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AUTHOR Birman, Beatrice F.
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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with a review of past sociological research on the influence of counselors. Most of this past research views the counselor as a "gatekeeper," perpetuating the social status ordering by giving students advice which is compatible with their social status. The research reported in this paper takes a different approach to counselor-student interaction by looking at the processes which predict student perceptions of the strength of counselor influence. The outcomes of this research address the earlier literature in two ways. First, the process outlined in this paper indicates that the channeling of students, if it occurs, may occur in an atmosphere in which counselors are regarded as warm and concerned about the welfare of the student. Those students who, in the gatekeeping literature are most likely to have their aspirations lowered by counselors, are also those who, in this study are most likely to report the counselors as warm (friendly and concerned). Secondly, this study actually strengthens the impact of the channeling argument. While past studies have indicated that counselors affect students in the direction of lowering the aspirations of certain students, this study adds that counselors are most likely to have a strong impact on these students' thinking about the future. (Author/BP)

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A STUDY OF COUNSELOR INTERACTIONS AND INFLUENCE*

Beatrice F. Birman

Stanford University

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Introduction

This paper focuses on antecedents of the counselor's perceived influence on students' thinking about their future work. The research addresses two sets of questions:

1. What is the process which results in counselor influence on students? In particular, do certain characteristics of counselor-student interaction (such as the frequency or quality of the interaction or the perceived warmth of the counselor) result in increased counselor influence on the student?

2. On which students is the counselor most likely to have the greatest influence vis-a-vis future plans? In particular, do certain student status characteristics (e.g. social class or ethnicity) or performance characteristics (e.g. grades or achievement test scores) increase the likelihood of counselor influence on the student's future plans?

The counselor's influence on students has been a concern for both practitioners and researchers. Counselors often deplore their minimal opportunity to affect students (Birman, 1976). Many counselors feel that their bureaucratic duties and extremely high case loads sharply curtail the amount of time and attention they can devote to student problems and plans. Researchers, by contrast, have proposed that counselors have a tremendous effect on students in the function of social "gatekeeper". In this view counselors reinforce the ascribed social stutus of students by affecting student aspirations (Bowles, 1972; Carnoy, 1974; Cicourel and Kitsuse, 1963). The difference in the perspectives of researchers and counselors emphasizes how little is empirically known about how counselors influence students.

The research reported in this paper explores the process through which counselors influence students. Our conception of the counselor's role assumes high case loads and a large number of bureaucratic demands on the counselor's time. But even within the image of the "overburdened" counselor, influence

on certain students can and does occur. Even if most of the counselor's duties are routine and bureaucratic, the counselor's role has implications for influence on students.

The purpose of this paper is not merely to assure or to caution counselors that, overworked though they are, they are having an effect. Our approach to the counselor's role was also chosen because of certain gaps in the traditional view of counselor effects which is found in the sociological literature. In order to highlight the contribution of our approach, this past literature will be briefly reviewed in the next section.

The Counselor as a Gatekeeper

A number of social scientists have depicted the counselor as a social "gatekeeper" (Cicourel and Kitsuse, 1963; Erickson, 1975). The term "gatekeeper" conveys an image of the counselor standing at the gateway to higher social status, making decisions about which students should pass through to eventually become higher status members of society. The concern of some writers is that, through their assignment of lower status students to lower curriculum tracks, counselors reinforce existing social status orderings (Bowles, 1972; Carnoy, 1974).

Empirical studies have lent some support to the "gatekeeper" conception of the counselor's role. In particular, studies have shown that student aspirations for the future are affected by interactions with counselors. More frequent interactions with counselors are related to a closer fit between student aspirations and either tested ability (Armor, 1969) or status characteristics such as ethnicity or sex (Graham, 1974). In other words, it is possible that students who have high aspirations but who are members of lower status or ability groups will have their aspirations lowered through interactions with counselors, while higher status or higher ability students will have their aspirations raised through interactions with the counselor. These effects on aspiration would be logical outcomes if counselors did, indeed, encourage lower status students to enter lower curriculum tracks and vice versa.

