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Should I Stay or Should I Go?: Race, Education and Status
Attainment Before the NBA

Christian E. Yost

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Should I Stay or Should I Go?: Race, Education and Status Attainment Before the NBA

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Master of Science

Extracurricular activities have long been recognized as a socializing agent fostering subsequent life achievements and success orientations in the status attainment process. In particular, minorities and disadvantaged high school students who may not succeed in traditional academic classes benefit greatly from extracurricular activities, especially sports. In the case of basketball, young Black males are more likely to both participate in basketball as an extracurricular activity and pursue a career as a professional basketball player than their White peers, even to the detriment of their formal education. This thesis uses the Wisconsin Status-Attainment model as a framework for examining the extent to which the educational attainment of these young men affects their eventual occupational status (salary and career longevity), specifically a ten-year sample of first-round NBA draft picks. In the end, White players averaged more post-high school educational attainment than their Black counterparts, but the variable that affected salary and longevity was on-court performance. Although the educational attainment of these players did not directly affect how much they make and how long they play, the results presented here still provide insight into how young men are socialized into a NBA career trajectory.

Keywords: status attainment, race, educational attainment, occupational attainment, basketball

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INTRODUCTION

Almost every middle school and high school in the U.S. provides various types of scholastic, club, and sports extracurricular activities. Participation in extracurricular activities has been positively associated with consistent attendance, academic achievement, and higher educational aspirations (NCES 1995), higher SAT Reasoning Test™ (SAT®) scores (Everson and Millsap 2005), lower dropout rates (McNeil 1995), and many other outcomes related to increased educational and occupational attainment in young adulthood. In particular, minorities and disadvantaged high school students who may not succeed in traditional academic classes benefit greatly from extracurricular activities (Everson and Millsap 2005; Marsh and Kleitman 2002; Holloway 2000; Gerber 1996; Marsh 1992; Camp 1990; Holland and Andre 1987).

Extracurricular activities have long been recognized as a socializing agent fostering subsequent life achievements and success orientations in the status attainment process (Otto 1976). Among the range of extracurricular activities, sports provide links to academic outcomes (Barber, Stone, and Eccles 2005). With White unemployment (15%) and Black unemployment (29%) being so high among post-secondary students who begin a full-time degree program (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012), youth may question the efficacy of classroom education when they perceive high-reward career opportunities and professional sports that could permit them to circumvent the normal status attainment process. If physical skills in middle school and high school sports like basketball are exceptional, the athlete may have marketable skills that far exceed what could be expected via educational attainments. Although, aspiring to play professional basketball at such a young age is extremely unrealistic, a recent New York Times article reporting on the recruitment of middle school boys to play basketball in local private schools located in one of the top college recruiting areas in the country suggests that this

alternative career pathway is a viable option for some young men (Himmelsbach and Thamel 2012). This article underscores what local communities already know: in spite of rules to counteract it, even local high school coaches try to recruit the “best” athletes and families will move to enhance athletic opportunities for their children.

To date, little research has focused on this alternative career trajectory for adolescent boys (especially those who are Black) and its impact on their education. For seventh- and eighth-grade Black males, the income opportunities associated with a career as a professional basketball player in the National Basketball Association (NBA) far exceeds any income aspirations than they see obtainable through career paths in their local communities. Even though only a tiny percentage of these youth will attain an NBA career, the allure of fame and fortune reinforced by significant others sets up career aspirations and life-course trajectories outside the normal educational pathways that are predicated more on basketball talent and physical ability than on obtaining education in the classroom.

This study uses the Wisconsin Status-Attainment model, (Spenner, Otto, and Call 1982; Sewell, Hauser, and Wolf 1980; Sewell and Hauser 1972; Sewell, Haller, and Portes, 1969) as a framework for examining how young men are socialized into an NBA career trajectory. The study focuses on those who actually make it to the NBA, how much they are paid (relative to their education) after they get there and how reward systems affect the attainment of a formal education. The study examines the effects of early aspirations for basketball careers for young men who actually manage to be drafted into the NBA and the consequences of their choice to focus on athletics in high school and earlier.

BACKGROUND

Status-Attainment Model

Blau and Duncan's (1967) classic analysis of social mobility as a process of occupational achievement over the life course examined how one's social origins over the life cycle affected later occupational status. In their examination of males (aged 20 to 64), they looked at the educational and occupational status of the subject's father, as well as the subject's own educational attainment, first job and then-current occupation. Ultimately, they found that a person's educational attainment accounted for all of the effects of his father's background, while better explaining current occupations than first jobs (controlling for other social variables).

Building on Blau and Duncan's study, Sewell et al. (1969) and Sewell et al. (1980) formulated the Wisconsin model of status-attainment. The Wisconsin model expanded upon the Blau-Duncan model by also considering the effects of the subject's socioeconomic status, academic ability, academic performance, educational and occupational aspirations, and the influence of significant others on his/her eventual occupational status.

Spenner et al. (1982) elaborated the status-attainment model by combining elements of the Blau-Duncan and Wisconsin models. Their model (Figure 1) will serve as the frame of reference for this study. Each of the elements of this model (social and economic background, mental ability/high school rank, educational and occupational aspirations, significant other influences, educational attainment, and occupational status) will be explored, specifically in relation to Black and White young males who participate in athletics. This approach to the status-attainment process focuses on variables that may encourage young men to attempt to circumvent the attainment of formal education in order to achieve the higher occupational status of being

drafted into the NBA. The following sections review relevant research related to the elements included in this model.

(Figure 1 here)

Social and Economic Background

Social background characteristics have been found to have important effects on occupational achievement and status. For example, racial and ethnic group membership has been consistently related to social class status for individuals and families (Brown et al. 2005).

Educational attainment, however, has been an important factor related to occupational attainment (Samuel, Bergman, and Hupka-Brunner 2013; Kerckhoff, Raudenbush, and Glennie 2001; Solorzano 1991).

Household income is related to a number of factors, especially the number of adults in the home and how many of them are in the work force. When examining the median household incomes of families by race, there appears to be a consistently glaring disparity between White and Black households. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2011), White households in which both spouses worked earned 16.5% more than Black households with two working spouses. In homes where the husband was the only breadwinner, White households earned 15.7% more. The differences between the races are even more pronounced in households with a single householder (and no spouse present). In households led by a male, Whites earned 19.9% more than Blacks, and in households led by a female, Whites earned 21.8% more than Blacks.

Davis-Kean (2005) found that in both Black and White households, family income and both parents' educational attainment had a significant positive effect on the educational expectations that these parents have for their children. These expectations were then shown to

directly influence achievement in White children and influence achievement in Black children through reading with their children and the warmth they showed toward them.

