

APPROVAL PAGE

A TEN-YEAR ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS
ON FUTURE PLANS OF LOW-INCOME SOUTHERN YOUTH

This thesis has been approved by the following
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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

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Greensboro
1980

June 20, 1980
Date of Acceptance by Committee

June 20, 1980
Date of Final Oral Examination

Approved by

Sarah M. Shoffner
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STROUPE, ANITA FIELDEN. A Ten-year Analysis of the Influence of Significant Others on Future Plans of Low-income Southern Youth. (1980). Directed by: Dr. Sarah M. Shoffner. Pp. 88

This study examined whom lower socioeconomic young people reported as the most influential people in their general future plans and in future educational and occupational matters. The sample consisted of 5,224 fifth and sixth graders from seven Southern states. The data were collected as part of two Regional Research Projects and included three cohort groups over a ten-year period of time (1969, 1975, and 1978) with three subsamples--rural blacks, urban blacks, and rural Appalachian whites.

The independent variables in this research were cohort, sex, and race. The dependent variables were three aspects of significant others' influence measured by asking the young students (a) whose advice was important about future plans; (b) who had talked to them about future schooling; and (c) who had talked to them about future job choices. Each question had 10 categories of significant persons from which the students could select. The data were analyzed by the chi square measure of association at the .05 level of significance.

The first hypothesis of no difference across cohort groups in reporting parents as significant others was rejected for the three dependent variables. The significant difference appeared to be the result of a decrease of the youth in the 1975 cohort group who reported parents as significant others, whereas the 1969 and 1978 cohorts remained stable.

Parents were the most often reported significant others in the three cohorts, with mother being the person most often reported and father the second person most often reported.

The second hypothesis of differences in males and females reporting their parents as significant persons was supported for the three dependent measures. When only one parent was reported, the parent of the same sex as the child was most often reported. Therefore, girls reported their mothers more often than they did fathers, and boys reported their fathers more often than their mothers.

The third hypothesis of no difference between the races was rejected for the three dependent variables. Parents were found to be the most influential significant others for both black and white students; however, depending on the type of measurement, there were some variations in where the race differences occurred. Generally, black students tended to report their mother more frequently than white youngsters did, whereas the white children tended to report their father more frequently than black children did. Other race differences found were that black students reported a teacher more frequently as a significant person in future life matters than did white students, whereas white students discussed their future plans with peers more frequently than did the black young people.

Another finding is that the results of studying significant others is dependent to some extent on the type of

measurement used. The research questions would determine whether one wanted the dependent measure to provide information regarding who is most influential or all who are influential. The topic of discussion (future plan, schooling or job) also affected who was reported.

It was recommended that further examination of this data would be desirable to determine if any of the cohort differences were related to sex and race variation and also to utilize nonparametric statistical procedures. Adding a longitudinal component was suggested to examine maturational changes. Emphasis on parental education and further research to determine if the emphasis is effective in helping disadvantaged low-income youth was recommended.

Greensboro
1980

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although "equal opportunity" is an American ideal, equal opportunity is not available for all Americans. Members of some subcultures, particularly low-income, minority groups and the people living in certain geographic areas, are often at a disadvantage in American society. This disadvantage is evident in the realm of educational and occupational attainment. Sociological theory has emphasized the importance of "significant others" in the process of socialization. Therefore, the influence of significant others in the educational and occupational attainment of lower socioeconomic youth is an important area for further research.

During the past decade considerable research has dealt with factors related to educational and occupational attainment. Two basic approaches have emerged from these research efforts (Goodale & Hall, 1976). Studies conducted in the framework of the first approach have examined the impact of a person's social origin (parents, socioeconomic status, education, occupation and occupational status) upon educational and occupational goals (Blau & Duncan, 1967). Research using the second basic approach has focused on the social-psychological factors which mediate the relationship between social origin and educational/occupational goals

and their attainment. The emphasis has been on the process through which social origin is translated into choices regarding education, vocation, and subsequently on the jobs obtained (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969; Sewell & Shah, 1968).

The second approach to research in the status attainment process was used by Sewell and Shah (1968) and Sewell et al. (1969) to develop an occupational attainment model. Basically, they took Blau and Duncan's (1967) model and added the social-psychological variables which they found explained more of the variance in educational and occupational attainment. One of the intervening variables included in their model was significant others' influence. The term "significant others" included parents, teachers, and friends--the people who have some influence or an effect on the young person's goals.

Sociological theory has provided the concept of socialization which is educating the young to the roles and expectations of society (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Socialization is provided by many sources within the society; however, this responsibility is usually carried out by the people closest to the child or the significant others (Sullivan, 1953). Since the influence of significant others is a social-psychological factor which is thought to be more subject to change than a factor such as socioeconomic status, Sewell et al. (1969) and Sewell and Shah (1968) suggested

that it is a possible point at which intervention can occur. Knowing whom lower-socioeconomic young people consider to be most influential in their lives may provide an effective means of improving their status attainment. It is this particular interest that motivated pursuit of this study about the role of significant others in influencing educational and occupational goals of young people in low-income Southern subcultures.

Data used in this study were collected in two Southern Regional Research Projects, S-63 (Southern Regional Technical Committee, 1974) and S-126 (Southern Regional Research Committee, 1977). In 1969, S-63 Research Project examined the "Influences on Occupational Goals of Young People from Three Subcultures in the South." In that project data about career aspirations were obtained from fifth and sixth grade students and their mothers in low-income areas of seven states: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. There were three subsamples in the total Southern sample: rural blacks, urban blacks, and rural Appalachian whites.

In 1975, under the collaborative efforts of four state projects (Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) a new cohort sample of comparable schools was obtained from the same or low-income fifth and sixth graders. Another follow-up study to S-63 was initiated in 1978. In this S-126 Regional Project researchers are examining career

to the developing body of knowledge in this area.

projections and attainment of low-income youth and the subsequent changes over time. Through this project data were collected from a third and new cohort sample of fifth and sixth graders from the same population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine who are the significant others that lower socioeconomic young people think are most influential in their future plans. More specifically, this study identified who are the significant others in relation to educational and occupational choices. By examining data from three cohort groups, this study explored whether there were any changes in whom fifth and sixth graders reported as significant others over a ten-year period of time. The sample was examined for any sex and race differences in reported significant others.

Value of the Study

If young people in all social-economic groups are to have equal opportunity in the status attainment process in our society, some improvements need to be made in the way youth are taught to handle the educational and occupational attainment process. Since the influence of significant others is one factor which has been shown to intervene between social origin factors and status attainment, then perhaps intervention strategies could effectively occur through those significant others. This study, therefore, attempted to add to the developing body of knowledge in this area.

The particular population studied in this research is unique in several aspects. First, data to be used were collected from a lower socioeconomic group with three different subcultures (rural blacks, urban blacks, and rural Appalachian whites) from seven different states represented in the sample. Secondly, the respondents were contacted at a much earlier age than were the subjects in typical status attainment studies making this sample one of the youngest populations to be reported in the literature. Thirdly, there were three cohort samples of fifth and sixth graders, spanning nearly a ten-year period of time. The existence of the cohort data provided an opportunity to examine how pre-adolescents have changed or remained the same during those years.

Definition of Terms

Significant Others: parents, relatives, teachers, friends or any other persons the young people thought were influential in their future plans about educational and occupational areas.

Baseline phase or Cohort I: data collected from the first sample of fifth and sixth graders in 1969.

Cohort II: data collected from the second sample of fifth and sixth graders in 1975.

Cohort III: data collected from the third sample of fifth and sixth graders in 1978.

Cohort Comparisons: data from three cohort samples of fifth and sixth graders compared.

Limitations of the Study

1. There are many variables which mediate the relationship between social origin and the educational and occupational attainment process. This study is limited by the fact that only one intervening variable, the choice of significant others, was examined.

2. The influence of significant others is probably not in a simple linear relationship with educational and occupational goals. There are interactive relationships occurring: the child influences the significant other by his or her behavior, interest in school, motivation, and general interests. These interactions, in turn, affect how the significant other influences the child. The interactive, more circular, and complex relationship within the child/significant others relationship was beyond the scope of this study.

3. The measure of significant others' influence was the child's perception of who was influential. Although this is useful information, it is limited because there is no means of verifying the child's perception.

4. Findings may be generalized only to the population from which the sample groups were selected--rural and urban, black and white young people in the Southern region of the United States who are members of the lower socioeconomic subcultures studied.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Following a review of the research on the influence of significant others on young people, the theoretical background and how significant others' influence fits into the career attainment model was examined. The major areas of research reviewed included parental influence, parental versus peer influence, and differences in influence according to the child's sex and race. An analysis of the literature and a statement of the study hypotheses conclude this chapter.

Theoretical Background

Basic to the study of who is influential in a child's life is the theory of socialization. From sociological theory comes the basic concepts related to the process of socialization. The child is seen as an asocial being when he or she enters the world, and it is through the relationships with the people in the child's world that he or she becomes socialized to the roles and behaviors the society expects (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). The people who are most important in the child's life and in this process of socialization are called the "significant others" (Sullivan, 1953). Since parents are the primary socialization agents in our society,

they are often the "significant others" in a child's life. However, as a child matures and has more contact with people outside the immediate family, the range of significant others broadens to include other people such as relatives, teachers, friends, etc.

There are two basic theories of socialization (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979) which attempt to explain how children are influenced by significant others: (1) symbolic interaction framework and (2) social learning theory. The symbolic interaction perspective views the individual as both an actor and reactor. A person's self is formed by social interaction between the child and significant others (often the parents). The child's choices are made based on their actions and behaviors which produce the desired behaviors and responses in the significant others. From this theoretical perspective the significant others are seen as influencing the child, and the child is seen as influencing the significant others.

The social learning theory has two perspectives relevant to significant others' influence. First, the model identification theory states that behavior is acquired by imitation of behavior that the child perceives is rewarded. The imitated behavior is then reinforced and maintained. From this perspective the child is a respondent to significant others' support and power. Therefore, imitation occurs more often when the significant others have power and/or the

child perceives a positive affective relationship with the significant others. The second perspective is the social power-exchange theory, which is based on the idea that in all social interactions participants attempt to maximize profits (rewards minus costs) and avoid losses (punishment). The basic exchange is between significant others' support and child compliance, whereby compliance is viewed as behavior that is valued by the significant others and the culture. This model is a dynamic example of action and reaction between the significant others and child. The more powerful the significant others, the more likely the child will behave as the significant others desire. In summary, these theories provide a basis for explaining significant others' influence in general and, more specifically, in educational and occupational goals.

