

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 606

RC 007 732

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TITLE Black-White Variations in a Model of the Occupational Plans Process of Southern Youth.
INSTITUTION Louisiana State Univ., Baton Rouge. Agricultural Experiment Station.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO USDA-RR-S-61
PUB DATE Apr 73
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society (Atlanta, Georgia, April, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Caucasians; Family Income; Family Status; Fathers; *High School Students; *Negroes; *Occupational Choice; Occupations; *Parent Influence; Parent Role; Parochial Schools; Predictor Variables; Public Schools; Rural Urban Differences; Seniors
IDENTIFIERS *Louisiana

ABSTRACT

The occupational plans of a sample of white and black high school seniors were analyzed by a model which included the following variables: father's occupation, family income, father's education, and academic performance. A proportionate, stratified, random cluster sample of Louisiana high school seniors was selected in November 1970, yielding a total of 3,245 respondents. High schools within the state were stratified on the basis of residence (rural-urban), school type (public-parochial), and school size (large-medium-small). Path analyses were conducted separately by residence and racial categories within residence. Within models by specific control categories the path coefficients revealed that the 3 social status variables were rather weak predictors of academic performance, while academic performance manifested the strongest independent effects on occupational plans. A comparison of models across control categories was made utilizing path regression coefficients. The findings of this analysis indicated that, comparatively, father's education had the strongest impact on occupational plans for all control categories. The effect of this variable was substantially less for rural black respondents. These findings and others were discussed along with proposals for future research in this general area. (Author/KM)

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Black-White Variations in a Model of
the Occupational Plans Process of Southern
Youth*+

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*Financial support for the collection of the data was provided, in part, by the Louisiana State University Agricultural Experiment Station and U.S.D.A. Regional Research Project S-61, "Human Resource Development and Mobility in the Rural South." The author is grateful for the aid and assistance provided by Henry T. Azuma, Alvin L. Bertrand, Arthur G. Cosby, Pedro F. Hernandez, Vernon J. Parenton, Neil Paterson, George S. Tracy and Snow White concerning various aspects of this study. The helpful comments provided by Donna Albanese, Russell A. Dynes, Evans W. Curry, Archibald O. Haller, Andrew I. Kohen, Wen Lang Li, Jerry Olivero, Frank Pratzner and Richard A. Rehberg on earlier drafts of this paper are also acknowledged. The author is solely responsible for the contents of this paper.

+Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society April, 1973, Atlanta, Georgia.

ED 087606

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Abstract

The occupational plans of a sample of white and black high school seniors are analyzed in terms of a model which includes the following variables: father's occupation, family income, father's education and academic performance. Path analyses were conducted separately by residence and racial categories within residence. Within models by specific control categories the path coefficients reveal that the three social status variables were rather weak predictors of academic performance, while academic performance manifested the strongest independent effects on occupational plans. A comparison of models across control categories was made utilizing path regression coefficients. The findings of this analysis indicates that, comparatively, father's education had the strongest impact on occupational plans for all control categories. The effect of this variable was substantially less for rural black respondents. These findings and others are discussed along with proposals for future research in this general area.

Black-White Variations in a Model of
the Occupational Plans Process of Southern
Youth*

During the last 25 years an extensive body of research literature has accumulated on the occupational choice process of adolescents (Goldstein, 1967 and Kuvlesky and Reynolds, 1970).¹ Studies conducted in all regions of the United States generally indicate that social status, residence, and race are three crucial "structural" factors which influence the occupational choices of adolescents.² Early studies by Kroger and Lauthitt (1935), Hollingshead (1949), Porter (1954), Empey (1956), Sewell, et al. (1957), Stephenson (1957), Grigg and Middleton (1960) and Haller and Miller (1963) found

¹It is important to note that researchers in this general area have posited that there are various analytical dimensions of occupational choice. Blau, et al. (1956:536) noted the existence of "ideal" job preferences and "actual expectations." Stephenson (1957) operationalized mobility orientations in terms of "ideal aspirations and expectations;" Haller and Miller (1963) have developed an "occupational aspiration scale" which takes into account "ideal" and "real" occupational preferences and short-term and long-term occupational placement, Kuvlesky and Bealer (1966) have provided a concise distinction between occupational "aspirations" and "expectations" the former reflecting a "desired goal" and the latter an "anticipated" occurrence. In this study the dependent variable, occupational plans, is congruent with the conception of realistic, long-term occupational expectations, an explicit, analytical dimension in the works of all the researchers noted above. For more information on the specification of the dimensions of occupational choice, see Picou and Curry, 1971.