As explained by Downey (1995), another aspect of the family that has been shown to affect educational performance in children (albeit negatively, in this case) is the number of siblings that they have. A dilution of parental resources might be the best explanation behind this relationship, be they finite things like money, time, or attention that then have to be spread across multiple children. In 2010, White households had an average of 0.89 children under the age of 18, as compared to 1.20 children in Black households (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010). While this may not seem like a substantial difference, when coupled with the already mentioned household income disparity (and its own effect on educational achievement) between the two races, the potential effect of even fewer resources needing to be stretched becomes more evident.

While some racial differences may exist, some may actually be more about socioeconomic status instead. Lareau (2003) showed that differences in how parents approach education and extra-curricular activities is more a matter of middle-class versus working-class and poor, rather than White versus Black. Other characteristics that may also influence educational and occupational attainment include: parental job quality and the quality of a mother's relationship with her partner (Menaghan, Kowaleski-Jones, and Mott 1997), self-esteem and locus of control (Wang et al. 1999), religion (Regnerus 2003) and social/cultural capital (Dumais 2002; Carbonaro 1998; Caspi et al. 1998; Runyan et al. 1998).

Mental Ability

Research on mental ability in the early status attainment process has been reasonably consistent with most studies showing that increased mental ability enhances the acquisition of

additional formal schooling for both men and women (Spenner et al. 1982). Mental ability, then, is measured indirectly through high school performance, e.g. high school grades.

A major obstacle for minorities is *stereotypical threat* (Aronson, Fried, and Good 2002). Stereotypical threat is based on the knowledge that certain stereotypes exist, like the supposed intellectual inferiority of African Americans as compared to Whites. As explained by Aronson et al.:

In situations where a stereotype about a group's intellectual abilities is relevant—taking an intellectually challenging test, being called upon to speak in class, and so on—Black students bear an extra cognitive and emotional burden not borne by people for whom the stereotype does not apply. This burden takes the form of a performance-disruptive apprehension, anxiety about the possibility of confirming a deeply negative racial inferiority—in the eyes of others, in one's own eyes, or both at the same time.

(P. 114)

Students need not believe in the stereotype itself, but only know that it exists and care about performing the task.

This increased anxiety can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. To psychologically cope, the students may “disidentify” with the task, or avoid using it as the criterion for their self-concept. Once they displace the burden of being a representative of their race or no longer care about how they perform the task, they no longer have the accompanying anxiety. So, even if academics were once important, this process of disengagement and disidentification makes school irrelevant.

When conceptualizing how school performance may be affected by stereotypes for minority students, Erickson (1987) suggests that majority-minority group relations occurring outside the school inform the attitudes and perceptions that both students and school personnel

bring into the school setting. Thus, negative stereotypes can affect minority students' classroom performance through the ways they relate to instructors and other school staff and the expectations they have for schooling. Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) describe the anticipation of negative treatment based on stereotypes as *rejection sensitivity*: in situations where rejection is possible, individuals expect, recognize, and actively react to it. When it comes to education, if Blacks feel as if they are seen as inferior, they will anticipate being rejected as such and then these status-based rejection expectations affect their attachment to the institution of education, as well as their relationships with the people within it (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002:914). Success in school is no longer seen as being as important, and interactions with teachers/administrators can be negatively affected. When this happens, students turn to other aspects of the adolescent peer culture for recognition (Coleman 1961). Extracurricular activities, athletics, and popularity become more important than scholarship.

An important aspect of achievement involves attitudes. Although attitudes towards education may be more positive, performance might not match these attitudes. Mickelson (1990) called this the Attitude-Achievement Paradox: When Black students recognize a connection between education and opportunity, they may aspire to do well academically in order to achieve social mobility. Their academic performance, however, is shaped by a reality of prejudice and a lack of resources and does not match their aspirations. They recognize that education leads to success, but not necessarily for them. Instead, many Black students have seen those of their race who have been successful in athletics, and therefore see sports as a more upwardly mobile path for them than academia. They then “may derive more of their self-concept from their abilities in those areas than in the domain of academics” (Nichols et al. 2010).

While stereotypes persist about ability differences between White and Black students, evidence about actual ability differences between racial groups is useful in understanding their school performance and achievement. Although “virtually every measure of academic achievement taken at every level of schooling shows African Americans trailing their White counterparts” (Aronson et al., 2002:114), these educational differences are more the result of underlying differences in family structure and socioeconomic status, rather than race itself (Conley 1999).

High School Educational and Extracurricular Activities

Generally, participation in extracurricular activities has been shown to be beneficial for participants in relation to school performance and achievement. Playing sports has been shown to increase self-esteem, as well as academic achievement and educational aspirations (Rees and Sabia 2010; Troutman and Dufur 2007). Starting even as early as elementary school, being athletically proficient leads to both being noticed by one's peers and upward social mobility or popularity (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992). With middle school males, popularity comes from being involved in sports and especially performing well in those activities, with participation in basketball resulting in strong, positive effects on their peer status and popularity (Eder and Kinney 1995). Participation in athletics not only affects who others see as being popular, but analyses also show a positive relationship between being involved with sports and self-perceived popularity (Shakib et al. 2011).

Popularity gained from sports participation can also lead to a stronger bond to society due to the rewards bestowed upon athletes by society (Tracy and Erkut 2002). These rewards and how they make the recipient feel about him or herself lead to a stronger desire to conform to socially acceptable behavior. So, for example, a student might feel an increased desire to go to

class and strive for good grades, in order to remain eligible to play on the team, allowing the rewards to continue (Braddock 2005).

Not all research on extracurricular activity participation, however, has focused entirely on the benefits experienced by its participants. Frey and Eitzen (1991) report that multiple studies have found “little evidence to support the idea that sport is necessary for complete and adequate socialization, or that involvement in sport results in character building, moral development, a competitive or team orientation, good citizenship or valued personality traits,” (p. 506).

Additionally, there is a concern that playing youth sports will lead to its participants engaging in problem behaviors (Le Menestrel and Perkin 2007), and in turn developing into those who "operate with unbridled hubris and have acquired a distorted self-image that allows them to do whatever they want without regard for the repercussions" (Teitelbaum 2010: 39).

Ultimately, the underlying motivations of these athletes and the kinds of rewards they are seeking might be different for student-athletes of different racial or social class groups and these may even push them toward certain sports over others. Phillips (1993), for example, notes that there is a sports opportunity structure, wherein Blacks are not funneled into sports that require substantial resources (many players, facilities, equipment, coaches). Rather, Blacks focus on a sport like basketball that can be played with a single player and a hoop that can be put up anywhere, making the sport available to almost everyone at an early age. By the time they attend middle school, many hours have been invested in becoming proficient at basketball. This proficiency is noted by peers, teachers, coaches, and significant others who help establish aspirations for the future.