Significant Others and the Career Attainment Model

There has been some controversy as to whether significant others' influence is really an intervening variable between structural background factors and educational goals as Bordua (1960) suggested or whether it is really an independent variable as Rehberg, Bond, and Doyel (1966) suggested. Sewell and Shah (1968) randomly selected 10,318 Wisconsin high school seniors (from the public, private, and parochial schools) and studied how several variables, including parental encouragement, affected the educational aspirations of the

students. They found that parental influence was a strong intervening variable between social-economic background factors and educational aspirations. This finding led to additional studies and further development and elaboration of the Blau and Duncan (1967) linear model of occupational attainment process by including social-psychological variables.

Sewell, Haller, and Portes (1969) studied Wisconsin farm boys in their senior year of high school and found that the influences of socioeconomic status on educational aspirations (and later attainments) were wholly mediated by the expectations of significant others (parents, friends, and teachers). The educational and occupational attainment model they developed has come to be known as the "Wisconsin Model." The importance of significant others as an intervening variable as described in the "Wisconsin Model" was supported in studies by Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf (1970) and Haller and Porter (1973). Additional research has supported significant others' influence as mediating between parental background and the educational and occupational aspirations of high school students (Fleming, 1977; Goodale & Hall, 1976; Sandis, 1968; Smith, Ohlendorf, & Falk, 1976).

The "Wisconsin Model" (Sewell et al., 1969) was criticized by Woefel and Haller (1971), who found a more complex relationship existed between the variables. Feedback from academic performance exerted influence over both significant

others' expectations and the individual's own attitudes, both of which affected educational and occupational goals. Hauser (1972) critically examined the "Wisconsin Model" (Sewell et al., 1969; Sewell et al., 1970) and "broke down" the composite measure for significant others. He found that parents and peers had more influence than teachers did and that some antecedent factors had different impacts on influence. For example, socioeconomic status affected parental influence, whereas student grades affected teacher influence; both parent and teacher influence were affected by student mental ability. According to his own admission, Hauser's revised model was not completely satisfactory either, but he concluded that it provided additional information not available from previous models because, by breaking down the factors, the researcher obtained insights which were lost when the composites were entered into the model as Sewell et al. (1969) had done.

Based on longitudinal data of a nationally representative sample of 2,213 tenth grade high school students (with follow-ups when the students were twelfth graders and during their first and second years out of high school), Wilson and Portes (1975) developed a different model of the educational attainment process. Their results pointed to a reduction of the importance of social-psychological intervening variables, such as significant others' influence. "Structural effects of parental resources and the bureaucratic evaluation of

ability" (p. 343) were stronger factors. Furstenberg (1971) also found parental influence to be relatively modest.

Although the issue of how important significant others' influence is in the career attainment model has not been completely resolved, research shows it is a relevant variable and further study is needed to clarify how it fits into the model. The "Wisconsin Model" which includes significant others' influence as an intervening variable is the most accepted model, particularly for white males (on whom most studies have been done). Further development and research is needed to know how applicable it is to the career attainment process of blacks and females.

Parental Influence

There are many "significant others" that may influence adolescents' decisions regarding their educational and occupational goals. However, since parents are the primary socialization agents in our society, researchers have been interested in how parents influence their children in educational and occupational goals.

Kahl (1953) first suggested the importance of parental encouragement in educational and occupational aspirations as a result of his study of 3,971 high school boys in the Boston area. He found that both intelligence and family status were useful predictors of the educational and occupational ambitions of the boys. However, there was still a large amount of unexplained variance, particularly for the

intelligent boys from the lower middle-class homes. Kahl selected a subsample of 24 boys (similar in intelligence and socioeconomic background), 12 of whom aspired to go to college and prepare for middle-class occupations and 12 of whom did not desire college and looked forward to working-class occupations. After interviewing both the boys and their parents, he concluded that there was a relationship between the boys' aspirations and the parental stress on education as a means to "get ahead." In a study of 1,529 ninth through twelfth graders in two cities in Massachusetts, Bordua (1960) found that parental stress on education was positively related to college plans. Cohen (1965) and Krauss (1964) also found that working-class parents' encouragement of higher education and middle-class occupational goals increased the sons' aspirations.

In a study of 404 upper-middle-class students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) in Palo Alto, California, Norris and Sherman (1966) found that when the young people were asked who was the strongest influence in their career planning, the response given most often was father and mother. At each grade level significantly more boys than girls listed their father as the strongest influence and more girls than boys listed mother as the strongest influence. Rehberg and Westby (1967) studied 2,852 male sophomore students in all the public and secondary schools in six middle-size Pennsylvania cities (populations between 50,000-100,000) to find the relationship between

parental encouragement and adolescents' educational expectations. Parental encouragement was measured by asking the students how often each parent urged the student to continue his or her education beyond high school. Rehberg and Westby's findings confirmed that parental encouragement made the largest contribution in explaining the variance in adolescent educational expectations.

Other studies have found that there are many factors involved in parental influence. Jacobsen (1971) found two types of parental encouragement: (1) abstractly verbalizing encouragement and (2) other types of encouragement (such as to study, observe, and work) in addition to abstract verbalizing. Goodale and Hall (1978) found that parental interest and parents' hopes for college were reflected in a more active involvement in the student's career; however, neither parental involvement nor parental pressure were translated to students' aspirations. Kerckhoff and Huff (1974) found that different types of parental influence may be operative according to the child's age. Parents used modeling for younger boys and direct goal transmission for older boys.

Parental Versus Peer Influence

The issue of whether parents or peers have more influence over adolescents was raised by Coleman's contention (1961) in The Adolescent Society that a distinct and influential adolescent subculture existed. Simpson (1962) studied

717 boys in white high schools in two Southern cities and found that both peers and parents have independent effects in how they influence, but that parents appeared to have the stronger effect. Simpson's findings that parental influence is a factor in upward mobility of working-class boys supported the previous findings of Kahl (1953) and Bordua (1960) and also extended the findings to middle-class boys as well. Epperson (1964) questioned Coleman's conclusions (1961) because of Coleman's measure of parental influence and his interpretation that adolescents selecting an occupation other than their parents' occupation meant rejection of parental values. Using Coleman's instrument, but with his own revisions, Epperson studied 619 pre-adolescents and 159 adolescents. He found that pre-adolescents and adolescents want parental approval of their decisions and that "desire for father's occupation" is not a good index of decreasing parental influence.

Support for Coleman's contention that peer influence was greater than parental influence was found by Herriott (1963) and McDill and Coleman (1965). Herriott (1963) studied 1,489 adolescents in one public high school in an urban community in Massachusetts. The adolescents' perceptions of the educational expectations held by 11 different types of persons were utilized as the data of parental and peer influences. The highest correlation was found between adolescents' educational aspirations and perceived expectations

of same-age friend. McDill and Coleman (1965) obtained data from 612 students in six Mid-western high schools and assessed parental and peer influence on the students' college plans. Parental influence was measured in terms of socioeconomic background and peer influence was measured in terms of status at school. They found that by the end of the senior year peer influences were stronger in educational aspirations than the child's socioeconomic background.

Further studies tried to clear up the contradictory findings. Cotugno (1975) found that both parents and peers play a role in the adolescent's decision to continue his or her education. Solomon (1963) interviewed Michigan adolescents and found that situational factors determine who has the most influence. This research was also supported by Brittain's studies (1963, 1967) of Southern high school-age white females; he found that in more difficult, long-term decisions, such as educational and occupational matters, adolescents look to parents for guidance. This finding was further supported in studies by Kandel, Lesser, Roberts, and Weiss (1968), Kandel and Lesser (1969), and Williams (1972).

Kandel et al. (1968) and Kandel and Lesser (1969) studied all the students in three high schools ($N = 2,327$), their mothers, and a same-sex best friend. The final sample of matched adolescent, mother, and best friend consisted of 1,065 cases. Measurement of educational plans was different for the parents and best friend. Parental influence was measured by

the mother's expectations for the child, whereas peer influence was inferred by the child's expectations for self. The findings were that concordance is higher between child and mother than between child and best friend for both boys and girls. They concluded that parental influence on future life goals is stronger than peer influence and remains strong throughout the entire adolescent period.

In contrast to these studies, Larson's (1972) study of high school students in Oregon (N = 1,542 seventh, ninth, and twelfth graders) did not find parents to be most influential in future life situations. Larson concluded that it was not really the crosspressure of parents or peers that determined the adolescent's response to the hypothetical situations in the study, but more what the adolescent considered appropriate according to his or her own values. It was the content of the situation, not the pressure of either parents or peers, that determined the adolescent's course of action. Larson felt that the adolescent values could be attributed to earlier socialization influence by parents; therefore, in effect parental influence was still operative in a less direct way. He also pointed out that using hypothetical situations, such as Brittain (1963, 1967) used, provides limited insight into the structure of parent and peer-oriented decisions because a hypothetical situation may only measure the adolescents' choice of action, not really the process of influence.

In a longitudinal study Otto (1977) studied male high school students and found that who is most influential there depends on the area of influence being examined. For example, he found that parents, male friends, and girlfriends all influence a young man's educational aspirations, but only parents influence the young man's occupational aspirations. Peer influence was found to be stronger in educational achievement and educational encouragement.

Emmerich's study (1978) of ninth and twelfth grade high school students in a small Mid-western town (N = 49 boys and 49 girls) found that whether adolescents are influenced more by parents or peers is determined in part by the situation and also by the sex of the child. (This aspect will be discussed under male/female differences.) Another factor found to determine whether parent or peer influence was most effective was residential location. Picou and Carter (1976) studied 1,241 male high school seniors (from a statewide probability sample in Louisiana) and found that urban youth were more influenced by parents than by peers and that the opposite was true for rural youth.

Male/Female Differences

There have been some contradictory findings on whether males and females differ in significant others' influence. Smith, Ohlendorf, and Falk (1976) studied white unmarried high school seniors (N = 143 males; N = 158 females) in rural

Louisiana and found that, although the effect of others was a crucial source of influence on the educational plans, there was no difference in the process between males and females. Solomon (1963) found that Michigan adolescent girls were more receptive to influence from the four sources examined: parents, peers, impulses, and values. These differences between the girls and boys were interpreted as being related to the difference in roles. Whereas males are socialized to have a strong educational and occupational orientation, females are socialized to be marriage and family oriented. This finding was further supported by Boeding (1977) in his study of young children (kindergarten through sixth graders).

