications of familiar idioms such as “Knowledge is power” or “Education is the key” combines with overall anti-Blackness in the U.S. educational apparatus to undermine the education of marginalized minority students.

In their extensive research of achievement orientation among academically gifted Black students, Donna Y. Ford and J. John Harris (1996) observed that Black children nearly unanimously reported that school was not a waste of time, although they also reported disinterest in going to school “on some days.” Although their research was conducted among academically gifted students whose positive reinforcement results in higher rates of adherence to the achievement ideology, Ford and Harris also observed that for non-gifted students there were discrepancies between stated adherence to the achievement ideology and their achievement-oriented behaviors. This phenomenon was later observed by Attewell, Battle, and Suazo-Garcia (2003) and Dumas (2007), who theorized that such discrepancies pointed to the near universal mantra among African Americans that education is the key to racial freedom, even when the other social factors prevented such notions from being effectively acted upon.

**Sociocultural Capital Variables**

The literature on sociocultural capital variables is centered on the theories of James S. Coleman, who developed an educational theory of social capital, and Pierre Bourdieu, who developed an educational theory of cultural capital. Due to limitations of the ELS:2002, cultural
capital variables are primarily operationalized as objectified cultural capital. Social capital related to educational attainment is captured by variables that describe the attitudes and aspirations of the respondents’ peers or the quality of their social networks. The two concepts were combined into a single domain to capture the fundamental idea that noneconomic forms of capital create a social matrix that combine to influence the educational attainment of Black and Latino students.

The variables that make up the sociocultural capital domain represent the view that non-economic forms of capital may be influential in the educational outcomes of Black and Latino students. Bourdieu (cultural capital) and Coleman (social capital) explored the ways in which socioeconomic inequality was reproduced through an education system that presented itself as meritocratic but then appeared to predictably sort students along class and racial lines. Bourdieu’s conceptualization of cultural capital in *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (1990) posits that socioeconomic elites possess a distinct habitus with its own cultural codes that are not easily accessible to out-group members. It is through their cultural exclusion that they are able to reinforce their own economic position in society. These mechanisms of exclusion are at work in the education system, which serves the interest of elites. Students who lack the cultural capital signifiers most valued by the school perform more poorly and are thus relegated to the working class.

James Coleman’s concept of social capital emerges from his efforts to bring economically oriented rational thought into the social realm without undermining the social character of human interaction. He reasons that humans are able to behave in rationally self-interested ways, but their agency is enabled or constrained by the socially rational actions of others. In his influential 1986 essay on social capital, Coleman describes the wholesale diamond
market in New York City. The close ties of family and kinship within the mostly Jewish market enable the efficient trade of often extremely expensive stones without the layers of bureaucracy that must accompany such interactions among strangers or outsiders. Thus, it is the high level of social capital among the diamond merchants that enables the market to function. This setup implies that an outsider would have less success within the wholesale diamond market because he lacks the social capital necessary for fruitful interaction within such spaces.

Bourdieu theorized three forms of cultural capital that combine to structure the functionality of the concept: embodied, objectified, and institutional (Bourdieu 1984, 1986). Embodied cultural capital is manifested in the particular linguistic and behavioral practices that mark one’s status. Objectified cultural capital describes the sorts of material possessions one owns or has access to—such as a particular type of automobile, artwork, or books—that signifies “distinction.” And institutional cultural capital represents the credentials and titles (Ph.D., nobility, military rank) that are socially recognized and denote status. For this dissertation, data limitations within the ELS:2002 have limited me to using indicators of objectified cultural capital. The “cultural capital” variable is a composite combining several manifestations of the respondents’ objectified cultural capital: receiving a daily newspaper, regular magazine subscription, access to a home computer, access to the internet, and more than 50 books in the home.

In a widely cited 2010 study of “scholarly culture” among families in 27 different countries, researchers looked at the educational outcomes for students in a number of different countries and compared them to the number of books in their homes (Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010). Students with more books tended to have more years of schooling than those with fewer books, and this trend was present regardless of student socioeconomic status. The
robustness of the findings suggests the existence of a scholarly culture in which education may truly be an objective marker of advantage that confers tangible benefits to those who have it. On the one hand, the authors affirmed Bourdieu’s formulation that objectified cultural capital translated into socioeconomic advantage. But on the other hand, the study’s findings challenge Bourdieu’s account of how this cultural capital worked. Possession of books was not a simple and arbitrary marker of status used by elites to exclude non-elites, as Bourdieu saw it. Rather, possession of books, according to the authors, denotes real advantage by virtue of the knowledge within those books.

Other studies have looked at the role of computer ownership in educational outcomes. Computer and internet access is stratified along demographic lines, with Blacks and Latinos owning fewer computers and with less internet connectivity than whites, and high income earners have considerably greater access than poorer people. In recent years, these gaps have narrowed, although for older people computer use and internet connectivity gaps remain quite large. Findings regarding the role of computer ownership and internet access in education outcomes are somewhat contradictory. Attewell and Battle (1999) reported significant but uneven gains in academic performance linked to computer access for students across the board—even for very young children (Attewell et al., 2003)—but high SES students, whites, and boys tended to benefit more than low SES students, girls, and ethnic minorities. The researchers attributed these outcomes to the “Sesame Street effect,” which describes a scenario where a broadly available education innovation is pitched as a method for closing the achievement gap but instead serves to give advantage to demographics that are already ahead. Fairlie and his colleagues (Beltran, Das, & Fairlie, 2006; Fairlie, 2012; Fairlie & Robinson, 2013) reached
similar conclusions in their NLS:97 based study of technology ownership and education outcomes.

Discussions of cultural capital for marginalized minority students have run headlong into critiques arguing that Bourdieu’s theory represents a cultural deficit model, which implies that minority students lack the appropriate cultural orientation to be successful in school. The onus for school failure falls on Black and Latino culture. Further, the cultural deficit model suggests that academic success requires the adoption of the dominant form of cultural capital largely possessed by upper-middle-class and elite whites. Prudence Carter (2003) developed a formulation of “Black cultural capital” as a form of non-dominant cultural capital that sustains Black youth and explains culturally specific in-group and out-group positioning in predominantly white school settings. For Carter, African American high school students develop a form of non-dominant cultural capital that conveys social honor in ways that may appear oppositional to the norms of the dominant culture. In her research, Carter found no evidence that accusations of acting white corresponded to rejection of the achievement ideology. Acting white, rather, signified differences in language from the dominant speech patterns among Black students (“talking proper”) or perceived senses superiority (“putting on airs”).

Social capital in this dissertation is measured by way of peer influence on the educational outcome of the Black and Latino students in the sample. Social capital is a vague concept in that it is not entirely clear how its internal mechanisms work to produce outcomes that give advantage to those who have it. Glenn Loury (Wallace & LaMond, 1977) famously defined social capital as the impact of one’s social position in hindering or enhancing acquisition of human capital. For Bourdieu, however, social capital is a form of capital that one either has or does not have. It is a product of imbeddedness in exclusive social networks (Bourdieu, 1994).
Coleman (1988) theorized social capital as a form of support that helps one achieve, and therefore the quality of social capital plays an important role in determining success. In this dissertation, I have chosen peer influence variables that best fit Coleman’s conceptualization.

Research has consistently found that adolescent peer groups are influential in academic achievement. Adolescent attitudes toward education are influenced by their peer attitudes across the board, and therefore, such sources of social capital are of particular interest to researchers of marginalized minorities. Ide, Parkerson, Haertel, and Walberg (1981) found that peer influences had a small but consistent effect on educational outcomes and that those effects were strongest in urban settings. Chen (1997), in contrast, found that although youth are certainly influenced by their peers in a number of ways, it was not apparent that peers directly influenced student achievement and outcomes. Chen implies that research on student peer influence on achievement may be afflicted with causality bias. The activities that students engage in with their friends are often assumed to correlate directly with achievement when, in reality, there may be many mediating factors that produce such appearances. Nevertheless, Lynch, Lerner, and Leventhal (2012), in their study of school wide peer culture, found that broader peer cultures still significantly influenced the outcomes for individual students. For instance, the researchers found that in schools with more “positive” peer cultures, student GPAs and school engagement were higher than at schools with less positive peer cultures. Similarly, Black and Latino student perceptions of their own peer groups back up such findings. Kaplan (1999) found in her study of adolescent perceptions of experiences in an inner city academic enrichment program that the kids praised the program for giving them tools to confront peer taunting. The implication is that the students’ peers would object to their participation. This creates a question about how student perceptions of peer groups are formed. Kaplan’s findings are challenged by Carter’s later
findings that taunts such as “acting white” do not actually indicate a rejection of academic achievement.

**Contribution to the Field**

This study will examine the possible sociocultural predictors of the educational attainment of Black and Latino high school students. Contemporary education debates, with their preoccupation with job preparedness and global competitiveness, are rife with competing theories intended to explain the racial achievement gap. Efforts to close the achievement gap have tended to focus on helping Black and Latino children to “catch up” with their white peers, suggesting that there is either something wrong with the youths’ environments, something deficient about their cultures, or some combination. For instance, the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York City has emphasized that to improve educational outcomes for marginalized minority students, their environments—from home to social service institutions—must change. The expansion of charter schools in predominantly minority districts has been justified by advocates for their “zero tolerance” and positive slogan approaches to the education and discipline of Black and Latino students, suggesting such students lack proper socialization to public education. Most recently, Barack Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative, though excluding girls, has emphasized the supposed need for sociocultural capital in the form of mentors and enrichment programs for Black and Latino boys. Little effort has been made, however, to measure the relative predictive efficacy of theories that assume that sociocultural deficits are to blame for racial achievement gaps. By measuring the relative impact of such predictors of educational outcomes, this research can provide guidance for the development of actual solutions rather than simply relying on assumptions of causation that trade in racial stereotypes.
This study will distinguish itself from previous work by dividing the research sample into socioeconomic quintiles and comparing the top three quintiles, “non-poor” students, with the lower two quintiles, “poor” students. This methodology will allow us to determine the degree to which sociocultural variables interact with socioeconomic status to produce observed educational outcomes for the Black and Latino students. Such information brings SES back into discussions of marginalized minority educational outcomes.
Chapter Three: Methods

Chapter three will provide an in-depth discussion of this dissertation’s methodology to analyze the impact of sociocultural factors on the education attainment of Black and Latino youth. First, the history and the purpose of the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002) will be discussed. Second, the analytic sample of Black and Latino youth extracted from the ELS:2002 will be described. Third, measures utilized in this dissertation are discussed. The measures section will provide a discussion of the dependent variable and independent variables, which are split into three domains, demographic, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital variables. From there, the analytical strategy is outlined. I describe three initial OLS regression models. The analytic sample is split into “poor” and “non-poor” students, which are then subjected to the same battery of regressions.

Introduction

The previous chapters discussed the scholarly literature on Black and Latino educational attainment with a specific focus on cultural explanations for the achievement gap in educational outcomes. I reviewed research on Black and Latino student aspirations and attitudes toward achievement and the literature on cultural and social (peer effects) capital. Chapter Two expanded on several theoretical frameworks and their applicability to this study, including ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1997), intersectionality theory (Bartlett & Kennedy, 2001; Collins, 2000, 2005), and social (Coleman, 1988) and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theories. This chapter will explain the methodology this dissertation employs to explore the research questions generated by the review of the relevant scholarly literature.

This study utilizes data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002) to explore the sociocultural factors that influence the educational outcomes of Black and Latino
students such as demographics, aspirations, adherence to the achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital. ELS:2002 is a nationally representative longitudinal study that follows a cohort of high school 10th grade students through their secondary and postsecondary experiences. The first survey of 10th graders was conducted in 2002, and it added 12th graders in 2004. It tracked students over the course of three follow-up surveys in 2004, 2006, and 2012. By 2012, the students were well into their post-secondary lives in the labor force with a subset continuing their education beyond high school. I chose the dataset for several reasons: First, the national representativeness of the ELS:2002 allows for the results of the current study to be generalized for the population of high school 10th graders in 2002. Second, the breadth of the ELS:2002 allows for the extraction of a large sample of Black and Latino students. Third, the longitudinal structure alongside ELS:2002’s focus on postsecondary outcomes makes it ideal for analyzing the influence of student attitudes and home life on future education and economic outcomes. Finally, the timing of ELS:2002 places the initial and follow-up surveys on either side of the 2007-2008 economic downturn. Such a structure—placed within the context of other relevant research—allows this dissertation to explore the degree to which the downturn affected education outcomes for Black and Latino high school students who, unbeknownst to themselves, were on the cusp of entering a weaker labor market than previous cohorts (Berube, 2010).

The dissertation will use bivariate analysis to analyze the relationship between student educational attainment as of 2012 (dependent variable) and the demographics, aspiration and achievement attitudes, and sociocultural variables (independent variables) from the 2002 base year. Ordinary Least Squares regression will determine which of the independent variables has the greatest impact on the student 2012 educational attainment. I will then divide the sample into socioeconomic quintiles, the poorest two of which will be labeled “poor” and the wealthiest three
“non-poor.” OLS regressions will run on each of the sub-cohorts of Black and Latino students to compare the impact of the independent variables on educational outcomes for those who were poor in 2002 with those who were not poor in the same year. All of the analysis will be performed using SPSS software.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. First, *Dataset* will describe the ELS:2002 and offer a detailed rationale for using it in this study. *Analytic Samples* will explain the NCES sampling procedures. *Measures* will provide a detailed description of the dependent and each of the independent variables used in the study as well as a general rationale for their use. Lastly, the *Analytical Strategy* will explain the study’s data analysis methods.

**Dataset**

This dissertation utilizes public-use data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Education Longitudinal Survey of 2002 (ELS:2002). It is the fourth in a series of NCES longitudinal studies that follow students through their secondary school and post-secondary educational and work roles. The design of the ELS:2002 must be understood in the context of the earlier studies in the series. The NCES began collecting national longitudinal data on high school students with the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72). NCES surveyed over 21,000 high school seniors. The survey gave education researchers and policymakers longitudinal data that linked high school experiences with later outcomes such as post-secondary education and early labor market participation. To facilitate intensive study of disadvantaged groups, the NLS-72 oversampled schools with significant minority enrollments and in minority communities. The Class of 1972 cohort was resurveyed four more times in 1973, 1974, 1979, and finally in 1986.
The High School and Beyond study began in 1980 with two cohorts—one of seniors, similar to the NLS-72 and a second made up of sophomores. The younger cohort allowed researchers to link early high school experiences with later educational and labor market experiences (a goal of the current study). The robust study allowed researchers to compare outcomes for public and private schools and to even measure cognitive growth of the students. Both cohorts were resurveyed three more times—in 1982, 1984, and in 1986. This allowed observation of the shift from early high school through graduation and into the labor market or post-secondary school.

The well-known National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) was launched with a large sample of 24,599 8th graders, some teachers and principals, and one parent of each student. A subsample of the original cohort was resurveyed in 1990 along with a refreshing of teachers and principals. Because some of the students had dropped out, the NELS:88 was able to capture important data on drop-outs. This method was repeated in the 1992 follow-up survey, and residential data were mapped onto the 1990 Census to provide more robust community data. The cohort was resurveyed in 2000, where post-secondary transcripts were also collected.

The aims of this dissertation are in line with the larger goals of the series of NCES longitudinal education studies since 1972. Previous studies have attempted to capture the full range of experiences prior to and after the major life transition from compulsory education to post-secondary education and entrance into the labor market. Ultimately, such efforts are concerned with the role of differential educational experiences in determining life chances. The ELS:2002 is robust in its concern regarding student aspirations and attitudes, and in that regard, it reflects larger shifts toward factors that influence social mobility beyond high school.
Nowhere have issues of attitudes and non-economic capital in social mobility been of greater concern to researchers than with the United States’ two largest minority groups—Blacks and Latinos.

The base year of the ELS:2002 was composed of 752 public, Catholic, and private schools in the spring of the 2001-2002 school year. About 15,300 students completed the base-year questionnaire as well as about 13,500 parents, about 7,100 teachers, along with principals and librarians. The weighted response rate for students was about 87.3%.

Seven components made up the base-year design: an assessment of student math and reading, and surveys of students, parents, teachers, principals, and librarians. The student questionnaire gathered information about the student’s background, school experiences, future plans and aspirations, employment and out-of-school experiences, language background, and psychological orientation toward learning. The student survey and test were administered in group settings in schools.

One parent of each of the participating sophomores was asked to complete a survey. This component was designed to explore a number of factors, including parents’ aspirations for their children, home background, and home educational support.

**Analytic Samples**

For this dissertation, I extracted Black and Latino student data (N=4327) from the base year sample of the ELS:2002 to explore some of the contemporary debates on Black and Latino educational attainment (for a survey of such issues and debates, see Noguera, 2008). After using listwise deletion to handle missing data, the number of students in the final sample of the two large minority groups was 837. A T-test and other preliminary analyses were performed to ensure that Black and Latino students were similar enough to combine into a single sample of
“marginalized minority” students. Sophomores are important for the purposes of this study because they had yet to experience the full impact of high school—a significant time of cognitive growth and transition. It is during this time that experientially based attitudes toward school and aspirations for the future are solidified, and early high school is a time when minority children—beginning to look physically like adults—begin to face significant external threats to their life chances in the form interactions with the police, other adult institutions, and broader forms of discrimination (Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2008).

Measures

This dissertation employs data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 to explore the relative impact on Black and Latino students of a series of demographic and sociocultural variables on the dependent variable of educational attainment for the 10th year beyond the initial survey. The study further divides the sample into socioeconomic quintiles—labeling the top three quintiles “non-poor”, and the bottom two “poor”—to examine and compare how those relationships unfold for different socioeconomic groups of Blacks and Latinos. All of the variables were retrieved from the ELS:2002 public-use file, which was downloaded from the National Center for Education Statistics website. Some of the variables were used in their original form while others have been recoded for analysis using SPSS software. The following sections describe the variables used in this dissertation.

