

Influences on Parental Expectations for Post-High School Transitions

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Recent research has shown that parental expectancies have a strong influence on adolescent choices regarding course enrollment in high school and career choices outside of high school as well as influence on educational aspiration and college enrollment (Eccles, Adler, & Kaczala, 1992; Farmer, 1985; Carpenter & Fleishman, 1987; Patrikakou, 1997; Vida, Eccles, & Barber, 1997). These expectancies can be quite strong in predicting to the academic outcomes of children (Davis-Kean & Schnabel, 2001; Alexander, Entwistle, & Bedinger, 1994; Eccles, Jacobs, Harold, Yoon, Aberbach, & Freedman-Doan, 1991). In general, it is agreed that these academic expectancies are formed by the reciprocal information shared between parents and children (Eccles, et al, 1991). Indeed, Alexander and colleagues (1994) show that parents seem to take actual performance indicators of their children into account when forming (even though there was a difference in accuracy depending on SES). They suggest that the parents ability to understand or take into account performance information and other information about their children's ability is important in guiding their children's post-high school aspirations. Thus, it is important to understand not only the expectations of the parents but also how these expectations are being formed. Thus, unlike previous studies that have examined parental expectations as a predictor of child outcomes, we will be focusing on what factors predict to the formation of parental expectations. This paper focuses on what predicts parent's expectations for post-high school outcomes (getting a full-time job or going to college). We use the Eccles et al. (1993) model of parenting effects on child outcomes to guide our selection of items to include in our regressions (see Figure 1). Thus, items related to parent socio-economic status such as income and mother's education are included in our analyses. Characteristics of the child (gender, GPA, future expectations and academic self-concept) are also included to see how they influence the prediction of parental expectations. We hypothesis that parent's socio-economic status and GPA

will be significant predictors of parental expectations for post-high school transitions. We also hypothesize that other child characteristics might predict to parental expectations and that these predictors will change over time.

Sample and Methods

In this study we are using data from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT), a longitudinal study that began with a cohort of sixth graders (starting in 1983-84) that were followed until they were adults (1996-98) (A total of 9 waves). This sample (approximately 880 families at 7th grade) is primarily white and from working and middle class families and communities. These adolescents were followed through high school and as they made the transition into early adulthood; and focuses on the educational, occupational, and family plans of adolescents and, more generally, on their psychological adjustment. In this study we use data from 7th grade (Time 1) and 10th grade (Time 2). At Time-1, participants completed questionnaires in their mathematics classroom twice in grade 7 (fall & spring). Time 2 data was collect in schools in the spring semester only. At Time 2, 48% or our sample are male (52% female). In both waves, parents' surveys were mailed directly to the home. Complete school data (i.e., grades and test scores) were collected from school records.

Measures

This study is based on self-reports as well as on school records of academic achievement, in the both Time 1 and Time 2 of study (see Table 1 for descriptive information on measures).

Parent's Education (Time 1-2). Parent's level of education was based on parent's' responses to an eight level ordinal item that was coded "1: for grade school education to "8" for Ph.D. or professional degrees. The average parental education was 3.92 (SD=1.18), which is equivalent to high school and some post high school education.

Family income (Time 1-2). Family income was based on parent's responses to the question "What is your average yearly family income?" with 6 categories (1=under \$10,000 through 6=over \$80,000). Mean family income was 3.47 (SD=1.25), corresponding to a figure between \$40,000 and \$50,000.

Gender. Gender was coded as female (1) and male (2).

Academic Achievement and Grades (Time 1-2). In addition to self-reported data from youths and their parents, record data was collected from the schools.

Math and English Concept of Ability. Participants were asked to rate their math and English ability. Items included "How good at math (or English) are you?" (1=not at all good to 7=very good) and "How well do you think you will do in Math (or English) this year?" (1=not at all well to 7=very well). These scales have good reliabilities with an alpha of .88 for math and a .84 for English.

Youth Future Educational Plans (Time 1-2). Youth indicated their plans for future education by answering the question "When you finish high school, do you plan to go to a four-year college? (1=definitely no, 7=definitely yes).