Additional evidence suggested that boys and girls respond differently to the relative influence of parents and peers (Emmerich, 1978). Boys tend to change their responses to parent and peer pressure from the ninth to the twelfth grade, whereas girls tend to remain stable over the same period of time. Thus, ninth grade boys rely on parents' opinions more than either older boys or ninth grade girls do.

Different parental influences were found to be operative for girls and boys. A national survey of 12- to 17-year-olds found that mothers held higher aspirations for boys than for girls (Oliver, 1977). In general, the expectations by girls showed that they did not agree with such differential treatment. The girls had higher goals for themselves than did their parents, whereas the parents of boys had significantly

higher goals for their sons than their sons had for themselves (Oliver, 1977). Goodale and Hall (1976) found that although both males and females perceived the same level of parents' desire for them to go to college, girls perceived less parental interest in their school work than boys did. Females in a special academic program reported that both parents influenced them, whereas males tended to report only one parent (Mims, 1976). The differential influence by parents would tend to add support to Alexander and Elkland's findings (1974) of differences in the female and male educational attainment process.

In a recent study Lueptow (1980) studied parental influence in adolescent sex-role socialization. His sample consisted of 5,600 graduating senior high school students (2,773 surveyed in 1969 and 2,827 in 1975). Parental influence was obtained by first asking students to indicate from a list of 14 possible influential others those whom they had talked to about post-high school plans. They were then asked who on the list was most influential. If they listed one or both parents, then parental influence was scored. Lueptow found that approximately one-third of the young people reported both parents as most influential. Another third indicated that neither parent was among the most influential. The remaining third indicated that one, but not both, of the parents was among the most influential. If only one parent was influential, it was more likely to be the same-sex parent,

an effect slightly stronger for females than for males. This result confirmed Norris and Sherman's (1966) findings that boys listed fathers more often and girls listed mothers more often as the strongest influence. Lueptow found that the major change that occurred between 1964 and 1975 was that there was an increase in parental influence for both males and females. For the females there was a decline in the reported influence of the mother and an increase in the reported influence of the father. This shift was the opposite of what was expected (Lueptow, 1980).

Race Differences

Most of the studies on significant others' influence have studied white populations. Although some of the studies--such as those which have nationally representative samples--probably included some blacks, the percentage was small and often the blacks in the sample were not included in the data analysis.

Some studies (Hout & Morgan, 1975; Kerckhoff & Campbell, 1977; Porter, 1974) have found differences in black and white young people's educational and occupational attainment process. In looking specifically at significant others' influence in his study of high school males, Porter (1974) found that the effect of significant others was absent in the black educational attainment process. Kerckhoff and Campbell (1977) found that using the father or head of household in

explaining race differences in educational ambition was not effective because the mother was the strongest source of influence among the black males, even in families where the father was present. Another study which studied racial differences in significant others' influence utilized one of the same samples used in this study (Howell & Frese, 1979). Parental influence was measured by the level of education the fifth and sixth graders perceived to be expected of them by their parents. Howell and Frese concluded that the significant other effect is less associated with social origins for blacks than for whites. The level of parental expectations for schooling reported by these students was higher for blacks of either sex than for whites.

Analysis of the Literature

Several areas of difficulty were noted in the literature. First, there were contradictory findings in some areas among the various studies. For example, the studies on whether parents or peers have more influence on adolescents' decisions provided contradictory results. Some researchers have found parents to be the most influential; others have found peer influence to be stronger; and still others have found that it depends entirely on the situation, sex of the child, and the area of residence (rural or urban).

To some extent these contradictions can be explained by a second problem, which is the difficulty of comparing the results of studies in which the populations sampled have been

so diverse. Many areas of the country and different socio-economic levels have been represented. Sample sizes varied from the small sample of 24 boys in Bordua's study (1960), to larger representative samples of 3,687 young people (Williams, 1972). Some samples have included only the young people, whereas others have included the parents or parents and peers in addition to the young people. Some work has been done with females only or males only, and other studies have included both. Difficulty comes in synthesizing these findings since some male-female differences in response to influence (Emmerich, 1978) and differences in parental influence according to the child's sex (Oliver, 1977) have been found. Although most studies looked at high school students there was age variability across the studies. This caution is necessary when the results are reviewed since different aged individuals seemed to also make a differentiation in parental influence (Emmerich, 1978; Kerckhoff & Huff, 1974).

A third area of difficulty and another reason for lack of comparability among the studies was the way in which the variables were conceptualized and measured. When the reported studies are compared with the conceptualization of this study, the independent variables have generally been conceptualized as parental encouragement or support, parental influence, and significant other influences (which included friends and teachers in addition to parents). However, in this study "significant others" was considered a dependent variable.

Significant others' influence has been measured in a variety of ways. In some cases it was measured by only one question which asked the adolescent how much parental urging he or she was receiving to continue education after high school. In other studies the young people were asked which individuals they felt were most influential in their post-high school or future plans. In such cases the measurement was really what the child perceived as parental or significant other influence. In other ways of measuring parental influence the children and their parents were questioned. In this type of measurement "actual agreement" was considered agreement between the expressed goals of both the child and the parents' goals for the child. Still another measurement procedure was "perceived agreement" which was agreement between the child's expressed goal and the child's report of the parent's goal. Parental influence was then inferred from the "actual agreement" or "perceived agreement." In studies where peers were included as significant others, measurement of influence was inferred by asking what were the peer goals for themselves and then by comparing their answers to the young person's goals for himself or herself.

A fourth weakness was found in early studies in which there was a lack of control for variables which are pertinent. For example, Bordua (1960) and Simpson (1962) did not control for intelligence which has been found to be consistently related to college plans.

Lastly, although a weakness in some of the literature was lack of incorporation of a theoretical basis for the research and in the explanation of findings, this weakness was not the case for all of the research. The symbolic interaction perspective, with emphasis on the role modeling, was used most frequently (Cohen, 1965; Jacobsen, 1971; Kerckhoff & Huff, 1974; Picou & Carter, 1976; Rehberg & Westby, 1967). The social power model was applied in Smith's research (1970a; 1970b).

Several strengths are notable from the literature on parental influence. First there has been an effort through several studies to examine a very important part of family life which has rather serious implications regarding the adolescent's future. What a person "does" the rest of his or her life is affected, enhanced, or even limited by decisions made during adolescence. Therefore, the influence of parents or others becomes a significant contribution to a young person's future in terms of the educational and occupational goals and attainments. Secondly, the findings that parents influence adolescents' educational and occupational goals have practical applications in the field of parent education (Anderson, Mawby, Miller, & Olson, 1965; Shoffner & Klemer, 1973).

A third strength is that there have been some longitudinal studies. In 1964 Sewell et al. (1969) studied twelfth grade Wisconsin boys whose fathers were farmers in 1957 when

the original data had been collected. Williams (1972) studied 3,687 twelfth grade Canadian youth who had been studied in the ninth grade. The most comprehensive longitudinal study was done by Wilson and Portes (1975) on a nationally representative sample of 2,213 adolescent boys in the tenth grade (1966). These boys were followed up in 1968 when they were seniors in high school, and again in 1969 and 1970 after they had either started to college or had begun working.

A fourth strength has been a movement in the literature toward the realization that parental influence is a very complex relationship. Studies have moved from a simple linear relationship to more complex linear causal models with many types of parental influence included. There also has been some progress toward consideration of parental influence as both a cause and an effect (Hauser, 1972).

Hypotheses

In reference to the studies reported in the review of literature, little research has been done with age and social class variables. Few studies have considered youth under high school age, yet there is an assumption that a person's occupational attainment may be influenced early in life. Since occupational upward mobility appears to be influenced by the intervening variable, significant others, finding whom low-income youth looked to for advice seemed to be a

first step. Therefore, this study was planned to find out whom fifth and sixth graders looked to for advice in planning their future.

The general hypothesis for this study was that parents are probably the most influential significant others in the future educational and occupational plans of young people. The independent variables studied were cohort, sex, and race. The dependent variables were those reported as significant others in three specific areas of influence. These variables were measured when young people were asked to choose the people who had been most influential in their future plans, in general and more specifically in educational (schooling) and occupational (job choice) goals.

For research purposes these specific hypotheses, stated in the direction of the expected findings, were tested:

H_1 There is no relationship between the group an individual is in (Cohort I, II, III) and the frequency with which the young person will report parents as the significant others regarding their

- a) future plans
- b) future schooling
- c) future job

H₂ There will be sex differences in the choices of significant others reported by young people regarding their

a) future plans

b) future schooling

c) future job

Of all the young people who select one parent as significant other, it is expected that females will report their mother more often than their father, and that males will report their father more often than their mother.

H₃ There will be no race differences in the choices of significant others reported by young people regarding their

a) future plans

b) future schooling

c) future job

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

The purpose of the study was to analyze that portion of an existing data set from a larger research project.

Specifically, the purpose was to identify the significant others who influence low-income youth in decisions about their future plans. In this chapter the sampling procedure is reported, followed by a description of the methods and phases of data collection, instruments used, and the method of analysis.

Sample Selection

As detailed in the introduction, the data for this study were part of a larger regional project. The data were collected by the cooperative efforts of the Agricultural Experimental Stations in seven Southern states (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia). The research projects were designed to study the occupational and educational goals of low-income youth in the Southeastern and Appalachian regions of the United States. Samples from three subcultures of low-income youth were included in the studies: urban blacks, rural blacks, and Appalachian rural whites.

The baseline sample of fifth and sixth graders was comprised of classes from 28 schools which were thought to be

representative of the three subcultures being studied. Basically, the schools served areas which were characterized by school drop-out, unemployment, and poverty. No obvious tension about desegregation or other political conflict was evident in the schools selected. Although the schools in the areas studied were officially desegregated, the children in the sample were attending schools which were essentially or exclusively populated by others of their own race. In some of the Appalachian areas studied there were no blacks or other races. Children were characterized as being from the rural subculture if they attended school and lived in the county or in a town with a population of less than 2,500. Urban children were those who attended schools in cities with populations of 50,000 or more in 1960.

