DIFFERENCES IN FAMILY INFLUENCES ON COLLEGE ATTENDANCE PLANS FOR MALE AND FEMALE NINTH GRADERS

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This study examined a model of college student choice for male and female ninth graders using LISREL. A sample of 703 male students and 718 female students and their parents responded to two sets of questionnaires regarding high school experiences and expectations about college. Endogenous variables examined included parents' expectation regarding higher education for their children, parents' savings for college, students' discussion of college with their parents, and students' aspiration for postsecondary education. The model explained 30.8% of the variance in students' aspiration for males and 36.8% for females. Final empirical models for the two groups suggested that there may be subtle differences in family influence on male and female students' college-going plans.

With the declining pool of high school graduates and the increasing state and federal role in financing college attendance, institutional, state, and federal policy makers have become interested in the topic of student college choice. Institutional policy makers are concerned with what they can do to attract desirable high school graduates to their campuses. State and federal policy makers are concerned with the effective utilization of financial aid awards as well as with aggregate postsecondary enrollments.

A number of studies have investigated the correlates of postsecondary enrollments (see, for example, Brown, 1982; Jackson, 1986; Parents, Programs and Pennsylvania Students, 1984; Trent and Medsker, 1967) or focused upon the factors that influenced the decision to attend a specific postsecondary educational institution (see for example Litten et al., 1983; Maguire and Lay, 1981; Chapman and Jackson, 1987).

Sewell and others (see, for example, Sewell and Shah, 1978) used causal

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analysis to examine status attainment for large samples of high school students. Few studies, however, attempted to understand the interaction of family and student background characteristics, student achievement, and student motivation upon students' predisposition to pursue formal postsecondary schooling.

Jackson (1986), Manski and Wise (1983), and Tierney (1980) used large samples to conduct causal studies of student college choice. However, two of these used data sets more than a decade old, and neither looked specifically at predisposition to pursue some form of postsecondary education. More importantly, few of these studies were grounded in a theoretical model of student college choice.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) identified several types of college choice models. These included: econometric models, consumer models, sociological models, and combined models (which drew upon econometric, consumer, or sociological constructs). Each type of model postulated that a set of factors determined outcomes of college choice.

Econometric models assumed that individual students would attend a postsecondary educational institution if the perceived benefits of attendance outweighed the perceived benefits of noncollege alternatives. Econometric models generally contained the following factors: expected costs (direct and indirect), expected future earnings, student background characteristics, high school characteristics, and college characteristics. Several econometric models of college choice were developed which employed these factors to predict the likelihood of college attendance (Kohn, Manski, and Mundel, 1976; Bishop, 1977; Nolfi, 1978; Fuller, Manski, and Wise, 1982; Manski and Wise, 1983).

The consumer model viewed college choice from a marketing perspective. Young and Reyes (1987) developed a consumer model of college choice which required students to estimate a minimal degree of costs and risks associated with college enrollment. Kotler and Fox (1985) also viewed college choice from the perspective of risks and costs. Their model included four stages: (1) need arousal, when an initial interest in college was developed; (2) information gathering; (3) decision evaluation, the narrowing down of colleges to a particular set of choices; and (4) decision execution, the choice of one postsecondary educational institution over another. Young and Reyes (ibid.) suggested that such nonmonetary costs and risks as parental and peer expectations were more influential in the need arousal and information gathering stages than were monetary costs.

Sociological models were derivative of status attainment research and focused on the identification and interrelationship of factors influencing aspirations for college attendance. The status attainment process is concerned with the role played by various factors in the allocation of individual positions or occupations of varying degrees of prestige or status (Sewell and Shah, 1978; Sewell, Haller, and Portes, 1969; Sewell and Hauser, 1975).