²Occupational choices refer to both dimensions of choice, i.e., aspirations and expectations, unless noted otherwise.

social status positively related to the occupational choices of youth. More recent research conducted by Harrison (1969), Gurin (1970), Cosby and Picou (1971) and Picou and Cosby (1971) has substantiated this contention. The research literature in this area also indicates that urban youth have higher-status occupational choices than their rural counterparts (Grigg and Middleton, 1960; Burchinal, 1961; Sewell and Orienstein, 1965; Kuvlesky and Ohlendorf, 1968 and Picou and Cosby, 1971).³

Studies which have made racial comparisons of adolescents' occupational choices report inconsistent findings. For example, Antonovosky and Lerner (1959) report for a sample of "disadvantaged" youth residing in upstate New York that blacks had higher occupational goals than whites. Similar findings were recently noted for the occupational plans of rural deep-south adolescents (Curry and Picou, 1971). However, other studies have found no racial differences in adolescents' occupational choices (Gist and Bennett, 1963 and Cosby and Picou, 1971) or that white youth have higher status occupational choices (Middleton and Grigg, 1959 and Sprey, 1962).

³ It should be noted that several exceptions to this finding have been reported for black youth. For further information, see: Middleton and Grigg, 1959 and Picou, et al., 1970.

While many of the above researchers have attempted multi-variate analyses of their data, relatively few have looked at the effects of social status on occupational choice within different residence and racial groups.⁴ This paper provides additional information on the subject by assessing the effects social status has on occupational plans between residential groupings and by racial classifications (black-white) of the respondents within each residence category. Furthermore, academic performance is viewed as an intervening variable and the model developed below is analyzed for different sub-populations when residence and racial controls are applied.

Academic Performance: An Intervening Variable
Between Social Status and Occupational Choice

In a recent investigation, Harrison (1969) found that "real and ideal" occupational choices of high school sophomores were related to social status, sex, and school performance. With regard to his empirical analysis, he posits:

...performance in school, it appears, has a major role in the development of real and ideal educational and occupational aspirations, regardless of the home backgrounds of the students and of their sex (Harrison, 1969:78).

⁴ A notable exception to this general contention is Gurin's (1970) study of deep-south black college students. This study found that educational attainment of parents and residence had significant effects on occupational expectations. This finding reinforces the contention that many black-white comparative studies ignore class and residence factors which vary across racial categories (For further information, see: Billingsley, 1968 and Coleman, 1965).

In general, academic performance and achievement have been thought to be considerably influenced by the social status of the adolescent's family (Rossi, 1967:269). Charters (1963:739-740) contends that "social class position predicts grades, achievement" and many additional behavioral traits of adolescents within the educational system. Evidence produced from Coleman's (1966:300) comprehensive study reveals that individual social class and school social class had important influences on the educational achievement of youth.⁵ Research by Wilson (1959:842-843) provides some additional empirical support for these contentions (See also Havighurst and Neugarten, 1967:84-85). However, recent empirical investigations in Wisconsin failed to validate the relationship between the social status and academic performance of high school seniors. They show (among other things) that the effects of status on grade point average are small at best and wholly mediated by intelligence (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969 and Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970).

Theoretical explanations concerning the relationship between social status and academic performance include psychoanalytical interpretations (Bettelheim, 1964), cultural

⁵ The two primary correlates of achievement found by Coleman and his associates were "home background of the child" and "student body quality of the school." A number of indicators were utilized in the operationalization of these variables in the Coleman study. See Coleman (1966).

deprivation theories (Ausubel and Ausubel, 1963 and Hunt, 1968) and cultural conflict perspectives (Howard and Jones, 1963 and Inkeles, 1966). The significance of social status for influencing different socialization and child-rearing patterns has also been noted by Hollingshead (1949) and Barber (1957). These authors state that in contradistinction to "lower-class" youth, "middle-class" youth are socialized in a family environment which stresses independence and academic achievement. Additionally, "lower-class" youth are usually socialized more in terms of short-range goals, while "middle-class" youth are oriented toward long-range goals and the necessary means to eventual achievement.

In light of the above discussion, it appears that the independent effects of social status on adolescents' occupational choices are, in part, mediated by the influence of academic performance. For the purposes of this investigation, it is assumed that academic performance is influenced by social status and in turn, occupational expectations are influenced by both of these variables.

Methodology

The sample. A proportionate, stratified, random cluster sample of Louisiana high school seniors was selected in November of 1970, yielding a total N of 3,245 respondents. High schools within the state were stratified on the basis of residence (rural-urban), school type (public-parochial)

and school size (large-medium-small). The census classification of rural and urban was employed to differentiate between residence categories. Schools which had an enrollment of 500 or more pupils were considered as "large", while schools with 100 pupils or less were considered small. Questionnaires were administered to all seniors present the day group interviews were scheduled.