The sample was not a random sample, since there was not a list of all possible qualifying schools utilized with each school given an equal or known chance of being selected. It was a stratified sample because each of the sub-populations were assigned to three states. It also was a clustered sample because all the fifth and sixth graders in the selected schools were included in the sample. The project statistician, Proctor, noted that:

A stratified sample design usually leads to greater internal diversity than for a simple random sample, while clustering leads to the opposite. One could say that, in balance, the variance formulas for a simple random sample should thus be realistic.
(Southern Regional Technical Committee, 1974, n. 61-2)

Basically, the sample could best be described as purposive, and that selection seems justified for the objectives of the study.

The second and third cohort samples of fifth and sixth graders were selected from the same population. The same schools or similar ones were utilized.

Data Collection

There were three phases of data collection in the larger study. The first or baseline phase was carried out under the Regional Research Project S-63. In 1969 data were collected from 1503 low-income mother-child pairs. The young people were fifth and sixth graders, most of whom were between the ages of 11 and 13, who answered a survey-type questionnaire at their school. Mothers of these youth were interviewed in their homes about their plans and aspirations for their children.¹ The young people were questioned about their self-concept, academic motivation, educational and occupational goals, their relationship and communication with their parents, and significant other influence on their future plans.

There was an experimental phase in this project, conducted in 1971, in which a randomly selected sub-sample of

¹The mothers' interview information will not be utilized in this study, since it was not available for the later two cohort samples.

mothers attended three "workshop sessions" to help them guide their children in developing vocational interests and occupational goals.²

The second phase of data collection was conducted in 1975 under state projects in Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. A new sample of fifth and sixth graders was questioned regarding their educational and occupational goals and whose influence was most important in their goal-decision process. There were 1502 young people questioned in this second cohort group (including some low-income urban white children in Kentucky and Virginia).

Data collection for a third cohort sample of 2219 fifth and sixth graders was conducted in 1978 under the Southern Regional Project, S-126. Again students were asked the same questions about their educational and occupational goals and about whose influence was important to them.

Instruments and Administration

The instrument used in the baseline phase was a 116-item questionnaire which included a variety of questions and scales to measure approximately 24 variables. Some of the information obtained in the "Survey of Student Plans for Work and School" included background information, occupational and

²The experimental phase data will also not be utilized in this study. For additional information describing either the baseline or the experimental phase of S-63 Southern Regional Project, see Southern Regional Technical Committee for Family Life, 1974.

educational goals, significant other influence in future goals, academic and achievement motivation, child's perception of mother's behavior and communication, and the child's self-concept. The questionnaires were administered in the students' classroom by two-person teams. One person read the instructions and questions while the students followed and answered on their questionnaires. The other team member was available to help the students with individual questions, prevent student collaboration, and make sure the students were together and using proper answering procedures.³

The instruments used in the 1975 and 1978 cohort studies were essentially the same as the instrument in the baseline study. There were some minor modifications (five questions were added and the questions on achievement motivation were omitted); however, the items related to the proposed study were identical. The same basic guidelines were utilized in the administration of the questionnaires.

Significant Others' Influence

The dependent variables, significant others' influence in three aspects of future plans (future plans, future schooling, and future jobs), were measured by the following three questions:

³More detailed and specific instructions are found in the "Research Procedures Manual for Baseline Phase" included in Appendix D of Southern Regional Technical Committee, 1974.

1. Whose advice is most important to you about your future plans? (Check only one.)

- 1. mother
- 2. father
- 3. older brother or sister
- 4. another relative
- 5. teacher
- 6. preacher
- 7. adult friend or neighbor
- 8. other kids
- 9. other (Who? _____)
- 0. no one

2. Put a check by each of the people who have talked with you about the kind of job you might have when you grow up. (You may check more than one.)

- 1. mother
- 2. father
- 3. older brother or sister
- 4. another relative
- 5. teacher
- 6. preacher
- 7. adult friend or neighbor
- 8. other kids
- 9. other (Who? _____)
- 0. no one

3. Put a check by each of the people who have talked with you about how far you should go in school.

- 1. mother
- 2. father
- 3. older brother or sister
- 4. another relative
- 5. teacher
- 6. preacher
- 7. adult friend or neighbor
- 8. other kids
- 9. other (Who? _____)
- 0. no one

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) (Barr, Goodnight, Sall, Blair, & Chilko, 1979).

Three dependent variables, aspects of significant others' influence, were measured by responses to these questions:

- (a) whose advice is most important about future plans,
(b) who has talked with the young person about future schooling, and
(c) who has talked with the young person about future job choices.

In the first measure the students were asked to check only one response; therefore, the analysis involved the frequency of respondents. In the last two measures (b and c), the students were given the opportunity to check more than one response category; therefore, the analysis involved the frequency of responses.

The independent variables in this study were cohort, sex, and race. The cohort variable involved comparing the three cohort groups; the sex and race variables were determined by direct questions at the beginning of each questionnaire in which the student's background information was obtained.

The data were analyzed by utilizing the chi square measure of association, which is based on the expected versus observed frequencies. Chi square was used to determine whether there is a relationship between two nominal variables. For example, the research questions may be seen in this framework: With respect to whether or not young people report mother as a significant other, do males and females represent two different populations or a single population? (Roscoe, 1975). The .05 level of significance was used to test the hypotheses.

Table 1

Number of Respondents in the Total Sample by

CHAPTER IV

Cohort, Race, and Sex

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Number of Respondents

The results of this study will be presented in the following manner. A general view of the entire sample will be presented first. The findings related to each hypothesis and the sub-hypotheses will follow. Then a summary of the findings related to each hypothesis will be presented, followed by discussion.

The data were analyzed and hypotheses tested using the chi square measure of association, which is based on the expected versus observed frequencies of the individuals falling within each cell of the contingency tables. It is important to note that small differences which at first appear negligible in a practical sense are, in fact, statistically significant partially as a result of the large sample size ($N = 5,224$). Because the underlying distribution of young people across cohorts and by sex and race directly affects the numbers of individuals in each cell of the contingency (cross-tabulation) tables, the results will primarily be reported in percentages. The total sample size divided by the three independent variables--cohort, sex, and race--is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Number of Respondents in the Total Sample by
Cohort, Race, and Sex

Cohort Groups	Number of Respondents				
	Sex		Race		
I	1503	Male	2451	Black	2336
II	1502	Female	2773	White	2888
III	<u>2219</u>				
	5224		5224		5224

Total sample. Of the 5,138 young people responding to the question, over 50% ($n = 2,830$) reported that their mothers were the most significant other person with whom they had discussed their plans for the future. Another 29% ($n = 1,503$) indicated that their father was the individual with whom they discussed their future plans. The other six categories of significant others were reported by fewer young people, ranging from about 1% to 3% of the sample.

Cohort comparisons. Regarding differences in students' responses across cohort groups, the chi-square ($\chi^2 = 211.84$)

Analysis of Significant Others in
Three Cohort Groups

The first hypothesis was that there is no relationship between the individual's cohort group (Cohort I, II, and III) and the frequency with which the young person will report parents as the significant others regarding their (a) future plans, (b) future schooling, and (c) future job.

Significant Others in Future Plans

The results regarding the person who was selected as being a significant other for the young person when grouped by cohort are reported in Table 2. Since the students were instructed to choose only one significant other from among 10 possible responses regarding their future plans, the contingency table reflects the number of respondents for each cohort across the top of the table and for the total for each significant other down the table.

Total sample. Of the 5,128 young people responding to the question, over 55% ($n = 2,830$) reported that their mothers were the most significant other person with whom they had discussed their plans for the future. Another 29% ($n = 1,503$) indicated that their father was the individual with whom they discussed their future plans. The other six categories of significant others were reported by fewer young people, ranging from about 1% to 3% of the sample.

Cohort comparisons. Regarding differences in students' responses across cohort groups, the chi square ($\chi^2 = 211.84$)

Table 2

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others Regarding
Future Plans by Three Cohort Groups

Cohort	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
I	58.5 (879)	30.0 (451)	3.7 (56)	1.5 (22)	3.1 (46)	.9 (14)	.9 (14)	.7 (10)	.7 (11)	0 (0)
II	49.3 (740)	30.0 (451)	3.6 (54)	2.2 (33)	2.7 (40)	.6 (9)	1.2 (18)	1.5 (23)	1.4 (21)	7.5 (113)
III	57.0 (1211)	28.3 (601)	3.0 (64)	2.7 (57)	2.0 (41)	.3 (7)	1.8 (39)	1.3 (27)	1.8 (38)	1.8 (38)
Total N	2830	1503	174	112	127	30	71	60	70	151
%	55.2	29.3	3.4	2.2	2.5	.6	1.4	1.2	1.4	2.9

Note. The percentages reflect 100% of the respondents in each cohort and the total sample, since the young people selected only one significant person or category.

$$\chi^2 = 211.84$$

$$df = 18$$

$$p = .0001***$$

$$N(\text{Cohort I}) = 1503; N(\text{II}) = 1502; N(\text{III}) = 2123$$

$$\text{Total N} = 5128 \text{ (with 96 missing from Cohort III)}$$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

indicated that there was a significant difference across cohorts in the pattern of significant others reported; thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. In each of the three cohorts the mother was reported most often by 59%, 49%, and 57% of the young people in Cohorts I, II, and III, respectively. The father was the second most often reported significant other with approximately equal percentages of students choosing their father (30%, 30%, and 28%, respectively). Even though the mother and father were the two most influential significant others regarding the discussion of future plans in each of the cohort groups, the percentages indicating mothers appears to account for the differences across cohorts with the second cohort reporting mothers less frequently than did the other two cohort groups.

The pattern of reporting significant others also differs across cohorts when the categories other than mother and father are considered. In Cohorts I and III the next most often reported significant other was the respondent's older brother or sister, with approximately 3% to 4% of the youngsters reporting this item. However, in the second cohort, category "no one" was the third highest percentage (7.5), and the older sibling followed in fourth place for about 4% of the respondents. The percentage of students reporting the remaining items was small, and the order or ranking varied across cohorts. For example, a teacher was the fourth most often reported significant other in Cohort I, but fifth in

Cohorts II and III; other kids were reported ninth in Cohorts I and III, but seventh in Cohort II; the preacher was the least reported significant other in Cohorts II and III, but sixth in Cohort I (tied in rank with an adult friend or neighbor).

