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Viewing Adolescents' Career Futures Through the Lenses of Socioeconomic Status and Social Class

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This study examined socioeconomic status (SES) and perceived social class as predictors of educational and occupational aspirations and expectations in a sample of 100 high school students from 2 midwestern high schools. SES was measured using caregivers' occupation and education, and subjective social status was assessed using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status–Youth Version (Goodman et al., 2001). SES and perceived social class made independent contributions to educational aspirations, whereas SES made an independent contribution to occupational aspirations and expectations. The authors discuss the importance of SES and social class in career development theory and research and provide practical implications based on the present findings. Overall, this study highlights the importance of measuring SES and social class as distinct constructs and the need for future work to identify the unique impacts of these variables.

Keywords: socioeconomic status, social class, educational aspirations, occupational aspirations, educational expectations

Career development scholars have called for a heightened emphasis on historically underserved populations, such as the poor and the chronically unemployed (Blustein, 2011; Liu & Ali, 2005; Richardson, 1993). Liu and Ali (2005), for example, observed that vocational psychology has often implicitly embraced a classist bias toward upward mobility. Blustein (2011) noted that researchers have tended to focus on middle-class populations who enjoy above-average levels of choice. He further argued that if career professionals hope to understand and assist all working people and not simply middle-class individuals with relatively high levels of vocational volition, the research base of the field must expand to encompass populations that have been largely overlooked in the past. To address some of these shortcomings, the present study examined socioeconomic constructs related to educational and occupational aspirations of high school students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) communities. Gaining a better understanding of these variables is particularly important with respect to adolescent populations, who make pivotal life and career decisions during this phase of life (Akos, Konold, & Niles, 2004; Turner & Lapan, 2005). Moreover, examining these variables in low-income adolescents helps advance important social justice initiatives in the discipline.

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Conceptualizing SES and Social Class

Although SES has received concerted research attention, there is ongoing debate regarding whether SES relates mainly to economic position or to social status, or prestige (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). This ongoing debate has led to some definitional confusion in the literature, with terms such as *SES*, *social class*, and *economic background* often being conflated (Liu et al., 2004). Despite this confusion, it is generally agreed that an essential component of SES is access to resources, or capital. Coleman (1988) described three forms of capital: physical capital, human capital, and social capital. Physical capital is wholly tangible and relates to tools, productive equipment, and other material resources. Human capital relates to nonmaterial resources, such as skills and abilities that are acquired through education. Finally, social capital relates to resources that derive from social relations or connections. Bradley and Corwyn (2002) argued that this notion of SES as capital is perhaps the most prevalent conceptualization espoused by psychologists, probably in part because these forms of capital have relatively direct implications for well-being. Saegert et al. (2007) noted four distinct pathways through which SES affects health and well-being: differential access to health care, differential exposure to environmental hazards, health behaviors, and differential exposure to stress. These numerous detrimental influences affect myriad facets of individuals' lives, including career development and employability (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004), and underscore the importance of incorporating the construct robustly into career development research.

Although scholars generally agree on the importance of capital to SES, there is disagreement about the role of prestige and status, and some have made a distinction between SES and social class. Liu et al. (2004), for example, argued that even though both SES and social class relate to power, prestige, and access to resources, a primary distinction between the two involves group awareness. Specifically, they observed that social class implies a collective consciousness of a group's relative position within society. SES implies no such group awareness and is instead an index of access to resources and power (Saegert et al., 2007). Similarly, Fouad and Brown (2000) emphasized the distinction between socioeconomic factors and the ways in which these factors are internalized and affect individuals' self-perceptions. They argued that perception of social standing has important impacts on development and personal and social identities and should be examined in greater depth.

Because it relates to self-perception, perceived social class must be assessed differently than SES. So-called objective measures are often used to assess SES, and subjective measures have been helpful in assessing perceived social class (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Goodman et al. (2001) noted that purely objective measures of SES fail to capture important subjective impacts of social standing. Adler et al. (2000) found that subjective or perceived social status was associated with a variety of biological functions as well as psychological functioning (e.g., pessimism, control over life, and active coping), even after controlling for objective social status. These results provide strong support for assessing the incremental contribution of perceived social class to health and psychological outcomes above and beyond SES.