Although the "gatekeeper" conception of the counselor's role does receive some empirical support, the underlying evidence and the assumptions

on which it is based might be questioned. First, the "gatekeeper" argument is based on the assumption that counselors have the organizational right to assign students to courses and tracks. There is no evidence that this right is pervasive. Counselors sometimes argue that teachers and students themselves make the final decisions on student assignment to courses more often than do counselors (Birman, 1976). No representative data exist on the rules used in most high schools to assign students to courses, and, therefore, on the extent to which counselors exercise the "gatekeeping" function.

From the perspective of this paper, a more important weakness of the "gatekeeper" conception is that it does not distinguish which students counselors are most likely to affect. Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963, p. 101) emphasize the counselor's tremendous impact on students when they state that counselors "may alter the students' and parents' conceptions of themselves and each other and what is best for the student in all areas of life". However, Cicourel and Kitsuse do not carefully qualify this statement. Certainly the counselor cannot have such a tremendous impact on all students. Such an image would not be consistent with the statistics on counselor-student ratios. Armor (1969) reports that, on the average, the counselor-student ratio in senior high schools across the nation was 1:621. Given the limited amount of time that the counselor would have available for each student, the counselor's impact on most students is likely to be very small. The empirical studies of counselor effects cited above (Armor, 1969; Graham, 1974) do, indeed, report very small counselor effects on the whole. If counselors cannot have a great impact on the plans of all of their students, the "gatekeeping" literature leaves us wondering about which students would be most strongly affected by their interaction with the counselor.

Finally, the evidence used to support the counselor's "gatekeeping" effect on students could be easily interpreted in other ways. Measured correlations between the frequency of counselor-student interactions and a closer fit between aspirations and achievement test scores (Armor, 1969), or between aspirations and student status characteristics (Graham, 1974), do not necessarily mean that the interactions with the counselor caused the closer fit between aspirations and student characteristics. Rehberg and Hotchkiss (1972) found that the strongest predictor of the level of

counselor's educational advice to students was the student's educational intention at a previous point in time. Similarly, students whose aspirations were more compatible with their tested ability or their status might conceivably feel more comfortable with counselors. If such students sought out counselor interactions more frequently than other students, the empirical relationships would not reflect counselor influence at all. From the available evidence, the direction of influence is unclear.

Our questions about the "gatekeeping" argument highlight our ignorance about the process which ultimately results in counselor effects on students. Without knowing the antecedents of counselor influence in general, differential effects on different kinds of students cannot be predicted. Without more information about patterns of counselor-student interaction, we are not in a position to assert that counselors influence students rather than being influenced by them.

The research presented in this paper begins to address these issues by focusing on the antecedents of counselor influence on students. Given that counselors are responsible for so many students, we ask under what conditions might counselors have any conceivable influence? In the course of answering this question, we will be able to assess which students are most likely to be influenced by their counselors.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework presented in this section will propose that the frequency and quality of counselor-student interactions will result in a student's positive sentiment toward the counselor. This positive sentiment will, in turn, be the basis of a counselor's influence on the student.

In order to understand the basis for this argument, we must begin with our conception of influence. March (1955) states that influence can be said to have occurred only if the behavior of the influenced person is, after some contact with the influencer, different than would have been predicted prior to the interaction. Strong (1968), drawing upon the research on opinion change, conceives of influence as a cognitive event involving the acceptance by one person of another's opinion which is contrary to his own.

For both of these writers, the essential component of influence is some change in the person being influenced.

One way that counselors might produce a change in the student would be to develop a close relationship with the student, or to become a "significant other" for the student. In such a situation, counselor approval would become, from the student's perspective, a valued resource. The literature on social power (Emerson, 1963) would lead us to predict that, if the students valued the counselor's approval, they would shape their attitudes or their behavior in order to gain this approval.