Significant Other Influences

Unrealistic or not, aspirations regarding professional basketball are very salient to young Black males because of the importance placed on basketball within much of Black society and culture. Ogden and Hilt (2003) highlight research that has found basketball, more so than other sports, as a major driving force in the formation of the cultural and collective identities of African-Americans. Basketball, like jazz and hip hop, are marked as belonging to Blacks and are venues wherein one's "Blackness" can be communicated to all audiences (p. 217) and it is seen as the embodiment of success and escape from poverty, especially for Black males (p. 218). As such, Black parents are more likely than White parents to encourage their children to pursue playing basketball, and Black males are more likely than White males to be encouraged by non-family members to participate in the sport (p. 219).

Support or encouragement to play basketball can also come from other sources, and again, Blacks are more likely to see this than are Whites. Harris (1994) found that among high school players in a Washington D.C. summer league, almost half of the Black players said that a teacher had encouraged them "pretty much" or "very much" to play basketball, as compared to only 4% of White players. He also examined encouragement from other non-parent significant others, with 68% of Blacks and 36% of Whites being very encouraged by friends, as well as 63% and 47%, respectively, being very much encouraged to play basketball by a coach.

The salience of significant other's encouragement to play basketball is further enhanced by the inherent "Blackness" of collegiate and professional basketball. During the 2011-2012 season, 78 percent of the NBA's players were African-American players. (Lapchick et al. 2012b:18). This percentage is relatively consistent with previous studies as reported by Singer and Buford May (2010): black males made up 75% of the players in the NBA and 60% of the

players in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I men's basketball programs.

Furthermore, success stories of the most popular players in the NBA provide powerful, mass media affirmation of the viability and salience of basketball as a career option for young Black males. LeBron James, for example, entered the NBA straight out of high school and had a \$60 million dollar endorsement contract even before playing in his first NBA game. Nearly 10 million people tuned in to watch him tell the world where he was going to sign a free-agent contract worth more than \$110 million (Adams 2010). He also had the highest-selling jersey during that following 2010-2011 season. Players like him are significant role models, even occupational role models, for young Blacks weighing the pursuit of success on the basketball court versus the classroom (Giles and Maltby 2004).

Educational and Occupational Aspirations

Racial differences are evident between receiving support and recognition for playing basketball and the formation of the goal of playing professionally. Harris (1994) found that only "among blacks does support for participation in basketball predict aspirations for a professional sports future" (p. 46). Differences are also seen in the racial backgrounds of the athletes playing these sports. Eitle and Eitle (2002) found that when controlling for other variables, the odds that a Black male will participate in interscholastic basketball is 5.68 times higher than the odds of a White male participating. Black males are more likely to play basketball as an extracurricular activity, to be supported for their participation in it, and to aspire to play it professionally.

Other theorists have attempted to explain why Black males are more likely to have these sports-based aspirations. Edwards (2000) outlines three main causes for why Blacks tend to focus on a career in sports: 1) the stereotypical belief that Blacks are superior athletically and

inferior intellectually, 2) the media portraying athletics as a widely-accessible means for Blacks to achieve economic and social mobility and 3) a lack of prominent Black role models outside of sports. This is echoed by Zeiser (2011) who sees that even in our society “fraught with discrimination and racism, images of successful African American athletes provide collective self-esteem to many black men who otherwise perceive their options for future careers as limited” (p.1144), although this then “provides little incentive for young African American athletes to prioritize their education above success within their sport” (Zeiser 2011). Thus, aspirations for sport-related careers are presented as realistic alternatives compared to other careers.

The chances of these aspirations of playing basketball professionally becoming reality, however, are extremely unlikely. Out of the 4,372,115 boys participating in high school sports during the 2007-2008 school year, 552,935 (or 13%) played basketball (Singer and Buford May 2010). At the collegiate level, about 4,000 players complete their college basketball careers each year (Gaston 1986). Only about sixty of these players will be drafted into the NBA, half of whom will not even receive guaranteed contracts. This is consistent with the findings that less than 1% of college athletes will ever sign a professional sports contract (Sailes 1998). Nonetheless, despite these seemingly overwhelming odds, “countless numbers of young Black males still have hoop dreams or a set of expectations about their chances of success as future basketball players, that, in most cases, are unrealistic” (Singer and Buford May, 2010:2).

Educational Attainment

In 2010, 67% of all recent high school graduates enrolled in college; for African Americans, it was 56% (Nichols et al. 2010). Nationwide the four-year college graduation rate for black male students within 6 years of college entrance is 34 percent versus 58 percent for

White males (U.S. Department of Education 2011). Racial differences in educational attainment are also prevalent between those who enroll in colleges to play basketball and those who don't. The reported graduation rates for the sixty-eight schools in the 2013 NCAA tournament was 90% for White players versus 65% for Black players (Lapchick et al. 2013). The gap between the two groups of players narrowed slightly from the previous year, when they had rates of 88% and 60%, respectively (Lapchick et al. 2012a). The director of these studies addresses why these graduation rates are higher than those of the general student body, claiming that "in many cases, the athletics department is more welcoming..." to "African-American students [who] arrive on too many of our predominantly white campuses" (Lapchick et al. 2013:3).

This may be true, but these numbers only account for the 68 schools that made the NCAA Tournament, which are in most instances the best of the 347 total Division-I teams in the country. Presumably to reach this level of on-court success, these teams will need their best players to remain eligible throughout the season and if these players are passing their classes to remain eligible, they are at least staying on the path toward graduation. It appears that these tournament teams are not the norm regarding graduation rates, especially when examining the rates of every team playing Division-I basketball, as done by the College Sport Research Institute. Southall et al. (2010) found that every Division-I conference has "men's basketball player graduation rates that are less than the estimated full-time male student-body rate" (p. 2), averaging 20 percentage points lower.

Therefore, when looking at all schools, male basketball players are not graduating at the same rate as their peers and even with the best teams whose rates are higher than the general student body, there is a substantial difference between the White and Black student-athletes. Part of the reason for the racial gap is the quick transfer of college level success into a professional

basketball career. For example, all five of the starting line-up players (three freshmen, two sophomores) for the University of Kentucky team that won the 2012 Men's NCAA basketball tournament) declared themselves eligible for the National Basketball Association (NBA) draft shortly after winning the National Championship. Institutionalized recruiting practices focusing on immediate wins by using “one-and-done players” (players who only intend to stay for one season to fulfill the NBA’s requirements before becoming draft eligible) is making universities look more like “basketball way station[s]” (Weiberg 2012). Kentucky’s coach (John Calipari) who recruited the best players with little to no intention of staying for all four years, was promptly given an 8.3% raise following Kentucky’s victory (Fly 2012).