Operationalization of variables. Three indicators of social status were utilized. Father's occupation (X_5) was determined by assigning metric transformations of Duncan's socio-economic scores to NORC prestige scores to the job that the respondents indicated their fathers' currently held (Duncan, 1961). In the event that the respondents' fathers were unemployed or deceased, the last job held by the father was used. Family income (X_4) was determined by the respondent's estimation of total family income for the previous calendar year. Father's education (X_3) was determined by responses to an item on the questionnaire which asked the students to indicate, from an exhaustive rank ordered list of years of school completed, how much education their fathers attained.

Actual grade point averages, calculated by school officials, were obtained for only 49 percent of the total sample. However, an exhaustive list of possible high school courses was provided on the research instrument and respondents were asked to note the letter grade they received in

each course they had completed. Thus, reported grade point averages were available for approximately 99 percent of the sample. The zero-order correlation between actual and reported grade point average was found to be .80. Reported grade point average was utilized as an indicator of academic performance (X_2) because of the small sample loss and the rather strong correlation observed between actual and reported grade point averages.⁶

Occupational Expectations were determined by an open-ended question which read: "Taking all the facts of your job-future into consideration, including your own personal ability and the opportunities you really think you have, what job do you really expect to have most of your life?" Responses to this question were coded in the same manner as father's occupation.

Findings

Zero-order correlations among the five variables by residence and racial groups within residence are presented in Table 1.⁷ Path diagrams showing the direct and indirect effects of social status on academic performance, and social status and academic performance on occupational plans by

⁶Reported grade point average has been found to be a rather accurate indicator of actual grade point average. For example, see Davis (1964:27).

⁷Models are not presented by sex. Correlation matrices were computed for sex within race-residence categories and no exceedingly large variations were observed. A detailed comparison of sex variations in the career planning process is currently underway. A consideration of sex differences goes beyond the scope of the present work.

residence categories are presented in Figure 1. The multiple regression equations, by residence, for all four predictor variables on occupational choice resulted in an R of .388 for urban respondents and an R of .369 for the rural respondents. Approximately 15 percent of the variance in occupational choice was accounted for by social status and academic performance for the urban respondents, while these variables explained slightly less than 14 percent of the variance for the rural respondents.⁸

(Table 1 about here)

The independent effects of all four predictor variables were found to be relatively similar. Father's occupation (X_5) and father's education (X_3) manifested stronger direct effects on the occupational expectations of the urban respondents. Both of these variables had similar moderate direct effects on academic performance (X_2). Family income (X_4) demonstrated rather weak direct effects on both occupational expectations (X_1) and academic performance (X_2). Only 3% of the variance in academic performance (X_2) was accounted for by the three social status indicators for the urban

⁸The path coefficients entered next to the causal arrows in all diagrams are partial regression coefficients in standardized form. These coefficients measure the independent, direct effect of the predictor (independent) variable on the criterion (dependent) variable. If the reader is interested in further explication of this statistical analysis technique, he should consult: Duncan (1966); Land (1969); Hiese (1969); Li (1955); Nygreen (1971); Boyle (1970); and Lyons and Carter (1971). Because of the large sample size, all standardized coefficients $\geq .10$ are considered statistically "significant."

respondents and approximately 5% of the variance was explained for this variable within the rural subsample. Of the social status indicators, father's occupation (X_5) was found to exert the strongest independent influence on academic performance for both urban and rural respondents, while academic performance (X_2) manifested the strongest independent effect on occupational expectations. The indirect effect of father's occupation on educational expectations, through academic performance, is reflected by the coefficient of .038 for the rural respondents ($.12 \times .32$) and .033 for the urban respondents ($.13 \times .25$).

(Figure 1 about here)

Figure 2 reveals the path diagrams for racial groupings of the urban respondents. The multiple regression equation for all four predictor variables yielded an R of .403 for whites and .406 for blacks. Thus, for urban youth, when controls for race were applied, it was found that slightly more than 16% of the variance in occupational choice was accounted for by both models. For the urban blacks, academic performance (X_2) and family income (X_4) manifested the strongest direct effects, reflected by the B-coefficients of .32 and .19, respectively.

On the other hand, academic performance (X_2) and father's occupation (X_5) had the strongest direct effects for the urban whites. The direct effect of family income (X_4) on the urban white respondents occupational choices was weak

(reflected by the \underline{B} - coefficient of .04), as was the direct effect of father's occupation (X_5) on the occupational choices of urban blacks. In fact, a weak negative relationship ($\underline{B} = -.01$) obtained for the direct effect of father's occupation on the urban black youth's occupational choices.