Under what conditions would the counselor become a "significant other" for the student? We might speculate that those students who have the most interaction with the counselor have a greater chance of developing a close personal relationship with the counselor. George Homans (1950) notes that, in many human groups, increased frequency of interaction increases positive sentiment among members. Positive sentiment might also be produced through more discussions about personal issues or discussions about a broader range of issues. The positive sentiment between counselor and student would be one foundation of the counselor's influence on the student. A series of research studies by Strong and his associates (Dell, 1973; Strong and Dixon, 1971; Schmidt and Strong, 1971; Strong, 1968) show that counselor attractiveness and trustworthiness, two aspects of positive sentiment, increase counselor influence on students.

In their interactions with most students, counselors are unlikely to develop the types of relationships which would result in high counselor influence. In an earlier section, we mentioned that counselors are typically responsible for a very large number of students. Armor (1969) also reports that in a national sample of 60,419 high school seniors, only 25% reported having seen their counselor more than three times during the past year. Furthermore, for most students, interactions with counselors are more likely to focus on program planning or educational counseling rather than personal issues (Armor, 1969).

Clearly, counselors do not have the opportunity for the amount or depth of interaction which would enable them to establish a personal relationship with most students. This has two implications for counselor influence.

First, as has been documented in the literature (Kahl, 1953; Armor, 1969) counselors are likely to be less influential on students than other "significant others", such as family and friends. Second, those students who do establish closer relationships with counselors are more likely to be influenced by them than students who do not. This second implication is a major focus of our empirical analysis.

If we label as "routine" the typical student interactions with counselors, characterized by low frequency and whose subject matter is focused on program planning, our argument can be summarized in the following propositions:

1. Compared to students who have routine interactions with counselors, students who have non-routine interactions with counselors will be more likely to have positive sentiments toward counselors.

2. Students who have positive sentiments toward counselors will report more counselor influence on their plans for future work than students who do not have positive sentiment toward the counselor.

We are proposing that positive student perceptions of counselors mediate the effects of non-routine interaction upon counselor influence on the student's future work plans. In other words, non-routine interactions provide the social-psychological foundations for increased student perceptions of counselor influence. (Hereafter, student positive sentiment toward counselors will be labeled "perceived counselor warmth" or, simply, "counselor warmth".)

Other Variables in the Analysis

In order to adequately evaluate our predictions about the counselor influence process, a number of student characteristics will be explored simultaneously with the characteristics of counselor-student interactions. First, the student's social class will be included in the analysis because the results of previous research show that social class affects student perception of counselor influence.

Armor (1969) reports a study of counselor influence in three high schools in Boston. He asked 25-35 students in each of the three schools to list their first or second choices for persons "whose advice has been most important in making plans about your future" (p. 121). Student responses to this question

indicate that from two-thirds to three-fourths of the students in each school felt that their family was their most important source of advice about the future. In general, very few students reported counselors to be important sources of advice.

However, there were some interesting differences among different kinds of students. While no suburban middle class students mention the counselor as their first or second choice, 11 percent of the urban working class students chose counselors as their first choice, and another 19 percent chose counselors as their second choice. While these numbers should be read with some skepticism due to the small number of students within each category, they still indicate a difference between the two types of students.

Some of Armor's other findings support the impression that students with lower social class backgrounds are more influenced by counselors than higher social class students. He found that correlations between ability and both aspiration and self-concept of ability increased with more frequent interaction with the counselor. These findings were stronger for students of lower social class compared to students of higher social class.

Other student characteristics will be controlled in addition to social class. Ethnicity will be used as another measure of student status because our measure of student social class may be unreliable. Rather than an objective measure of social class, we were forced to rely on student reports of parents' occupation. Student ethnicity, on the other hand, was gathered from school records.

Student achievement scores and grades will also be controlled because students with low performance on either of these measures might be more likely to interact frequently with counselors or discuss topics in addition to program planning. We wanted to ascertain the effects of frequency and quality of interaction on perceived counselor warmth and influence independent of grades and test scores.

The analysis in this paper will focus on four sets of questions:

1. How do students describe their interactions with counselors? How often do students interact with counselors and on what subjects do the interactions focus?