Significant Others in Future Schooling Plans

In the second measure of significant other influence, the students were asked with whom they had discussed how far they should go in school. For this item the students could check as many categories as they thought pertinent. The distribution of the number of responses indicated by the sampled children is presented in Table 3. The largest percentage of fifth and sixth graders, approximately 30%, reported that two people were influential. Another 25% checked only one category, and 22% checked three categories. Generally, the percentages decreased as the number of categories checked increased.

Total sample. The results of the significant others reported by the young students regarding their future schooling plans when grouped by cohort are shown in Table 4. (Note: Since more than one selection per respondent was possible, the totals do not add up to 100%.) Of the 5,224 individuals responding, 85% reported "mother" as the person with whom they talked about future schooling plans. Another 61% (n = 3,177) indicated that their father was the significant

Table 3

Frequency of Responses Regarding Future Schooling:
Number of Different Significant Others Checked

Number of Items Checked	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
0	31	.6	8
1	1330	25.5	2
2	1542	29.5	1
3	1142	21.9	3
4	623	11.9	4
5	311	6.0	5
6	148	2.8	6
7	62	1.2	7
8	23	.4	9
9	10	.2	10
10	2	.04	11

Table 4

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others Regarding
Future Schooling Plans by Three Cohort Groups

Cohort	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
I	87.1 (1309)	61.5 (924)	26.8 (403)	22.2 (333)	27.0 (405)	4.9 (74)	14.5 (218)	12.0 (181)	1.7 (26)	3.5 (53)
II	83.0 (1246)	57.1 (857)	23.7 (356)	22.4 (337)	18.2 (274)	2.1 (32)	14.3 (215)	17.3 (260)	2.6 (39)	5.4 (81)
III	84.6 (1877)	62.9 (1396)	25.5 (566)	24.7 (548)	20.2 (448)	3.6 (79)	17.4 (387)	17.3 (383)	4.1 (90)	2.0 (106)
Total										
N	4432	3177	1325	1218	1127	185	820	824	155	240
%	84.8	60.9	25.4	23.3	21.6	3.5	15.7	15.8	3.0	4.6
χ^2	10.18	13.27	3.88	4.14	38.01	17.16	8.88	22.11	17.84	6.27
p value	.0061**	.0013**	.1435	.1259	.0001***	.0002***	.0118*	.0001***	.0001***	.0436*

Note. Percentages represent those individuals in a particular cohort who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 2

N(Cohort I) = 1503; N(II) = 1502; N(III) = 2123

Total N = 5128 (with 96 missing from Cohort III)

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

other regarding how far they should go in school. Approximately 22 to 25% of the young people indicated that an older sibling, another relative, or a teacher was influential for them. The remaining five categories were selected by a relatively small number of students.

Cohort comparisons. The chi square results indicated that the significant others for fifth and sixth grade students regarding future schooling plans, differed across cohorts in the majority of categories. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Parents. When the differences across the three cohort groups were considered, the mother was the most frequently reported significant other in each cohort, with approximately 87%, 83%, and 85% of the students reporting "mother" in Cohort I, II, and III, respectively. Although the differences between the cohort groups are small, the greatest difference appears to be where the percentage of "mother" responses dropped from Cohort I to Cohort II and then increased again in the third cohort. The father was the second most frequently reported significant other in the three cohorts. Approximately 61% of the young people in the first cohort, 57% in the second cohort, and 63% in the last cohort reported their father. Again, the lower frequency of responses reported by the second cohort probably was responsible for the significant difference.

adult friend was selected as the sixth significant other in the first and third cohorts.

Older siblings or another relative. There were no significant differences across cohorts in the selection of older siblings or another relative as significant others. An older brother or sister was selected by approximately 25% of the young students in each of the cohort groups, and nearly the same number (about 23%) of the youngsters in each cohort group reported another relative.

Teachers. There was a difference across cohorts in the reporting of teachers as significant persons in discussions about future schooling. The teacher was the third most frequent response of the young people in Cohort I, with approximately 27% reporting teacher. However, the percentage declined in Cohort II with only 18% reporting a teacher as the significant other in their future plans about schooling. There was a small increase to 20% in Cohort III. However, it appears that the significant difference occurred because of the general decline in reports of teachers as significant others from Cohort I to Cohorts II and III.

Adult friends or neighbors and other kids. The next most frequently reported significant others included adult friends or neighbors. In Cohort I and II about 14% of the individuals reported that an adult friend or neighbor was an important influence in their future schooling. However, the increase to 17% in Cohort III probably attributed to the significant difference. Whereas the adult friend was selected as the sixth significant other in the first and third cohorts,

he was seventh in Cohort II. The opposite trend was evident in the selection of other kids who ranked sixth in Cohort II, whereas they placed seventh in the first and third cohorts. There were 12% of the youngsters in Cohort I and 17% in Cohorts II and III, who reported other kids; therefore, it seems that the significant difference occurred in the increase from the first cohort to the last two.

Other significant persons. The three remaining categories--preacher, other, and no one--were the least frequently selected. The frequency of reporting the preacher declined from the first to the second cohort but increased slightly in Cohort III, with percentages of 4.9, 2.1, and 3.6, respectively. There was a gradual increase with each cohort reporting "other" as significant others (1.7%, 2.6%, and 4.1%, respectively). The percentage of young people reporting that "no one" had talked with them about future school plans increased from Cohort I to Cohort II (3.5% to 5.4%); however, it decreased even further in Cohort III to 2.0%.

In summary, the null hypothesis of no significant differences across cohorts in the reporting of mothers and fathers as significant others regarding future school plans was rejected. It appears that Cohort II, the 1975 group, reported their parents less frequently than did the other cohorts, although even in 1975 (as in the other years) mothers and fathers were still reported most frequently and second most frequently, respectively, as significant others.

Although the influence of both older siblings and other relatives remained stable over the years, teachers' influence decreased in importance from 1969 to the later years. The remaining choices open to the students were selected relatively less frequently; and the pattern of their selection as significant others differed significantly across cohorts for preacher, adult friend or neighbor, other kids, other, and no one.

Significant Others in Future Job Plans

In the third measure of significant other influence the students were asked to indicate the people with whom they had discussed the type of job they might have when they grew up. More than one selection was possible. Table 5 indicates the distribution of the frequency of responses by the children. Although more young people checked two categories ($n = 1,351$), an almost equal number checked one category ($n = 1,333$), both of which represented approximately 26%. Twenty-one percent indicated that three significant others had talked with them about future jobs. Similarly to the future schooling measure, the percentages of young people reporting significant others decreased as the number of items increased; very few children selected five or more significant others.

Results of the significant others reported by the three cohorts of fifth and sixth grade students regarding their future jobs are shown in Table 6. Because selection of more

Table 5

Frequency of Responses Regarding Future Job:
Number of Different Significant Others Checked

Number of Items Checked	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
0	46	.9	8
1	1333	25.5	2
2	1351	25.9	1
3	1086	20.8	3
4	758	14.5	4
5	364	7.0	5
6	196	3.8	6
7	66	1.3	7
8	19	.4	9
9	5	.1	10

Table 6

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others Regarding
Future Job Plans by Three Cohort Groups

Cohort	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
I	67.3 (1011)	49.0 (736)	27.2 (409)	24.2 (364)	20.5 (308)	5.0 (75)	20.9 (314)	29.0 (436)	2.9 (43)	8.4 (126)
II	62.8 (943)	43.5 (653)	28.9 (434)	24.2 (364)	17.1 (259)	4.1 (61)	21.2 (319)	35.8 (538)	4.0 (60)	10.2 (153)
III	68.9 (1528)	52.7 (1170)	29.9 (663)	30.4 (674)	21.5 (477)	5.5 (123)	25.6 (567)	41.2 (914)	5.9 (131)	5.8 (129)
Total										
N	3482	2259	1506	1402	1042	259	1200	1888	234	408
%	66.7	49.0	28.8	26.8	20.0	5.0	23.0	36.1	4.5	7.8
χ^2	15.24	30.68	3.11	24.57	11.18	4.18	14.58	57.70	20.55	24.75
p value	.0005***	.0001***	.2113	.0001***	.0037**	.1238	.0007***	.0001***	.0001***	.0001***

Note. Percentages represent those individuals in a particular cohort who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 2

N(Cohort I) = 1503; N(II) = 1502; N(III) = 2123

Total N = 5128 (with 96 missing from Cohort III)

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

than one category was possible, the percentages represent the individuals in each cohort who checked a particular significant other category; therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

Total sample. Of the entire sample of 5,224 students 67% (n = 3,482) indicated that their mothers were the most significant individual in discussing future occupations. Another 49% reported their father as a significant person. Peers were the third most frequently reported significant others in influencing the young students' discussions (36%; n = 1,888). The next most often reported categories were older brother or sister (29%), another relative (27%), and an adult friend or neighbor (23%). The remaining four items were reported by relatively few young people, ranging from 4 to 20%.

Cohort comparisons. Most of the chi squares indicated a significant difference across cohorts. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there were no cohort differences in significant others thought important in future job plans was rejected.

Parents and peers. Again the students' mothers were the most frequently reported persons in all three cohorts (67%, 63%, and 69% in Cohorts I, II, and III, respectively). The significant difference across cohorts appears to be a decrease in the number of Cohort II students who reported their mothers. The father was the second most frequently reported person in the three cohorts (Cohort I, 49%; II, 44%; and III,

53%). As in the case of mothers, the significant difference across cohorts seemed to result from the decrease in the frequency of young people in Cohort II who reported their fathers.

The third category of significant others indicated by the young people in the three cohorts was peers or "other kids." The frequency of reporting peers increased in each cohort and probably accounts for the significant difference (29% in Cohort I, 36% in II, and 41% in III).

Older siblings, other relatives, adult friends, and neighbors. In the remaining categories a significant difference was not found in the cohort groups reporting older siblings as significant others (27 to 30% range). However, there was a significant difference across cohorts in reports of "another relative" as important to plans for a future job. In both Cohorts I and II about 24% selected this item, whereas the percentage in Cohort III increased to 30%. The adult friend or neighbor category exhibited a similar pattern, with approximately 21% in Cohorts I and II selecting this item and an increase to 26% in Cohort III. In both cases the significant difference appears to be a result of the increase from the first and second cohorts to the third group in the number of children checking the item.