(Figure 2 about here)

The three social status indicators were found to account for relatively little variance in academic performance (X_2) within both models (Figure 2). Father's occupation (X_5) manifested the largest direct effect on academic performance (X_2) for both blacks and whites. Weak negative effects were found to obtain for family income's (X_4) effects on academic performance (X_2). Father's education (X_3) had slightly stronger effects on both academic performance (X_2) and occupational choice (X_1) within the model for urban whites than the corresponding model for urban blacks.

Figure 3 presents the path diagrams for the rural respondents when controls for race were applied. More than twice the amount of variance in the occupational choices of the rural whites than the rural blacks was accounted for by the predictor variables. Calculations of the multiple regression equations for both black and white rural youth produced an R of .446 for whites and an R of .314 for blacks. Approximately 20 percent of the variance in the dependent variable was explained for whites, in contrast to about 10 percent for blacks. Academic performance (X_2) was found to exert the strongest independent effects for both the black

and white rural respondents. The direct effects of two social status indicators--father's occupation (X_5) and father's education (X_3)--were "significant" for the white rural respondents, while only family income (X_4) manifested a "significant" direct effect for blacks.

(Figure 3 about here)

Approximately 3% of the variance in academic performance (X_2) was accounted for by the social status indicators for both rural racial categories. Father's occupation (X_5) manifested the strongest independent effect on academic performance (X_2) for the rural whites ($B=.11$), while family income (X_4) and father's education (X_3) had direct effects of similar magnitude on academic performance (X_2) for the rural black respondents.

Model Comparisons: Path Regression Analysis

At this stage of the analysis we have looked primarily at variable effects within control categories in our evaluation of the model under investigation. Thus, our comparison of effects has been limited to only those variables which have paths effecting a common dependent variable. In comparing effects of variables across different populations (denoted by control categories) we must turn to a comparison of unstandardized regression coefficients or path regression coefficients (Tukey, 1954; Blalock, 1967A; 1967B; Schoenberg, 1972). The statistical rationale for this analysis procedure stems from the fact that variations across populations in path coefficients, or standardized regression coefficients, may be attributed to differences in variances as well as effect differences

(Blalock, 1967A and Schoenberg, 1972).

The path regression analysis is presented in Table 2 by control categories. Several noteworthy findings are revealed by the analysis. The effects of the three socio-economic status variables on academic performance are extremely weak for all populations under investigation. Thus both the path analysis and path regression analysis clearly demonstrate that no support is provided for the theoretical argument that academic performance varies by social status.

The direct influence of two social status indicators, father's occupation (X_5) and father's education (X_3), on occupational plans appears to be greater for white youth in both residence categories. However, it should be pointed out that father's education (X_3) did manifest a "significant" effect on job plans for the urban black youth. These findings tend to support earlier studies of career attainments of blacks which found that black parents do not pass on status advantages to progeny (Duncan, 1968). In our case the findings point to the conclusion that social origins have relatively less impact on the formation of occupational plans for blacks.

Across models, academic performance manifested the strongest effects on occupational plans. The effect of this variable was substantially stronger for the rural white and urban black respondents. Additionally, it should be noted that mean level of occupational plans were higher for the rural and urban white respondents. For the rural respondents the level of occupational plans was similar when controls for race were applied (Table 3).

Although the black respondents in both residence categories tended to have lower means for all variables included in the analysis (Table 3), the intercepts for occupational plans are substantially higher for black youth in both residence categories. Substantively, this finding indicates that the variables included in the model under investigation may not be appropriate predictors for blacks. When all values are set to zero, the higher intercepts observed for blacks suggests that variable or set of variables not included in this study may be operating.

The differences in the magnitudes observed for family income effects in the path analysis and path regression analysis indicates that the path analysis effects were artifactual. The unusually large variances for this variable inflated the magnitude of effects in the standardization process. This finding indicates that family income, as measured and reported in this study, manifested relatively little influence on academic performance and occupational plans of respondents in all control categories.