Occupational Attainment

The differences in White and Black occupational attainments are seen in their group differences in median incomes. Recent estimates of median weekly earnings for Black men working at full-time jobs were \$680 per week versus \$895 for White men (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). Using USA Today salary figures for the 2009-10 season, the estimated median salary for an NBA player was about \$2.33 million and the league’s minimum salary for a rookie was \$473,604 (Aschburner 2011). This former figure equates to a median salary of about \$44,800 a week, making the choice to leave college not difficult, as the attainment of a college degree before being drafted or signed is not necessary. Career longevity, however, is another issue. An NBA player’s ability to remain employed is based on his level of talent and ability on the court.

Up until this point, we have explored how the status-attainment process can play out in the life of a young (especially Black) male on the career path toward playing professional basketball, particularly how it can affect his educational attainment. Could putting one's athletic

aspirations over one's education actually be beneficial for those who successfully manage to reach the end of this alternative career trajectory? Specifically, would the young men who are drafted into the NBA be better served in terms of how long they remain employed and how much they are paid while in a league, by leaving school as soon as they can? In addition to being able to begin earning a substantially higher income sooner, these players will also be younger in a league with an average career span of about five years. Assuming that they can produce on the court and avoid injury, entering the league at a younger age might allow for a longer career that, in turn, would also mean more money.

Hypotheses

There are several issues happening here. Black male athletes graduate college at a lower rate than Whites, because of differences in the way members of these two racial groups may view higher educational attainment, the amount of time needed to develop the skills necessary to play professionally or a combination of the two. Thus, despite sentiments that education is important and that the graduation rate gap between Blacks and Whites needs to be closed, there are young male athletes who, since they were children, have been on a certain career trajectory, striving to be successful at something that does not necessarily require a formal education, and ultimately wanting to be hired to play in the NBA, a business wherein success among players is not contingent on earning a college degree.

In this thesis, I will explore this confluence of issues by looking at first-round draft picks into the NBA for a ten-year period. All players drafted in the first-round are guaranteed a three-year contract (with an option of a fourth year), reducing the likelihood that a player would leave school early without a reasonable assurance of being drafted in the first round. Also, the structure of the contract allows for the players to be reasonably compared to one another. While examining

these players, I will take into account the amount of time they spent in school prior to being drafted as well as how these players perform and how they are paid once in the league.

Specifically, I will do this by testing the hypotheses discussed below.

The general attitudes toward educational and status attainment for Whites and Blacks have been explored above as well as the differences in graduation rates between the races. Do these differences translate into ultimately who is drafted and the amount of time spent in school before it happens?

Hypothesis 1: White players selected in the first round of the NBA draft will have completed more years of college (on average) than Black players selected in the first round.

Presumably, every player drafted in the first-round is thought to have the ability or potential to be a contributing member to an NBA team given the guaranteed money they will be given. How long they remain on a team should be determined by how well they live up to those expectations, but even when controlling for actual player performance, will players drafted with fewer years of school prior to being drafted remain on a team longer than those who complete more schooling?

Hypothesis 2: Controlling for player statistics, players with fewer years of educational attainment will be more likely to remain under contract in the NBA for a longer period of time.

Continuing with the line of thought that younger players will be seen as more valuable than older players, again, even when controlling for actual player performance, will differences in the amount of time players spent in school prior to being drafted result in differences in the amount they are paid after being in the league?

Hypothesis 3: Controlling for player statistics, those with fewer years of educational attainment are given larger contracts following their initial rookie contract.

METHODS

Data

For this analysis, I will examine data for players drafted in the first round of the NBA draft for the ten-year period of 1996-2005. The reasoning for choosing these particular years are:

- 1) The 1995 draft (the draft previous to the initial year I will be analyzing) was the first in twenty years wherein a high-school student was drafted. The next 10 drafts saw 28 high school students drafted in the first round. (See Figures 2 and 3.)
- 2) The 2005 draft was the final draft class that allowed students to be eligible to be drafted directly out of high school. The “one-and-done” rule went into effect the following year.
- 3) The rookie contract structure was not established until the 1995 draft. Prior to this, rookies were not guaranteed a contract and it was up to the player’s team to determine the salary and length of the contract, i.e. one player could be offered and sign a 10-year contract while another could be offered and sign a 1-year deal. Therefore, although it would be nice to examine more than these ten years, the lack of uniformity in the way rookie contracts were set up would make comparing players in even the same draft class impossible.
- 4) This same lack of uniformity in contracts exists with non-first round draft picks, including those drafted in the second round. These players, although selected by a team, are not guaranteed a contract, let alone one that follows the same contract structure for the first round selections.

(Figures 2 and 3 here)

All of the data used for the measures described below are taken from basketball-reference.com, a website that is one of the sports statistical sites owned and operated by Sports Reference LLC. It is frequently cited by ESPN Stats and Info for its statistical measures and it presents professional basketball player statistics from the 1940s to the present, including standard player statistics like points and rebounds, as well as advanced statistical measures like Win Shares (an estimate of the total number of wins contributed by an individual player to his team) and a measure of a player's probability of being selected to the Basketball Hall of Fame calculated by running a logistical regression using predictor variables that include player statistics, awards and accomplishments, physical characteristics and when they played. The website also includes player salary information and where they attended college and for how long.

Although my dataset includes the following measures for every player drafted in the first round of the 1996-2005 NBA drafts, the players who will be examined in this study will be exclusively players who are White or Black, and who attended school in the United States prior to being drafted. The rationale for this is the relatively small number of players not categorized in one of these two races (n=12) and the difference in the educational systems and standards of other countries.

Measures

Race: Players are categorized into one of the following racial categories: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian or Mixed-Race.

Educational Attainment: This variable will be determined by the players' college class standing before entering the draft (High School=0, Freshman=1, Sophomore=2, Junior=3, Senior=4).

Interaction Effect Between Race and Education: Much of the background research referenced earlier indicates how the role of education is different in the lives of Black males than it is for their White peers. Therefore, the interaction effect between race and education will be included to account for the effect of this particular combination of variables that could not be anticipated from the main effects of these variables by themselves.