Teachers. The next most frequently reported person important in future job discussions was a teacher. There was a significant difference across cohort groups which may

be attributable to a decrease in the number of fifth and sixth graders in the second cohort who reported teachers. The percentages of students reporting their teachers were approximately 21% in the first and third cohorts and 17 in Cohort II. The remaining three categories (no one, preacher, and other) were the least reported categories. There was not a significant difference across cohorts in students reporting their preachers; however, there was a significant difference across cohort groups in reports of other people (2.9, 4.0 and 5.9, for Cohorts I, II, and III, respectively) or no one (8.4, 10.2, and 5.8, respectively).

Summary. The null hypothesis of no difference across cohort groups in reporting of parents as significant persons in future job plan discussions was rejected. The students in the 1975 cohort group reported their parents less frequently than did the 1969 or 1978 groups. Even so, in all three cohorts parents were the most frequently reported significant others, with the mother being the most frequently selected person and the father being the second most frequently reported significant other. The influence of other kids or peers progressively increased from 1969 to 1978. The influence of older siblings remained stable; however, both other relatives and adult friends remained stable for the first two cohorts and then increased for the 1978 cohort. The pattern of reporting a teacher decreased for the middle cohort but remained stable for the first and third cohort

groups. The remaining items were selected relatively less frequently, and with the exception of the preacher choice, the pattern of selection differed across cohorts as previously reported.

Analysis of Significant Others and Sex

The second hypothesis was that there will be sex differences in the choices of significant others reported by the young people regarding their (a) future plans, (b) future schooling, and (c) future jobs. Of all the young people who selected one parent as a significant other, it was expected that females would report their mother more often than their father and that males would report their father more often than their mother.

Significant Others in Future Plans

Reported in Table 7 are the results concerning the individual whose advice fifth and sixth grade students considered important in making their future plans according to the child's sex. The chi square ($\chi^2 = 644.44$) indicated that there was a significant difference among the individuals girls and boys reported as significant others; therefore, the hypothesis of differences was supported.

Of the 5,128 young people responding, 69% of the girls ($n = 1,882$) reported their mothers as most influential, whereas nearly 46% of the boys ($n = 1,106$) reported their fathers as most influential. The second most frequently

Table 7

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others
Regarding Future Plans by Sex

Sex	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
Boys	39.4 (948)	45.9 (1106)	3.2 (78)	2.5 (60)	2.2 (53)	0.7 (16)	1.0 (24)	1.0 (24)	1.3 (30)	2.9 (70)
Girls	69.2 (1882)	14.6 (397)	3.5 (96)	1.9 (52)	2.72 (74)	0.5 (14)	1.7 (47)	1.3 (36)	1.5 (40)	3.0 (81)
Total N	2830	1503	174	112	127	30	71	60	70	151
%	55.2	29.3	3.4	2.2	2.5	.6	1.4	1.2	1.4	2.9

Note. The percentages reflect 100% of the respondents in each cohort and in the total sample, since the young people selected only one significant person or category.

$$X^2 = 644.44$$

$$df = 9$$

$$p \text{ value} = .0001***$$

$$N(\text{Boys}) = 2409; N(\text{Girls}) = 2719$$

$$N(\text{Total}) = 5128 \text{ (with 42 missing values for boys and 54 missing values for girls)}$$

$$* p < .05$$

$$** p < .01$$

$$*** p < .001$$

reported significant other was the parent of the opposite sex. Slightly over 39% of the boys reported their mothers and a much smaller number of girls (15%, $n = 397$) reported their fathers.

The frequency of responses for all the remaining categories was much smaller compared to the selection of parents. Also, there did not appear to be much difference between the boys and girls in their preference for the other categories of significant others.

Significant Others in Future Schooling Plans

The results of students' responses according to their sex and the people they consider influential in their future schooling plans are presented in Table 8. In contrast to future plans in general, for future schooling there was not a significant difference between the sexes in reports of mothers. Approximately 84% of the boys ($n = 2,062$) and 85.5% of the girls ($n = 2,370$) reported their mothers as the most significant person with whom they had discussed future schooling plans. However, there was a significant difference between the sexes in reporting their fathers. Nearly 65% of the males ($n = 1,585$) reported their father, whereas a smaller percentage of females (58%, $n = 1,592$) reported their fathers. Both males and females reported their mother more frequently than their father.

Table 8

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others
Regarding Future Schooling Plans by Sex

Sex	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
Boys	84.1 (2062)	64.7 (1585)	25.4 (622)	22.1 (541)	22.4 (550)	4.3 (105)	14.3 (350)	15.2 (373)	2.4 (58)	4.7 (114)
Girls	85.5 (2370)	57.4 (1592)	25.4 (703)	24.4 (677)	20.8 (577)	2.9 (80)	17.0 (470)	16.3 (451)	3.5 (97)	4.5 (126)
Total N	4432	3177	1324	1218	1127	185	820	824	155	240
%	84.8	60.8	25.4	23.3	21.6	3.5	15.7	15.8	3.0	4.6
χ^2	1.81	28.75	0.00	3.99	2.05	7.45	7.00	1.07	5.78	0.03
P value	.1784	.0001 ^{***}	.9829	.0458 [*]	.1524	.0063 ^{**}	.0081 ^{**}	.3008	.0161 [*]	.8533

Note. Percentages represent those individuals who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 1

N(Boys) = 2451; N(Girls) = 2773; N(Total) = 5224

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

The three next most often reported categories--older siblings, another relative, and a teacher--were selected by 21 to 25% of the students. There was a small, but significant difference between the sexes in reporting another relative as a significant other. Of the females about 24% reported another relative, whereas fewer males did likewise (about 22%). There were no significant differences found between the sexes in reporting older brothers or sisters and teachers as significant others.

The remaining five items had relatively small percentages (range: 2-17%), and only in three of the categories were there indications of significant differences between males and females. These categories were adult friend or neighbor, preacher, and other.

Parents as significant others. The results of examining parents as significant others for both young men and women in their future schooling plans are presented in Table 9. The chi squares for the young people reporting only mother ($\chi^2 = 28.32$) or only father ($\chi^2 = 10.24$) were significant; therefore, the hypothesis of differences according to sex was supported.

A higher percentage of young women (32%) indicated that only their mothers had been influential, whereas 25% of the young men reported their mothers only. Although the percentages decreased markedly, the opposite was true for those reporting fathers. Approximately 6% ($n = 144$) of the

Table 9

Chi Square Contingency Table for Parents as Significant Others Regarding Future Schooling Plans by Sex

Sex	Mother	Father	Only Mother (Not Father)	Only Father (Not Mother)	Both Parents	Neither Parent
Boys	84.1 (2062)	64.7 (1585)	25.3 (621)	5.8 (144)	58.8 (1441)	10.0 (245)
Girls	85.5 (2370)	57.4 (1592)	32.0 (888)	4.0 (110)	53.4 (1482)	10.6 (293)
Total						
N	4432	3177	1509	254	2923	538
%	84.8	60.8	28.9	4.9	56.0	10.3
χ^2	1.81	28.8	28.32	10.24	15.10	.458
p value	.1784	.0001***	.0001***	.0014**	.0001***	.4986

Note. Percentages represent those individuals who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 1

N(Boys) = 2451; N(Girls) = 2773; N(Total) = 5224

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

boys reported that only their fathers had talked with them about their future schooling plans; and of the girls, 4% (n = 110) reported only their fathers. Interestingly enough, more males (59%; n = 1,441) than females (53%; n = 1,482) reported talking to both parents. Nearly the same number of males and females (10%) reported that neither parent had discussed how far they should go in school.

Significant Others in Future Job Plans

The results of whom male and female students reported as significant others related to future jobs are shown in Table 10. Findings indicate a significant difference in male and female students reporting their mothers as a significant person in discussing future jobs. Of the 3,482 young people responding the mother as the most influential person regarding future jobs, 71% of the females (n = 1,967) reported their mother, whereas 62% (n = 1,515) of the males did likewise. There were also significant differences between the sexes in fathers being reported. Fifty-nine percent of the males reported their fathers, which is slightly less frequently than they reported their mothers. However, only 40% of the females reported their fathers as significant influencers in their future job plans.

Of the remaining eight possible choices only one category exhibited a significant difference between boys and girls. More females (24%) than males (21%) reported that an adult friend or neighbor was a significant person.

Table 10

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others
Regarding Future Job Plans by Sex

Sex	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
Boys	61.8 (1515)	59.3 (1453)	29.0 (712)	26.0 (638)	19.3 (475)	5.6 (136)	21.4 (525)	35.8 (877)	3.9 (96)	8.1 (199)
Girls	70.9 (1967)	39.9 (1106)	28.6 (794)	27.6 (764)	20.5 (567)	4.4 (123)	24.3 (675)	36.5 (1011)	2.6 (138)	7.5 (209)
Total										
N	3482	2559	1506	1402	1042	259	1200	1888	234	408
%	66.7	49.0	28.8	26.8	20.0	5.0	23.0	36.2	4.5	7.8
χ^2	48.71	195.89	.11	1.53	.93	3.42	6.28	.26	3.42	.61
p value	*** .0001	*** .0001	.7404	.2156	.3353	.0644	.0122*	.6110	.0646	.4339

Note. Percentages represent those individuals who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 1

N(Boys) = 2451; N(Girls) = 2773; N(Total) = 5224

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

Parents as significant others. A more specific examination of parents as influential people for young men and women in discussions of future job plans is presented in Table 11. Significant differences between the males and females who selected one parent were evident; thus, the hypothesis of difference was supported. More girls than boys indicated that only their mothers were influential: 34% of the girls as compared to 16% of the boys. Although the number of young people reporting their father only was smaller than those reporting mother only, a greater percentage of boys (13%; $n = 319$) reported that only their father discussed future jobs with them, whereas about 3% of the girls ($n = 78$) reported father only. More boys (46%) than girls (37%) reported that both parents were influential. There was no difference between the sexes in reporting that neither parent had discussed future job plans with them.

Analysis of Significant Others and Race

The last hypothesis tested was that there were no race differences in the choices of significant others reported by the young people regarding their (a) future plans, (b) future schooling, and (c) future job.