Summary and Conclusions

The findings of the analysis presented above indicates that academic performance was independently the strongest source of influence for the occupational choices of the urban and rural and black and white high school seniors involved in this study. This finding reinforces the contentions of Harrison (1969:78) noted earlier in this paper that academic performance is an important determinant of mobility

orientations and has implications for the "Wisconsin model" of the status attainments process. Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf (1970:1025) note that within their model of status attainment that "academic performance has effects on aspirational and attainment variables that are not mediated by significant-other's influence." This statement (for occupational expectations or plans) is reinforced for a sample of deep-south high school seniors. Additionally, this contention appears to be valid for black and white youth residing in both rural and urban areas. Apparently, school grades are an important source of self-evaluation for the student and the "feedback effect" provided by such information may influence self-concept formation, which in turn, has an important effect on future orientations.⁹

Social status was found to be a rather poor predictor of academic performance, indicating that simplistic contentions of scholars concerning class and academic achievement should be tempered (For example, see Charters, 1963:739-740). The fact that within different control categories analyzed, at most, the three social status indicators accounted for approximately five percent of the variance in academic performance, suggests that the relationship between these variables has been overemphasized in the past. These findings

⁹The manner in which academic performance was operationalized in this paper may have additional significance for the adolescent's definition of his academic status relative to his peers. The sociological truism that Thomas (1928:584) posited long ago is relevant here: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

also coincide with the recent research conducted on the "status attainment process" of high school seniors residing in the North (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969 and Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf, 1970).

The effects of social status on occupational expectations were found to vary within control categories. The path regression analysis revealed that for both urban and rural white respondents, father's occupation and father's education manifested substantial direct effects (Table 2). On the other hand, only father's education was found to have a substantial direct effect on job plans for urban blacks. Weak effects for both father's occupation and education were noted for rural blacks. These findings indicate that social origins are more significant predictors of white youths' occupational plans.

In conclusion, the relatively weak influence on occupational expectations observed for social status, coupled with the much greater effects of academic performance suggest that low status occupational plans of "disadvantaged" youth may be raised by action programs designed to improve levels of academic performance. Mobility orientations apparently form, for the most part, in terms of realistic estimates of self-competency. These findings imply that an alteration in adolescents' mobility orientations cannot be assured solely by attempts to raise family status levels.

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations Among the Variables by Residential and Racial Categories*

	FathOcc X ₅	FamInc X ₄	FathEd X ₃	AcadPer X ₂	OccExp X ₁
Urban					
X ₅ FathOcc	---	.51	.47	.20	.19
X ₄ FamInc	.49	---	.36	.16	.13
X ₃ FathEd	.60	.36	---	.17	.14
X ₂ AcadPer	.17	.08	.15	---	.35
X ₁ OccExp	.27	.18	.25	.30	---
Urban Blacks					
X ₅ FathOcc	---	.36	.16	.11**	.14
X ₄ FamInc	.56	---	.10**	.14	.17
X ₃ FathEd	.42	.35	---	.12	.09**
X ₂ AcadPer	.14	.07	.09	---	.27
X ₁ OccExp	.17	.23	.17	.34	---
Urban Whites					
X ₅ FathOcc	---	.36	.42	.16	.26
X ₄ FamInc	.38	---	.28	.12	.14
X ₃ FathEd	.53	.26	---	.13	.21
X ₂ AcadPer	.14	.05	.13	---	.39
X ₁ OccExp	.31	.16	.26	.28	---

*For each panel, correlation coefficients above the diagonal refer to the residence and racial groupings indicated on the right-hand side of the table, while correlation coefficients below the diagonal refer to the residence and racial categories noted on the left-hand side of the table.

**All correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the .05 level except those noted by two asterisks.

Table 2

Path Regression Coefficients by Control Categories*

<u>URBAN</u>						<u>RURAL</u>					
	X ₅	X ₄	X ₃	X ₂	α	X ₅	X ₄	X ₃	X ₂	α	
X ₂	.006	.000	.008	--	1.41	.006	.000	.012	--	1.58	X ₂
X ₁	.099	.000	.232	3.30	47.84	.085	.000	.097	5.00	47.58	X ₁
<u>URBAN WHITE</u>						<u>RURAL WHITE</u>					
	X ₅	X ₄	X ₃	X ₂	α	X ₅	X ₄	X ₃	X ₂	α	
X ₂	.004	.000	.009	--	1.47	.006	.000	.012	--	1.48	X ₂
X ₁	.150	.000	.269	2.87	43.85	.161	.000	.309	5.51	37.37	X ₁
<u>URBAN BLACK</u>						<u>RURAL BLACK</u>					
	X ₅	X ₄	X ₃	X ₂	α	X ₅	X ₄	X ₃	X ₂	α	
X ₂	.005	.000	.002	--	1.51	.003	.000	.012	--	1.77	X ₂
X ₁	-.010	.000	.209	5.51	54.37	.067	.000	.087	3.81	52.35	X ₁