Standard Player Efficiency: Using per game averages does not lend itself to comparison between players who play a drastically different number of minutes played per game. As such, I will use the National Basketball Association's Efficiency rating which takes into account both a player's positive and negative contributions (offensive and defensive) in a game. A player's Efficiency for each season is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{Points} + \text{Rebounds} + \text{Assists} + \text{Steals} + \text{Blocks}) - (\text{Field Goals Missed} + \text{Free Throws Missed} + \text{Turnovers})}{\text{Games Played}}$$

In order to determine a player's statistical worth before signing a new contract, I will use the average Efficiency of each of his regular seasons in the league prior to when the contract decision is made. Therefore, for players that become restricted free agents in their fifth year, their Efficiency from their first four years will be averaged; for players released from their contracts prior to or up until the end of their third season, their Efficiency to that point will be used. All of this is done in an attempt to view all of the players' contributions up until the contract decision is made, rather than just the one season before.

Players who miss an entire season due to injury will have an Efficiency of 0.0 for the missed season, but this will not be averaged in with the others seasons in which statistics are accumulated. However, players who miss an entire season due to behavioral issues will have the Efficiency rating of 0.0 included in their overall average. This decision was made to differentiate

how a missed season would be evaluated by those responsible for determining whether or not a player will receive a new contract and how much he will be paid if he is. A player who has to miss an entire season because of a torn ACL will likely be evaluated differently from one who has been suspended because of off-the-court behavioral issues.

Adjusted Player Efficiency: A player can only accumulate statistics when he is on the court and presumably those who are on the court longer will be able to produce more of the statistics used to calculate the above Efficiency. Therefore, I will also create an Adjusted Efficiency statistic using the previous formula, but instead of dividing by the games played, I will divide by the number of minutes played. I will then multiply this per-minute efficiency by 48 (for the total number of minutes in a regulation NBA game.) Using this adjusted per-game efficiency will attempt to control for the differences in playing time between the players.

Draft Order: In order to control for perceived talent and ability prior to being drafted, where in the draft each player is selected will also be considered. The number of selections in the first round of the draft is determined by the number of teams in the NBA at the time, with each team having one selection (although this can be traded.) Admittedly, this is not a perfect measurement of a baseline (perceived) ability, as a team with a specific need (i.e. a player who plays specific position) could select a player who fills that need and not necessarily the next “best” player.

Career Longevity: I will be looking at (up to) the first six seasons in the league for each player. I chose this number of seasons because of the way rookie contracts were set up for players drafted in the 1996 through 2005 drafts. Each first-round draft pick is initially allowed to sign a three-year contract, with his team holding the option for a fourth year following the pay raise structure established for the first three years. The player becomes a free agent either if the

team does not chose to keep the player for this optional fourth season, or after the fourth year if they do. As a free agent, the player can then sign a new contract worth potentially much more than is allowed in his initial rookie contract. Therefore, I chose six seasons to examine whether the player remains under contract in the league through the possible first four years covered by the rookie contract until the beginning of the sixth season, allowing at least one full season on the new free agent contract while still allowing for a “buyer’s remorse” period for teams unsatisfied with the player’s production during that fifth year.

A dummy variable will be created to indicate the first season in which the player is no longer under contract, either after being waived/cut by his team or just not re-signed after his rookie contract. Of course a player can sign with another team if either of these things happen, but I am looking at the number of seasons each player spends in the league prior to the first time this happens (if at all.)

Salary: As explained by Kahn and Shah (2005), all first-round draft picks are given guaranteed contracts that stipulate what their salary will be for their first three seasons, with each subsequent season resulting in a pay raise. After the third season, each player’s team has the option to hold on to the player for a fourth year wherein the player will be paid commensurate to the pay scale increases that they have over the previous seasons. After the fourth year, “the player becomes a restricted free agent who can be reserved on his original team as long as the team offers at least a stipulated raise, and matches any outside offer—the so-called right of first refusal” (p. 448). If the original team decides not to offer this raise or match the outside offer, the player is allowed to sign a free agent contract with any other team.

Given that the initial player salaries are determined by draft order (#1 makes more than #2, who makes more than #3, etc.), I chose not to use either the initial contract amount

(determined before the player has ever played a minute in the NBA) or the numerical difference between the rookie and free agent contracts. Instead, I will determine the player's monetary worth based on how his new contract compares to the maximum free agent contract signed by members of his particular rookie class.

Analysis

Hypothesis 1 will be tested by running a two-group mean-comparison test examining the average number of years of post-high school education for White and Black players.

Hypothesis 2 will be tested using a Discrete-Time Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) Event History Model examining the number of seasons in the NBA until a player is no longer under contract (if at all), while controlling for race, educational attainment, the interaction between race and education, player statistics, and draft order. Exact marginal likelihood will be used in case of ties.

Hypothesis 3 will be tested running a linear regression model with salary as the outcome variable and draft order, player statistics, educational attainment, race, and the interaction between race and education as explanatory variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows percentages for the variables *race* and *educational attainment*, as well as the mean, standard deviation and range for the variables *standard player efficiency*, *adjusted player efficiency*, *draft order*, and *salary*. Of the 236 players examined in this study, 194 are Black and 42 are White. Of these players, 28 entered the draft directly from high school (27 Black, 1 White), 19 after their Freshman year of college (all 19 Black), 39 after their Sophomore

year (34 Black, 5 White), 56 after their Junior year (45 Black, 11 White), and 94 after their Senior year (69 Black, 25 White).

(Table 1 here)

The values for *standard player efficiency* range from 0.0 to 26.5 and have an average value of 9.33. The values for *adjusted player efficiency* range from 0.0 to 32.6, with an average value of 19.00. For *draft order*, during the ten-year period studied, three drafts had 28 selections, six drafts had 29 selections, and one draft had 30 first-round selections. Of the players actually examined, their average draft order is 14.32. Finally, given that the *salary* variable was the percentage of the maximum salary earned, its range goes from 0% (for players no longer in the league) to 100% (players who signed for the maximum contract value) with the average at 38.8%.

Table 2 shows the results of the two-group mean-comparison test used to test hypothesis #1 (White players selected in the first round of the NBA draft will have completed more years of college (on average) than Black players selected in the first round.) From 1996-2005, White non-foreign players selected in the first round averaged a statistically significant ($p < .001$) .837 more years of school prior to their professional basketball careers than their Black counterparts. These results appear to support Hypothesis #1.

(Table 2 here)

Table 3 shows the results of the Discrete-Time Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) Event History Model used to test hypothesis #2 (Controlling for player statistics, players with fewer years of educational attainment will be more likely to remain under contract in the NBA for a longer period of time.) The race variable of *White* is used as the reference racial category.