Dependent Variable

Educational attainment, or the number of years or level of credentials of formal education received, is a primary predictor, along with socioeconomic origin (Jencks, 1972), of intergenerational social mobility. Other factors such as student aspirations (MacLeod, 2009; Noguera 2008), adherence to the achievement ideology (MacLeod, 2009; Ogbu & Simon 1998),
social capital (Coleman, 1988), and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) have all been shown to have varying degrees of second order and first order influence. This is particularly important for Black and Latino students, who are considerably less likely than their white counterparts to come from high income households. There is much popular and scholarly speculation regarding what factors have the greatest impact on the educational attainment of Black and Latino students, and particularly those from poor and working-class families. To examine these effects, this study uses the ELS variable “Highest level of education” earned as of the third follow-up (F3ATTAINMENT) as the dependent variable.

*Independent Variables*

Twenty independent variables are used in this research. Nominal level variables were taken directly from the ELS:2002 public-use file. Some recoding was performed to create dummy and other variables pertinent to the study. Recoding was performed using SPSS software and will be further discussed in subsequent sections.

To address the research question, I divided independent variables into three domains. Domain One includes all of the demographic variables used in the study. This includes sex, region, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, the percentage of the student’s school that qualifies for free lunch (a measure of school SES), neighborhood crime, and number of academic risk factors. Domain Two includes independent variables measuring student aspirations and the student adherence to the achievement ideology. Notably, a variable for student race is not included in the analysis. This is because all of the students are either Black or Latino—two minority groups with remarkably similar demographic and educational profiles. For the purposes of this research, which looks at the sociocultural factors influencing the educational attainment of historically underprivileged minority youth, the sample of only Black and Latino students was extracted
from the larger ELS:2002 data set. Because of the relatively small numbers of each group, Blacks and Latinos were combined into a single population. The limits of this technique are mitigated by preliminary analysis that revealed similar demographic profiles for the two groups.

Demographic Variables

“Female” (FEMALE “Student is female”) is a dummy variable for which females were coded as 1 and males were coded as 0. The variable was derived from BYS14 “Sex of student” in the base-year student questionnaire.

“South” (SOUTH “School is in the South”) is a dummy variable for which schools in the South were coded as 1 and students from all other regions were coded as 0. The South is politically, socially and economically distinct from the other regions, and that is particularly true for Black students. The variable was derived from BYREGION “geographical region of the school,” in which the other regions identified were Northeast, Midwest, and the West.

“Urban” (URBAN “School is in an urban setting”) is a dummy variable indicating whether or not a student’s school is located in an urban environment. Urban is coded as 1, and all else (suburban and rural) are coded as 0. The variable was derived from BYURBAN “School urbanicity.”

“Socioeconomic status” (BYSES1 “Student’s socioeconomic status”) is a composite variable created by NCES to combine parent income, occupation, and education. For later analysis, BYSES1 is divided into quintiles. I created a dummy variable “POOR” by recoding the lowest two quintiles=1 and the highest three quintiles=0.

“Percent free lunch” (BY10FLP “Grade 10 percent free lunch-categorical”) is a variable indicating the percentage of 10th graders in the school who are eligible for “free lunch.”
Eligibility for free lunch is an indicator of household income, and thus BY10FLP may be used as a measure of school socioeconomic status.

“Low neighborhood crime” (LOW_CRIME) is a dummy variable for which 1 indicates that the student lives in a neighborhood with low crime and 0 indicates that the student lives in a neighborhood without low crime. The variable is derived from BYA05 (“Crime in student’s neighborhood”) in which other values are “high level of crime,” “moderate level of crime,” and “mixed level of crime.”

“Academic risk factors” (BYRISKFC “Number of academic risk factors in 10th grade”) is a measure of the cumulative risk factors that beset a student in the base year. Academic risk factors include whether the student: (1) comes from a single-parent household; (2) has two parents without a high school diploma; (3) has a sibling who has dropped out of school; (4) has changed schools two or more times (excluding changes due to school promotions); (5) has repeated at least one grade; and (6) comes from a household with an income below the federal threshold for poverty. Households are considered impoverished if family income is $20,000 or less and household size is 5 or less; $25,000 or less if household size is 6 or 7; $35,000 or less if household size is 8; and $50,000 or less if household size is 9 or more.

Aspirations and Achievement Ideology Variables

The second domain consists of variables chosen to analyze the student’s aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology in the 10th grade. Scholarly literature suggests that Black and Latino students tend to have higher educational and occupational aspirations than their white counterparts when SES is controlled (MacLeod, 2009). Certainly, it is popularly believed that a student’s educational attainment is heavily influenced by level of aspirations. For poorer students, however, economic barriers often serve as significant impediments despite
a student’s aspirations. Similar dynamics can be seen with regard to student adherence to the achievement ideology. According to MacLeod (2009), minority students tend to believe more strongly in achievement ideology than their white counterparts, yet their educational and occupational outcomes do not bear this out. The variables in this domain are intended to measure the effects of such attitudes on the educational attainment of the Black and Latino students.

“Plans four year school” (FOUR_YEAR “plans four year school”) is a dummy variable for which 1 indicates that the student plans to attend a four year college upon high school graduation, and 0 indicates that the student does not plan to attend a four year college. The variable was derived from BYS58 “type of school plans to attend.” The categories are: four-year university, two-year community college, and vocational, technical, or trade school.

“Respondent’s expectations” (BYSTEXP “How far in school student thinks will get”) is a composite indicating how far beyond the 10th grade the student believes that she will get with her education: “Less than high school graduation”=1, “High school graduation or GED only”=2, “Attend or complete 2-year college/school”=3, “Attend college, 4-year degree incomplete”=4, “Graduate from college”=5, “Obtain Master's degree or equivalent”=6, or “Obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree”=7.

“Respondent’s fulfilled expectations” (F3BYEDEXPFF “Fulfillment by educational expectations as of F3”) is the only independent variable in this study from the third follow-up survey. The item compares a student’s highest level of education as of the third follow-up (F3ATTAINMENT) to base-year educational expectations (BYSTEXP), and indicates whether the respondent exceeded those expectations, met those expectations exactly, or did not meet those expectations. Students coded as “base-year expectations and third follow-up attainment are
not comparable” (F3BYEDEXPFF=5) are those whose base-year expectations were “attend or complete a 2-year school course in a community college or vocational school” (BYSTEXP=3) or “attend college, but not complete a 4-year degree” (BYSTEXP=4), but their educational attainment as of the third follow-up was “some postsecondary attendance, no postsecondary credential” (F3ATTAINMENT=3), “undergraduate certificate” (F3ATTAINMENT=4), or “associate's degree” (F3ATTAINMENT=5).

“Parent’s desires” (BYP79 “How far in school wants 10th grader to go”) is a measure of the student’s parents’ desires regarding the student’s educational attainment. The variable employs identical choices as those from BYSTEXP, but the question is included in the parent’s base-year survey.

“Respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary” (BYS57 “Plans to continue education after high school”) is an indication of the certitude of a 10th grader’s plans for post-secondary education, if at all. The choices prompt the student to concretize post-secondary educational plans by asking about plans to pursue further education, if at all: “Yes, right after high school”=1, “Yes, after out of high school 1 year”=2, “Yes, after out of high school over 1 year”=3, “Yes, but don't know when”=4, “No, don't plan to continue education”=5.

“Achievement ideology” (ACHV_IDEOLOGY “Believes that hard work is the key to achievement”) is a scale created from four Likert scale base-year variables intended to measure the degree to which the student believes that that achievement is the result of hard work by the individual. The four variables are: BYS89D “Studies to get a good grade,” BYS89H “Studies to increase job opportunities,” BYS89J “Works as hard as possible when studies,” BYS89P “Studies to ensure financial security.”
“Respondent likes school” (LIKES_SCHOOL) is a dummy variable in which 1= “not at all” and all else= 0 because it was determined that the significant response to such a question is that the student does not like school. The variable was derived from BYS28 “How much likes school” which is a measure of how much the student likes school in the base year. The original response choices ranged from 1-3: 1=“Not at all,” 2=“Somewhat,” and 3=“A Great deal.”

**Sociocultural Capital Variables**

The third domain consists of variables chosen to analyze two forms of non-economic capital possessed by student respondents. Higher levels of cultural capital and “positive” forms of social capital are broadly recognized to have positive impacts on educational and economic outcomes. This was extrapolated from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who argued that elites maintain their class position by way of shared cultural knowledge and status-parochial ways of seeing the world (habitus). Following Bourdieu and Passeron’s research on social reproduction in education (1990), much speculation has been made as to the role of obtaining middle-class cultural capital in facilitating upward mobility (Lareau, 2003). Due to limitations of the ELS:2002, the measure for cultural capital only includes variables intended to indicate “objectified” cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital consists of objects that are owned by the student and her family such as books, computers, or works of art (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). These types of objects can be transformed into profit through their sale, used to symbolically convey cultural knowledge possessed by their owner, or used to obtain knowledge beyond the capacity of those without such possessions.

Social capital is derived from the amount and quality of social connections that a student might have, which, in turn, influence quality of life and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman 1988; Loury, 1977). For high school students, student peer groups heavily influence
their social capital (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013). For instance, do their peers have the knowledge or desire to pursue higher education? For this dissertation, cultural capital and social capital are combined into a single domain signifying the presence or lack thereof of non-economic resources that facilitate mobility. This is especially crucial for Black and Latino students, the large majority of whom lack significant economic resources.

“Cultural capital” (CULT_CAPITAL “Count of cultural capital signifiers”) is a count variable created as a measure of the number of signifiers of objectified cultural capital the student owns or is present in her household. Whereas Bourdieu originally counted trappings of upper-class culture such as paintings, the ELS:2002 specifically focuses on resources that may be used to facilitate learning. The variables used for CULT_CAPITAL are all answered either “yes” or “no” by the respondent: BYS84A “Family has a daily newspaper,” BYS84B “Family has regularly received magazine,” BYS84C “Family has a computer,” BYS84D “Family has access to the Internet,” BYS84H “Family has more than 50 books,” and BYP72 “Computer has access to Internet.”

“Peer attitudes” (PEER_ATTITUDES “Student peer attitudes toward school and achievement”) is a scale created to measure a respondent’s perceptions of peers’ attitudes toward school and achievement. It has been demonstrated that peers often share similar values, and this is a crucial aspect of social capital. The variables used for PEER_ATTITUDES are all answered as either 1=“not important,” 2=“somewhat important,” or 3=“very important”: BYS90A “Important to friends to attend classes regularly,” BYS90B “Important to friends to study,” BYS90D “Important to friends to get good grades,” BYS90F “Important to friends to finish high school,” BYS90H “Important to friends to continue education past high school.”
“Peer dropouts BY” (BYS91 “Number of close friends who dropped out”) is a measure of the number of close friends to the respondent who have dropped out of school by the base year, which gives an indication of the shape and quality (with respect to pursuing higher education) of the student’s 10th grade social network. The variable does not indicate exact quantities: 1= “None of them,” 2= “Some of them,” 3= “Most of them,” or 4= “All of them.”

The variable “Peer dropouts F1” (F1S65A) measures “How many friends dropped out of high school” and was asked during the first follow-up (2004) when the respondent was in the 12th grade. The variable captures the total proportion of the respondent’s friends who dropped out during high school. Although a different scale, F1S65A, like BYS91, does not solicit exact quantities: 1= “None,” 2= “A few,” 3= “Some,” 4= “Most,” and 5= “All.”

“Peers want full time jobs” (F1S65B) indicates “How many friends plan to have full time jobs after high school.” It is a measure of a respondent’s peer group employment aspirations as of the 12th grade—when most students will enter either the labor market or post-secondary education or both. The question is worded in such a way that it does not indicate how far beyond high school the respondent believes her friends intend to have full time jobs. F1S65B does not solicit exact quantities: 1= “None,” 2= “A few,” 3= “Some,” 4= “Most,” and 5= “All.”

“Friends of different race” (SAME_FRIENDS) is a dummy variable where 0 indicates that the student has no friends of a different race, and 1 indicates that the student has at least one friend of a different race. In the context of this research, it might represent a dimension of the diversity and breadth of the respondent’s social network—a component of social capital. Social networks tend to be racially homogeneous and it has been suggested that segregated networks of minority students negatively affects their opportunities and life chances. All of the students in this research are Black or Latino—two groups highly segregated from whites but less segregated
from one another when located in the same areas. The measure does not indicate the race of the respondent’s friends, and thus it is impossible to determine if the numbers are inflated due to slippage in determining the race of Latino students or the whether or not the respondent considers “Latino” a racial group. The variable is derived from BYFRRACE, which is a measure of the number of a student’s friends of a different race.

Analytical Strategy

To examine the impact of demographic, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital level variables on the educational attainment of poor and non-poor Black and Latino students, this dissertation will employ three distinct levels of analysis. First, univariate analysis will be used to provide descriptive statistics of all the variables used in the study. Next, bivariate analysis will be used to determine the relationships between the dependent variable (F3ATTAINMENT) and each of the independent variables. The dependent variable in this study—“Highest level of education earned as of F3”—is a continuous variable, therefore, two bivariate tests will be used: T-tests and Pearson’s correlations. T-tests will be used to explore the relationship between the dependent variable and all the categorical independent variables with two categories (dummy variables): a student’s sex, whether or not a student lives in the South, whether or not a student’s school is located in an urban area, if a student’s neighborhood has a low rate of crime, if a student plans to attend a four-year college after high school, whether or not a student likes school, and whether or not a student has friends of a different race. Pearson’s correlations will be used to investigate the relationship between the highest level of education earned by the respondent as of the third follow-up and thirteen continuous independent variables. They include: student’s socioeconomic status, the percentage of a student’s school population eligible for free lunch, a student’s number of academic risk
factors, a student’s educational expectations, the degree to which a student’s expectations were fulfilled as of the third follow-up, a student’s parents’ desires for her educational attainment, a student’s plans for pursuing post-secondary education, the degree to which a student adheres to the achievement ideology, a student’s level of cultural capital, a student’s peer’s attitudes toward achievement, the number of student’s friends who had dropped out by the base year (10th grade), the number of a student’s friends who dropped out by the first follow-up (12th grade), and the number of the student’s peers who want full time jobs after high school.

Following the univariate and bivariate analyses, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression tests which independent variables are best able to predict a student’s educational attainment as of the third follow-up. Three hierarchical models are used for the regression.

Model I examines the impact of the demographic variables on a student’s educational attainment as of the third follow-up. It includes student sex, region, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, percent of a student’s school qualifying for free lunch, the level of a student’s neighborhood crime, and a student’s number of academic risk factors. For this research, such demographic information is important for determining how the educational attainment for Black and Latino students may vary by different groupings and the degree to which the variance is aligned along particular structured aspects of the contemporary social landscape. Previous work has shown, for instance, that socioeconomic status is an important predictor of educational attainment. As well, the number of academic risk factors attributed to students (single parent household, both parents without high school diploma, repeated at least one grade, etc.) is known to have deleterious effects on future educational attainment.

Model II examines the impact of aspiration and achievement ideology variables on the educational attainment of Black and Latino respondents by the third follow-up. A great deal of
contemporary research on the educational attainment of minority high school students has focused on student aspirations and the degree to which Black and Latino youth have embraced or rejected the “mainstream” value that hard work in school results in enhanced life chances and social mobility. Fordham and Ogbu’s work on what they consider an “oppositional culture” of involuntary minorities against the mainstream achievement ideology is central to this debate. Further, Black students’ stated aspirations are often incommensurate with their actual performance. In other words, Black students, rather than rejecting education, have demonstrated a deep belief in the promise of education to change their condition—what Michael Dumas calls “the Black educational imagination.” At the same time, Black and Latino students lag well behind their white counterparts in academic achievement. Whereas one could argue that the lower attainment by minority students is the result of direct and institutional discrimination, the effects of that discrimination must be considered when evaluating minority students’ everyday approach to school.

Model III focuses on the impact of socio-cultural factors on the future educational attainment of the Black and Latino respondents. These factors are broken into two forms of non-economic capital—cultural and social capital—as explored in the educational discourse inspired by the research of Pierre Bourdieu and Charles Coleman. Scholars have long debated the consequences of the lack of middle-class, white cultural capital on the life chances of poor and working-class minority youth. On the one hand, a simple lack of cultural exposure may be of consequence. However, a working-class habitus, erecting an alternative framework of cultural capital from the mainstream, may be at work among lower socioeconomic groups. This study focuses on the former scenario through Black and Latino students’ possession of objectified
cultural capital. Certainly, material cultural resources in the home can be imagined to influence a student’s educational attainment.

Social capital, for this dissertation, is explored through the prism of peer attitudes and perspectives on education (see Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; MacLeod, 2009). A student’s peer group is often very influential in his decision-making. But beyond simple peer influence, the quality of a student’s social network might facilitate smooth or rough transitions beyond high school. For instance, a student who knows others with insight into college admissions processes or standardized test preparation is better positioned to enter college than someone who does not have such resources in his social network. For Black and Latino students, college enrollment is considerably lower than for their white counterparts. How does this relative lack of social capital manifest itself in educational attainment beyond high school?