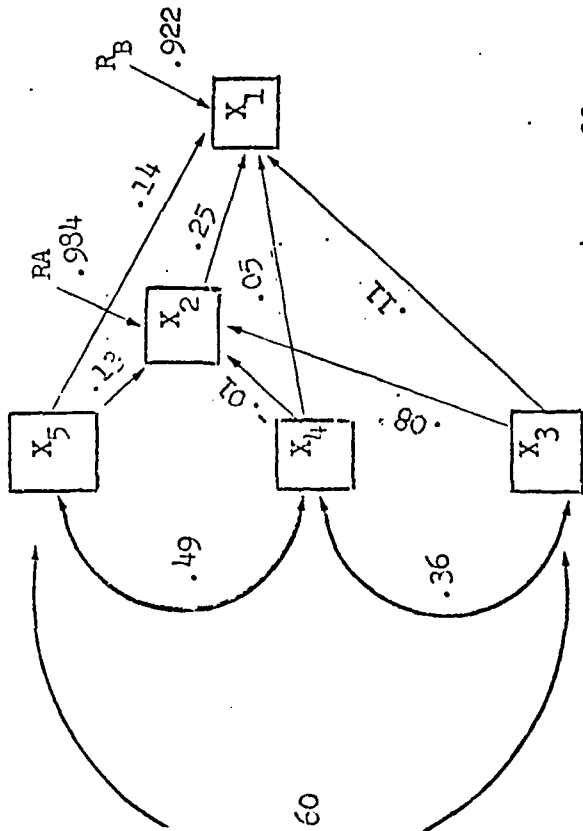
*See Figure 1 for variable identification

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of
Variables Included in the Model by Control Category

<u>URBAN</u>			<u>RURAL</u>		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
X ₅	66.03	12.32	56.75	11.90	X ₅
X ₄	11,445.55	7,953.16	7,896.02	6,534.74	X ₄
X ₃	12.46	3.62	9.95	4.44	X ₃
X ₂	2.65	0.63	2.58	0.67	X ₂
X ₁	72.97	8.99	68.77	10.62	X ₁
<u>URBAN WHITE</u>			<u>RURAL WHITE</u>		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
X ₅	68.85	10.36	61.75	10.69	X ₅
X ₄	12,547.00	7,836.93	10,108.14	6,919.17	X ₄
X ₃	13.08	3.19	11.39	3.53	X ₃
X ₂	2.67	0.63	2.65 2.58	0.68 0.67	X ₂
X ₁	73.26	8.68	68.70	11.10	X ₁
<u>URBAN BLACK</u>			<u>RURAL BLACK</u>		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
X ₅	52.31	11.90	48.01	8.36	X ₅
X ₄	5,869.44	4,994.83	4,052.26	3,270.93	X ₄
X ₃	9.50	4.05	7.45	4.75	X ₃
X ₂	2.52	0.60	2.46	0.62	X ₂
X ₁	71.66	10.30	68.82	9.78	X ₁