(Table 3 here)

After removing foreign players and focusing solely on White and Black players, there are 236 players left to be followed for at most six seasons or until they “fail” out of the model by no longer being under contract. Of these remaining players, 60 of them (25.42%) failed out of the model at some point in the six years this model examined.

When using the *standard efficiency* and controlling for the other variables, each one unit increase in efficiency average is associated with a 41.9% decrease in the risk of not being under contract at some point during the first six years in the NBA, with a *p*-value of less than .001. Conversely, a player’s *draft order*, his *educational attainment*, his *race* and the *interaction effect* between the latter two have no statistically significant association with how long he will remain under contract during the initial seasons.

When using the *adjusted efficiency* and controlling for the other variables, each one unit increase in efficiency average is associated with a 19.1% decrease in the risk that a player will not be under contract within his first six seasons ($p < .001$). A player’s *draft order* is also statistically significant ($p = .001$), with each subsequent selection being associated with a 7.5% increase in the odds of no longer being under contract. In other words, when controlling for the variables in this model, the odds of a player selected with the second pick no longer being under contract within the first six years is 7.5% higher than the first pick, and so on. Neither *educational attainment*, *race*, nor the *interaction effect* between the two appear to be significantly related to whether or not a player will no longer be under contract during his first six years in the league, at least when controlling for the variables in this model. Therefore, these results do not seem to support Hypothesis #2.

Table 4 shows the results of the linear regression model used to test hypothesis #3 (Controlling for player statistics, those with fewer years of educational attainment are given

larger contracts following their initial rookie contract.) Again, *White* is the reference racial category. When using the *standard efficiency* and controlling for the other variables, each one unit increase in efficiency average is associated with a 5.0% increase in the maximum contract percentage received ($p < .001$). This was the only explanatory variable that was statistically significant.

(Table 4 here)

When using the *adjusted efficiency* and controlling for the other variables, each one unit increase in efficiency average is associated with a 3.2% increase in the maximum contract percentage received ($p < .001$). Also, when controlling for the other variables in the model, each subsequent draft pick would be expected to sign a contract that is 1.3% less than the player drafted before him ($p < .001$). None of the independent variables, *educational attainment*, *race*, and the *interaction effect* between the two were significantly related to the amount of money these players were paid after their initial rookie contract, at least when controlling for the other variables in the model. Overall, these results do not support Hypothesis #3.

DISCUSSION

In this study, I set out to examine the status-attainment process in the lives of young men who play a sport that in the past thirty years has seen more and more success come to those who have circumvented the step of attaining a formal education on their way to attaining the occupational status of being able to play the sport professionally. I chose to conduct this study by examining a small, select group of young men who actually beat the odds by being drafted into the NBA, and therefore also had publicly-available measures of their educational attainment, their on-the-job performance and their salary. Although I studied the relationship between the educational attainment and the occupational status of these 236 players, I believe the real

implications of the results of this study concern the futures of these players long after the time period in which they are examined here, and more importantly, the countless number of young men who, despite living their lives on the same career trajectory, never get the chance to play for millions of dollars and adoring fans.

The statistical models examined in this study show that although the White males included in the sample attended school for significantly longer before being drafted than their Black peers, the only variable that was significantly associated with how long a player stays under contract and how much they are paid is their on-court performance. Even when using the adjusted efficiency, both their NBA performance and their draft order (i.e. pre-NBA performance) were significantly associated with their salary and how long they were under contract. Through the first five seasons of the professional careers of these players, never attending college or staying all four years and earning a degree did not ultimately affect their salary or NBA career longevity. This, however, says little of the impact that their education (or lack thereof) will have on their occupational status after their playing careers are over, nor the impact that these players are potentially having on the young men who are going through the same status-attainment process that put them on this alternative career trajectory.

First, regarding their post-NBA occupational status, Torre (2009) estimates that 60% of NBA players are financially broke within five years of their retirement from the league. One likely explanation for this is that while they are playing in the NBA and making millions of dollars, these men believe this type of money will continuously be at their disposal and spend it as such. Not only are many of these players making extravagant purchases like sports cars, boats, and multi-million dollar houses for themselves, but some players also feel obligated to support family members and even childhood friends, continuing with the influence that significant others

have on their life and career choices. All of these purchases and obligations are likely to remain long after their multi-million dollar contracts have ended.

Additionally, many of these players will likely have encountered individuals in their professional careers who are similar to those they met when they were recruited at such an early age, namely those who seek to take advantage of a young man's talents (and now money) for their own benefit. The more agents or accountants or sycophants that a player allows into his life, the more likely it is that one of them might not be there with the best of intentions. Additionally, the lack of money management skills of someone who came from having little money to then having millions creates a situation in which exploitation can occur.

Financial troubles may also occur because after spending most of their lives pursuing an NBA dream, these former players are lacking in other skills that employers may find attractive. When the ability to competitively play amongst the best basketball players in the world, and when the name-recognition and clout that come from once being one of those players both diminish, these men may not have much in the way of other qualifications, especially if they never earned a degree. Instead, they may find themselves, for example, playing in an inferior league for a fraction of their former salary, in front of a fraction of the number of fans in the hopes of somehow getting another chance to return to the NBA because in their eyes, there is no other viable option (Ballard 2012). Even after it is apparent to everyone but the player that his NBA career is over, the occupational aspirations remain, if only because players who circumvent the normal status attainment process are without the educational credentials necessary to pursue other career options.

In spite of the short-term duration of most NBA careers and the financial crisis that occurs for many players after their career is over, the mass media exposure and the allure of fame

and fortune continue to influence the educational and occupational aspirations of numerous young men who will never set foot on an NBA court as a player. I mentioned earlier that LeBron James had the highest-selling jersey during the 2010-2011 season. Following him that season in the list of the highest-selling NBA jerseys were, in order: Kobe Bryant, Rajon Rondo, Amar'e Stoudemire, Derrick Rose, Dwayne Wade, Kevin Durant, Carmelo Anthony, Dwight Howard, and John Wall, all of whom are Black. Of these top ten players, four of them entered the NBA directly from high school, four more left college after their freshman year, and the other two left after their sophomore season. Although their level of educational attainment prior to the NBA is probably known by most NBA fans, the player's level of popularity is more likely related to their on-court performance, instead of how long they stayed in school. In other words, they are likely viewed as having the relevant talents or abilities earlier than others and not necessarily as a typical player with that amount of education. Nonetheless, if the most popular players are the ones who perform well when they get to the league and they also happen to have spent less time in school before doing so, teenage boys and their parents may continue to believe that putting education secondary to athletics can help replicate the success of these players.