2. How influential on future plans do students report their counselors to be? How does the perceived strength of the counselors influence compare to the perceived influence of other significant others?

3. Do our predictions of counselor influence as a function of non-routine interactions and counselor warmth receive support in the data, independent of the effects of student characteristics?

4. In what ways do selected student characteristics (social class, ethnicity, grades, achievement tests) predict perceptions of counselor warmth and influence?

Before assessing how our data answer these questions, we will review the design of the study.

Design of the Study

The Sample

The data used to evaluate our arguments were a subset of items from a questionnaire administered to high school students in San Francisco in Spring, 1974. Background data, giving ethnicity, grades, and scores on standardized achievement tests and unexcused absences for each student, were also collected. The questionnaire was completed by 772 students, a 5% random sample of the students in all eight comprehensive schools in the city. The initial response rate was approximately 80%, with 20% added from a randomly generated list of alternates.*

The sample was diverse in ethnic composition, reflecting the ethnic distribution of the city. Four groups are represented: Spanish Surname, Other Whites, Blacks, and Asian students.

Operational Definitions and Methods of Analysis

The following variables were tapped by items from the student questionnaire.

* Elaborate measures were taken to minimize non-response to the questionnaire, and to prevent bias in the sample. A full description of these procedures is documented in Birman (1976) and can be obtained from the author.

Frequency of Counselor-Student Interactions. Students were asked to respond to the question: "How many times have you had discussions with your counselor since last September?"--Never, once, 2 or 3 times, 4 or 5 times, 6 or more times.

Subjects of Counselor-Student Interactions. The following questions tapped the topics discussed in counselor-student interactions: "Students talk about different things with their counselors. How many times have you talked with your counselor about these things since last September--assignment to specific classes or courses, planning your school program in general, your future after high school, problems with your school work and problems in your personal life?" Response categories for each topic were: never, once, 2 or 3 times, 4 or 5 times, 6 or more times.

Quality of Counselor-Student Interaction. Using cutpoints for all questions between "never" and "once" the above questions formed a Guttman scale with a reproducibility of .93 and a scalability of .86. We labeled this scale the quality of interaction scale.

Positive Student Sentiment Toward Counselor: Perceived Counselor Warmth. This variable is a measure tapping student perceptions of the counselor's friendliness and personal interest. Since the responses from the following two questions were highly correlated ($r = .64$) they were added together to produce an index of student perceptions or positive student sentiment toward counselors. The items were: "How friendly are your counselors:--Extremely friendly, very friendly, moderately friendly, slightly friendly; not at all friendly," and "How interested are your counselors in you as a person? Extremely interested, very interested, moderately interested, slightly interested, not at all interested."

Counselor Influence on Student Plans for Future Work. Students were asked: "How much influence do (counselors) have on your thinking about your future work?--Extremely influential, very, moderately, slightly, not at all influential."*

* Because of the focus on the change implied, our conceptual definition of influence, the dependent variable chosen for this research was student perceptions of the counselors influence on the student's thinking about

Ethnicity. Student ethnicity was collected from school records.

Social Class. A five-point scale was developed which coded responses to an open-ended question about father's occupation. If the father's occupation was not listed, mother's occupation was substituted.

Grades in English. Student grades were collected in four subjects: math, English, social studies and vocational/business courses. In this study, only grades in English were selected for analysis because many counselors seem to consider grades in English most basic to other school performance. Preliminary analyses using other subjects showed similar patterns of results.

Scores on 10th Grade Verbal Achievement. Data were available for Math and Reading Achievement Tests at 8th and 10th grades. In our analysis, only 10th grade reading scores were used. This was a more recent measure and we had test scores for more students than for other tests.

Our predictions about the relationships between characteristics of counselor-student interactions and perceived counselor influence were tested using regression analysis. This technique permitted us to test our predictions independent of other variables of interest (student social class, ethnicity, grades and achievement test scores). Prior to the regression analyses, we will examine the frequency distributions of our major theoretical variables. This will provide a picture of the types of interactions reported by most students and the extent to which students perceive counselors as influential compared to others.