URBAN



$$R_1^2 \cdot 2345 = .388$$

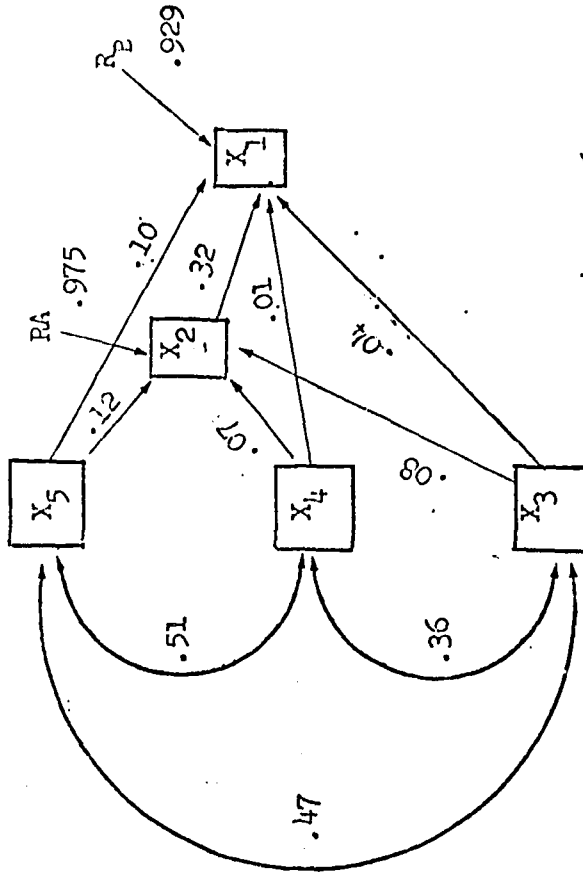
$$R_2^2 \cdot 2345 = .1504$$

X₅ = Father's Occupation

X₄ = Family Income

X₃ = Father's Education

RURAL



$$R_1^2 \cdot 2345 = .369$$

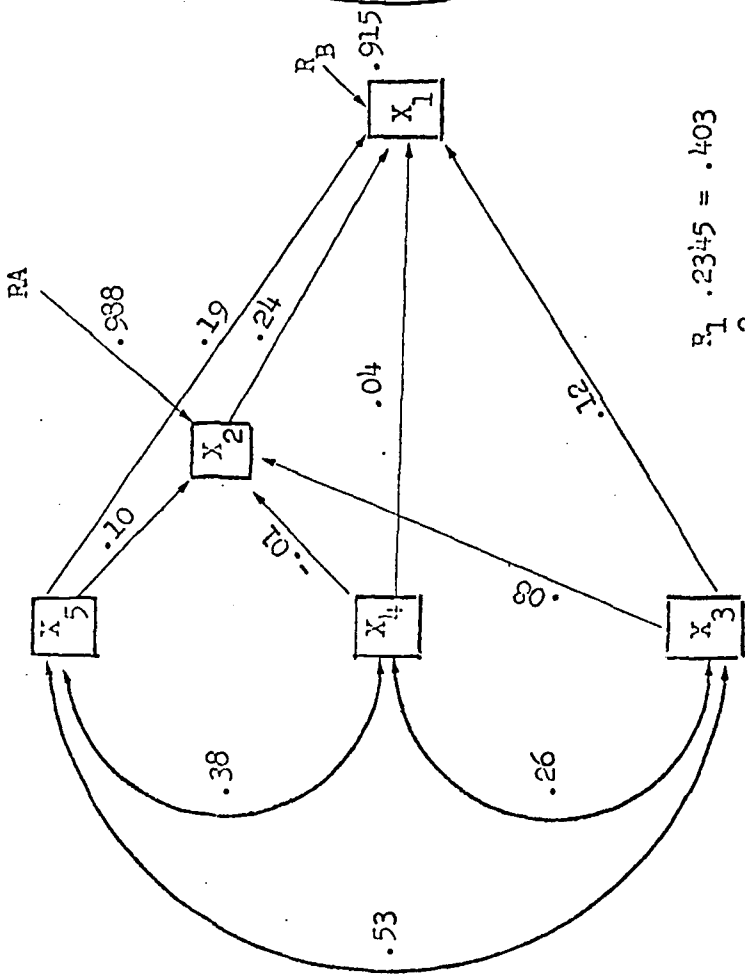
$$R_2^2 \cdot 2345 = .1362$$

X₂ = Academic Performance

X₁ = Occupational Expectations

Figure 1. Path Diagrams for the Effects of Social Status and Academic Performance on Occupational Expectations by Residence.