Since the 1960s, the proportion of African Americans entering college has increased considerably, up to nearly 26% in 1970 (Landry, 1987). By 2012, the overall number of Blacks holding college degrees had topped 4.6 million, though the proportion of the Black population had declined to about 20%. In 2012, about 2.4 million Latinos and 1.7 million Blacks were enrolled in college, 33% of all college students. In light of the changing socioeconomic profiles of Blacks and Latinos, each model will be examined across economic class (Models I – III) and separately for poor Black and Latino students (Models IV – VI) and non-poor Black and Latino students. Splitting the data by class reveals how educational attainment differs for poor and non-poor Black and Latino students as well as identifies factors that may be improve attainment for poor students. Further, such delineation allows us to explore how aspects of the race versus class debate are played out among non-poor minorities.
The previous chapter discussed a series of hypotheses in each domain. To test those hypotheses, OLS regression will determine the relative impact of the independent variables within each domain on the educational attainment of the Black and Latino students ten years beyond their sophomore year of high school. The hypotheses include:

- Female Black and Latino students will have higher educational attainment than their male counterparts by the third follow-up.
- Socioeconomic status will have a significant positive impact on the educational attainment of Black and Latino students.
- Compounded academic risk factors will be a strong predictor of educational attainment among Black and Latino students.
- Student expectations and plans to attend post-secondary education will be significant predictors of educational attainment among non-poor Black and Latino students.
- Cultural capital will be a strong predictor of educational attainment among students.
- Peer dropout rates during the base year will be a significant predictor of educational attainment for the Black and Latino students.

The goal of this dissertation is to explore the relative impact of demographics, aspirations and achievement ideology variables, and socio-cultural variables on the educational attainment of Black and Latino students. The following chapter will present the results of OLS regressions that explore the ways in which the variables outlined above interact to predict the educational attainment of Black and Latino students.
Chapter Four: Results

This chapter asks: How do demographics, aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital variables affect the future (10 years later) education attainment of 10th grade Black and Latino students? The analysis was conducted in three distinct stages. First, descriptive statistics were generated to characterize the sample of Black and Latino students. Second, bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the empirical relationships among the variables. Finally, OLS regression was used to explore the relative impact of 20 independent variables on the dependent variable of student education attainment ten years after the base year. Three hierarchical regression models were created, and the independent variables were grouped into three domains: demographic, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital variables. Regression analysis was performed for the entire sample of Black and Latino students (Models I through III), for poor Black and Latino students only (Models IV through VI), and for non-poor Black and Latino students only (Models VII through IX).

Univariate Analysis

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics of means, standard deviations, ranges, and descriptions of variables for the entire sample of Black and Latino students in this study. The table allows for the univariate analysis of the distribution of single variables. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the 10th grade Black and Latino student population used for analysis in this study.

Dependent Variable: Highest Education Attainment

The dependent variable, highest education attainment (n = 3,311) runs from 1 to 10. The mean of 3.85 indicates that on average, Black and Latino students’ 10th year education attainment is toward the lower end of the range—signifying relatively low education attainment.
A standard deviation of 1.705 indicates that most students in the sample are relatively close to the mean.

**Independent Variables**

I selected 20 independent variables for analysis in this study, grouped into three domains: demographic, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital variables.

**Demographic Variables**

After reviewing the literature on student, school, and neighborhood level factors influencing future education attainment, I chose seven variables to measure demographic characteristics for the Black and Latino students.

The range for the dummy variable created for student gender runs from 0 to 1. The mean for females is .504, indicating a near even distribution of female to male students in the entire sample of Black and Latino students (N = 4,221).

The range of the dummy variable created for whether or not the student is from the South also runs from 0 to 1. The mean indicates that the students from the South make up 45.2% of the sample.

The range of the dummy variable created to indicate whether or not the student respondent’s school is located in an urban area runs from 0 to 1. The mean for school urbanicity is .476, which means that 47.6% — nearly half—of the Black and Latino student respondents attend school in urban areas.

Student socioeconomic status is a composite variable with a range of -2 to 2. The mean of -.3 tells us that the average student in the sample is slightly below the average SES; the standard deviation of .715 indicates that there is a relatively wide distribution of SES among the student respondents.
“Percent free lunch” is a measure of school SES whereby the proportion of 10th grade students in the school who qualify for free or reduced price lunch is a proxy for the proportion of students who are poor. The mean of 4.16 indicates that, on average, the student respondents attended schools at which 21-30% of 10th graders received free or reduced lunch. The standard deviation of 2.039 shows that the distribution of school SES is quite wide.

A dummy variable (Range = 0 to 1) was created to indicate the proportion of student respondents from neighborhoods with low levels of crime. On average, 40.8% of the student respondents live in low crime neighborhoods. The standard deviation of .496 shows that there is considerable variation in whether or not the student respondents lived in low crime neighborhoods.

“Academic risk factors” is a count variable created to quantify the number of demonstrated risk factors threatening the respondents” academic achievement. The range is 0 to 5 where 5 indicates that the student respondent had five or more academic risk factors and 0 means that the respondent had no academic risk factors. Academic risk factors include: (1) comes from a single family household, (2) neither parent has high school diploma, (3) has a sibling who has dropped out of school, (4) has changed school at least twice (not including grade promotions), (5) has repeated at least one grade, and (6) comes from a family with poverty level income.

Aspirations and Achievement Ideology Variables

After reviewing the literature on the impact of student aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology, I selected seven variables to measure the influence of such factors on the educational attainment of Black and Latino youths. Much scholarly and popular sentiment has been poured into the notion that the educational achievement gap between Black and Latino
students and their white counterparts is either caused or exacerbated by minority students’ supposedly negative attitudes toward education. Therefore, this dissertation analyzed several indicators of Black and Latino students’ educational aspirations and their attitudes toward individual achievement.

“Plans four year school” is a dummy variable created to indicate whether or not the 10th grade student intends to attend a four year college. This assumes that the student also intends to graduate from high school. The range is 0 to 1 where 1 indicates that the respondent does intend to attend a four-year college and 0 indicates all other responses. The mean of .805 shows that 80.5% of Black and Latino 10th graders plan to attend four year colleges.

“Respondent’s expectations” is a measure of how far the student believes that she will get in school. The range is 1 to 7 with 1 signifying that the respondent does not plan to finish high school and 7 indicating that the respondent expects to finish a terminal post-graduate degree. The mean of 5.01 shows that the average respondent expected to “graduate from college” (four-year college). The standard deviation of 1.536 indicates a relatively narrow distribution of responses around the mean.

“Respondent’s fulfilled expectations” compares the respondent’s base year educational expectations with their actual educational achievement by the third follow-up (ten years later) to determine if their base year expectations had been met. The range of 1 to 5 indicates that the respondent (1) exceeded her base year expectations, (2) met his base year expectations exactly, (3) did not meet his base year expectations, (4) did not know her initial expectations, or (5) that the results were incomparable. The mean of 3.02 indicates that, on average, the respondents did not meet their base year educational expectations by the third follow-up.
“Parent’s desires” is a measure of the student’s parent’s desires for their children’s future educational attainment in the base year. It was taken from the ELS:2002 parent’s survey that was administered in the base year. The range of 1 to 7—representing “less than high school graduation” to “obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree”—indicates where parents would like to see their kids in the future. The mean of 5.54 indicates that, on average, parents wanted their children to obtain college degrees or higher. The standard deviation of 1.341 shows that parent’s desires hovered relatively close to the mean.

“Respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education” offers a measurement not only of whether or not the respondent intends to go to college but also the time frame in which the respondent expects to do so. The mean of 1.44 indicates that, on average, respondents intended to pursue post-secondary education immediately after high school. With a standard deviation of .902, the responses were packed close to the mean.

The achievement ideology, which asserts that social mobility and economic success are achieved through individual hard work and education, is a hegemonic idea within the United States. The concept is discussed at length in Marxist education literature, which tends to frame such beliefs as a form of false consciousness. There is considerable debate as to whether or not minority and poor youth reject the achievement ideology, the source of such attitudes, and how education and life chances are affected as a result. A scale composed of four base-year variables relating to the rewards of hard work was created to determine the proportion of Black and Latino 10th graders who adhere to the achievement ideology. The range of 1 to 4 indicates the degree to which the practices apply to the respondent. The mean of 2.719 shows that, on average, respondents do not reject the achievement ideology. The standard deviation of .802 indicates relatively broad distribution of responses around the mean.
“Respondent likes school” is a dummy variable created to indicate the proportion of Black and Latino 10th graders who do not dislike school. The range is 0 to 1 where 0 represents students who do not like school and 1 represents students who do like school. The mean of .914 shows that 91.4% of the respondents said that the do like school, and the small standard deviation of .280 shows that the responses are packed close to the mean.

**Sociocultural Capital Variables**

After reviewing the scholarly literature on cultural and social capital, I chose six variables to measure the influence of non-economic forms of capital on the future educational outcomes of Black and Latino students.

“Cultural capital” is a count variable created as a measure of the number of signifiers of objectified cultural capital the student owns or has in her household. The range is 0 to 6 signifiers of cultural capital. The mean of 3.139 indicates that respondents averaged about three signifiers of objectified cultural capital, but the standard deviation of 2.084 shows that respondent answers were widely distributed across the range.

Much popular attention is given to the effect of the quality of the student peer groups on educational outcomes. It is popularly believed that youth who hang out with the “wrong crowd” are negatively influenced. This may also be understood as a form of social capital, whereby a “positive” school peer group is a resource for facilitating upward social mobility and increased life chances.

“Peer attitudes” is a scale created from several variables assembled to determine a respondent’s assessment of her friends’ attitudes toward school and pursuing post-secondary education. The mean of 2.476 reveals that respondents believed their friends to think of school as “somewhat important” to “very important.” The standard deviation of .497 is quite small, and
thus few respondents reported that their friends believed that school and achievement was unimportant.

The variable measuring the number of the respondent’s close friends to drop out of school by the base year has a range of 1 to 4 representing none of them to all of them. The mean of 1.32 indicates that on average, the Black and Latino respondents had no close friends who had dropped out of school. The standard deviation of .576 shows that there is relatively small variance in their responses.

A variable was also created to measure the number of the respondent’s close friends who dropped out of school by the first follow-up survey in 2004, when respondents were in the 12th grade. Unlike the preceding variable, the range of 1 to 5 represents none of them to all of them. The added response category, however, makes direct comparisons more difficult. By the 12th grade, the mean is 1.80 indicating that on average the respondents had “a few” close friends to drop out. The standard deviation of .854 shows a distribution that remains close to the mean.

Respondents during the first follow-up (12th grade) were asked how many of their friends intended to have full-time jobs after high school. The range is 1 to 5, where 1 represents “none” and 5 represents “all.” The mean of 2.68 indicates that, on average, respondents believed that some of their friends planned to have full time jobs after graduation. The standard deviation of 1.143 highlights a wide distribution of responses and suggests that the question is unclear as to the time frame of “after high school.”

“Friends of a different race” is a dummy variable with a range of 0 to 1, where 0 means that a 10th grade respondent had no friends of a different race and 1 means that she had at least one friend of a different race. The mean of .507 indicates that 50.7% of the respondents had at
least one friend of a different race and the standard deviation of .500 reveals a near perfect
distribution of responses.
Table 4.1: Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, and Description of Variables for Respondents

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<td>FEMALE “Student is female”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>4237</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>SOUTH “School is in the south”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>4237</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>.499</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>URBAN “School is in urban setting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>4237</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.715</td>
<td>-2 - 2</td>
<td>BYSES1 “Socio-economic status composite, v.1”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent free lunch</td>
<td>3910</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>2.039</td>
<td>1 – 7</td>
<td>BY10FLP “Grade 10 percent free lunch-categorical”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low neighborhood crime</td>
<td>4237</td>
<td>.408</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BYA05 “Crime in students’ neighborhood”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic risk factors</td>
<td>3121</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>0 – 5</td>
<td>BYRISKFC “Number of academic risk factors in 10th grade”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspirations and Achievement Ideology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans four-year school</td>
<td>3277</td>
<td>.805</td>
<td>1.222</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BYS58 “Type of school plans to attend”</td>
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<tr>
<td>R’s expectations</td>
<td>3777</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.536</td>
<td>1 – 7</td>
<td>BYSTEXP “How far in school student thinks will get-composite”</td>
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<tr>
<td>R’s fulfilled expectations</td>
<td>3429</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>F3BYEDEEXPFF “Fulfillment of BY educational expectations as of F3”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.1 (cont): Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, and Description of Variables for Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Description: ELS Variable Name and Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s Desires</td>
<td>3515</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.341</td>
<td>1 – 7</td>
<td>BYP79 “How far in school wants 10th grader to go”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R plans on pursuing post-secondary</td>
<td>3585</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>BYS57 “Plans to continue education after high school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement ideology</td>
<td>2797</td>
<td>2.719</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td>1 – 4</td>
<td>ACHV_IDEOLOGY “Believes that hard work is the key to achievement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R likes school</td>
<td>4014</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BYS28 “How much likes school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Socio-cultural Capital</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
<td>4237</td>
<td>3.189</td>
<td>2.084</td>
<td>0 – 6</td>
<td>CULT_CAPITAL “Count of cultural capital signifiers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer attitudes</td>
<td>2634</td>
<td>2.476</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>1 – 3</td>
<td>PEER_ATTITUDES “Student peers’ attitudes toward school and achievement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer dropouts BY</td>
<td>2327</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>1 – 4</td>
<td>BYS91 “Number of close friends who dropped out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer dropouts F1</td>
<td>3748</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.858</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>F1S65A “How many friends dropped out of high school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers want full time jobs</td>
<td>3714</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.143</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>F1S65B “How many friends plan to have full-time job after high school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of a different race</td>
<td>3437</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>SAME_FRIENDS “Number of 10th grader’s friends of a different race”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 837

Note: All respondents are Black/African American and Latino/a. Sample was extracted from the Educational Longitudinal Study, 2002 (F1, 2004; F2, 2008; F3, 2012)
### Bivariate Analysis

Table 4.2 presents the results from T-tests performed on seven dummy variables to determine if their mean scores on the dependent variable “highest level of education earned as of F3” are significantly different. Bivariate analysis reveals the following about the students in the survey population.

“Female” appears to have had a significant impact on future educational attainment. Female students reported a higher education attainment by the third follow-up (N=4.05) than their male counterparts (N=3.63); this difference was significant at the .001 level.

“Urban” also appears to have had a significant impact on the highest education attainment in the third follow-up. Students who were from urban areas reported having higher education attainment (N=3.95) than their non-urban counterparts (N=3.75). This difference was significant at the .001 level.

“Low neighborhood crime” had a significant impact on the highest educational attainment in the third follow-up. Students from low-crime neighborhoods reported higher educational attainment (N=3.94) than students from neighborhoods without low crime (N=3.79). The difference was significant at the .01 level.

“Plans four year school” also had a significant impact on the respondents’ highest educational level by the third follow-up. Black and Latino 10th graders who planned to go to four-year colleges reported higher educational attainment (N=4.25) than Black and Latino students who did not plan to go to four-year colleges (N=3.23). That difference was significant at the .001 level.

“Respondent likes school” has a significant impact on the student’s highest educational level by the third follow-up. Respondents who liked school had a higher level of educational
attainment in the third follow-up (N=3.92) than respondents who did not like school (N=3.44). The difference is significant at the .001 level.

Finally, “friends of a different race” also had a significant impact on the respondents’ highest level of educational attainment by the third follow-up. Black and Latino students who had friends of a different race had a lower level of educational attainment in the third follow-up (N=3.62) than respondents who did not have friends of a different race (N=4.13), and that difference is significant at the .001 level.
### Table 4.2: Comparison of Means on 3\textsuperscript{rd} Follow-up Education Attainment by Dummy Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Highest Education Attainment by 3\textsuperscript{rd} Follow-Up (n\textsubscript{1} in parentheses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1773)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1524)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1519)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1792)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1602)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1709)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Neighborhood Crime</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.94**</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(1378)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1933)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plans Four Year School</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R likes school</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.92***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2871)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(278)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friends of a different race</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.62***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1358)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1337)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *p = .05  **p = .01  ***p = .001*
Table 4.3 presents the results from the Pearson’s correlations that were performed to determine whether the continuous independent variables have a statistically significant association with the dependent variable “highest level of education earned” as of the third follow-up. Correlation coefficients (Pearson’s $r$) indicate the degree of linear relationship that each continuous independent variable has with the dependent variable and with each other. Pearson’s correlations reveal the following in relation to the population of Black and Latino students in this study.

It is important that no two variables be exceedingly correlated with one another, lest they are inadvertently measuring the same underlying concepts. It is generally accepted that the correlation coefficient should not exceed +/- .400. Two correlations fit this criterion:

1. “Highest level of education earned as of third follow-up” is moderately negatively correlated with the “respondent’s fulfilled expectations” in the third follow-up (-.544). This relationship is significant at the .001 level.

2. “Socioeconomic status” is moderately positively correlated with “cultural capital” (.439), and that relationship is also significant at the .001 level. Although both correlations are above .400, neither is significantly higher. This suggests that although, for instance, one can see where a measure of cultural capital may be a proxy for socioeconomic status, they are apparently two distinct concepts deserving of their own unique consideration.

“Socioeconomic status” is either weakly positively or weakly negatively correlated with every other variable, and all of those relationships are significant at the .001 level. It is negatively correlated with “percent free lunch,” “academic risk factors,” “respondent’s fulfilled expectations,” “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary,” “peer dropouts during the base
year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” It has a weak positive association with “respondent’s expectations,” “parent’s desires,” “achievement ideology,” and “cultural capital.” As mentioned above, the relationship between “socioeconomic status” and “cultural capital” is approaching collinearity. All of those relationships are significant at the .001 level.

“Percent free lunch” has a weak positive correlation with “academic risk factors,” “respondent’s fulfilled expectations,” “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education,” “peer drop-outs in the base year,” “peer drop-outs by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” It has a weak negative correlation with “respondent’s expectations,” “parent’s desires,” “cultural capital,” and “peer attitudes.” All of those relationships are significant at the .001 level.

“Academic risk factors” has a relatively weak negative correlation with “respondent’s expectations,” “parent’s desires,” “achievement ideology,” and “peer attitudes.” The relationship between “academic risk factors” and “cultural capital” is unsurprisingly more moderate, suggesting that both are related to socioeconomic status. “Academic risk factors” has a weak positive relationship with “respondent’s fulfilled expectations,” “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education,” “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” All of these relationships—positive and negative—are significant at the .001 level.