Even if these young men and their significant others were informed of the results of this study that the only variable significantly related to eventual NBA salary and career longevity was player statistics, their view of the role of education in the process will likely remain unchanged. Instead, those with NBA aspirations would want to invest most of their time and energy on the court than in the classroom in order to develop the skills to a level that will keep them employed and paid well if or when they get there.

Socioeconomic status was mentioned as another variable that has been shown to influence the educational and occupational aspirations of adolescents, but it was not controlled

for in the models of this study. I attempted to take this variable into consideration when exploring the differences between who stays in school longer by finding where these players attended high school and using available census data to take into account the socioeconomic data for their residential areas or neighborhoods. While doing this, I discovered that many of these eventual NBA first-rounder draft picks attended private, boarding or preparatory high schools, presumably there on a scholarship given to them at least partially because of their ability to play basketball.

Discovering where they attended high school did not provide me with the socioeconomic data I wanted, but it did point to how early it is in the lives of these young men that they are possibly deciding on this career trajectory. Many of them are being recruited at such a young age to play basketball for these private and boarding schools, where the education they could receive is likely superior to what they receive at an underfunded, inner-city public school and yet they still may view basketball as their only viable career option. When these kids are being shown at a young age that better educational opportunities are available, but are dependent on their ability on the basketball court, their priorities will most likely be decided from them. If their scholarships can be revoked if their on-court performance is not satisfactory, they will then strive to perfect skills to keep them in a school where they will not be able to fully explore the new educational opportunities that are “available” to them.

Finally, the policy implications of the NBA should also be considered. The years studied in this thesis were selected in order to examine the NBA for the 10 years before the league instituted its requirement that all players be at least 19 years old and one year removed from their high school graduation. This rule was instituted in order to allow the league “more time to evaluate prospects, and college basketball would help the players develop the maturity they

desired in their prospects” (Medcalf 2012). Whether or not this rule has accomplished this remains to be seen, but it appears that there have been at least one development since it was implemented, albeit not one that speaks to the rule’s effectiveness at keeping these young men in school. When examining the ten-year period prior (1986-1995) to the decade examined in this study, White non-foreign players drafted in the first round averaged 3.88 years of college, while Black players averaged 3.67 years of post-high school education. For the years explored in this study (1996-2005), it was 3.40 and 2.57 years, respectively. Although it has not been a complete decade since the rule was established, the data available for players drafted in the first round of the 2006-2013 NBA drafts show that the average amount of years of college education for both White and Black players continues to decrease, namely with averages of 2.64 years for White players and 2.43 years for Black players.

I do not anticipate this downward trend to change, either. Before the 2013 NBA draft was even completed, the following year’s draft was already being lauded as one to be filled with substantially more-talented players than in 2013. This is not because of upperclassmen who need an additional year of collegiate experience, but rather the incoming 2013-2014 freshmen class. In fact, one analyst (Parrish 2013) already began predicting the top 2014 draft selections; six of the top fourteen are incoming freshman, seven are sophomores and the remaining top player is foreign. Not only are these freshmen players already being expected to be some of the best players in the NCAA despite not yet playing one minute of college basketball, but there is also no belief that they will remain in school beyond that single season; they are only going to college in the first place to satisfy the NBA’s age requirement. Leaving school early has become the norm, with little attention being given to the long-term implications of how circumventing the

education process will affect these young men, let alone the ones who never reach these top levels of competition.

Instead, the NBA has little incentive to change anything because it is first and foremost a business. For example, the contract that the NBA currently has with ABC/ESPN and TNT for broadcasting rights pays them nearly \$1 billion a year (Cohen 2007). A large indicator for these broadcasters to feel like they are getting their money's worth before the current contract expires after the 2015-16 season will be the ratings that these NBA games receive, which then affect the advertising revenue they can recoup. In order to achieve the ratings that will allow these broadcasters to charge more to advertise during the broadcasts, the NBA will want to present the best product possible that will draw the most viewers. It would not make sense financially to put rules in place to keep the best players in college for longer, allowing the NCAA to earn those ratings and that revenue. The best players will make their way to the NBA as soon as they are capable of competing there, regardless of the amount of education that they have attained. Then these players will eventually be replaced by a new collection of players who likely were first recruited based on their talent even earlier than the previous generation. Not mentioned will be the countless ones who were also recruited early, also encouraged by their parents, teachers, coaches and friends to pursue this dream, and eventually just not good or fortunate enough to join that very elite group.

In conclusion, this study used the framework of the status attainment model to examine an alternative career trajectory for adolescent boys and its impact on their educational and occupational attainment. This model has previously shown the influence that the social and economic background, mental ability, high school rank and significant other influences have on educational and occupational aspirations and attainment and this study was no different, even

when considering that the key point of educational attainment was being circumvented in the overall process. As such, I believe that the results presented here have implications for the relationships between race, education and athletics. With future research introducing the variable of socioeconomic status into this model, as well as exploring the status attainment process of young basketball players who ultimately do not reach the pinnacle of being a first-round NBA draft pick, we will more fully comprehend how young men are socialized to this alternative career trajectory and its effects on them, in both the short- and long-term.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Primary Variables, Only White and Black Non-Foreign Players (N=236)

	%	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Race					
White	17.8				
Black	82.2				
Educational Attainment					
High School	11.9				
Freshman	8.1				
Sophomore	16.5				
Junior	23.7				
Senior	39.8				
Statistics					
Standard Player Efficiency		9.33	5.51	0	26.5
Adjusted Player Efficiency		19.00	5.71	0	32.6
Draft Order		14.32	8.27	1	30.0
Salary (Percentage of Maximum)		0.39	0.33	0	1.0

Table 2. Two-group (Race and Education) Mean-Comparison Test.

	Number of Players	Mean	Standard Error	Standard Deviation
White	42	3.4047	0.1366	0.8851
Black	194	2.5670	0.1015	1.4135
Pr (T > t) = .0003				t=3.6841

Table 3. Discrete-Time Cox PH Event History Model of First Time Not Under Contract (N=236).

Variable	Standard Efficiency			Adjusted Efficiency		
	Hazard Ratio	Standard Error	<i>p</i> -value	Hazard Ratio	Standard Error	<i>p</i> -value
Education	0.9047	0.1909	0.635	0.9399	0.2190	0.790
Statistics	0.5810	0.0387	0.000	0.8090	0.0187	0.000
Draft Pick	1.0131	0.0217	0.543	1.0748	0.0229	0.001
Race	0.5462	0.4467	0.460	0.4531	0.3951	0.364
Interaction	1.2415	0.2935	0.360	1.1311	0.2905	0.632

Table 4. Linear Regression Analysis of Educational Attainment, Player Statistics, Draft Order, and Race on Player Salary (N=236).