Educational and Occupational Aspirations and Expectations

As a valuable component of human capital, education is considered a key dimension of employability (Fugate et al., 2004). By equipping individuals with increased skills and knowledge, educational attainment enhances income and health outcomes (Saegert et al., 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), which underlines the importance of obtaining postsecondary education. Moreover, educational aspirations are closely related to career aspirations, career adaptability (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005), self-efficacy, interests, and personality (Rottinghaus, Lindley, Green, & Borgen, 2002).

McWhirter, Larson, and Daniels (1996) found that educational aspirations of minority adolescents were correlated with parents' educational level. Cook et al. (1996) observed lower occupational aspirations in individuals from poor neighborhoods, and Rojewski and Yang (1997) found a positive relationship between occupational aspirations and SES (measured using a composite score of parents' educational attainment, occupations, and income) in adolescents. Furthermore, Smith-Maddox (1999) found that poverty status was also negatively correlated with educational aspirations. Diemer and Hsieh (2008) explored the importance of sociopolitical development for the development of vocational expectations in a sample of low-SES adolescents of color. These authors noted that a vocational aspiration–expectation gap has been observed in low-SES adolescents but not in higher SES adolescents. This research provides strong evidence of links between SES and occupational and educational aspirations and expectations, but it does not address how individuals' perceptions of their social standing influence these variables.

Purpose of the Study

Diemer and Hsieh's (2008) findings indicate that it is less clear how perceived social class relates to pivotal career development constructs of educational and occupational expectations and aspirations. It is critical to better understand the unique influence of the subjective, internalized factors of social stratification and not simply the impacts of differential access to resources. Building this understanding could yield a more fine-grained view of the interrelations between these constructs and might point the way toward empirically grounded interventions that take these variables into account. As a subjective construct, perceived social class may be more amenable to counseling interventions than SES. The current study addresses these needs by examining the strength of SES and perceived social class as independent predictors of educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of high school students. Examining the relationship of perceived social class above and beyond SES to these constructs represents a novel approach that could contribute to better understanding relationships between these important variables. We hypothesized that SES and perceived social class will each make independent, positive, direct contributions to four outcome variables: (a) educational aspirations, (b) educational expectations, (c) occupational aspirations, and (d) occupational expectations.

Method

Participants

Participants included 100 (63 women and 37 men) high school students (ages 14–19 years) selected from two midwestern high schools. These high schools reside in rural, relatively low-income communities (median household incomes range from $26,919 to $30,182). Of the 41 participants who identified their ethnicity, 76.3% identified as European American/White, 15.2% as two or more races, 3.4% as Native American, 3.4% as Hispanic American/Latino(a), and 1.7% as African American/Black. We selected these high schools as participant pools based on the demographics of the surrounding communities. The participants resided in communities with relatively low academic attainment (between 7.4% and 12.7% of residents in these communities had obtained bachelor's degrees) and household income, which are two contributors to low SES and social class (Saegert et al., 2007). A power analysis indicated that, for the proposed analyses, a sample of 69 would be needed to detect a medium effect. Thus, even our relatively small sample size was adequate for the analyses conducted.

Measures

Demographic and career planning questionnaire. A questionnaire elicited participants' age, gender, social class, cumulative grade point average (GPA), race/ethnicity, educational aspirations and expectations, and specific occupational aspirations. To assess educational aspirations and expectations, participants selected one of the following options: less than high school diploma, high school diploma, some college, technical degree or certificate, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, law degree, medical degree (e.g., doctor of medicine, doctor of dental surgery, doctor of veterinary medicine), or doctorate degree (e.g., doctor of philosophy, doctor of education). For educational aspirations, we asked participants, "How far in school would you most like to go?" For educational expectations, we asked participants, "How far in school do you think you will probably go?" For occupational aspirations, we asked participants, "What kind of work would you most like to do?" For occupational expectations, we asked participants, "What kind of work do you think you will probably do?" These items were separated by numerous other items to avoid being repetitive.