“Respondent’s expectations” has a weak positive correlation with “achievement ideology,” “cultural capital,” and “peer attitudes.” It is moderately positively correlated with “parent’s desires,” and it has weak negative relationships with “respondent’s fulfilled expectations,” “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education,” “peer dropouts in the
base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” All are statistically significant at the .001 level.

“Respondent’s fulfilled expectations” is weakly negatively correlated with “parent’s desires,” “achievement ideology,” “cultural capital,” and “peer attitudes.” It has a weak positive correlation with “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education,” “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” All of these relationships are significant at the .001 level.

“Parent’s desires” has weak negative correlations with “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education,” “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” It has weak positive correlations with “achievement ideology,” “cultural capital,” and “peer attitudes.” All these relationships are significant at the .001 level.

“Respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary education” is weakly negatively correlated with “achievement ideology,” “cultural capital,” and “peer attitudes,” and it has a weak positive relationship with “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” As with the other relationships within the Pearson’s correlation, these relationships are significant at the .001 level.

“Achievement ideology” is weakly positively correlated with “cultural capital” and “peer attitudes,” and it has a weak negative correlation with “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.”

“Cultural capital” has a weak positive correlation with “peer attitudes,” and it has weak negative associations with “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” These are significant at the .001 level.
“Peer attitudes” has weak negative correlations with “peer dropouts in the base year,” “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.”

Expectedly, “peer dropouts in the base year” is weakly positively correlated with “peer dropouts by the first follow-up,” and “peers want full time jobs.” At .364, the relationship between base year peer dropouts and first follow-up peer dropouts is approaching the threshold for collinearity. However, the longitudinal nature of the study—that the two questions are aimed at assessing change between the 10th and 12th grades—excuses this artifact. All are significant at the .001 level.

“Peer dropouts by the first follow-up” is moderately positively associated with “peers want full time jobs,” and this relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level. This association is approaching collinearity, but it more strongly suggests the 12th graders’ maturing understandings of the post-high school labor market.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
<th>(11)</th>
<th>(12)</th>
<th>(13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Highest level of education earned as of F3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Socioeconomic status</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(3) Percent free lunch</td>
<td>-.224***</td>
<td>-.398***</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Academic risk factors</td>
<td>-.215***</td>
<td>-.387***</td>
<td>.261***</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) R’s expectations</td>
<td>.267***</td>
<td>.226***</td>
<td>-.105**</td>
<td>-.098***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) R’s fulfilled expectations</td>
<td>-.544***</td>
<td>-.194***</td>
<td>.147***</td>
<td>.153***</td>
<td>-.090***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Parent’s desires</td>
<td>.230***</td>
<td>.223***</td>
<td>-.072***</td>
<td>-.042***</td>
<td>.370***</td>
<td>-.102***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) R plans on pursuing post-secondary</td>
<td>-.201***</td>
<td>-.151***</td>
<td>.092***</td>
<td>.112***</td>
<td>-.214***</td>
<td>.107***</td>
<td>-.161***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(9) Achievement ideology</td>
<td>.178***</td>
<td>.067***</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.061***</td>
<td>.262***</td>
<td>-.086***</td>
<td>.163***</td>
<td>-.144***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Cultural capital</td>
<td>.237***</td>
<td>.439***</td>
<td>-.306***</td>
<td>-.342***</td>
<td>.138***</td>
<td>-.159***</td>
<td>.064***</td>
<td>-.121***</td>
<td>.060***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) Peer attitudes</td>
<td>.151***</td>
<td>.104***</td>
<td>-.078***</td>
<td>-.083***</td>
<td>.158***</td>
<td>-.099***</td>
<td>.097***</td>
<td>-.145***</td>
<td>.276***</td>
<td>-.092***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Peer dropouts BY</td>
<td>-.169***</td>
<td>-.158***</td>
<td>.156***</td>
<td>.178***</td>
<td>-.091***</td>
<td>.124***</td>
<td>-.081***</td>
<td>.067***</td>
<td>-.054***</td>
<td>-.132***</td>
<td>-.157***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Peer dropouts F1</td>
<td>-.236***</td>
<td>-.209***</td>
<td>.188***</td>
<td>.186***</td>
<td>-.117***</td>
<td>.140***</td>
<td>-.096***</td>
<td>.093***</td>
<td>-.098***</td>
<td>-.189***</td>
<td>-.202***</td>
<td>.364***</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Peers want full time jobs</td>
<td>-.315***</td>
<td>-.250***</td>
<td>.184***</td>
<td>.187***</td>
<td>-.208***</td>
<td>.175***</td>
<td>-.158***</td>
<td>.148***</td>
<td>-.100***</td>
<td>-.180***</td>
<td>-.172***</td>
<td>.211***</td>
<td>.390***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p = .05  **p = .01  ***p=.001
Multivariate Analysis

The primary goal of this dissertation is to examine the multivariate influence that a number of demographic, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital variables have on the future educational attainment of Black and Latino high school students. To accomplish this, OLS regression tests the relative power of selected independent variables in predicting the dependent variable of the highest educational attainment during the third follow-up survey, ten years after the base year.

Three hierarchical regression models are used in this analysis. Model I examines the impact of demographic variables on future educational attainment. These demographic variables can be used to characterize the Black and Latino respondents as well as their social environments. Model II includes aspirations and achievement ideology variables that represent measures derived from current discourses about Black and Latino student motivations to achieve and pursue college education as a route to upward mobility. Model III adds several sociocultural capital variables in representing the current academic debates on the impact of peer networks and non-economic forms of capital on the educational attainment of minority youth.

Each of these three models will be included in the regression analysis for the entire sample of Black and Latino students (Models I – III), for poor students only (Models IV – VI), and for non-poor students only (VII – IX).

Analysis and Interpretation of OLS Regression Models

Table 4.4 presents unstandardized regression coefficients for the dependent variable “Highest education attainment in 3rd follow-up.” The three models—Models I, II, and III—show the impact of demographic, aspirations and achievement, and sociocultural capital variables in predicting education attainment for all students in the sample, regardless of class status.
Table 4.4: OLS Regression on Highest Education Attainment in 3rd Follow-Up for Stratified Socioeconomic Groups (Betas in parentheses)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>All (N = 837)</th>
<th>Poor (N = 287)</th>
<th>Non-Poor (N = 550)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model I</td>
<td>Model II</td>
<td>Model III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.412***</td>
<td>.296**</td>
<td>.249*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.114)</td>
<td>(.080)</td>
<td>(.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>-.150</td>
<td>-.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-.020)</td>
<td>(-.041)</td>
<td>(-.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.051)</td>
<td>(.018)</td>
<td>(.019)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>.544***</td>
<td>.366***</td>
<td>.249**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.227)</td>
<td>(.153)</td>
<td>(.104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent free lunch</td>
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<td>(-.057)</td>
<td>(-.028)</td>
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<td>Low neighborhood crime</td>
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<td>.063</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.018)</td>
<td>(.014)</td>
<td>(.017)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic risk factors</td>
<td>-.198***</td>
<td>-.162**</td>
<td>-.124*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-.124)</td>
<td>(-.101)</td>
<td>(-.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations and Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans four year school</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-.263</td>
<td>-.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.049)</td>
<td>(.063)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R’s expectations</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.184**</td>
<td>.165**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.110)</td>
<td>(.099)</td>
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<tr>
<td>R’s fulfilled expectations</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-.889***</td>
<td>-.844***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-.346)</td>
<td>(-.328)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent’s desires</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.048)</td>
<td>(.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R plans on pursuing post-</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-.270***</td>
<td>-.241***</td>
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<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
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<td>(-.112)</td>
<td>(-.100)</td>
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<td>Achievement ideology</td>
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<td>.080</td>
<td>.061</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.034)</td>
<td>(.026)</td>
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<td>R likes school</td>
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<td>(.216)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
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Table 4.4 (cont): OLS Regression on Highest Education Attainment in 3rd Follow-Up for Stratified Socioeconomic Groups (Betas in parentheses)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>All (N = 837)</th>
<th>Poor (N = 287)</th>
<th>Non-Poor (N = 550)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model I</td>
<td>Model II</td>
<td>Model III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural Capital</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
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<td>.081*</td>
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<td>(.071)</td>
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<td>(.165)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer attitudes</td>
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<td>.129</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.029)</td>
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<td>(.070)</td>
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<td>Peer dropouts BY</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>-.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-.019)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-.050)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(-.151)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers want full time jobs</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-.219</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-.134)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(-.161)</td>
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<td>Friends of a different race</td>
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<td>-.097***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-.027)</td>
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<td>(-.038)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>5.935***</td>
<td>6.215***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.310</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

---

Information above is based on a listwise deletion of cases.

*p = .05

**p = .01

***p = .001
Demographic Variables

Models I, II, and III show significant gender differences in students’ third follow-up education attainment. The significance of the predictions, however, diminishes for each subsequent model. In Model I, female Black and Latino students are .412 units higher than their male counterparts, and this relationship was significant at the .001 level. Controlling for all the other variables in Model II, female students are .296 units higher than their male counterparts, and that relationship was significant at the .01 level. And in Model III, female students are .249 units higher than male students. This relationship is significant at the .05 level.

Models IV, V, and VI—Poor students—show no significant gender differences in the Black and Latino respondents’ third follow-up education attainment. For non-poor students (Models VII, VIII, and IX), however, there are significant gender differences in student respondents’ third-follow up education attainment. The significance of those predictions, though, diminishes as aspirations and achievement variables and sociocultural capital variables are added in subsequent models. Controlling for all the variables in Model VII, female respondents are .517 units higher than their male counterparts, and that relationship was significant at the .001 level. For Model VIII, female students are .318 units higher than male student respondents, and that relationship was significant at the .05 level. Finally, for Model IX, women are .293 units higher than their male counterparts on the dependent variable, and that relationship was significant at the .05 level. Unlike for all students or for non-poor students, the gender of poor Black and Latino students does not matter in predicting their future education attainment.
Student socioeconomic status (SES) is a significant predictor of education attainment in the third follow-up for the models representing the entire sample of Black and Latino students. Controlling for all variables in Model I, for every unit increase in SES, education attainment increases by .544 units, and that is significant at the .001 level. The Beta of .227 indicates that SES is the most powerful predictor of future education attainment of all the variables in Model I. Controlling for all the variables in Model II, for every unit increase in SES, education attainment increases by .366 units, significant at the .001 level. In Model III, for every unit increase in SES, student education attainment increases by .249 units. This relationship was significant at the .01 level.

Although students’ socioeconomic status is not a significant predictor of future education attainment for poor students (Models IV, V, and VI), it is a significant predictor for non-poor students. Within Model VII, for every unit increase in SES, third follow-up education attainment increases by .705 units, which is significant at the .001 level. The significance of that relationship diminishes with added variable domains. When controlling for all the other variables in Models VIII and XI, for every unit increase in SES, respondents’ future education attainment increases by .361 units and .306 units, respectively. Those relationships are both significant at the .05 level.

“Academic risk factors” is a significant predictor of students’ future education attainment; the significance, however, diminishes in subsequent models of the entire sample. In Model I, for every unit decrease in the number of academic risk factors that the student has in the base year, future education attainment increases by .198 units, and that is significant at the .001 level. In Model II, for every unit decrease in the number of academic risk factors in the base year, the future education attainment increases by .162
units, which is significant at the .01 level. For Model III, for every unity decrease in the number of academic risk factors in the base year, the future education attainment increases by .124 units. That relationship is significant at the .05 level.

For poor Black and Latino students, “academic risk factors” are a significant predictor of third follow-up education attainment until sociocultural capital variables are controlled for (Model VI), at which point the relationship loses significance. For Models IV and V, controlling for all the other variables in the model, for every unit decrease in the number of academic risk factors in the base year, the future education attainment increases by .262 units and .214 units, respectively. Both of those relationships are significant at the .01 level.

The number of academic risk factors in the base year is a significant predictor of future education attainment for non-poor Black and Latino students when controlling only for demographic variables (Model VII). That significance disappears in subsequent models for non-poor students. For every unit decrease in the number of academic risk factors in Model VII future education attainment increases by .186 units. This relationship was significant at the .05 level. For Black and Latino students base year academic risk factors decrease the education attainment for poor students but generally not for non-poor students.

Neither the respondents’ region, urbanicity, the percentage of students in the respondents’ schools eligible for free lunch, nor student residence in a low crime neighborhood were significant predictors of education attainment in the third follow-up within any of the three models.
Aspirations and Achievement Ideology Variables

Whether respondents plan to attend a four-year college is a significant predictor of future education attainment only for non-poor Black and Latino students. It is not a predictor of future education attainment for the sample overall or for poor students. For Models VIII and IX, Black and Latino students who report wanting to attend a four-year college were oddly .730 and .776 units lower on the dependent variable than students who did not plan to attend four-year colleges upon high school graduation, which may reflect overly lofty goals for large numbers of non-poor Black and Latino students. These relationships were both significant at the .01 level. Planning to attend a four-year school is not a significant predictor of future education attainment for poor Black and Latino students. It suggests that poverty makes such goals unpredictable for these students.

Black and Latino students’ base-year expectations for education attainment is an important predictor of education attainment by the third follow-up. Controlling for the other variables in Models II and III, for every unit increase in the students’ expectations, future education attainment increases by .184 units and .165 units for each model, respectively. Those relationships are significant at the .01 level.

For poor students, too, base-year expectations for education attainment are an important predictor for education attainment in the third follow-up. Within Models V and VI, for every unit increase in poor students’ expectations, third follow-up education attainment increases by .248 units and .252 units, in each of the models. The results are significant at the .01 level.
Likewise, for non-poor students, base year expectations is an important predictor for actual future education attainment. In Models VIII and IX, for every unit increase in non-poor Black and Latino students’ expectations, future education attainment increases by .178 (significant at the .01 level) units and .158 units (significant at the .05 level), respectively.

Student-fulfilled expectations is a robust and significant predictor of educational attainment by the third follow-up. This is the case generally but also for poor and non-poor Black and Latino students. Controlling for the other variables in Models II and III, V and VI, and VIII and XI, for every unit decrease in the respondents’ fulfilled expectations for how far think they will get, future education attainment increases .889 units, .844 units, .568 units, .474 units, 1.109 units, and 1.093 units for each model, respectively. All of these relationships are significant at the .001 level. Betas of -.346 (Model II), -.328 (Model III), -.251 (Model V), -.210 (Model VI), -.419 (Model VIII), and -.413 (Model XI) show that respondents’ fulfilled expectations are the most powerful predictor of third follow-up education attainment or all models. It should be noted again, however, that the Pearson’s correlation indicated that the respondents’ fulfilled expectations and third follow-up education attainment approach collinearity (-.544), and thus the robustness of the respondent’s fulfilled expectations should be judged accordingly.

For non-poor Black and Latino students, parent desires in the base year for how far they will get is a significant predictor of their third follow-up education attainment for Model VIII only. None of the other models is significant. In Model VIII, for every unit increase in parent desires, future education attainment increases by .148 units, which is
significant at the .05 level. Among non-poor students, however, when controlling for sociocultural capital variables, that relationship becomes insignificant.

The Black and Latino students’ base-year plans for pursuing post-secondary education is significant in predicting education attainment by the third follow-up for all models. For Models II and III, for every unit decrease in the respondents’ plans to pursue post-secondary education, education attainment by the third follow-up increases by .270 for Model II and .214 for Model III. Both relationships are significant at the .001 level. For poor Black and Latino students, controlling for all the other variables in Models V and VI, for every unit decrease in student plans to pursue post-secondary education, future education attainment increases by .246 units for Model V and .231 units for Model VI. These relationships are both significant at the .05 level. Finally, for non-poor Black and Latino students, when controlling for all the other variables in Models VIII and IX, for every unit decrease in student plans to pursue post-secondary education, future education attainment increases by .289 (significant at the .01 level) units and .251 units (significant at the .05 level), respectively.

Several variables within the domain are not significant predictors of Black and Latino students’ education attainment by the third follow-up. Respondent plans to attend four-year schools, parent desires for their kids, the number of signifiers of the achievement ideology, and whether respondents like school are all poor predictors of future education attainment for Black and Latino students.

**Sociocultural Capital Variables**

The number of the student signifiers of objectified cultural capital in the base year is a significant predictor of education attainment in the third follow-up. This is the case
for the sample overall and for poor respondents. There is no significant relationship, however, between the number of cultural capital signifiers and future education attainment for non-poor Black and Latino students. In accounting for all other variables in Model III, for every unit increase in cultural capital signifiers, student education attainment increases by .081 units. This relationship is significant at the .05 level. For Model VI, for every unit increase in the number of cultural capital signifiers for poor respondents, third-follow-up education attainment increases by .152 units, and that relationship is significant at the .01 level. This pattern indicates that having some forms of objectified cultural capital matters for education attainment for poor Black and Latino students, whereas it does not matter for their non-poor counterparts.

The number of the respondents’ friends who had dropped out of school by the first follow-up (12th grade) is a significant predictor of future education attainment for poor students only. In Model VI, for every unit decrease in “peer dropouts F1” third follow-up education attainment increased by .297 units, which is significant at the .01 level. This relationship did not exist for non-poor Black and Latino respondents, which indicates that higher socioeconomic status mitigates the influence of social student networks with regard to future education attainment.

The number of the student respondents’ friends who want full-time jobs after high school is not a significant predictor of future education attainment for respondents overall; it is, however, a significant predictor for both poor and non-poor Black and Latino students separately. When controlling for the other variables in Model VI, for every unit decrease in the number of the poor respondents’ peers who want full-time jobs after high school education attainment increases by .237 units, and that relationship was
significant at the .01 level. As well, when controlling for all the other variables in Model IX, for every unit decrease in the number of non-poor respondents’ peers who want full-time jobs after high school education attainment increases by .206 units. That relationship is also significant at the .01 level.