Youth Future Occupational Plans (Time 1-2). Students were asked their plans for future occupation by answering the question "When you finish high school, do you plan to get a full-time job? (1=definitely no, 7=definitely yes).

Parent expectation for college (Time 1-2). To assess parents' expectations for their children's future education, they were asked, "Right after high school do you expect your child to go to a four- year college? (1=definitely not 7=definitely yes).

Parent expectation for job (Time 1-Time 2). To assess parents' expectations for their children's future occupation, they were asked, "Right after high school do you expect your child to get a full-time job? (1=definitely not 7=definitely yes).

Results

First, we wanted to look at the cross-sectional results at 7th grade in order to see whether or not parents had formed expectations related to post-high school transition at the junior high wave. Then, we examined the parent's perception in 10th grade in order to see what above the initial status (7th grade) might still be influencing parent perceptions. We specifically chose not to look at the 12th grade results because the outcome of going to college or not is already a reality in the Spring of the 12th grade year and thus we would have a difficult time knowing whether or not the parents were responding about their perceptions or the reality of the post-high school outcome. Results from these two hierarchical regressions are presented in Tables 1 and 2. In both regressions parental SES factors are entered into the regression first followed by child characteristics at the second level of the hierarchy. The dependent variable is parental expectations in both regressions. The second hierarchical regression has an additional step where child characteristics at 7th grade are entered into the equation in order to control for the influence of these initial status variables on parental perceptions.

Cross-sectional Regression

Results from the cross-sectional regression indicate that parent education, family income, self-concept of ability in English, GPA, and child's own post-high school expectation influences the parental expectations on whether or not their child is going to go to college or into a job after graduation high school. As Table 1 indicates, these variables predict more of the variance for parent's perceptions of their children going to college (approx. 36% of the variance) than to jobs (approx. 27% of the variance) and that socio-economic factors and academic indicators are positively related to college perceptions and negatively related to job perceptions. Gender has no influence on parent perceptions of post-high school transitions. Interestingly, children's expectations of their own post-high school outcome is positively related to going to both college and into a job. Thus, as early as 7th grade, children (and their parents) already have the perceptions of what they will be doing after high school and in the case of this study; about half of the families and children believe they will be going from high school into a full-time job.

Longitudinal Regression

The longitudinal regression indicates that after controlling for parental socio-economic status and initial status of child characteristics for 7th grade, with a few exceptions, only 10th grade GPA and child's post-high school expectations are still significant predictors of parental expectations of post-high school transition at 10th grade. In addition to GPA and child's expectation for going to college, family income remains a predictor of parental expectations of college at 10th grade but parental education becomes non-significant after controlling for initial status of the child characteristics. In contrast, parent education has a significant negative impact on parental expectations for post-high school transitions to a job but income becomes a non-significant indicator. This regression also indicates that being male and having a negative self-

concept of ability about English influences the perception of the parents for a full-time job transition. Again, the overall amount of variance explained is moderate for both outcomes ($R^2=.32$, college; $R^2=.31$, job).

Discussion

As hypothesized, GPA and family socio-economic variables are significant predictors of parental expectations in almost all of the regressions. Parents seem to be influenced by their own resources as well as information from their child's achievement. This finding is consistent over time. Parent's perceived their children were more likely to be college-bound if youth achievement and parent's socio-economic situation was positive. The opposite is true for parent's perception of transition to a full-time job, where negative achievement and socio-economic status indicators predict to job perceptions.

Other child characteristics also seemed to play a role in influencing parental perceptions. Self-concept of ability in English and the child's own perception of their post-high school transition is also predictive of parental expectations. The self-concept of ability in English may be important to the extent that ability to read and write are fundamental to achievement in all subjects—not just English specifically. So, the child's belief that they are low in ability on this subject might be an indication of deficits in a variety of subjects.