WHITES



$R^2_1 .2345 = .403$

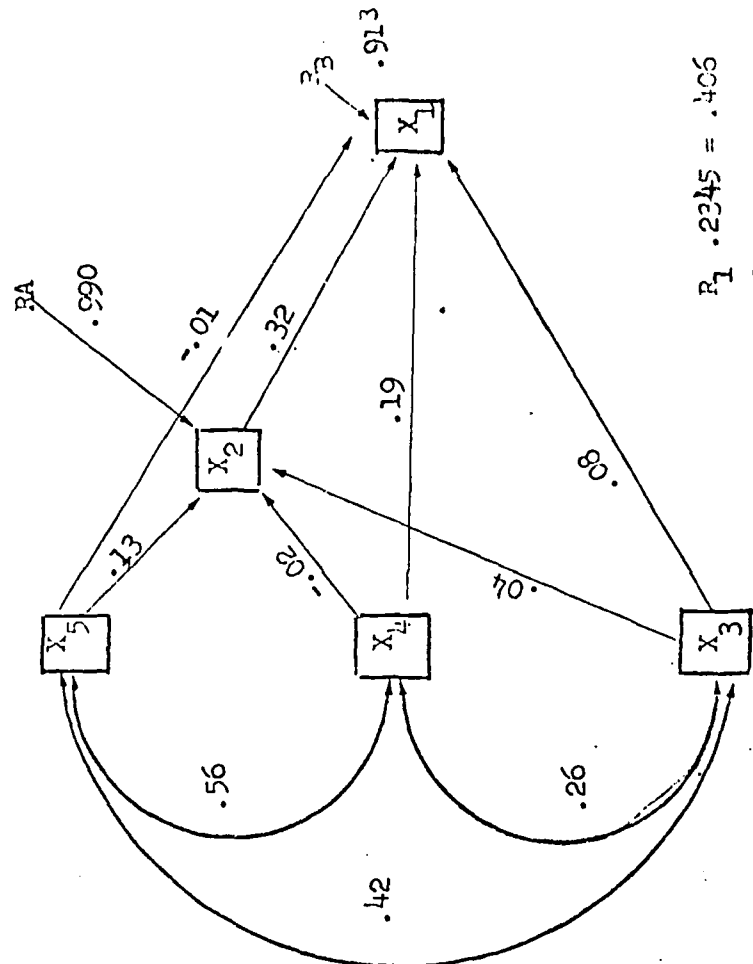
$R^2_2 .2345 = .1627$

X_5 = Father's Occupation

X_4 = Family Income

X_3 = Father's Education

BLACKS



$R^2_1 .2345 = .406$

$R^2_2 .2345 = .1643$

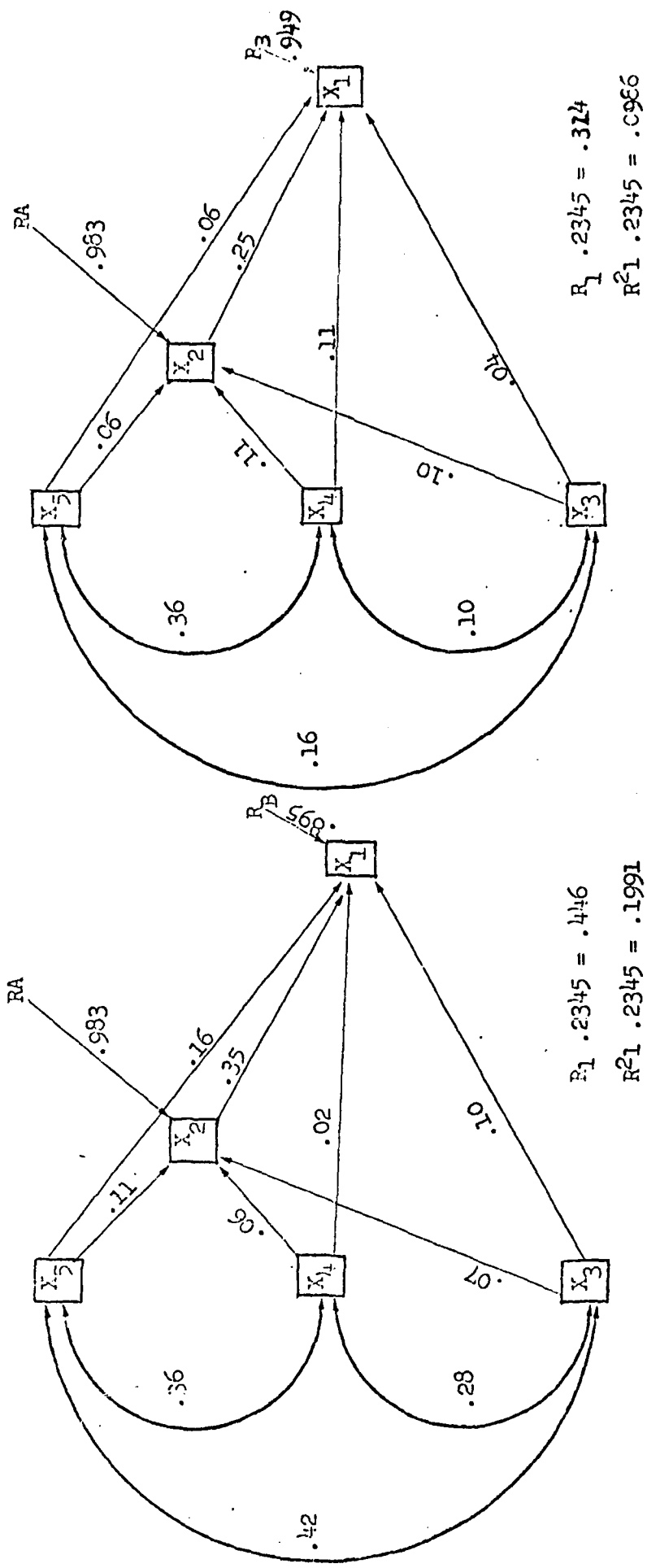
X_2 = Academic Performance

X_1 = Occupational Exp.

Figure 2. Path Diagrams for the Effects of Social Status and Academic Performance on Occupational Expectations for the Urban Respondents by Race

WHITES

BLACKS



$R^2_1 = .446$
 $R^2_2 = .1991$

X_5 = Father's Occupation
 X_4 = Family Income
 X_3 = Father's Education

$R^2_1 = .314$
 $R^2_2 = .0966$

X_2 = Academic Performance
 X_1 = Occupational Expectations

Figure 3. Path Diagrams for the Effects of Social Status and Academic Performance on Occupational Expectations for the Rural Respondents by Race

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