Having “friends of a different race” in the base year is a significant predictor of Black and Latino student education attainment by the third follow-up only for the entire sample, and is no longer significant when accounting for poor and non-poor students separately. Regarding Model III, students with friends of a different race are .097 units lower than students with only friends of the same race, and that relationship was significant at the .001 level.

Two of the variables chosen to measure the influence of peer group attitudes on education attainment are not significant predictors of the dependent variable in any of the models. When accounting for the other variables in Models III, VI, and IX, neither peer attitudes toward school nor peer dropouts in the base year are important predictors of future education attainment.

The adjusted $R^2$ for Model I was .118 indicating that the variables in the model explained 11.8% of the variance in highest education attainment in the third follow-up. The adjusted $R^2$ for Model II was .284, meaning that the added aspirations and achievement ideology variables boosted the explanatory power to 28.4% of the variance in future education attainment for the sample. The adjusted $R^2$ for Model III was .310, indicating that the variables in the model explained 31% of the variance in highest education attainment in the third follow-up. The F-tests for all three models are
significant at the .001 level, meaning that they are useful in predicting the dependent variable.

For poor students, the adjusted $R^2$ for Models IV, V, and VI are .088, .474, and .612. These indicate that the variables in Model IV explain 8.8% of the variance in the highest education attainment by the third follow-up. The variables in Model V explain 47.4% of the variance in the dependent variable for poor students, and the variables in Model VI explain 61.2% of the variance in the dependent variable. The F-tests for these models are all significant at the .001, .01, and .01 levels, showing that the models are highly dependable for predicting the highest education attainment for poor Black and Latino students.

For non-poor respondents, the adjusted $R^2$ for Models VII, VIII, and IX are .081, .427, and .458. Therefore, the variables in Model VII explain 8.1% of the variance in the highest education attainment by the third follow-up. Model VIII explains 42.7% of the variance in the dependent variable. Model IX explains 45.8% of the variance in the dependent variable. The F-tests for all the models for non-poor Black and Latino students are significant at the .001 level.

Summary of Results

A total of nine regression models are used to examine the strength of demographic level variables, aspirations and achievement ideology level variables, and sociocultural capital level variables in predicting the dependent variable of highest education attainment by the third follow-up for Black and Latino high school students. Several independent variables prove to be significant predictors of future education attainment, while notably some are not when comparing poor and non-poor students.
Briefly, neither gender nor socioeconomic status are significant predictors of the dependent variable for poor students. The influence of the number of academic risk factors appears to be mitigated by higher socioeconomic factors. The significance of the respondents’ fulfilled expectations by the third follow-up is robust across all nine models, and it is consistently the most powerful predictor in each model. Whether or not the respondent plans to attend a four-year school appears to be a significant predictor of future education attainment for non-poor students. Yet, unexpectedly, it is non-poor Black and Latino students who plan to attend four-year colleges who are less likely to do so when controlling for all the other variables in the models. The number of objectified cultural capital indicators is not a significant predictor of education attainment for non-poor respondents, suggesting that when one is not poor a lack of cultural capital does not present a barrier to future education attainment. Finally, perhaps counter-intuitively, respondents with friends of a different race did less well in future education attainment than their counterparts with only friends of the same race. The following chapter will develop these results in relation to the theoretical framework and relevant literature previously discussed in chapter two.
Chapter Five: Discussion

This dissertation employs the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis to examine the relative impact of various demographic and sociocultural variables on the future educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. The analysis went further by splitting the sample into socioeconomic cohorts, poor and non-poor, to compare the impact for the independent variables for different socioeconomic levels. As presented in chapter four, the results of this analysis indicate that multiple demographic and sociocultural variables are significant predictors of the future educational attainment of marginalized minority youth. Salient findings include the powerful effects of socioeconomic status for all but poor Black and Latino youth, the declining importance of academic risk factors as SES increases, and the irrelevance of high educational aspirations for poor marginalized minority students. The remainder of this chapter will discuss these findings as they relate to previous research. The findings will also be contextualized within the frameworks of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory, intersectionality theory, achievement ideology, and cultural capital theory.

Domains

A number of independent variables were selected for analysis in this dissertation based upon a review of the literature on the educational attainment of Black and Latino students, the achievement ideology, and social and cultural capital. These variables were grouped into three domains: demographics, aspirations and achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the findings regarding each of the domains with respect to the literature and the theoretical framework informing the study.
**Demographics**

I examined seven student demographic variables for this study: gender (“Female”), region (“South”), urbanicity (“Urban”), socioeconomic status, percent free lunch, neighborhood crime (low neighborhood crime), and academic risk factors. Generally, the findings in this study corroborate earlier research findings on the demographics of U.S. students, marginalized minority youth, and the educational outcomes for those groups.

Results from the current study show significant gender differences in the students’ third follow-up education attainment. Overall, female students report higher third follow-up attainment outcomes than their male counterparts. Once the sample is divided into poor and non-poor cohorts, however, we see that although the relationship remains for non-poor students, poor female students enjoy no significant educational attainment over their poor male students. The overall findings are aligned with previous literature, which has found that women have surpassed men in educational attainment in recent decades. Wells et al. (2011) noted several factors that contributed to women’s gains, including the significant influence of the expectations of the same-sex parent—mitigated by the likelihood that boys are less apt to have significant contact with their fathers than girls with their mothers. In addition, Wells et al. noted that women enjoy more social capital in the form of parental involvement and peer influence than boys. Finally, the authors call attention to significant gaps between educational expectations and attainment among African American students.

My findings are further reinforced by earlier data from the NCES (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010) that showed significant gender differences in educational
attainment for Black students, with Black girls enjoying higher expectations and attainment than Black boys. That research, however, did not show the important SES differences between marginalized minority boys and girls, with poverty erasing any significant attainment advantages that female students had over male students. The finding of gender differences is consistent with intersectional perspectives of gender and class that call attention to the unique structural position of poor Black women that renders them particularly vulnerable.

The findings from this dissertation indicate that Southern marginalized minority students are not different from their non-Southern counterparts in terms of third follow-up educational attainment. This finding is inconsistent with previous literature showing significant regional differences in educational attainment. In fact, earlier research highlighted that the South’s dubious distinction of being the region with the lowest educational attainment.

Several factors might account for the inconsistency of these findings. First, the current study aggregates all of the different regions outside of the South. Thus, differences between the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West may have reduced the degree to which the South is an educational attainment outlier. Second, the Educational Law Center’s (Baker, Sciarra, & Farrie, 2010) study was based on attainment as a factor of regional differences in school funding, where the lowest funding was found in the South and the West. Since this dissertation did not examine school funding, I am unable to conclude the degree to which attainment for Black and Latino students is linked significantly to region.
This dissertation finds no significant differences in third follow-up educational attainment between urban Black and Latino students and their non-urban counterparts; and it is consistent for both poor and non-poor respondents. This finding, however, is not corroborated by previous literature, which found significant educational attainment differences between urban, suburban, and rural students. In those studies, rural students tended to have lower educational outcomes than either urban or suburban students. Byun, Irvin, and Meece 2012(2012) framed this phenomenon as a rural deficit, highlighting factors such as social capital and school funding as important in explaining those differences.

In his study of urban contexts and educational outcomes, Sander (2006) observed that the advantage that urban students had over rural students, found in earlier and subsequent studies, tended to decline for older students. Whereas the current study only tracks educational outcomes and not student performance, Sander’s finding aligns well with my finding that urbanicity appears to hold no significant influence over educational attainment for the sample. Interestingly, Sander notes that his findings might be explained by the suburban and urban demographic shifts post-1960s. Black, Latino, and other minority groups became the majority of urban students while economic resources flowed toward whiter suburban and exurban areas. The differences in our findings might therefore be accounted for as (1) methodological differences or (2) demographic differences. In this dissertation, “urban” is coded as a nominal dummy variable whereby the student is either urban or not urban. No distinction is made between suburban and rural, as was done in earlier studies. Thus, increased suburban advantage observed by Sander may be offset by the rural lag observed by Byun, Irvin, and Meece. As well,
earlier studies did not appear to control for race while this dissertation looked at only Black and Latino students. In other words, it may be the case that the decline of heavily minority urban public schools is powerful enough to erase whatever gains minority students might enjoy in suburban white districts and the deficits experienced by rural Black and Latino students.

The current study finds that, overall, socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of third follow-up educational attainment and that it broadly supports earlier findings regarding the relationship between educational outcomes and SES. That said, Sirin’s meta-analysis (2005) found a slight decrease in the strength of the relationship between educational attainment and SES since White’s original 1982 analysis. Sirin attributed this decline to the fact that the representation of minority students in such studies had increased significantly since 1982. Therefore, whereas SES and educational outcomes were related, the effects of racial discrimination on the attainment prospects of higher SES minority students and that minority students tended to have lower SES overall indicates that race mitigates such direct relationships.

In this dissertation, with the sample split into poor and non-poor cohorts, SES is not a significant predictor of educational attainment for poor Black and Latino students, although it remains so for their non-poor counterparts. This suggests that, below a particular ceiling, small differences in SES are unimportant for marginalized minority students, whereas above that ceiling, SES differences matter considerably. This finding supports Sirin’s suggestion that race interacts with SES in potent ways to generate less predictable outcomes than those found by White (1982) and even the NCES’s recent report on The Condition of Education 2016.
This dissertation found no significant relationship between the percentage of the school that is eligible for free lunch (a measure of school poverty) and future educational attainment for Black and Latino students. This unexpected finding is broadly supported by research from Snyder and Musu-Gillette (2015) who pointed out that, owing to state rules that offer free lunch to immigrant kids, foster kids, and use per-school measures instead of per-student measures for eligibility, a significant number of students qualify for free lunch even though they are above the poverty line. In that way, access to free or reduced lunch is not a reliable measure of poverty (Cruse & Powers, 2006). These findings, however, only explain the non-alignment of individual SES for Black and Latino students and access to free and reduced lunch. They do not indicate whether a more direct measure of school poverty might reveal stronger relationships between school poverty and future educational attainment for Black and Latino students.

The current study finds no relationship between the student living in a low crime neighborhood and future educational attainment. As discussed in chapter two, the literature on the relationship between neighborhood crime and educational attainment is indirect. For instance, this study asked if a low crime environment is associated with increased future educational attainment (suggesting causality), whereas much of the literature on these matters assumes that neighborhood crime rates are influenced by improved educational environments, a popular refrain of liberal education reformers. My findings, however, run counter to the mainstream ideas of the growing body of scholarship on “neighborhood effects” (Sharkey et al., 2013). In experiments with former public housing residents, researchers have found that student test scores improved when their families were removed from high crime areas, and those findings supported
earlier research that isolated neighborhood crime rates as the primary factor linking neighborhood disadvantage and low graduation rates (Harding 2002, 2009, 2010).

That the findings of the current study run counter to earlier studies may be explained by the relatively subjective nature of the independent variable. Crime in students’ neighborhood was a school level variable determined by responses from school administrators and not by any formal statistics. Thus, administrator perceptions of their students’ neighborhoods likely vary considerably and are less reliable than crime data used in earlier research on neighborhood effects.

This dissertation finds that the number of student academic risk factors is negatively related to future educational attainment; however, the significance of that relationship diminishes when aspiration and achievement and then sociocultural capital variables are added to regression. Further, for poor Black and Latino students, higher numbers of academic risk factors decline to insignificance with the addition of sociocultural capital variables. For non-poor students in the sample, the addition of subsequent domains beyond demographics diminishes the significance of the relationship. Thus, although compounded academic risk factors matter overall for Black and Latino students’ future educational attainment, they matter much less for non-poor students than for their poor counterparts. The overall findings are certainly corroborated by the literature, where high levels of academic risk are associated with low educational attainment. Boxer, Goldstein, DeLorenzo, Savoy, and Mercado (2011) linked adolescents’ academic risk (low SES) to discrepancies between educational aspirations and expectations. In other words, Boxer et al. found that high risk students had lower educational aspirations, which led to low educational attainment. An earlier NCES study
(Finn & Owings, 2006), which outlined distinctions between behavioral risk factors (risk factors identified by engagement/disengagement in school) and academic risk factors (poor grades, failure to progress), also found that lower levels of academic and behavioral risk were associated with increased likelihood to of postsecondary educational attainment.

It is not clear from the literature why the significance of academic risk factors diminishes with subsequent models in the current study or why such relationships matter more for poor students than non-poor students. Finn and Owings note that although behavioral risk factors are related to educational outcomes, they appear to have only a weak relationship with employment attainment and income by age 26. This suggests that there are quite a few mitigating factors that may weaken any direct relationship between risk factors and educational outcomes.

**Aspirations and Achievement Ideology**

I chose seven variables to measure the effects of student aspirations and adherence to the achievement ideology on third follow-up educational attainment: “Plans four year school,” “respondent’s expectations,” respondent’s fulfilled expectations,” “parent’s desires,” “respondent plans on pursuing postsecondary,” “achievement ideology,” and “respondent likes school.” The findings for the aspirations and achievement ideology variables are generally unsurprising given the broad literature on the subjects.

The results from the current study indicate that whether or not Black and Latino students plan to attend four-year colleges upon high school completion is not a significant predictor of their future educational attainment except for non-poor students. Oddly, for
non-poor students a desire to go to four-year colleges is negatively associated with future educational attainment. This finding refutes earlier research that links student college aspirations directly to future educational and occupational outcomes (Johnson, 2000; Klar, 1982; MacLeod, 2009; Willis, 1981).

Although earlier studies did find that high aspirations were not strongly linked to high educational attainment, particularly for poor and minority youth (Dumas, 2007; Klar, 1982; MacLeod, 2009), those researchers did not find that college aspirations were negatively associated with educational attainment for any group. The differences may be partly explained by the fact that most high school students report college aspirations—80.5% of the sample in the current study; 51% of the sample in Klar’s study. Thus, as Klar observed, since most students say that they want to go to four-year colleges, but attainment rates do not reflect those desires, it suggests that there are mitigating factors that thwart students’ aspirations. MacLeod (1992) observed that the Black boys in his study had higher educational aspirations than their white counterparts and yet they were generally unable to translate their aspirations into higher educational outcomes than the white boys. Dumas (2007) identified this phenomenon as the “Black educational imagination” whereby a constituent component of African American culture is the belief that freedom comes through access to formal education. Thus African American students are likely to express faith and desire for high education even when they do not possess the material or social resources or the institutional access to follow through.

This dissertation found that Black and Latino student educational expectations in the base year significantly predicted their third follow-up educational attainment for the sample overall and for poor and non-poor cohorts. The finding supports earlier research
linking college expectations to aspirations to actually college attendance for minority youth. Johnson (2000) argued that college aspirations and college expectations were not the same concept despite that previous scholarship treated them as such. He found that expectations, a more concrete concept than aspirations, were linked together by a student’s sense of self-efficacy, and that construct was linked to college attendance.

In a similar vein, the current study finds that the measure of the alignment between a respondent’s base year educational expectations and third follow-up attainment is significantly related to third follow-up attainment for all the models. Simply put, the higher the third follow-up attainment, the better base-year expectations are at predicting that attainment. Once again, this finding supports Johnson’s (2000) conclusion that for minority youth, expectations is a strong predictor of college attendance. The current study, however, does not attempt to link respondent expectations or aspirations to any measure of self-efficacy.

The present study finds no significant relationship between the desire Black and Latino parents’ have for how far they want their children to go in school and the students’ actual third follow-up attainment, but there is a significant relationship for non-poor students before adding sociocultural capital variables into the regression (a weak significance of .148 at the .05 level for Model VIII). That parent desire is generally unrelated to Black and Latino students’ future educational attainment is supported by earlier research suggesting that educational attainment, particularly for poor and marginalized minority students, is largely determined by structural (Bowles and Gintis 1978, MacLeod 1998) and institutional (Emdin, 2015; Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2008; Willis, 1981) factors.
The variable “R plans on pursuing postsecondary” asks respondents if and when they plan on attending college. It significantly predicts third follow-up educational attainment for the sample of Black and Latino students across all the regression models, although the significance drops for both poor and non-poor cohorts. The variable might be best understood as a measure of student expectations rather than aspirations in that the respondent is being asked to present a time frame for beginning postsecondary education. The finding supports earlier research (Johnson, 2000; Klar, 1982) that suggests a relationship between aspirations and expectations. This runs counter, however, to the structural/institutional grounded research of Bowles and Gintis and MacLeod. Liberal scholars such as Kunjufu (1985), Noguera (2008), and Emdin (2015) suggest that institutional factors (institutional racism) work to undermine the relationship between expectations and educational attainment for Black and Latino students. Thus the current findings complicate such assertions. This may be due to Kunjufu’s and Emdin’s primary role as theorists who have based their conclusions on analyses of racial dynamics and social psychological factors before students actually pursue postsecondary education.

For this dissertation, achievement ideology is measured with a composite of four interrelated base-year variables. No relationship is found across all the regression models between acceptance of the achievement ideology in the base year and students’ future educational attainment. This finding is strongly supported by MacLeod (1998), who noted in his study of Black and white boys (the Brothers and the hallway hangers) that although the Brothers adhered firmly to the achievement ideology, they were no more likely to graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education than their white counterparts. For their part, the hallway hangers roundly rejected the achievement
ideology promoted by their school. All of the youths in MacLeod’s study were poor, and it is uncertain whether or not the white hallway hangers would have gone further had they embraced the achievement ideology. In the current study, all of the students are Black and Latino but not all of them are poor, suggesting that race trumps class in undermining the influence of the achievement ideology on educational outcomes. This somewhat refutes Bowles and Gintis’s (1976) suggestion that class is the primary factor in determining educational outcomes as even the educational attainment of non-poor Blacks and Latinos in the current study is predicted by an adherence to the achievement ideology.