As stated in the introduction, it is generally agreed that parental expectations are reciprocal with the child's own perceptions. Thus, it is difficult to determine if the child's perceptions are influencing the parent or vice versa. What is surprising in the findings of this study is how early the child perceptions are already formed on their post-high school transition. As early as 7th grade (and probably earlier) about half of the children in this study already believe they will go into a full-time job after high school. This belief, and the indicators of the parent

perception of this belief, is consistent over time as well. It is possible that these perceptions are due to the geographical area that this sample was drawn from. There are a large amount of working class families in the auto industry in this sample, and it is possible that it is part of the expectation of this group that their children will also work full-time in the auto industry. This possibility can be examined in future studies by looking at the consistency in the child's expectation of post-high school transition and their parent's actual occupation.

In summary, consistent with what Alexander et al. (1994) found, parents do use information from grades to form expectations of future achievement or in the case of this study post-high school transitions. Expectations also seem to be influenced by the parent's own education and income background as well as child's own perceptions of ability for post-high school transitions. Future research will examine the impact of parental occupation on child's perceptions of post-high school transitions as well as how early these perceptions are being formed.

Figure 1: Model of Parental Influences on Eccles, et al. Value Model of Achievement

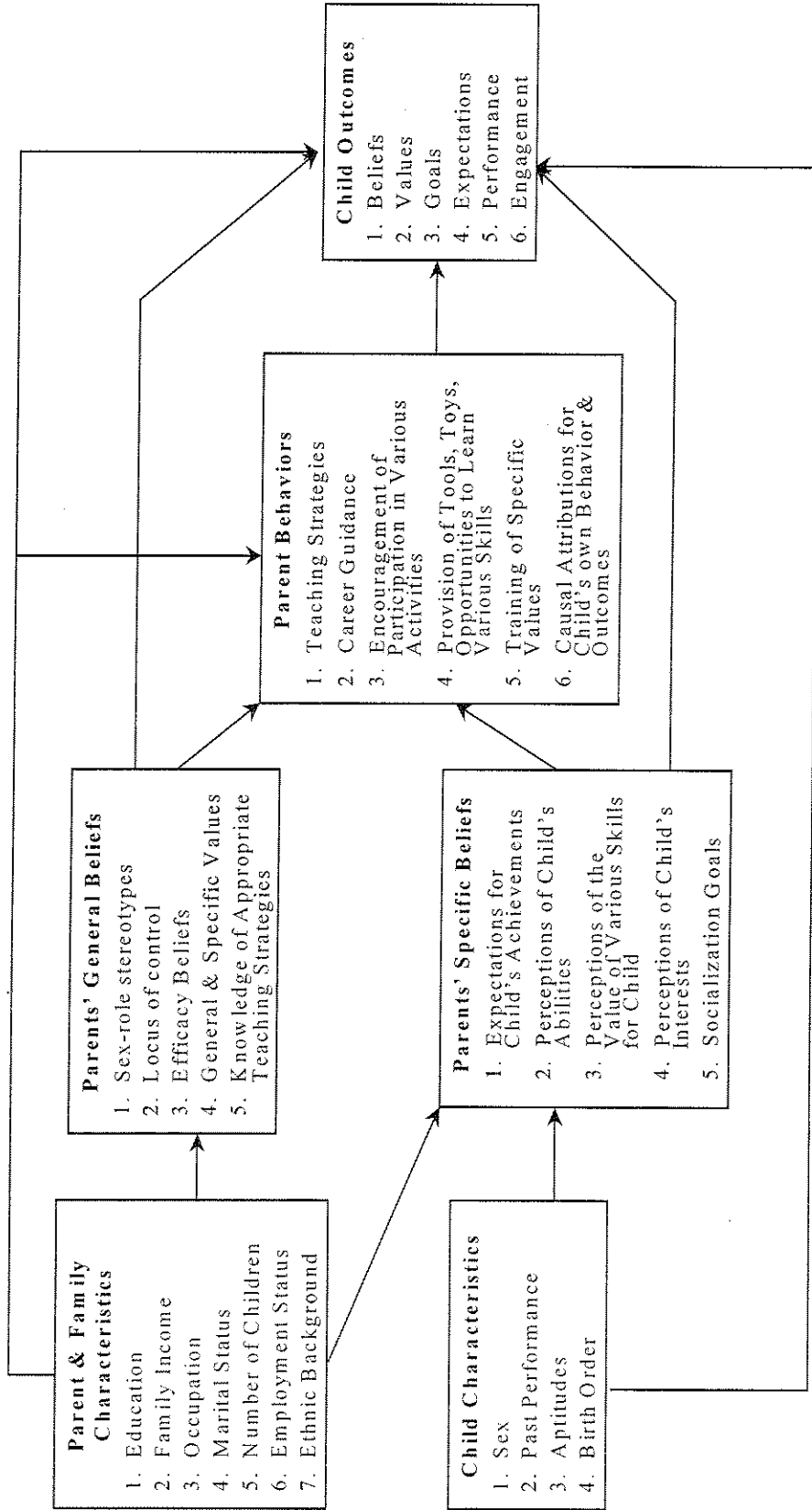


Figure 2: Parental Expectation Model

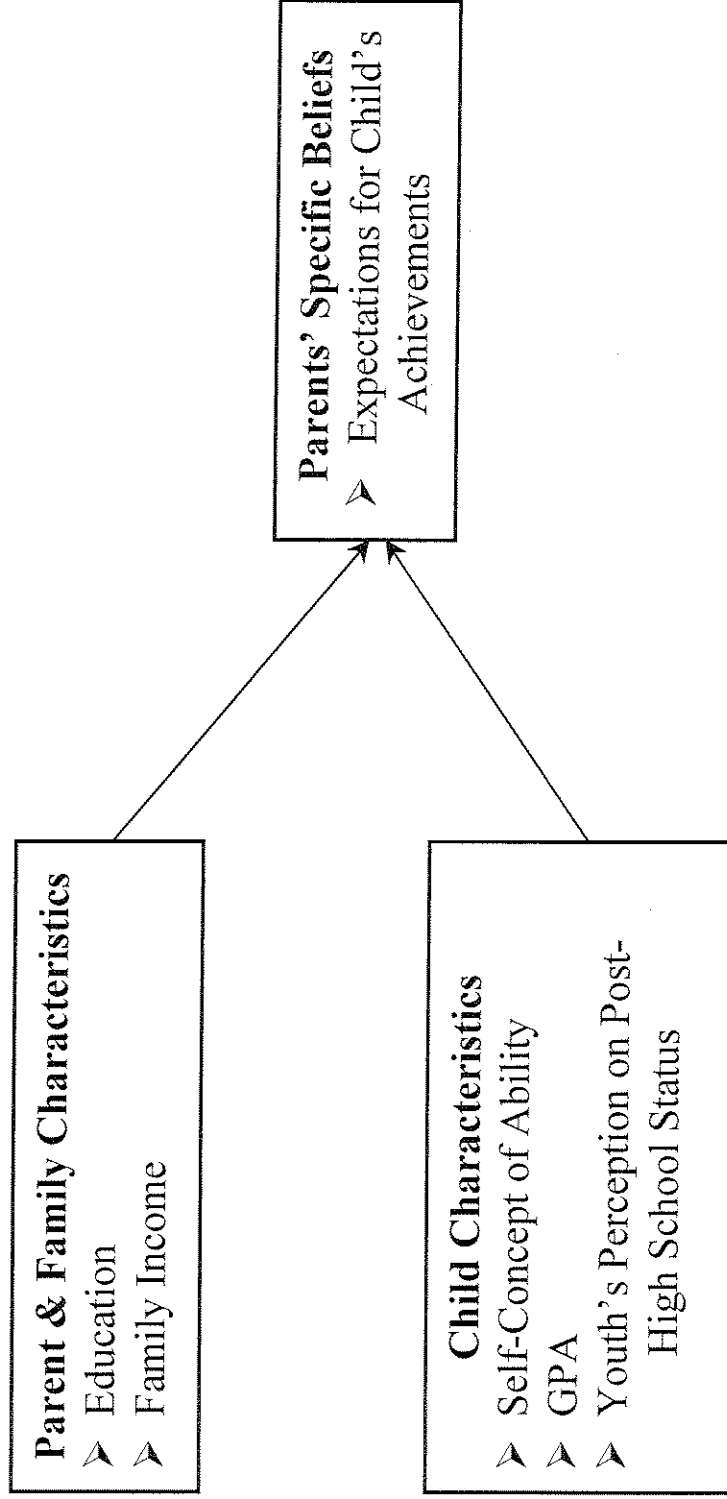


Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the full sample

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Parent's Education	1376	1	8	3.93	1.18
Family Income	2005	1	6	3.47	1.25
Gender of Child	2451	1	2	1.47	0.50
Self-Concept of Ability-Math					
7 th grade	2255	1	7	4.90	1.28
10 th grade	1414	1	7	4.64	1.34
Self-Concept of Ability-English					
7 th grade	2231	1	7	4.93	1.35
10 th grade	1407	1	7	4.86	1.34
GPA					
7 th grade	2256	0	4	2.54	1.00
10 th grade	1822	0	4	2.39	0.97
Child Expectations (College)					
7 th grade	2256	1	7	5.24	1.67
10 th grade	1352	1	7	5.23	2.09
Child Expectations (Jobs)					
7 th grade	2255	1	7	4.96	1.80
10 th grade	1348	1	7	3.34	2.08
Parental Expectations (College)					
7 th grade	884	1	7	5.00	1.54
10 th grade	405	1	7	4.68	1.90
Parental Expectations (Jobs)					
7 th grade	880	1	7	3.25	1.45
10 th grade	532	1	7	3.17	1.97

Note: This information is for the full sample and not for the specific regression analyses.

Table 2: Standardized beta coefficients for the effect of family and child variables on parent's expectations for college attendance or for getting a job after high school at Grade 7.

	Expectation for College		Expectation for Job	
	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>
Parent's Education	.322***	.209***	-.372***	-.326***
Family Income	.166***	.109***	-.185***	-.164***
Gender of Child		.051		-.013
Self-Concept of Ability-Math		.039		-.034