SES. SES is a notoriously challenging construct to assess (Saegert et al., 2007), and additional challenges arise when assessing it in adolescent populations (Hauser, 1994). The three most commonly used objective measures of SES are primary caregiver occupation, education, and income (Adler et al., 2000; Merola, 2005), but some have suggested that income is an unreliable indicator of SES (Hauser, 1994; Saegert et al., 2007). Consequently, following Hauser's (1994) recommendation, participants reported their primary caregivers' occupations and education. We coded the occupations using the Socioeconomic Index, which reflects the socioeconomic positions of occupations (Nakao & Treas, 1992). This index produces a score from 1 to 100 for a given occupation (among a total of 503 occupational categories), with higher scores representing higher SES occupations. We computed the scores on this index using a

composite of incumbents' income and attained educational level, as well as prestige ratings produced by respondents. In cases where participants listed two or more occupations (e.g., the occupations of both parents), we used the occupation with the highest score in the analyses. We coded primary caregiver education and educational aspirations as (1) less than a high school degree; (2) high school degree; (3) some college, technical degree, or associate's degree; (4) bachelor's degree; (5) master's degree; and (6) law degree, medical degree, or doctorate degree.

Perceived social class. We assessed perceived social class using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status—Youth Version (Goodman et al., 2001). This instrument asks participants to rank their relative social position on one of 10 rungs of a ladder, in which each rung up the ladder represents a slightly higher level of social status. The instrument consists of two pictures of a ladder with 10 rungs. For one ladder, participants imagine it depicts American society. Participants are asked to rank where they believe their family would fall on this ladder in terms of educational attainment, occupation, respect, etc. For the other ladder, they imagine it depicts their own school. Participants are instructed to consider their position within their schools (with regard to respect, social standing, academic achievement, etc.) and select the rung on which they believe they fall. In a sample of 115 adolescents, 2-month test–retest reliability for the measure was .73 for the societal ladder and .79 for the community ladder (Goodman et al., 2001).

Procedure

Students were invited to participate through morning intercom announcements. Interested students obtained a parental consent letter and form and signed up for the study using sign-up sheets distributed by classroom teachers. Students were given study hall time to complete the packet of materials and had the option to submit a separate slip of paper with an e-mail address to be entered into a gift-card raffle. We then provided the informed consent form and distributed packets containing all measures, which were randomized to eliminate any potential order effects. Upon completion, we debriefed participants, provided details about an optional career workshop that provided career-related resources, and entered interested individuals into a drawing for one of several $15 gift cards.

Data Analysis

Before the data from different sites were merged, we performed a series of analyses of variance to examine any significant differences between variables. Because of the number of comparisons conducted, we performed a Šídák-Bonferroni correction, resulting in a new alpha level ($\alpha = .003$). No significant differences were found between the samples on any variable, so the samples were merged. To test each hypothesis, we sequentially entered blocks of SES and perceived social class into a hierarchical regression predicting each outcome variable (educational and occupational aspirations and expectations).

Results

The average GPA (on a 4.0 scale) for the sample was relatively high ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.59$), although only 61 participants noted their GPAs.

SES as measured by caregivers' occupational attainment ranged from 27 to 96 (out of a possible range of 1–100), with a mean of 57.23 (SD = 19.45). On this same 100-point scale, participants' average occupational aspirations rated 60.72 (SD = 24.48), and their average occupational expectations rated 59.71 (SD = 22.10). Examples of professions on this 100-point scale include a mining machine operator (36.36), dentist (96.04), and secondary school teacher (62.49). Out of a possible range from 1 to 6, mean SES as measured by caregivers' educational attainment was 3.36 (SD = 1.32). On this same scale, participants' average educational aspirations rated 4.38 (SD = 1.45), whereas their average educational expectations rated 4.48 (SD = 1.35). On a scale from 1 to 10, participants' average perceived social class within American society was 5.83 (SD = 1.63), whereas their perceived social class within their communities was substantially higher (M = 7.52, SD = 1.83), $t(95)$ = 9.23, $p < .001$.