Moreover, several studies found that although African American students tended to adhere strongly to the achievement ideology—once again harkening to Dumas’ “Black educational imagination”—many of these same students failed to demonstrate achievement oriented behaviors that would conceivably facilitate high educational attainment (Buttaro et al., 2010; Ford & Harris, 1996). In that way, adherence to the achievement ideology is not a good predictor of academic success for marginalized minority students.

This dissertation finds that whether or not the respondent reports liking school in the base year is unrelated to students’ future educational attainment. This broadly supports findings in Ford and Harris’s (1996) study of achievement ideology among gifted African American students. The researchers observed that virtually all the students in the study adhered to the achievement ideology and saw school as valuable, even though they did not always feel like going.
This dissertation combines two forms of non-economic forms of capital, social capital and cultural capital, into a single domain called sociocultural capital. The combination groups several variables that would measure the relative influence of non-economic social resources on the future educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. Such factors have disparate effects on respondents’ educational attainment.

In this study, owing to limitations of the ELS:2002 questionnaire, the cultural capital variable is a count variable of several objectified cultural capital signifiers. Bourdieu (1984) described objectified cultural capital as the sort of material possessions one owns—such as a particular type of automobile, artwork, or books—that signify “distinction.” This dissertation extends Bourdieu’s concept to include objects that may be used as cultural resources for creating educational advantage—books, computers and internet access, etc.—rather than simply distinction.

The current study found that cultural capital had a significant influence on respondents’ third follow-up educational attainment overall and for poor students. No significant relationship, however, is found for non-poor students. The overall finding corroborates findings from Attewell and Battle (1999), who found significant but uneven gains in educational outcomes linked to home computer ownership for minority students. That said, Attewell et al. (2003), as well as Beltran et al. (2006), Farlie (2012), and Farlie and Robinson (2013) later found that these resources tended to benefit higher SES students, whites, and boys more than their poorer and minority counterparts—an observation they attribute to as the “Sesame Street Effect.” The current study, however, found a significant positive relationship between objectified cultural capital and educational outcomes for poor Black and Latino students, while no such relationship is
observed among non-poor students. This discrepancy may be because earlier studies focused exclusively on home computer ownership and internet access, whereas this dissertation combines computer ownership with other forms of objectified cultural capital such as household books, magazines, and newspapers.

In his research on social capital, Coleman (1988) depicted social capital as a form of social support. This conceptualization builds on Glenn Loury’s earlier definition in which he focused on the impact of social positioning in enhancing or acquiring human capital. This dissertation framed social capital as the “quality” of one’s peer group with regard to being a “positive influence” on the respondents’ future educational outcomes.

The current study finds no significant relationship between peer attitudes toward school and achievement and a respondents’ third follow-up educational outcomes. This finding supports an earlier study by Chen (1997) in which she found that although adolescents were influenced by their peers in a number of ways, it was not clear that peers directly influenced students’ achievement outcomes. Further, the finding counters the longstanding educational mythos that Black students are influenced by peers to underachieve for fear of being perceived as “acting white” (see Fordham & Ogbu, 2008). Prudence Carter (2003) further criticizes the “acting white” thesis in her study of Black cultural capital by noting that while Black students do indeed accuse each other of acting white, this was less associated with educational values than with non-dominant cultural capital signifiers. My findings, however, run against the conclusions in a study by Hyde, Parkerson, Haertel, and Walberg (1981) who found a slight but consistent peer effect on educational outcomes, which were strongest in urban settings. These findings were small, however, and Chen (1997) suggests that such findings might be inflected with
causality bias in which kids engaging in the same activities as their friends are assumed to correlate directly with influence on achievement. In reality, there may be many mitigating factors that may produce such appearances.

This study, in addition, finds no significant relationship between the number of peer dropouts in the base year and future educational outcomes for the respondents across all the models. Again, Chen corroborates such findings that peers have no clear impact on their classmates’ future educational attainment. That said, for poor students, the current study observes a moderately significant relationship between the number of respondent friends who dropped out by the first follow-up (12th grade) and the respondents’ third follow-up educational attainment. This is consistent with findings from Hyde et al. (1981) and implies that there is indeed an effect with regard to poor students. My findings suggest that the 10th grade might be too early to ascertain the possible influence of poor dropouts since there are likely to be more of such peers later in a respondents’ high school career. Nevertheless, there is no strong evidence of causality, and the current study does not explore the topic.

The current research finds that the reported number of 12th grade peers (first follow-up) who want regular full-time jobs after high school is not significantly related to third follow-up educational attainment overall; however, there are significant relationships for both poor and non-poor students. In both cases, the more peers wanted full-time jobs after high school the lower respondents’ educational attainment. This may be due to the question being widely interpreted as suggesting a full-time job immediately after high school instead of postsecondary education. This finding is in line with other research implying that students seek to avoid perceived negative peer influences such as
not going to college after high school or teasing (Kaplan, 1999). Thus these findings refute suggestions, such as those from Chen (1997), that peer groups do not influence members’ educational outcomes. Such inconsistencies may be due to Chen’s observations of a younger cohort (10th graders) than those in the current study (12th graders.)

This dissertation finds that having friends of a different race in the base year is a significant predictor of third follow-up educational attainment for the entire sample. That relationship, however, does not hold for poor or non-poor cohorts. Put simply, Black and Latino students with friends of a different race have lower educational outcomes than those who have friends of the same race. This odd finding is supported indirectly by Prudence Carter’s (2003) work in which she notes the existence of non-dominant forms of cultural capital oriented toward in-group sociability and cultural norms. According to Carter, counter to conclusions drawn by “acting white” theorists such as Fordham and Ogbu (2008), Black peer groups do not necessarily adopt educationally backward oppositional cultures that reject academic achievement. Rather, minority students place a high value on educational achievement (Buttar, 2010; Dumas, 2007; MacLeod, 1998). This suggests that minority friendships may be more encouraging and educationally beneficial for Black and Latino students than white friendships.

**Theoretical Discussion**

A framework incorporating the insight of four major theoretical perspectives situates this study within the existing scholarly literature on the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. This study’s findings confirmed the singular importance of intersectionality theory—particularly with respect to the intersection of race and class in
the ways in which a number of variables demonstrated particularly classed outcomes within the sample consisting entirely of marginalized minority students. Results also aligned with social reproduction and achievement ideology theories regarding Black and Latino students’ attitudes toward school and educational attainment. The findings are less consistent with social and cultural capital theories insofar as the influence of peers and embodied cultural capital appears weak and inconsistent throughout all the variables and models. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory, however, seems relevant, but only tangentially so, to this study than formerly hypothesized. This is likely due to the general weakness of most of the demographic variables that are intended to demonstrate the effects of Black and Latino students’ social embeddedness on their educational outcomes. That is not to refute Bronfenbrenner’s groundbreaking bioecological theory; rather it is to say that this study does not engage the theory in such a way as to draw strong conclusions.

**Intersectionality Theory**

The central components of intersectionality theory explain that categorical inequalities such as gender, race, and class suggest that people exist at the intersections of those categories. For the sake of simplicity, one is not just Black or white but also male or female and poor or not poor. When institutions and other people do not recognize the multiple intersecting identities of individuals they fail to see the power dynamics at play in determining different life chances and circumstances. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s scholarship on intersectionality in legal spheres has shown that prevailing ways in which laws designed to ensure that protected groups are not discriminated against also tend to erase the specific circumstances of those how sit at unequal positions. For instance,
Crenshaw pointed out that although Blacks and women were protected groups, Black women often saw that they could only file complaints as either women as a class or Blacks as a class. There was no legal protection for “Black women” even if they might have been specifically discriminated against as Black women.

In this dissertation all of the students were Black and Latino, and, since no distinction was made in the research design between Blacks and Latinos, it is fully recognized that the unique, but overlapping social positions of those two groups has not been addressed. That said, since all of the students in the study are marginalized minorities, it is difficult to draw hard conclusions about their relationship to whites. Nevertheless, gender and socioeconomic status were found to interact in important ways. The findings suggest that for poor Black and Latino students, there is no significant relationship between gender and future educational attainment. However, for students overall and for non-poor students there is a significant relationship between gender and third follow-up educational attainment where girls had higher outcomes than boys. Thus, whatever advantages Black and Latino girls had over their male counterparts, they were undermined by poverty. That is not to suggest that poor boys did better than poor girls, rather it appears that poverty erases meaningful gender differences in educational attainment for the Black and Latino students: class matters for Black and Latino girls.

Overall, this dissertation has attempted to take an intersectional approach to the discussion of educational attainment among Black and Latino students by building into the study a strong consideration of socioeconomic status differences among the students. By splitting the cohort into poor and non-poor students-- rather than pretending that all marginalized minority students are poor, I have shown that the statistical relationships
seen or not seen for the entire sample are often present or disappear for different socioeconomic cohorts.

**Social and Cultural Capital Theory**

For pragmatic methodological purposes, social and cultural capital were combined in the current study into the domain sociocultural capital, which is meant to capture the interconnectedness of cultural capital and social capital as Bourdieu theorized them. For Bourdieu, the several forms of non-economic capital combine to create a durable framework of class privilege by which economic elites maintain their dominance over other groups. In this dissertation, due to limitations of the ELS:2002, cultural capital was measured only in its objectified state. Bourdieu defined objectified cultural capital as the form of cultural capital that exists in a material state, which, nevertheless, signifies class distinction, is transmittable, and can be used by its owner to solidify status. In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu’s objectified cultural capital takes the form of numbers of books owned or artwork owned, magazine and newspaper subscriptions, and even particular types of automobiles. The current study, concerned with the forms of objectified cultural capital that may influence school success, identified factors such as home computer ownership, internet access, number of books owned, and newspaper subscriptions. The relationship between educational attainment and objectified cultural capital was significant but relatively weak for the entire sample. It is strong among poor Black and Latino students, however, and there is no relationship for non-poor students. These findings are notable in that objectified cultural capital is not related to future educational attainment for non-poor students—an unexpected result. The suggestion from these findings is that cultural capital is not particularly necessary for educational
attainment for Black and Latino students who already have economic capital.

Conversely, even if a non-poor respondent has such objectified resources, it does not appear to be related to future educational attainment. For poor students, factors such as computer ownership and books in the home made a difference for their future educational attainment. In the context of cultural capital theory, the findings uphold the idea that non-economic resources might be helpful for social mobility, at least for poor Black and Latino students.

Coleman’s (1988) conceptualization of social capital—a form of capital that is not the possession of elites but rather it is defined by the quality of relationships and networks to which individuals have access—is used in the current study to frame the relationship between the quality of a respondent’s peer group and his future educational attainment. Despite much anecdotal evidence to suggest that peer group influences matter for educational attainment, particularly for Black and Latino youth, the data from this dissertation suggest considerably weaker relationships. This may be because peer groups are not necessarily an effective way of measuring social capital, or it may be the case that social capital overall is a poor predictor of educational attainment for Black and Latino youth who face challenges that are more complex than having the “right” peer influences.

Social Reproduction and Achievement Ideology

Social reproduction theory and achievement ideology in this study is used as a framework for understanding the connection between Black and Latino respondents’ acceptance or rejection of the achievement ideology and the reproduction of social structures. MacLeod (1998) and others have indicated that Black students are more likely
to accept the achievement ideology than their white counterparts, and yet they do not have higher educational attainment than their white counterparts. No comparison between marginalized minority youth and white youth is made in this dissertation; however, no significant relationship is found between the Black and Latino respondents’ acceptance of the achievement ideology and their future educational attainment. A couple of different explanations may explain this dilemma. A number of researchers suggest that various instances of racial discrimination and structural inequities thwart Black students’ lofty educational aspirations (Kunjufu, 1985; MacLeod, 1998; Noguera, 2008). On the other hand, others have pointed out marginalized minority students tend to voice a high level of educational aspirations that they are not necessarily equipped to attain (Dumas, 2007). For Dumas, this is not because Black students are lying about their aspirations or acceptance of the achievement ideology. Rather, it is because the history of African Americans’ struggle for educational equality has engendered a widespread belief that formal education is the key to social mobility and that Blacks’ access to formal educational institutions has resulted in a belief that Black freedom will be attained through integration into educational spaces that Dumas identifies as inherently anti-Black.

**Bioecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model situates Black and Latino students within the larger social contexts that would influence their future educational attainment. In a way, his framework describes the multiple social contexts, institutions, and structures that influence their development. As mentioned earlier, the current study does not employ a framework that truly tests the bioecological model. There are, however, several issues to
consider for how Bronfenbrenner’s framework might be used to better understand some of the research findings.

Bronfenbrenner identifies the system closest to the individual student as the “microsystem.” It consists of institutions and people that directly influence the child’s development and that the child directly interacts with—family, peers, school. In the current study, the number of academic risk factors that a respondent has in the 10th grade significantly predicts third follow-up educational attainment where more risk factors lower attainment. The ELS:2002 names specific risk factors that correspond with the student’s microsystem. For instance, growing up in a single parent household or having a sibling who has dropped out of school are associated with increased risk that the student will have low educational attainment. These are factors that Black and Latino students have little power over and yet they profoundly affect their development. Demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, which is a strong predictor of educational attainment overall and for non-poor students, offer insight into the degree to which students are unable to influence their own educational outcomes. Even the social contextualization of seemingly personal decisions about student aspirations are often influenced by frameworks that exist outside of the respondent. That said, this research finds strong predictive relationships between student educational aspirations and future attainment. These results, however, are generally mediated by socioeconomic status.

Overall, this dissertation depends heavily on microsystem level cultural variables but then checks how those outcomes play out for poor and non-poor Black and Latino students. It finds that socioeconomic status influenced such variables in broadly predictable ways. Socioeconomic status appears to be an important qualifier of
aspirations and achievement ideology variables. Put succinctly: Having material resources makes it easier for students to forego other characteristics that tend to be associated with future educational outcomes. The role of socioeconomic status appears to be under-theorized in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems model. Rather than class being understood as structure within itself, socioeconomic class is a sort of invisible hand that influences much the context in which children develop but is not explicitly conceived of as an overarching context in which people live. In that way, results of this study suggest the need for a stronger consideration of socioeconomic class in thinking about the development of children within his framework.

**Summary**

The goal of this study is to analyze several categories of variables hypothesized to influence the future educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. Further, the study seeks to determine the degree to which socioeconomic status interacts with those variables to produce different outcomes. Overall, findings indicate that a number of selected variables are significant predictors of the future educational attainment for Black and Latino students. Notably, although Black and Latino girls tend to have higher educational attainment than boys, this relationship disappears for poor students. Such a finding suggests the ways in which class, gender, and race intersect in ways that relegate poor minority women to the bottom, despite popular accounts of studious girls who have overtaken boys at the head of the class and in post-secondary educational attainment.

A number of findings, particularly those pertaining to aspirations and achievement ideology, were consistent with literature suggesting that student aspirations are important overall. Not surprisingly, given the literature, acceptance of achievement
ideology is not a significant predictor of future educational attainment for Black and Latino youth. Since the study does not compare Black and white youth, as MacLeod (1998) did, it is impossible to determine if such a relationship exists.

Finally, measures of sociocultural capital were hobbled by the choice of peer characteristics and objectified cultural capital variables. In the case of cultural capital in particular, the emphasis on objectified cultural capital as opposed to less tangible forms or even “Black cultural capital” (Carter 2003) appears to have limited the scope of the variable. The only two factors that appear to matter strongly are whether or not peers wanted full-time jobs after high school. Not surprisingly, there is a negative relationship between peers wanting a full-time job immediately after high school and future educational attainment. Also, it turns out that having friends of a different race is a strong predictor of future educational attainment but associated with lower educational attainment.

Findings from this research will contribute to the growing body of scholarship by providing insight into cultural factors that influence the educational attainment of Black and Latino students. The implications of the findings for education and social policy will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study provides an analysis of various demographic and sociocultural factors that affect marginalized minority students’ educational outcomes (maximum level of education) ten years after the initial data was collected. The preceding chapter discussed the findings of the study contextualized within the scholarly literature and theoretical framework. This concluding chapter consists of four major components: 1) The introduction will provide an overview of the dissertation, its research methods, and major findings that emerged. 2) Next, the limitations of the study will be discussed. 3) The implications of the research will then be explicated. 4) Finally, areas for future research will be suggested.

Introduction

This dissertation set out to examine the influence of various sociocultural and demographic factors on the future educational attainment of Black and Latino high school students. The educational outcomes of marginalized minority youth have been a major area of concern for scholars and public officials since Emancipation (see Du Bois, [1904] 2005; Moore, 2003; Washington, 1901). Such concerns, however, have only grown in the last half-century since African Americans and other marginalized groups have been afforded nominal equal access to educational institutions and public education resources (Dumas, 2007; Jencks, 1972). In more recent years, as individuals’ life chances and economic prosperity have become increasingly tied to educational attainment in a competitive global market and as popular discourses about race have largely rejected overt discrimination in favor of conservative and colorblind ideologies, public attention
has been fixated on the “racial achievement gap” between the educational outcomes of white youth and those of marginalized minority groups, principally Blacks and Latinos.

The notion of a racial achievement gap frames achieving racial equality not as a proxy for racial justice, per se, but as a proficiency measure set against a white standard. The question becomes: What can be done to bring minority students’ educational outcomes into parity with white students’ outcomes? Responses to the racial achievement gap question vary widely but can generally be mapped onto a political spectrum. At one end of the political spectrum, some scholars, such as conservative social scientists Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994), have suggested that significant proportions of several racial minority groups lack the cognitive ability to adequately compete with whites in educational attainment and the labor market. On the opposite far end, radical education scholars like Jean Anyon (1997) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) have cited the effects of racialized political economic structures to explain why educational outcomes for (particularly poor urban) Blacks persistently lag behind their white counterparts.