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future work. We use this measure because it was a more accurate, though subjective, reflection of a change in student aspirations than the correlation between counselor advice and student aspirations. We reasoned that, the stronger the perceived counselor influence, the more likely the counselor would have been to change the student's aspirations.

Results

Table 1 presents the proportions of students reporting the frequency of their interactions with counselors. The table reports the number of times during the school year which students reported meeting with their counselors, both in general and for specific subjects.

Table 1 About Here

Table 1 represents an overview of the nature of counselor-student interactions for most students. First, we see that the most common frequency of counselor student interaction, in general, is two or three times per school year. The majority of students (56%) report interacting with counselors one to three times during the school year, although a substantial minority of students (38%) report interacting with counselors four or more times during the school year.

Turning to the subject matter of counselor-student interactions, we see that students are much more likely to report that they discuss assignment to courses and program planning with their counselors than they are likely to discuss their future plans, school or personal problems. Only 23% of students in our sample reported never discussing assignment to courses with their counselors, while only 15% never discussed program planning in general. While most students do discuss their programs and courses with counselors at least once, and, usually, two or three times during the school year, students reported much lower frequency of discussion about their future after high school with counselors. Fully 40% of the students in our sample reported that they never discussed their future after high school

with their counselors. An additional 29% of the students in the sample reported only one discussion about their future plans with counselors during the past year.

Table 1 also indicates that, in our sample, the majority of students do not discuss school or personal problems with their counselors. Fifty-eight percent and 84 percent of the students respectively, report never discussing problems with school work or problems with personal life.

Table 2 presents the distribution of student responses on our dependent variable, student perceptions of counselor influence on their thinking about future work, and compares perceived counselor influence to perceived influence from family, friends and teachers.

Table 2 About Here

Twenty-five percent of the students in our sample report that the counselor is extremely or very influential. Another twenty-five percent report that the counselor is moderately influential. Twenty-eight percent of the students reported that counselors were not at all influential on their future plans. The distribution of student perceptions of counselor influence is almost identical with student perceptions of the influence of both teachers and friends. Only in the case of family did a large majority of students report a substantial amount of influence on their thinking about their work. Seventy-three percent of the students in the sample reported that their families were either extremely or very influential.

Table 3 is a correlation matrix of all of the variables which are of interest in the analysis. There are many significant relationships in this matrix, largely due to the size of our sample. We will examine each of the counselor variables in turn. Student report of the frequency of interactions with the counselor do not reveal very strong relationships (although a number of significant ones). Spanish surname and Asian students seem somewhat less likely to have frequent interactions with counselors while Black students are more likely to report frequent interactions. Students with low grades and achievement are also somewhat more likely to report a high frequency of

interaction with counselors. Frequency of counselor-student interaction is strongly related to the quality of counselor-student interaction (Guttman scale) as well as student perceptions of counselor warmth and influence.

Table 3 About Here

The quality of counselor-student interactions seems to be strongly related to fewer variables than the frequency of interactions. Students with low reading scores, but expecially students with low grades are more likely to report talking to counselors about personal and school problems in addition to program planning and future plans. There is also a fairly substantial relationship between quality of counselor-student interactions and student perceptions of counselor warmth and influence.

Black students, students with low grades and students with low achievement test scores seem more likely to perceive the counselor as warm. Counselor warmth is, in turn, very strongly correlated with student perceptions of counselor influence.

Finally, while social class was unrelated to either frequency or quality of interaction, student perceptions of counselor influence is slightly (although significantly) correlated with low social class. Black and Spanish Surname students are more likely to perceive counselors as influential about their thinking about the future, while Asian students are less likely to perceive the counselor as influential. Students with low grades, and, much more strongly, students with low achievement test scores are more likely to perceive the counselor as influential on their thinking about their future work. As mentioned above, student perceptions of counselor influence are strongly related to student reports of the frequency and quality of interaction with the counselor as well as student perceptions of the counselor's friendliness and concern (the components of warmth).