Significant Others in Future Plans

The results of the reported significant others regarding students' future plans are presented according to the child's race in Table 12. The chi square ($X^2 = 124.41$)

Table 11

Chi Square Contingency Table for Parents as Significant
Others Regarding Future Job Plans by Sex

Sex	Mother	Father	Only Mother (Not Father)	Only Father (Not Mother)	Both Parents	Neither Parent
Boys	61.8 (1515)	59.3 (1453)	15.5 (381)	13.0 (319)	46.3 (1134)	25.2 (617)
Girls	70.9 (1967)	39.9 (1106)	33.9 (939)	2.8 (78)	37.1 (1028)	26.3 (728)
Total						
N	3482	2559	1320	397	2162	1345
%	66.7	49.0	25.3	7.6	41.4	25.8
χ^2	48.71	195.89	231.18	192.85	45.35	0.79
p value	.0001***	.0001***	.0001***	.0001***	.0001***	.3731

Note. Percentages represent those individuals who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 1

N(Boys) = 2451; N(Girls) = 2773; N(Total) = 5224

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Table 12

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others
Regarding Future Plans by Race

Race	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other	Other	No One
Black	63.0 (1441)	22.3 (511)	3.5 (80)	1.9 (44)	2.7 (61)	.7 (17)	1.2 (27)	1.0 (22)	1.0 (24)	2.7 (62)
White	48.9 (1389)	35.0 (992)	3.3 (94)	2.4 (68)	2.3 (66)	.5 (13)	1.6 (44)	1.3 (38)	1.6 (46)	3.1 (89)
Total N	2830	1503	174	112	127	30	71	60	70	151
%	55.2	29.3	3.4	2.2	2.5	.6	1.4	1.2	1.37	2.9

Note. The percentages reflect 100% of the respondents in each cohort and the total sample, since the young people selected only one significant person or category.

$\chi^2 = 124.41$
 $df = 9$
 $p \text{ value} = .0001^{***}$

$N(\text{Blacks}) = 2289; N(\text{Whites}) = 2839;$

Total N = 5128 (with 47 missing values for Blacks and
 49 missing values for Whites)

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

indicated that there was a significant difference between the individual whom black and white young people reported as significant others; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The most frequently reported person by both black and white youths was their mother; however, a higher percentage of black youngsters (63%; $n = 1,441$) than white youngsters (49%; $n = 1,389$) reported their mother. The second most frequently selected significant other for both races was the father; however, the trend was reversed in that more whites (35%) than blacks (22%) reported their father. Again, these differences appeared to indicate where some of the race differences occur. The remaining categories were selected by a much smaller frequency of young people (percentages range from 0.5 to 3.5) and there seemed to be very little variation according to race.

In summary, the differences between races seemed primarily related to the tendency for black youngsters to select their mothers more than white youngsters did, whereas white children selected their fathers more frequently than did the black children. It must be noted that in both races, the mother was the most frequently reported significant other and that the father was the second most frequently reported person. However, the percentage of white students reporting their fathers was about 14% less than those reporting their mothers, whereas the decrease was more dramatic for blacks (decreased from 63 to 22%, which is a 41% difference).

Significant Others in Future Schooling Plans

Race differences in reported significant others regarding how far a student should go in school are presented in Table 13. Since the majority of items indicated a significant difference between black and white students' responses, the null hypothesis of no difference was rejected.

The most frequently reported significant person in influencing future schooling plans for both races was the mother, with nearly equal percentages for both blacks (84.9) and whites (84.8). The father was the second most frequently reported person by both races. However, there was a significant difference between the races; 64% (n = 1,849) of the white fifth and sixth graders compared to 56.9% (n = 1,328) of the black students reported their fathers.

The next most frequently reported categories were an older brother or sister, another relative, and a teacher. Approximately equal percentages of black (26.3) and white (24.6) youngsters reported older siblings as influential. However, more white (24.8%) than black (21.5%) young people reported that another relative was helpful in future schooling discussions. The trend was reversed for teachers, with more black students (23.6%) than white ones (20.0%) reporting teachers as being influential in their future schooling plans.

The remaining five categories were much less frequently selected by the young students. There was a significant

Table 13

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others
Regarding Future Schooling Plans by Race

Race	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
Black	84.9 (1984)	56.9 (1328)	26.3 (614)	21.5 (503)	23.6 (551)	4.0 (94)	14.3 (334)	13.8 (323)	2.3 (53)	4.3 (101)
White	84.8 (2448)	64.0 (1849)	24.6 (711)	24.8 (715)	20.0 (576)	3.6 (91)	16.8 (486)	17.4 (501)	3.5 (102)	4.8 (139)
Total										
N	4432	3177	1325	1218	1127	185	820	824	155	240
%	84.8	60.8	25.4	23.3	21.6	3.5	15.7	15.8	3.0	4.6
χ^2	0.03	27.89	1.89	7.51	10.13	2.88	6.25	12.05	7.16	0.71
p value	.8671	.001*	.1690	.0061*	.0015**	.0896	.0124*	.0005**	.0075**	.4009

Note. Percentages represent those individuals who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 1

N(Blacks) = 2336; N(Whites) = 2888; Total N = 5224

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

difference in the selection of other kids as significant persons in future schooling discussions. More white young people (17.4%) than black ones (13.8%) indicated that peers were influential. There was also a significant difference in the selection of the categories of an adult friend or neighbor and other; white students selected these categories more frequently than blacks selected them. There was no difference in the races in selecting the categories of preacher and no one.

In summary, the null hypothesis of no difference was rejected since there were significant differences found according to race. Although approximately equal numbers of black and white young people reported their mother as most influential, more white students than black students reported their father. For both races, mother was the most frequently reported significant other and father was the second most frequently reported person. In three categories, older siblings, preacher, and no one, there were no differences according to race. However, black young people tended to select a teacher as a significant other in future schooling matters more often than white fifth and sixth graders did. As reported, white youngsters checked the remaining categories more frequently than did the black children.

Summary. There were significant differences between the races; therefore, the null hypothesis of no differences was rejected. A higher percentage of black than white

Significant Others in Future Job Plans

The results of significant others about future jobs by race are reported in Table 14. Since there were significant differences in the majority of the items selected, the null hypothesis of no difference between black and white young people's selection of significant others was rejected.

Although the young people of both races reported their mother most frequently, there was a significant difference between the races. A higher percentage of black children (70%; $n = 1,636$) reported their mothers as compared to 64% of the white children ($n = 1,846$). Children of both races reported their fathers as the second most influential person regarding future job discussions, with an approximately equal percentage for each race (50%).

In three categories--another relative, adult friend or neighbor, and other--there were no significant differences. However, black young people selected older siblings, a teacher, and preacher more frequently than did white students. The reporting of a teacher as a significant person with whom the child had discussed future job plans was much higher for blacks than for whites, about 24% compared to 17%. White youngsters tended to report "other kids" or "no one" as being significant others more frequently than did blacks.

Summary. There were significant differences between the races; therefore, the null hypothesis of no differences was rejected. A higher percentage of black than white

Table 14

Chi Square Contingency Table for Significant Others
Regarding Future Job Plans by Race

Race	Mother	Father	Older Brother or Sister	Another Relative	Teacher	Preacher	Adult Friend or Neighbor	Other Kids	Other	No One
Black	70.0 (1636)	47.8 (1116)	30.9 (721)	26.2 (611)	23.9 (558)	5.7 (132)	21.9 (511)	34.4 (803)	4.3 (101)	6.0 (139)
White	63.9 (1846)	50.0 (1443)	27.2 (785)	27.4 (791)	16.8 (484)	4.4 (127)	23.9 (689)	37.6 (1085)	4.6 (133)	9.3 (269)
Total N	3482	2559	1506	1402	1042	259	1200	1888	234	408
%	66.7	49.0	28.8	26.8	20.0	5.0	23.0	36.1	4.5	7.8
χ^2	21.7	2.48	8.54	1.00	41.09	4.30	2.87	5.71	.24	20.30
p value	*** .0001	.1152	** .0035	.3172	*** .0001	* .0380	.0904	* .0169	.6246	*** .0001

Note. Percentages represent those individuals who did check a particular category as being a significant other (as opposed to those who did not check); therefore, the totals do not add up to 100%.

df = 1

N(Blacks) = 2336; N(Whites) = 2888; Total N = 5224

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

students reported their mother; however, an approximately equal percentage of children of both races reported their fathers as significant others regarding future jobs. For both races the mother was reported most frequently, and the father was the second most frequently reported person. Black students reported their older siblings, a teacher and preacher, more frequently than whites did; however, white young people reported peers more frequently. There were no differences according to race in the remaining categories.

Summary of Findings and Discussion of Results

Each hypothesis was tested with three dependent variables; and in order that the findings of each sub-hypothesis may be compiled, a summary of the findings will be presented in this section. Each hypothesis will be examined separately and the results will be discussed.

Significant Others by Cohort Groups

The first hypothesis of no difference across cohorts in reporting parents as significant others was rejected for all three dependent variables. The difference in cohort groups appears to result from a decrease in the number of times the 1975 fifth and sixth graders (in Cohort II) reported parents as significant others, whereas the 1969 and 1978 groups remained fairly stable. However, in spite of this decrease, in all the cohort groups parents were the most often reported significant others, with the mothers being most often reported and the fathers the second most often reported.

When the cohort differences are discussed, it may help to note that the mid-to-late 1960's was a time of turmoil during which many of the former values were questioned. For example, authority was seriously questioned by many segments of American society. The changes that resulted from that time of upheaval could perhaps explain the decrease in parental influence reported by the young people in 1975. Perhaps the difference can also be explained by a particular variation in the 1975 sample of fifth and sixth graders. It is possible that those particular young people were atypical of lower socioeconomic students in the fifth and sixth grade, although this is not as likely a possibility since the young people sampled were from the same or similar schools and met similar requirements to be included in the sample as did the young people with whom they were compared.

The finding that parental influence was the strongest influence reported in future life goals of young people supports the prior research findings of Norris and Sherman (1966), Kandel et al. (1968), and Kandel and Lesser (1969). Support is added to the idea that parental influence is very prevalent throughout the time young people are making decisions regarding their future lives, since this study shows parental influence is strong in students as early as in the fifth and sixth grade, and the aforementioned studies show parental influence to predominate from the sixth grade through high school. This study also points out the strength of

maternal influence since mothers are the most frequently reported significant other, with fathers being the second most often reported persons. This study did not support previous studies in which findings showed peer influence to be greater than parental influence, such as reported by Coleman (1961), Herriott (1963), and McDill and Coleman (1965). This fact may result from the difference in instruments utilized or difference in samples since the students in this study were of lower socioeconomic status and younger than the other studies mentioned above.