Between those two poles lies a wide liberal discourse on racial achievement gaps and the educational outcomes of marginalized minorities. The broad liberal discourse on the educational outcomes of marginalized minority youth encompasses a number of different amalgamations of the liberal consensus that past and present racial discrimination—through institutional mechanisms and individual actions— influence the cultures of marginalized minority groups in ways that undermine group members’ ability to compete effectively with whites in terms of educational outcomes. Thus, for many liberal scholars and policymakers, responses to the achievement gap range from theories
of social reproduction through sociocultural neglect (MacLeod, 2009) to efforts to identify and root out the “conspiracy to destroy Black boys” (Kunjufu, 1985) by focusing on how teachers and schools demoralize and “push out” marginalized minority students through neglect and criminalization to the ways that societal discrimination has engendered an “oppositional culture” among racially marginalized students in which they reject the tenets of the achievement ideology. The recent administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama made controversial overtures toward closing the achievement gap through school choice and standards based federal programs like “No Child Left Behind” and “Race to the Top,” while simultaneously castigating the supposed oppositional cultures of minority youth and promoting school-based mentoring initiatives such as My Brother’s Keeper.

On their face, sociocultural explanations for the educational attainment outcomes of minority youth are intuitive. They are upheld by long-accepted rationalizations of the achievement ideology that posit a positive and causal relationship between high student aspirations and high educational attainment in the future. For instance, during his 2004 Democratic National Convention speech, Senator Barack Obama gave credence to the assertion that Black youth often rejected high educational achievement for fear that they would be accused of “acting white.” For Obama, Black youths’ poor educational outcomes could be explained by their supposedly low aspirations and rejection of the achievement ideology.

Further, following the theories of social capital put forth by Coleman (1988) and cultural capital presented by Bourdieu (1990), it is widely accepted, particularly in education contexts, that poor educational outcomes are the result of sociocultural
resources that marginalized minority youth lacked, due to past and present
discrimination. Combined with a broad rejection of dominant white, middle-class,
cultural norms, minority youth are often regarded as mired in a cycle of structurally and
institutionally reinforced self-sabotage that begins with their rejection of school achievement.

Researchers have challenged deficit perspectives by showing that the major
assumption of the deficit perspective—that minority students for individual and
communal reasons reject educational achievement—lack evidence. MacLeod, in his
singularly important ethnography of poor Black and white boys’ engagement with the
achievement ideology, notes that the Black boys fully embraced the achievement
ideology and yet they had no better future prospects than their white counterparts who
had fully rejected such middle-class attitudes. Nevertheless, a significant concern
regarding much of the current research on educational outcomes of minority youth is the
lack of quantitative data that actually test the relative importance (or relevance) of
aspirations, achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital for determining the
educational attainment of marginalized minority youth. The immense persuasive power
of sociocultural deficit perspectives, embraced by liberals and conservatives, along with
the general dearth of quantitative studies testing the usefulness of such perspectives for
predicting the educational outcomes of Black and Latino youth, indicate that more
attention must be paid to factors that predict educational outcomes for those students
rather than rehashing politically useful assumptions and stereotypes. This dissertation
seeks to examine quantitatively the dominant sociocultural perspectives on Black and
Latino educational attainment to provide information that practitioners and education policymakers may use to produce better educational futures.

This dissertation uses data from a subset of Black and Latino tenth graders taken from a nationwide study of high school students, the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002). The ELS:2002 is a longitudinal survey of over 15,000 young people as they progress through high school and into post-secondary education and the workforce. The initial survey was conducted in over 750 high schools in the spring of 2002. It was succeeded by follow-up surveys in 2004, 2006, and 2012. The current study utilizes ELS:2002 base-year survey data and a measure of educational attainment from the 2012 follow-up survey. Only responses from the Black and Latino student respondents are used for this dissertation, which are combined to form a single dataset of marginalized minority respondents.

First, I conducted univariate analysis to profile the variables selected or created for the current study. Bivariate analysis then tested the character of the relationships between each independent variable in the several domains and the dependent variable, highest educational attainment by the third follow-up. Finally, I analyzed the relative predictive value of demographic and sociocultural variables on the educational attainment of Black and Latino students using OLS regression.

From there, the study sample was split into socioeconomic quintiles. The two lowest quintiles were designated as “poor” and the three highest quintiles were designated as “non-poor.” Three hierarchical regression models—“all,” “poor,” and “non-poor”—were created to explore the relative impact of the twenty independent variables, which were separated into three distinct domains: demographic, aspiration and
achievement ideology, and sociocultural capital variables. Beyond student demographics, two subsequent domains were created to test the actual predictive value of several liberal sociocultural theories on marginalized minority educational achievement. The relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables from the three domains was examined for the entire sample of Black and Latino students, poor Black and Latino students, and non-poor Black and Latino students. This analytic model allowed for comparisons to be made between each socioeconomic cohort and the entire study sample.

Findings from this research show that a number of different demographic and sociocultural variables from the base year significantly predict the level of educational attainment for the Black and Latino respondents in the third follow-up. The most powerful set of predictors of future educational attainment are the aspirations and achievement ideology variables. How far the respondents thought they would get in school is a robust predictor of future educational attainment, indicating that Black and Latino tenth graders—controlling for all other variables in the model and across socioeconomic cohorts—are well able to predict their future educational attainment. This finding is further strengthened by students’ actual fulfillment of their base year expectations by the third follow-up. It is the single most powerful predictor of their third follow up educational attainment, with regression coefficients approaching collinearity. Thus Black and Latino tenth graders, across all the models, were under no illusions regarding their own educational attainment possibilities and limitations. It was the case for poor Black and Latino respondents as well as their non-poor counterparts.
The sample of Black and Latino tenth graders is split into socioeconomic quintiles with the poorest two quintiles designated “poor” (N=287) and the richest two quintiles “non-poor” (N=550). Only three variables (“respondent’s expectations,” “respondent’s fulfilled expectations,” and “respondent plans on pursuing post-secondary”) are significant across all nine regression models. Thus some of the most important phenomena emerge only through a comparison of the two socioeconomic cohorts.

Looking at gender, for instance, overall, female respondents enjoy higher future educational attainment than their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with much popular commentary on Black and Latino girls, who have shown remarkable educational gains compared to their male counterparts in recent generations. But once poor and non-poor student outcomes are compared—although the familiar pattern remained for non-poor students—for poor students, gender did not predict future educational attainment. Whatever advantage female Black and Latino students have over males, it disappears for poor students in the sample. Thus gender differences in future educational attainment turn out to be a class phenomenon that is hidden by non-stratified data.

The aspiration to attend a four-year college only predicts future educational outcomes for non-poor students. In that way, simply aspiring to go to a traditional four-year college is insufficient to predict future educational attainment for Black and Latino students who lack significant economic resources. Such a finding refutes fashionable claims by neoliberal education reform advocates that simply motivating poor minority children to aspire to (four-year) college correlates with actual college attendance. Tellingly, neither embracing achievement ideology nor liking, or not, school predicts the future educational attainment for the Black and Latino students. These findings echo the
conclusions of MacLeod (2009), who noted that the Brothers’ enthusiastic embrace of achievement ideology—owing to Black intellectual history that preached racial uplift through formal education—was not linked to their educational outcomes. (Neither, therefore, was its rejection by the hallway hangers.) Rather, as asserted by materialist education scholars (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1982), the machinery of educational institutions serves to reproduce class categories rather than facilitate any significant degree of upward mobility.

The findings for the sociocultural capital variables—a domain created by combining objectified cultural capital variables with variables associated with social capital (peer group influences)—reveal similarly class stratified results and are more supportive of deficit perspective explanations. “Cultural capital” is a composite variable created from several measures of objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986) that are independently linked to class status and educational outcomes. This study finds that although cultural capital predicts future educational attainment for the entire sample of Black and Latino students and for the poor SES cohort, controlling for all other variables in the study, it is unable to predict educational attainment for non-poor students. The question is: Why does objectified cultural capital (owning an internet enabled home computer, books, and newspaper subscriptions) not predict future attainment for non-poor Black and Latino students as it did for poor students? One might imagine that a significant proportion of non-poor students own the forms of cultural capital outlined in this study. But for these marginalized minority students, their SES makes it so that possessing or not possessing cultural capital has no significant influence on their educational attainment, whereas the limited economic resources of the poor students
make possession of cultural capital more decisive regarding future educational attainment. Whereas neither peer attitudes toward school nor peer dropouts by the 10th grade (base year) significantly predict future educational attainment for marginalized minority students, having peer (“close friends”) dropouts by the 12th grade (first follow-up in 2004) predicts the educational attainment for poor Black and Latino students. Thus, overall, the impact of noneconomic forms of capital, operationalized in this study as peer influence and objectified cultural capital, indicates that poor Black and Latino students benefitted from such resources in the absence of economic capital.

Several overarching theories are utilized in the overall design of this dissertation, though they have varying degrees of influence over the interpretation of the findings and conclusions. Bronfenbrenner’s (1997 & 2007) bioecological systems theory serves as a framework for understanding that the Black and Latino students are rooted within a dynamic social environment. Thus factors emerging in the home environment or among peers are understood as connected to institutions and larger social, economic, and political systems beyond the perspective of individuals but not social scientists. Intersectionality theory as outlined in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), and other Black feminist scholars (Combahee River Collective, 2014 [1978]), is employed to flesh out a class and gender stratified marginalized minority sample. For the poor Black and Latino respondents, in particular, one is compelled to account for their poverty and race simultaneously in considering sociocultural factors popularly believed to influence future educational attainment. Finally, a constellation of social reproduction theories foreground the ways in which schools function as mechanisms for the reproduction of class and racial structures by way of ideological
reinforcement of the achievement ideology and meritocracy. In this way, the works of MacLeod (2009), Willis (1981), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), and Fordham and Ogbu (2008) are influential in framing a class and racialized social order that depends as much on the agency of marginalized individuals as on the institutional mechanisms that marginalizes them for its own reproduction.

The results from this study have several important implications for education and policy, and this is particularly true given recent (neo)liberal education reform efforts targeting urban schools populated by Black and Latino students. The findings raise questions that point to possible trajectories for future research. There are, however, a number of limitations uncovered during the research process. Those limitations will be addressed in the following section.

Limitations

This study has generated a number of important findings regarding the impact of aspirations, achievement ideology, and sociocultural factors on the educational outcomes of Black and Latino students. These include a number of findings that add to earlier research and challenge popular ideas about the factors that influence educational attainment outcomes for marginalized minority youth. That said, there are also a number of limitations that must be acknowledged to discuss the implications of the study. Those limitations also point the way toward future research. The following is a list of nine limitations that were noted throughout the unfolding of this research.
1. The study is only quantitative.

Perhaps the most apparent limitation of this study is that it is solely quantitative and thus offers a narrow view of the student subjects, the totality of circumstances that led to the educational attainment outcomes in the third follow-up, and the phenomenology of the Black and Latino students’ journeys from high school and into the labor force ten years later. The study was designed to test some of sociocultural factors frequently deployed to explain the educational outcomes of marginalized minorities, but the complexity of such circumstances are flattened—reduced to predictive probabilities—in such a way as to imply causality even against warnings and carefully used language throughout this dissertation. Causality is implied in two interconnected ways that lay the groundwork for some subsequent limitations: First, the limited number of independent variables suggests that they comprise the universe of factors that influence the future educational attainment of Black and Latino students when, in fact, they do not. Second, the longitudinal framework of the dissertation rests upon a chronological foundation that implies causality between independent variables and the dependent variable. Whereas quantitative analysis in itself does not undermine the findings, the conclusions that could be drawn from the findings are necessarily limited and beg for a mixed methods approach.

2. Does not fully acknowledge the role of systemic/institutionalized racism and victim-blaming discourses.

This dissertation set out to determine the impact of sociocultural factors on the future educational attainment of marginalized minority students. However, the study is limited in its theoretical and political impact because the overall focus on cultural
predictors of attainment implicitly embraces a familiar victim-blaming discourse intended
to mask the mechanisms of systemic/institutionalized racism. (For a foundational
explication of institutionalized racism, see Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton’s Black
Power: The Politics of Liberation, 1992) In his classic work on the ways in which
mainstream American thought justifies racial and economic inequality by depicting the
marginalized as culturally deprived and deviant, Blaming the Victim, William Ryan
(1971) explains that there exists a “folklore of cultural deprivation” that guides the
thinking of mainstream education researchers in their consideration of poor and minority
outcomes. This folklore (e.g., “Blacks don’t value education.”) typically lays the blame
on a vague history of racism and economic inequality that supposedly distorts the culture
of marginalized people, thus perpetuating their marginalization. By shifting the blame
away from contemporary structures of oppression and onto Black culture and a “culture
of poverty” (Lewis, 1966), researchers effectively engage in a victim-blaming discourse
that may lead to benign neglect, active persecution, or liberal reformist agendas aimed
not at fixing structures and institution but rather reforming or fixing their victims.
Especially since my study focuses exclusively on marginalized minority students,
inattention to the role of systemic/institutionalized racism in generating everything from
the racial achievement gap to the folklore of cultural deprivation on which the
independent variables are ultimately based, serves, however unintentionally, to justify
victim-blaming discourses.

3. The study utilizes an unweighted sample.

The original dataset of Black and Latino students taken from the ELS:2002 was
N=4237. After listwise deletion, the research sample was reduced to 837 students.
Though it is impossible to determine why many students failed to respond to all of the questions—resulting in 3,400 dropped cases—it is understood that those who did respond to all of the questions are the result of some unknown selection bias, thus calling into question the representativeness of the study sample. In order to remedy the unrepresentativeness of the study sample, weights should have been applied in order to reduce the effect of selection bias on the composition of the sample.

4. Combines Black and Latino students due to small sample size.

Originally, this project was intended to focus only on the future educational attainment of Black high school students because popular cultural deficit and oppositional culture theories used to explain educational outcomes have primarily been used to explain why Black students lag behind their white counterparts in educational outcomes. For instance, Fordham and Ogbu’s work popularized the term “acting white” in academic circles and focused on African American public school students in Washington, DC—a school district that was almost completely Black in 2008. The “acting white” thesis morphed into such a powerful moral panic largely because it seemed to provide an explanation for Black underperformance that laid the blame at the feet of Black children themselves and depicted their supposed rejection of academic achievement as harbinger of U. S. social decline. Since my intent was to test the predictive capacity of such popular theories—guided by a healthy dose of skepticism on my part—I took the sample of Black students from the ELS:2002. Unfortunately, for reasons that are unclear, a significant number of chosen variables were left unanswered by the Black respondents, and the total number of cases (N) was reduced to about 400 out of national sample of over 15,000 students. Using a preliminary T-test to compare the
mean of the Black respondents to that of the Latino respondents, I determined that Black
students were remarkably similar to Latino students, who had similarly low response
rates for the same set of independent variables. When combined into a grouping labeled
“marginalized minority students,” Black and Latino respondents yielded an acceptable N
of 837 individual cases.

Blacks and Latinos have similar socioeconomic and educational profiles (Aud et
al., 2010); however, the combination within this research masks important differences.
First, although both groups might be properly understood as “ethnoracial groups” (see
Alcoff, 2009; Goldberg, 2004) where the lines of race and ethnicity become blurred, the
history of the United States shows Black ethnic identity formation as an effect of policies
and practices of racial oppression and exclusion (Steinberg, 2007). The combination
within this research does not fully theorize how demographic and relational differences
related to geographic region, academic risk factors, employment rates, etc. maintain
potentially salient group differences.

5. Does not examine ethnic group and immigrant status differences among Black and
Latino students.

Neither Latinos nor Blacks are homogeneous groups. Latinos may hail from
many different countries and have different experiences and sociological profiles within
the United States. For instance, Mexican Latinos in the Southwest may have long
histories within United States and significant proportions identify as racially white. At
the same time, the largest group of undocumented immigrants is also from Mexico.
Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens, did not migrate to the mainland in large groups
until the mid-20th century and remain concentrated in the New York City metropolitan
area. Many Puerto Ricans are discriminated against in ways similar to African Americans. Cubans, who also migrated to the United States in the mid-20th Century, came largely as a result of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and tend to be politically conservative, are disproportionately middle class, and are concentrated in the Miami area.

Whereas most Black people are descendent from enslaved people in the South, since the liberalization of immigration policy in the 1960s, large numbers of Black people from the Caribbean and Africa have skewed the ethnic categories in large metropolitan areas such as New York City, South Florida (Miami, Tampa, Orlando) and even traditionally African American enclaves such as Atlanta. Black immigrants from African countries like Ghana and Nigeria tend to be middle class and are disproportionately better educated than the larger U.S. Black population. All of these intraracial ethnic differences make generalizations and research groupings fraught. This study does not account for ethnic distinctions and their attendant demographic difference by region and SES.

6. The study only uses marginalized minority students, and it makes no comparisons with whites.

As mentioned above, this study was originally intended to examine the educational outcomes for Black students and then, with Latino students, “marginalized minority” students. Thus, no comparison was made between the marginalized minority groups and white students. There is a strong tendency within much quantitative social research to design studies that depict whiteness and the characteristics of white subjects as normal or a control to which all other groups are compared for their degree of deviance. By depicting whiteness as a baseline, white people are centered as ideal sociological subjects in ways that perpetuate racist and ethnocentric narratives of
difference. By having no control group, however, the initial salience of researching the educational outcomes for the Black and Latino subjects is rendered less impactful. Moreover, the popular debates about the factors impacting the educational attainment of marginalized minority students are concerned with social equality as determined by parity—a measure that can only be obtained with the presence of a comparison group. That comparison group does not have to be white, however. The ELS:2002 oversampled Asian students to have enough respondents to make racial/ethnic comparisons (2002).

Also, by having no comparison group, the research design implies that the chosen independent variables are only issues for marginalized minority students since it is not deemed worth it to ask such questions of whites or other groups. This reinforces the problematic narrative of minority cultural deficiency that the study aims to test. Ultimately, since the study cannot escape from the popular liberal discourses of marginalized minority educational attainment, the conclusions are rendered impressionistic and less conclusive.