The correlations, means, and standard deviations for these variables appear in Table 1. Notably, SES, as measured by caregivers' educational attainment, was modestly correlated with perceived social class within society, $r(90) = .31$, $p < .05$, and was not significantly correlated with perceived social class within the community, $r(90) = .16$, $p = .13$. SES as measured by caregivers' occupational attainment was weakly correlated with perceived social class within society, $r(88) = .26$, $p < .05$, and weakly correlated with perceived social class within the community, $r(88) = .24$, $p < .05$. Perceived social class within the community was moderately correlated with educational aspirations, $r(93) = .40$, $p < .001$.

The SES metric (i.e., caregivers' educational and occupational attainment) and perceived social class (within society and the community) were entered in separate blocks to assess the incremental variance of each

TABLE 1

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Educational aspirations	—	.89***	.56***	.55***	.30**	.29**	.11	.41***
2. Educational expectations		—	.51***	.53***	.24*	.24*	.20	.41***
3. Occupational aspirations			—	.90***	.28*	.38***	.04	.21
4. Occupational expectations				—	.29**	.45***	.07	.19
5. SES caregiver educational attainment					—	.64***	.31*	.16
6. SES caregiver occupational attainment						—	.26*	.24*
7. Perceived social class–society							—	.47***
8. Perceived social class–community								—
M	4.38	4.48	60.72	59.71	3.36	57.23	5.83	7.52
SD	1.45	1.35	24.48	22.10	1.32	19.45	1.63	1.83

Note. Educational and occupational aspirations and expectations and socioeconomic status (SES) caregiver occupational attainment range from 1 to 100. SES caregiver educational attainment ranges from 1 to 6. Perceived social class–society and perceived social class–community range from 1 to 10.

*$p < .05$, two-tailed. **$p < .01$, two-tailed. ***$p < .001$, two-tailed.

variable in explaining educational and occupational aspirations and expectations (see Tables 2 and 3). To measure the impact of multicollinearity in these hierarchical regressions, we calculated the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all analyses. The highest VIF value was 2.01, well below the recommended cutoff value of 5, indicating that a very low level of multicollinearity was present for these analyses. This is consistent with the slight amount of shared variance between these variables indicated by the correlations noted previously. SES was entered first to examine the variance explained by these objective factors. Perceived social class was entered second to examine any incremental variance it explained.

For educational aspirations, the first block, SES, explained a significant amount of variance, 10%, $F(2, 84) = 4.46$, $p = .014$ (see Table 2). The addition of the second block, perceived social class, resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of variance explained in the expected direction, 17%, $F(2, 82) = 9.65$, $p < .001$. Together, these blocks accounted for 27% of the variance of educational aspirations.

For educational expectations, the first block, SES, did not explain a significant amount of variance, 6%, $F(2, 81) = 2.61$, $p = .08$ (see Table 2). The addition of the second block, perceived social class, resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of variance explained, 14%, $F(2, 79) = 7.05$, $p < .01$. Within this second block, perceived social class within the community made a significant contribution to educational expectations in the expected direction, $t(79) = 3.60$, $p < .001$. These two blocks accounted for 20% of the variance of educational expectations.

TABLE 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regressions to Test for Incremental Variance in Educational Aspirations and Educational Expectations From Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Perceived Social Class

Variable	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*B*	*t*
Educational Aspirations					
Step 1	.10*	.10*			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.21	0.22	1.52
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.14	0.01	1.01
Step 2	.27***	.17***			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.24	0.25	1.89
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.05	0.00	0.44
Perceived social class–society			–.17	–0.15	–1.53
Perceived social class–community			.47	0.36	4.38***
Educational Expectations					
Step 1	.06	.06			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.16	0.16	1.09
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.11	0.01	0.74
Step 2	.20**	.14**			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.16	0.15	1.09
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.04	0.00	0.30
Perceived social class–society			–.06	–0.05	–0.49
Perceived social class–community			.41	0.29	3.60***

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

TABLE 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regressions to Test for Incremental Variance in Occupational Aspirations and Occupational Expectations From Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Perceived Social Class

Variable	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*B*	*t*
Occupational Aspirations					
Step 1	.21***	.21**			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.30	4.74	2.26*
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.20	0.22	1.50
Step 2	.25***	.04			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.33	5.28	2.52*
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.19	0.21	1.40
Perceived social class–society			–.20	–2.72	–1.70
Perceived social class–community			.22	2.68	1.89
Occupational Expectations					
Step 1	.23***	.23***			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.18	3.01	1.39
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.35	0.40	2.66**
Step 2	.25***	.02			
SES caregiver educational attainment			.20	3.29	1.50
SES caregiver occupational attainment			.34	0.39	2.54*
Perceived social class–society			–.12	–1.66	–1.02
Perceived social class–community			.14	1.72	1.26