Variable	Standard Efficiency			Adjusted Efficiency		
	b	β	<i>p</i>-value	b	β	<i>p</i>-value
Education	-0.0067	0.0297	0.823	-0.0196	0.0401	0.625
Statistics	0.0501	0.0024	0.000	0.0318	0.0028	0.000
Draft Pick	-0.0008	0.0017	0.638	-0.0128	0.0019	0.000
Race	0.0513	0.1069	0.631	0.0361	0.1441	0.802
Interaction	-0.0239	0.0307	0.437	0.0007	0.0415	0.987
Constant	-0.0420	0.1067	0.694	-0.0108	0.1455	0.941
<i>R</i> ²		0.7551			0.5594	

Figure 1: Adapted Status Attainment Model

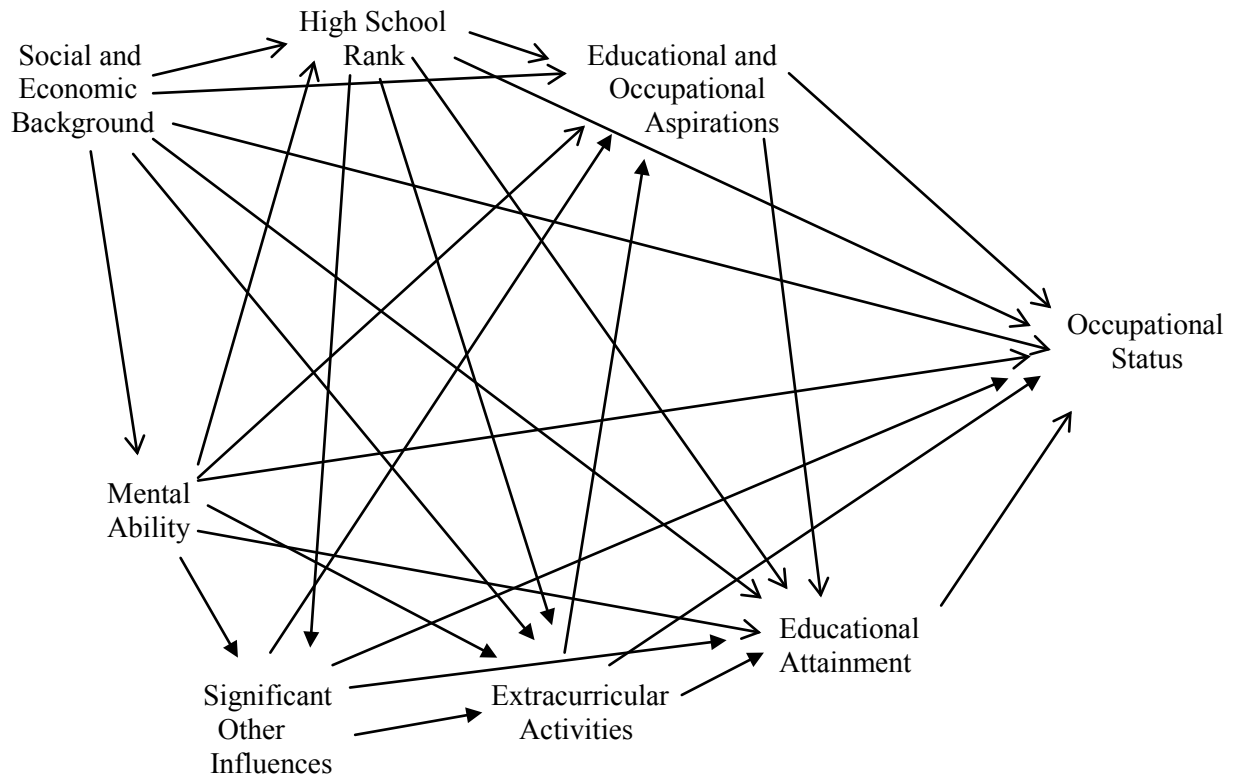


Figure 2

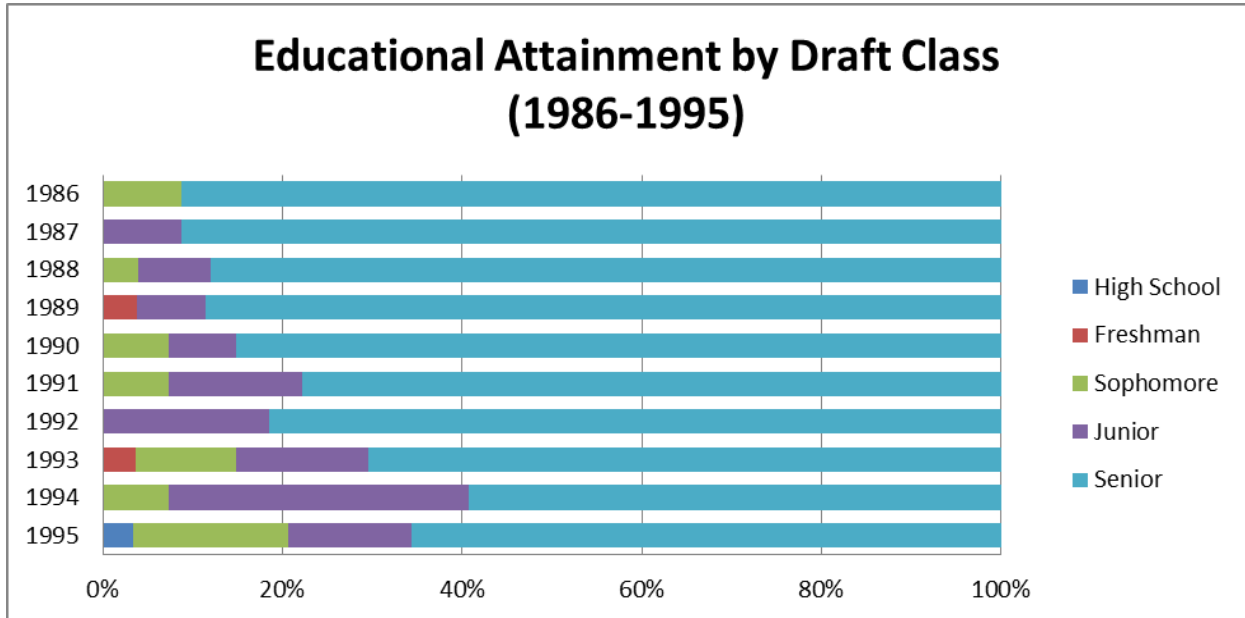


Figure 3