Further study of the cohort findings indicated that the next most often reported categories after parents were older siblings, another relative, teacher, and other kids. However, the importance of these categories varied according to the dependent measure being used. For example, when the young person could check only one category, then parents were most frequently selected, and the remaining categories were much less frequently selected. However, for the questions in which more than one person could be indicated, other categories had higher percentages of responses. The type of measures in which more than one answer is possible does not necessarily give the researcher the answer to who is most influential; instead, it gives additional information about significant others which would not be available if only one category were to be selected.

In this study since they are from minority and lower

The area of influence being examined seems to make a difference also. For example, there was a progressive increase in the reporting of other kids from the first to the later cohort groups; however, this change was reflected primarily in future job discussions. Perhaps this result indicates that fifth and sixth graders are more willing to talk to peers about future jobs than they are about future school plans. Therefore, if one is interested in peer influence, the type of questions used to measure influence may make a difference. The increase in peer influence in future job discussions, may also reflect some cultural changes that are occurring in our society. Young people may be looking to other kids (after parents) rather than to adult figures for discussions about job matters.

Another trend in the cohort data is the general decline in teacher influence over the years. Again this trend was more evident in the questions regarding future plans and future schooling, than it was in the future job question. This finding might indicate that the topic of discussion makes a difference in how young people respond. The finding that teacher influence has declined may also reflect some basic societal changes occurring in the last ten years, which have had an effect on the educational system. For instance, desegregation has created some changes in the educational system in general and has probably affected the youngsters in this study since they are from minority and lower

socioeconomic subcultures. Also, with a surplus of teachers, and general problems in the school systems, the profession of educators seems to be less respected in general, which probably has some carry-over to the young students.

A summary of the cohort findings points out that differences did appear across cohorts, particularly in the 1975 cohort group. However, parents are still the strongest influence in young people's future life plans. The type of measurements used reflected some variations in the individuals who were reported as significant influences; therefore, the type of measurement must be carefully selected depending on the purpose of the study.

Significant Others by Sex

The hypothesis of differences in males and females reporting their parents was supported for the three dependent variables. In the question of future plans only one category of significant other could be reported, and girls overwhelmingly reported their mothers, whereas more boys reported their fathers, even though the mother was a close second for boys. In the measures about future schooling and future job, when parental influence was examined--specifically where only one parent was reported--there were significant differences between males and females. When mother only was reported, girls more frequently reported their mothers than boys did, and when only fathers were reported, boys reported

their father more frequently than girls did. In both measures, however, boys reported their mothers more often than fathers; moreover, boys tended to report both parents more often than girls did.

A review of related literature indicates that the findings of this study support Norris and Sherman's (1966) findings that upper-middle-class girls and boys (grades 6, 8, 10 and 12) list the same-sex parent as the strongest influence in career planning. This study also supported Lueptow's (1980) findings that high school students listed the same-sex parent as most influential in future life decisions. Contrary to Mims' (1976) findings, this study found that males, more so than females, reported that both parents were influential. This study also did not provide any indication that females are more influenced by significant others than males are, as Solomon (1963) found. In fact, in more of the items related to future schooling and job (12 out of 20), there was no significant difference between the boys and girls.

It is not surprising that mothers are generally the most influential persons for both males and females since the traditional mother's role has been to rear children; consequently, mothers spend more time with the children during their preschool years. It also is not surprising that girls reported mothers as most influential since they are the primary role models. However, it is rather sobering to learn of the low percentage of lower socioeconomic young people

who have discussed future plans, schooling, and jobs with their father. This phenomenon is not uniquely lower socio-economic, but is also found in middle- and upper-class groups. This effect may be the result of easier accessibility to mothers since fathers are not in the home as frequently because of jobs or other responsibilities and, therefore, are not available. In terms of boys learning from the role models of the same-sex parents, there are some implications for males. Less accessibility to fathers also affects females in terms of getting the opposite sex-role model and, therefore, a healthy balance (Lueptow, 1980).

Significant Others by Race

The third hypothesis of no difference between races was rejected for the three dependent variables. Test results indicated that parents were the most influential significant other for both black and white young people. However, the type of measurement made a difference in who appeared most influential. For instance, when only one category could be checked, there was a significant race difference in the reported significant other regarding the child's future plans. Blacks indicated their mothers more frequently than whites did, and the opposite was true for fathers, with more white students reporting father than did black students. This difference is consistent with the fact that there are more one-parent families among lower income blacks than among lower-income whites. When several items could be checked, as in

the future schooling and future job measures, the results were different. In future schooling there was not a significant race difference in reporting mother, but there was for father since more white children reported their father. The opposite was found in the future job variable. Although there was no difference between races in reporting father, more blacks than whites reported mother. This finding has implications for the type of measurement used, because not only does the number of items to be checked seem to affect the results, but also the topic of discussion seems to make a difference. Again, the purpose of the study must be taken into account when the variables utilized to measure influence are selected.

Some consistent findings in all three dependent variables are that low-income black young people, more so than low-income white young people, tend to report teachers as being influential. These white students reported discussing their future with other kids or peers more often than these black young people did.

These findings are most influential in their lives may be effective in designing means of improving their status attainment. Longitudinal data to support that the influence of these significant others did, in fact, affect later status attainment are necessary and are underway.

The purpose of this study was to determine who are the significant others that lower socioeconomic young people feel are most influential in their future plans in general and,

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Young people from lower socioeconomic background who are black and from certain geographic locations, are often at a disadvantage in American society, particularly in the educational and occupational realms. Although sociological theory has emphasized the importance of significant others in the socialization process, research related to educational and occupational attainment models has found the influence of significant others to be an intervening variable between social origin factors and actual status attainment. Since the influence of significant others is a social-psychological factor which is thought to be more subject to change than such factors as socioeconomic status, this is a point at which intervention can occur. Therefore, knowing whom low-income youth consider most influential in their lives may be effective in designing means of improving their status attainment. Longitudinal data to support that the influence of these significant others did, in fact, affect later status attainment are necessary and are underway.

The purpose of this study was to determine who are the significant others that lower socioeconomic young people feel are most influential in their future plans in general and,

more specifically, in educational and occupational matters. Data about career aspirations were collected in two Southern Regional Research Projects and also under the collaborative efforts of four state projects. These data were obtained from fifth and sixth grade students in low income areas of seven states: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The total Southern sample included three sub-samples--rural blacks, urban blacks, and rural Appalachian whites--from which the data were collected from the cohort groups at three different times (1969, 1975, and 1978).

The particular population studied in this research had several unique characteristics. First, data were collected from a lower socioeconomic group, with three different sub-cultures represented, whereas most of the research in this area has studied white middle class young people. Secondly, the respondents were contacted at a much earlier age than were subjects in the typical studies on status attainment. The first hypothesis of no difference across cohorts was rejected for the three dependent variables. The significant difference appeared to be the result of a decrease in school students spanning nearly a 10-year period of time. The youth in the 1975 cohort group, who reported parents as significant others, whereas the 1969 and 1978 cohorts remained stable. It must be noted that parents were the most often reported significant others in the three cohorts, with mother being the most often reported and father being the second most often reported person.

during those particular years.

The independent variables in this research were cohort, sex, and race of the fifth and sixth graders. The dependent

variables were three aspects of significant others' influence and they were measured by asking the young people:

- (a) whose advice was most important to them about future plans,
- (b) who had talked with them about future schooling, and
- (c) who had talked with them about future job choices.

In the first measure the students were asked to check only one response; therefore, the analysis involved the frequency of respondents. In the last two measures (b and c), the youth were given the opportunity to check more than one response category; therefore, the analysis involved the frequency of responses. The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) (Barr et al., 1979) was used to analyze the data by the chi square measure of association. The .05 level of significance was used to test the hypotheses.

Findings and Conclusions

1. The first hypothesis of no difference across cohorts was rejected for the three dependent variables. The significant difference appeared to be the result of a decrease of the youth in the 1975 cohort group, who reported parents as significant others, whereas the 1969 and 1978 cohorts remained stable. It must be noted that parents were the most often reported significant others in the three cohorts, with mother being the most often reported and father being the second most often reported person.

2. The second hypothesis of differences in males and females reporting their parents as significant persons was supported for the three dependent measures. When only one parent was reported, the parent of the same sex as the child was most often reported; therefore, girls reported their mothers more often than they did fathers, and boys reported their fathers more often than they reported their mothers.

3. The third hypothesis of no difference between the races was rejected for the three dependent variables. Parents were found to be the most influential significant others for both black and white young people. However, depending on the type of measurement, there was some variation in where the race differences occurred. Generally, however, low-income black students tended to report their mother more frequently than low-income white youngsters did, while these white children tended to report their father more frequently than these black children did. Other race differences found were that black young people reported a teacher more frequently as a significant person in future life matters than white students did. However, low-income white students discussed their future plans with "other kids" or peers more frequently than did the low-income black young people.

4. The results of studying significant others is dependent to some extent on the type of measurement used. The item for which it was possible to check only one category provided a somewhat different perspective of who was

influential than did the measures for which more than one selection was possible. Although parental influence predominated in all three measures, the remaining categories were selected more often in the measures which allowed a greater range of choice among all significant others. Therefore, the measurement to be selected would depend on the research questions and whether or not one was interested in knowing only who was most influential or if one was also interested in all the persons who were influential.

Recommendations

1. Since this study was limited in scope, further examination of the data would be appropriate to determine if any of the cohort differences were related to sex and race variations. Also, further examination of the data with non-parametric statistical procedures would be desirable, to see if additional information or a stronger relationship can be ascertained.

2. More focus needs to be given to studying other lower socioeconomic groups regarding significant others' influence since most of the studies in the literature have utilized white middle-class samples. The need to study these groups is particularly evident since it is the disadvantaged minorities and lower socioeconomic youth who particularly need additional service to aid in their status attainment process.

3. Adding a longitudinal component to such a study would be helpful in determining if the findings are simply characteristic of the particular samples. An analysis of the same sample over time would examine whether or not these young people changed as they matured in their report of significant others. For example, does peer influence increase with the child's age, and does it become even stronger than parental influence for lower-income youth than middle-income youth as some of the literature suggests.

4. Since parents are the most often reported significant person in young people's future life plan, there are some definite implications for policies which emphasize parental educational programs, particularly in helping parents know how to guide their children in making future life goals in educational and occupational areas.

5. Further research could see if intervention through parental educational programs, which emphasize the parental role in a child's educational and career planning, are really successful in improving the status attainment of disadvantaged young people.

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