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

For occupational aspirations, the first block, SES, explained a significant amount of variance in the expected direction, 21%, $F(2, 77) = 10.00$, $p < .001$ (see Table 3). In this block, caregivers' educational attainment made a significant contribution to occupational aspirations, $t(75) = 2.26$, $p = .03$. The addition of the second block, perceived social class, did not result in a significant increase in the proportion of variance explained, 4%, $F(3, 75) = 2.20$, $p = .11$.

For occupational expectations, the first block, SES, explained a significant amount of variance, 23%, $F(2, 76) = 11.46$, $p < .001$ (see Table 3). In this first block, caregivers' occupational attainment made a significant contribution to occupational expectations in the expected direction, $t(76) = 2.66$, $p < .01$. As reported in Table 3, the second block did not result in a significant amount of variance explained.

Discussion

Previous studies have documented the connection between SES and educational aspirations and expectations (e.g., Cook et al., 1996; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Hanson, 1994; Rojewski & Yang, 1997; Smith-Maddox, 1999). Results of the present study support and expand upon this previous work because SES made a substantial independent contribution to educational aspirations in the expected direction. Much less work has examined the independent influence of perceived social class on educational aspirations and expectations, although theory suggests that the two constructs should operate distinctly (Liu et al., 2004). In the current sample, perceived social class made an independent and

substantial contribution to explaining both educational aspirations and expectations. Perceived social class within the community was a consistently significant predictor, underscoring the salience of adolescents' position within the social environment of their schools. SES also made a significant and substantial contribution to explaining occupational aspirations and expectations. This is consistent with our finding that SES makes a similar independent contribution to explaining educational aspirations and highlights the importance of SES.

An interesting finding was that perceived social class did not make an independent contribution to predicting either occupational aspirations or expectations. This was an unexpected result, and it suggests that perceived social class is related to how students think about education but not about occupations. One explanation could be that, when assessing their perceived social class, students were asked to consider their relative position in their schools. It is natural that their perceived status within an educational environment relates to their thoughts about education more strongly than toward their thoughts about occupations. Alternately, SES may simply be more impactful as adolescents consider their occupational futures.

Theoretical Implications

Scholars have called for increased incorporation of SES and social class into theoretical models (e.g., Blustein, 2011). Our findings support the importance of both SES and social class in predicting a number of important career development variables (in this case, educational and occupational aspirations and expectations). Moreover, the current study lends substantial support to Liu et al.'s (2004) assertion that SES and perceived social class are distinct constructs that should be assessed separately. In the present study, perceived social class within the community was a particularly consistent predictor of educational aspirations and expectations, which suggests that, for these adolescents, status within the community is especially important. Future research could explore whether the trend is unique to adolescents or whether similar patterns hold for adults. The fact that perceived social class did not independently predict occupational aspirations or expectations was unexpected and suggests that different factors may be important in educational versus occupational striving. More work is necessary to better understand how and under what circumstances the distinct constructs of SES and perceived social class are related to other important career constructs.

Practical Implications

SES has long been acknowledged as an important construct, and career development experts have made significant strides toward incorporating it into theory and practice. As conceptualized herein, SES relates to the objective factors of caregivers' educational attainment and current occupation. Blustein (2011) underscored the importance of expanding the research base of the field to better understand individuals from all socioeconomic levels. The current study represented an attempt to build this knowledge base by shedding light on potential relationships between SES and perceived social class and educational and occupational aspirations and expectations in a sample of high school students. Understanding

these relationships moves researchers and practitioners one step closer to developing and providing effective, empirically grounded services that incorporate these variables.