7. The study only looks at the United States.

This study was conducted using a dataset from a national study that is based entirely within the United States and thus the findings and conclusions are particular to the United States. That said, nominally integrated marginalized groups in other countries—notably the United Kingdom, France, and South Africa—face similar struggles over educational attainment that exacerbate inequality. Whereas the findings from this dissertation may allow for international comparisons, since the study focuses on the U.S. context, the present conclusions cannot be extended beyond the United States.

7. The study has only a minimal focus on gender.
Although gender is a significant factor in predicting educational attainment in this study, the current study is ill-equipped to allow for a fully intersectional (race, class, and gender) analysis of future educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. For instance, this dissertation, which centers its exploration on marginalized minority high school students, analyzes class by splitting the sample into SES quintiles and then comparing the regression outcomes for poor students with those of non-poor students. This method of analyzing multiple interactions between SES and the different independent variables has produced rich data that demonstrate that some of the findings are class stratified. The study, however, does not attend to gender in an equally robust manner and leaves no information regarding how gender and class interact with the other independent variables.

8. The study only looks at third follow-up educational attainment.

Another limitation of this research concerns the overall longitudinal design. The ELS:2002 is so far comprised of the base year survey in 2002 and three follow-up surveys in 2004, 2008, and 2012. This dissertation only examines variables from the base-year study and the third follow-up. The goal was to analyze the relative impact of the sociocultural variables, collected in the base year, on the student's' future educational attainment, as measured by the third follow-up dependent variable. By only analyzing the base year and third follow-up variables, this research does not explore the possible continuities between the two waves by looking at the 2004 and 2008 follow-up surveys. The ten-year gap in the data is a sort of black box within which it is impossible to determine how particular base-year variables actually influence the dependent variable or if the relationship is spurious or the result of intermediate factors. Without any
significant measures from the intermediate surveys, this study is forced to speculate on the unknown of the longitudinal regression models.

9. The study uses few school level variables and does not employ Hierarchical Linear Modeling to handle nested groups of variables.

Although it is commonly argued in research on educational outcomes of minority students that school-level factors such as class size and school funding (Jencks, 1972), teacher’s race (Emdin, 2015; Kunjufu, 1985), and disciplinary culture (Morris, 2016; Noguera, 2008) influence student achievement outcomes, the current study did not use school level variables to analyze the future educational attainment of the sample. By not employing school-level variables the study misses the opportunity for a potential fruitful comparison of the influence of student-level cultural factors versus those of school-level institutional factors in influencing marginalized minority student outcomes.

Additionally, including school-level variables would suggest the employment of Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) techniques as a method of measuring nested sets of independent variables where the individual marginalized minority student is located within an institution that also influences her future educational attainment. The inclusion of school-level variables and the utilization of HLM techniques for regression analysis would (1) allow for a more robust analysis of the predictors of educational outcomes and (2) would allow for a better utilization of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory as a dimension of my theoretical framework. HLM lends itself to the Ecological Systems Theory because the theory depicts the individual child’s development as nested within institutions such as schools.
10. The ELS:2002 starts with 10th graders and the design undermines the applicability of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory.

Since the ELS:2002 was initiated while respondents were in the tenth grade, the data for this research are limited to that time period. Although the ELS:2002 did collect some background data on the respondents, it was primarily focused on capturing the students from tenth grade and beyond. Although NCES currently conducts a national longitudinal study of children from kindergarten into the eighth grade, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Program, no early childhood data were collected for the ELS:2002 cohort. This makes the applicability of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory particularly inadequate in that there is very little early development life course data within the ELS:2002. This dissertation does not attempt to create a holistic life course model to which Bronfenbrenner’s theories can be reliably interpolated.

11. Cultural capital was operationalized in the current study differently than in the studies cited.

The current study used Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984, 1986) concept of cultural capital to frame sociocultural capital predictors of the respondents’ future educational attainment. However, due to data limitations in the ELS:2002, the variables selected to create the composite CULT_CAPITAL only measured the students’ cultural capital in its objectified state (e.g., home computer ownership, number of books owned). Other forms of cultural capital outlined by Bourdieu were not used. Regardless, several other studies of cultural capital and educational outcomes operationalized cultural capital differently than my research. For instance, Buttaro et al (2010), using the NELS:88 dataset, operationalize cultural capital in its embodied state (visits to museums) using signifiers
that were not available in the ELS:2002. Like Lareau (2003) and Lee & Bowen (2006), Carter (2003) also operationalized cultural capital in its embodied state, but she went further to theorize a non-dominant form of cultural capital utilized by African American high school students she labeled “black cultural capital.” The discrepancy between the way that the current study operationalized cultural capital (objectified) and that of earlier studies (embodied and non-dominant) limits the comparability of the different research projects. Further, since this dissertation looks only at marginalized minority students—a similar population to Carter—the focus on dominant (i.e., white, middle class) forms of cultural capital necessarily misses an opportunity to find value in the cultural practices of Black and Latino students and their communities.

The limitations of this study notwithstanding, this dissertation’s findings point toward implications for a number of different stakeholders at different levels of responsibility. These implications will be discussed in detail in the following section.

**Implications**

Education discourse and policy in the United States in recent decades has become increasingly imbued with the neoliberal ethos of competition within a high-stakes global market for skills and talent. Policymakers and pundits have likewise become increasingly shrill in their claims that students in the United States are falling behind their international counterparts. While liberal pundits often cite the rising costs of postsecondary education as a major factor in the United States’ faltering status, and neoliberal reformers charge that “failing schools” and “bad teachers” are to blame, liberals and conservatives have tended to see eye-to-eye regarding the placement of marginalized minority groups—particularly Blacks—fit into such narratives of failure.
According to this consensus, there is a racial achievement gap between Black and Latino students on the one hand and white students on the other that has contributed mightily to the decline in U.S. standing. Though there are wide-ranging debates about the contours and causes of the racial achievement gap, the liberal narrative that students from marginalized minority groups tend to be mired in a range of sociocultural deficits that undermine their education achievement sits at the foundation of the discourse. The candidacy of Barack Obama arguably began in 2004 with a speech in which he offered an unqualified endorsement to the popular notion that Black children reject the achievement ideology for fear that they would be perceived by their peers as “acting white,” a contentious claim that nevertheless continues to enjoy widespread appeal. Obama’s Race to the Top initiative, a scheme that incentivizes states to adopt privatization-friendly policies, has been partly sold by the perception that charter school networks such as the Knowledge is Power Program, the Eagle Academy and the Harlem Children’s Zone school reform initiative have pioneered strategies for overcoming the supposed cultural deficits that hurt marginalized minority students (Dixon, 2013). In the past few years, in response to complaints that Obama had neglected Black communities, the administration has rolled out the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, which provides mentoring support to Black and Latino students in an effort to stave off the cultural deficits that curtail their educational prospects. The findings of this dissertation speak to these concerns in important ways by demonstrating overall that what looks like a racial achievement gap, widened by the cultural pathologies of marginalized minority students, is more associated with poverty and marginalization. These findings imply that while micro-level strategies for improving Black and Latino student future educational attainment might be effective,
the primary levers for change exist at the level of institutions and structures. This, of course, is not a new assertion, as many education scholars have noted, and yet it has been largely sidestepped by policymakers (Anyon, 1997; Jencks, 1972; Kozol, 2006). This dissertation adds to the body of education scholarship emphasizing the role of economic class and its correlates such as “academic risk factors” in predicting the educational attainment of Black and Latino students. That is not to say that nothing short of revolution can improve the prospects for marginalized minority youth; rather it is to say that micro level proposals and cultural reform initiatives are likely insufficient for what is necessary to close the racial wealth gap.

This study finds that whatever advantages Black and Latino girls enjoy over boys in educational attainment disappears for poor girls. It suggests that the much ballyhooed ascension of Black girls in recent years must be qualified and more attention must be paid to the challenges faced by poor Black girls, in particular. For instance, legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, has pushed for the inclusion of Black girls into Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper program and similar programs such as former New York City mayor, Michael R. Bloomberg’s Young Men’s Initiative (Crenshaw, 2017). Although neither program calls for large federal or local taxpayer expenditures, relying primarily on philanthropic donations, My Brother’s Keeper requires federal agencies to monitor outcomes of the initiative and make recommendations for improvement. Crenshaw notes that Black girls grow up in the same households and communities as Black boys and yet their problems are often overlooked because conventional attitudes identify the problems of Black boys as universal for the entire group. Such opinions, Crenshaw observed, ignore the intersecting structures that hurt Black girls uniquely because they are Black
and because they are girls and because they are poor. The findings of this study suggest that government initiatives must take more intersectional perspectives in crafting social improvement programs and policy for marginalized minority youth.

In her remarkable new book, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (2016), Monique W. Morris comes closer, calling attention to the ways in which poor Black girls are criminalized and “pushed out” of schools in gender-specific ways that occur in the shadow of the much discussed “school to prison pipeline” that affects Black boys. The book’s appendices offer extremely useful recommendations for helping parents and educators see poor Black girls’ vulnerabilities rather than their supposed insolence and “attitudes.” For parents, Morris counsels them to listen to their girls and to resist the temptation to side with teachers and principals in disputes. Parents must become genuine advocates for poor Black girls in schools that scholars have already pointed out are often hostile to Black children.

For educators, Morris notes that teachers and school administrators are often more concerned with policing Black girls’ gender presentations (dress codes, acting “lady-like”) than with their education or their actual safety. For instance, indiscreet sexual behavior may be a sign that the girl is being exploited sexually. Enforcement of dress codes or punishing bad attitudes, however, does not attend to the problem, but rather they suggest that the Black girl herself is the problem.

Overall, this dissertation research suggests that the sociocultural factors analyzed, taken alone, are misleading predictors of future educational attainment for Black and Latino youth. Rather, the findings generally demonstrated the salience of class for the respondents. With the exception of three aspirations and achievement ideology variables,
none of the significant independent variables are robust across all nine models. These findings imply that education administrators and policy makers must devise strategies to better support poor Black and Latino students while simultaneously improving their current economic conditions.

First, policymakers and administrators must reject moral panics about minority student behavior, peer groups, and attitudes toward education. This dissertation’s findings support previous scholarship that challenges popular perceptions that marginalized minority students reject the achievement ideology and education. Adherence to the achievement ideology and liking school are unrelated to Black and Latino respondents’ future educational attainment because so few marginalized minority students actually reject such basic tenets of American thought. Researchers have pointed out for quite a while that Black students tend to be more achievement oriented than their white counterparts (MacLeod, 2009) and that, owing to a history of struggle for access to education, they tend to embrace education as a principal route to Black freedom (Dumas, 2007). In her research on Black student culture in public schools, Carter (2005) observed that while Black students used the phrase “acting white” as a form of derision, the slur actually had nothing to do with academic achievement but rather was a signifier of having low Black cultural capital.

By eschewing moral panics about marginalized minority student behaviors and attitudes toward school, administrators and policymakers are then free to promote more clearheaded education policies that are not mired in cultural baggage. The current trend in education policy, however, involves school privatization plans aimed squarely at poor urban minority schools that do not improve educational prospects. In recent years,
education policy scholar and former George W. Bush ally, Diane Ravitch, has turned over a new leaf, rejecting neoliberal school choice and privatization schemes like Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Obama’s Race to the Top (Ravitch, 2016). Such initiatives are ostensibly designed to enforce school accountability, particularly for schools in poor, heavily minority districts, by incentivizing standardized test-based progress evaluation and punishing “failing schools” through closings. Closing traditional schools clears the way for privately run charter schools, which have not been proven to improve the educational outcomes for their students. Ravitch further observed that test-based teacher evaluations created perverse incentives to cheat the system, while NCLB pledges of “one hundred percent proficiency” led to fudged student evaluation numbers (Ravitch, 2016).

Overall, the findings in this study suggest that the best strategies for improving the educational attainment of Black and Latino students is to improve their economic prospects. Policymakers must therefore address the causes of economic inequality that undermine the educational prospects for marginalized minority students. Many researchers have demonstrated that educational inequality is perpetuated by residential segregation (Jencks, 1972; Kozol, 2006; Lewis-McCoy, 20014; Massey and Denton, 1993.). Wealthy, mostly white, suburban school districts often enjoy well-appointed schools and educational resources with high quality, well-paid teachers. Continued segregation through mortgage redlining practices, exclusionary zoning policies, and blatant racial discrimination against Blacks and Latinos in particular ensures, however, that marginalized minority groups remain clustered in overburdened districts with poor institutional infrastructures. State-level policymakers might outlaw exclusionary zoning
in their states while federal administrators could begin to enforce the 1968 Fair Housing Act, a policy that has largely been abandoned as regions have resegregated in the past 30 years to levels that preceded the passage of the 1968 law.

Finally, policymakers could improve the educational attainment for Black and Latino students by removing economic barriers to postsecondary education. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Senator Bernie Sanders proposed tuition-free public colleges and universities as a way to reduce the economic burden of college education. Such a plan, Sanders frequently pointed out, was neither new nor radical. The City University of New York was tuition-free until the mid-1970s while the University of California maintained free tuition into the 1980s. Many other countries also offer free public education to their citizens (Sanders 2016). Though derided by the Clinton campaign early on, Clinton relented and offered her own less ambitious plan that involved “debt-free” public college where students from households making below $125,000 would pay no tuition and free community college for everyone (Clinton, 2016). Both proposed plans would reduce the economic barrier to higher education for all students, including minority students.

Future Research

The limitations and the findings of this dissertation point the way toward more robust and finely crafted research concerning the issue of future educational attainment for marginalized minority students. The following proposals for future research projects will expand on the current study and take the findings in new and important directions.

The most apparent limitation for this dissertation is that it is entirely quantitative. To generate a more complete understanding of the impact of sociocultural factors on the
educational attainment of Black and Latino youth, more research that goes beyond second-hand survey data is necessary. John Creswell (2009) explains that mixed-methods research models that combine survey research with qualitative methods allow for a more robust picture of a particular social problem or phenomenon. In such a design, the researcher collects and analyzes initial data via survey and statistical methods. The findings from the initial survey can be used to guide the execution of a qualitative study of a subset of the survey sample. This dissertation may serve as a starting point for a more holistic study of the educational attainment of Black and Latino youth. Though it would be impossible to gain access to the actual ELS:2002 participants for an independent qualitative study, by conducting a series of in-depth interviews with Black and Latino high school students mirroring the subsequent follow-ups of the ELS:2002, a number of questions might be answered regarding why particular findings occur.

Addressing an important limitation in the current study, a future research agenda might embrace and expand upon Prudence Carter’s concept of black cultural capital. Although this dissertation found that access to objectified cultural capital predicted educational attainment for poor Black and Latino students, following Bourdieu (1986), it presented cultural capital as a universal and singular quality that one either possessed or lacked. A future project might further theorize the constituent elements of a “black cultural capital” and then ask, like the current study, the degree to which it predicts educational outcomes for marginalized minority students. Such an critique of prevailing modes of evaluating minority students has already been taken up or suggested by education theorists such as Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) Christopher Emdin (2015), Monique Morris (2016), and Pedro Noguera (2008), who have all noted that the cultural
knowledge and proclivities of marginalized minority youth are undervalued and even punished in mainstream educational settings.

The primary innovation of this dissertation is to compare the regressions for different SES cohorts, and by splitting the sample into poor and non-poor Black and Latino students, some variables contain notable class stratified elements while others are robust across all nine models. A significant and useful expansion of the current research could create a more intersectional analysis that captures the sociocultural influences on the educational attainment of students at multiple structural locations. Such a study must add white students from the ELS:2002 into the sample to compare white students with Black and Latino students. The “race” variable would be split into its several components and white and Black and Latino students would be added into the analytical model. The same process should be repeated for gender—adding male students and female students into the model. The result would be an analytical model with 21 regressions that allow the researchers to analyze the relative impact of sociocultural variables on the respondents’ future educational attainment with a much larger sample and then compare non-poor Black female students with their poor white males. Without attempting to create a hierarchy of oppression, such a study would better respect the insights of intersectionality theorists and provide a deeper account of the sociocultural factors influencing the educational attainment outcomes for respondents at a number of different social locations. Moreover, such a study would allow for a comparison of marginalized minority students with white students to create a study that speaks better to policy concerns about racial achievement gaps.
The current study was conducted in the midst of a presidential election in which the incumbent party, the Democrats, was defeated and the Republicans, under President Donald Trump, are emboldened to pursue an education policy agenda that will likely continue to promote the proliferation of charter schools and other schemes intended to foster school competition, teacher deprofessionalization and deunionization, and reduce state accountability for public education overall. Beyond her fondness for school vouchers, the new secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, does not appear to be ideologically at odds with her predecessors under Barack Obama. The current administration, however, has shown itself to be aggressively predictable in ways that promise to make the lives and educational futures of Black and Latino young adults more precarious. The current study does not address the political economic and structural determinants of educational attainment beyond high school. For instance, it is unlikely that the new administration will address issues such as student debt reduction or forgiveness or free public college on its own. For increasingly higher proportions of the population, postsecondary education has become prohibitively expensive. This does not necessarily mean that people should not attend college. It does suggest, however, that their level of educational attainment will be affected due to their inability to complete traditional degree programs. Future research will need to account for the changing structure of education, the declining returns on educational investment, and the increasing difficulty for large swaths of the population to access quality education in the United States. As educational attainment, still a prerequisite for economic stability and prosperity, becomes increasingly difficult for many Americans, current debates about culture, race, and educational attainment that this dissertation is based on may decline in
relevance. Recent social movements against growing inequality and increasing precariouslyness such as Occupy Wall Street, the Movement for Black Lives, and even the Tea Party have already brought class and race politics to the forefront in shocking and polarizing ways. In that way, the class stratified findings of this dissertation, along with the somewhat weak attachment of sociocultural variables to education outcomes for Black and Latino respondents may threaten a not-too-far-off future in which poor educational outcomes need not even be rationalized by claims that particular racial and ethnic groups simply cannot cut it due to their broken cultures.
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