Self-Concept of Ability-English		.080**		-.074*
GPA		.213***		-.113**
Child Expectation		.298***		.103***

R ²	.171***	.186***	.225***	.042***
F-value	F(2,824)=84.90	F(5, 819)=47.48	F(2,815)=118.25	F(5,810)=9.386

Total Adj. R² = .357
F(7,819) = 65.02***

Total Adj. R² = .267
F(7,810) = 42.23***

Note: * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

Table 3: Standardized beta coefficients for the longitudinal effect of family and child variables on parent’s expectations for college attendance or for getting a job.

	Expectation for College			Expectation for Job		
	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 3</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 3</i>
Parent’s Education	.207***	.142**	.067	-.366***	-.331***	-.265***
Family Income	.184***	.148**	.145**	-.137**	-.096*	-.081
Gender of Child		.056	.028		-.079	-.104**
7 th Grade Self-Concept of Ability-Math		-.007	.015		-.045	-.042
7 th Grade Self-Concept of Ability-English		.009	.001		-.123**	-.093*
7 th Grade GPA		.098	-.050		-.150**	-.026
7 th Grade Child Expectation		.273***	.170		.064	.028
10 th Grade Self-Concept of Ability-Math			.000			.031
10 th Grade Self-Concept of Ability-English			-.037			-.092*
10 th Grade GPA			.203***			-.215***
10 th Grade Child Expectations			.337***			.126**

R ²	.108***	.091***	.144***	.187***	.065***	.060***
F-value	F(2,357)=53.26	F(5,352)=8.01	F(4,348)=9.96	F(2,462)=53.26	F(5,457)=8.0	F(4,453)=9.96

Total Adj. R² = .322
 F(11,348) = 16.53***

Total Adj. R² = .313
 F(11,453) = 18.78***

Note: * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

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