Although it is vital to continue to explore the important role that SES plays in clients' lives, it is less obvious how career interventions can be structured to alter SES in any meaningful way. Nevertheless, research in this area enables better informed social justice advocacy aimed at mitigating sociostructural inequities. On the other hand, perceived social class, as a subjective construct, may be more amenable to change on an individual level. The current study provides support for a key assumption of Liu's (2001) Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM), namely that people's perception of their social standing may differ from the objective conditions of their lives. Liu and Ali (2008) argued that this model could serve as a framework for helping clients understand their experiences of classism, connect their emotions and cognitions relating to these experiences, and ultimately develop strategies to change their situations.

Diemer and Blustein (2006) have suggested that an important antidote to structural oppression is critical consciousness, or the ability to both understand and also overcome sociopolitical obstacles. They argued that the construct is best conceptualized as an internal resource. As such, critical consciousness may help to alter how individuals perceive themselves within the social hierarchy of their immediate communities or the broader societal context. Wampold (2001) identified the cultivation of hope as an important common factor in approaches to therapy. The SCWM (Liu, 2001) and the cultivation of critical consciousness (Diemer & Blustein, 2006) could be useful approaches for cultivating hope in lower SES clients, which could positively affect both educational and occupational expectations.

Limitations

Although the current study has implications for both research and practice, it also has limitations that should be considered. Because the study is cross-sectional and nonexperimental, its internal validity is reduced and causal relationships cannot be established. Without this causal knowledge, it is difficult to identify targets for intervention. The relatively small sample size of the current study diminished statistical power; nonetheless, numerous significant relationships supported our hypotheses. Furthermore, participants were all drawn from rural, midwestern communities, thereby limiting the external validity of the study. The sample was relatively homogeneous racially and ethnically, which detracts from cultural validity. Hence, it is possible that the results of the current study reflect cultural phenomena and would not generalize to other populations. Replication with diverse populations would help to bolster external validity.

Future Directions

Previous literature suggests that SES and perceived social class are distinct constructs, and the findings of our study support this earlier work. Future work could explore the different impacts that SES and perceived social class have on various educational and occupational con-

structs. Results from the current study also suggest that perceived social class within the community may be particularly salient for adolescents. It would be interesting to explore whether this is also true for adults (or in what circumstances it is true for adults). Given that perceived social class seems to be a more appropriate target for intervention than does SES, it will also be important to explore the efficacy of various interventions for altering perceived social class. In light of the intuitive links between educational and occupational expectations and outcome expectations, the current study provides justification to examine the ways in which SES and perceived social class affect outcome expectations. Bandura (1986) argued that outcome expectations—the beliefs about the potential results or consequences of given behaviors—are important determinants of behavior and human choice. Lent (2005) contended that outcome expectations heavily influence career decision making and that negative expectations can cause individuals to restrict their career choices. Practically speaking, to be inspired to devote the necessary energy into school and the career development process, youth need to believe that their efforts pursuing careers will matter. It may be the case that SES-related factors (e.g., lack of finances for tuition, books) negatively affect students' outcome expectations and, in turn, their career goals. Fouad and Guillen (2006) recommended examining how barriers affect outcome expectations, and further study of the links between these constructs could provide this crucial insight.

Exploring the links between SES and perceived social class and outcome expectations and related career goals might provide insight into the mechanisms of career decision making for individuals from differing socioeconomic backgrounds. Longitudinal designs could be used to better understand how these phenomena manifest over time. For example, a longitudinal study could examine the development of aspirations and expectations, as well as how these potentially diverge or converge over time. The stability of perceived social class could also be addressed by such a design.

Conclusion

Results from this study provide strong support for Liu et al.'s (2004) conceptualization of SES and social class as distinct constructs. Perceived social class within the community appears to be particularly salient for adolescents, perhaps because the school environment is a microcosm of the immediate community. SES and perceived social class were potent predictors of educational aspirations and expectations. SES was also a robust predictor of occupational aspirations and expectations. The current study begins to shed light on some of the relationships between SES and perceived social class and educational aspirations and educational expectations in high school students. Understanding these constructs is especially relevant for adolescents, who are actively making crucial educational and career decisions. In addition, gaining insight into how these constructs operate in low-income adolescent populations represents a step toward important social justice initiatives within the discipline. Results from this study provide some insight and direction for future research that could pave the way to developing effective, empirically grounded interventions that take these crucial variables into account.

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