Table 4 reports the results of a regression analysis predicting student perceptions of counselor warmth. While Table 3 reported significant correlations between students' perceptions of counselor warmth with ethnicity (being Black and not being Asian), and with student grades, these variables are not significant predictors of counselor warmth in the regression analysis.

The significant predictors of counselor warmth in the regression analysis are frequency and quality of counselor-student interaction and student achievement test scores; students reporting high frequency of interaction with counselors and students with high quality of interaction with counselors are more likely to perceive counselors as warm. Whatever the relationship between students ethnicity or grades and perceptions of warmth, these relationships seem to be mediated by the characteristics of counselor-student interaction and the student's achievement.

Table 4 About Here

While not significant, the directions of the relationships indicate that Black and Spanish Surname students perceive counselors as warm compared to other students; the relationship of social class to perceived counselor warmth, controlling for the other variables, is negligible.

Table 5 reports regression results from an analysis predicting student perceptions of counselor influence on thinking about future work. While Table 3 indicated significant correlations between counselor influence and all of the

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Table 5 About Here

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variables in the equation, the regression results indicate that student perception of counselor warmth is, by far, the strongest independent predictor of student perception of counselor influence. Students with low achievement test scores and Spanish Surname students are also significantly more likely to perceive higher counselor influence on their thinking. Black students are also more likely to perceive the counselor as influential, but the direct effect of being Black is not significant. (Given the high correlations between Black and low reading achievement, it is likely that the effect of being Black is mediated through tenth grade reading achievement scores. Similarly, the high correlations of frequency and quality of counselor-student interaction and counselor influence indicates that counselor warmth mediates the effects

of frequency and quality of counselor-student interaction on student perceptions of counselor influence.

Discussion

The focus of this study has been on: (1) describing typical patterns of counselor-student interactions and counselor influence on students, and (2) identifying the antecedents of student perceptions of counselor influence on their plans for future work. The antecedents of perceived influence were sought in the patterns of counselor-student interaction (frequency, quality and warmth) and in the effects of certain student characteristics (social class, ethnicity, grades and test scores).

What do our results indicate about the typical patterns of counselor interaction and influence? First, we found that counselors are not perceived as highly influential by students, at least when compared to family. This finding confirms the results of past research.

One could hardly expect counselors to be perceived as influential, given the interaction patterns implied in Table 1. Table 1 confirms our impressions from the earlier literature that for most students, interactions with counselors are infrequent, and focus on program planning. Given that so large a proportion of students (40%) report never discussing the future with counselors, and an additional 29% having had only one discussion about the future in the past year, it is hardly surprising that counselors are not perceived as more influential. On the other hand, we should note that 50% of the students in our sample reported that counselors were moderately, very, or extremely influential. This is a substantial proportion of students, indeed, a slightly higher proportion than those reporting peers as moderately, very or extremely influential on their thinking about their future work. While counselors are clearly not the most influential people in the lives of many students, they do seem to have an impact on a substantial proportion of students.

Our data clearly indicate that counselors do not have a strong influence on all students. What kinds of interactions characterize students who report high amounts of counselor influence? High frequency and high quality of

counselor-student interaction did increase student perceptions of counselor warmth. Students who perceived counselors as warm were the most likely to perceive the counselor as influential. Thus, the analysis supports our initial conception of the process which predicts perceived counselor influence. Counselor effects on students can be predicted through a social-psychological influence process. However, the low explained variance of our regression equations clearly indicate that other processes are at work which would affect the strength of the counselor's effects on students. Identifying these other processes is an important project for future research.

What other student characteristics predicted counselor influence? Independent of the frequency and quality of their interactions with counselors, we found that students with low achievement scores are more likely to perceive the counselors as warm and are more likely to be influenced by them. This finding is surprising if we consider that low achievers are perhaps less likely to have pleasant interactions with counselors.

A related finding is the trend of students from the lowest status ethnic groups (Black and Spanish Surname students) to be more likely to perceive counselors as warm and influential than are other students. These findings are unexpected in the light of past literature on counselors which has suggested that students may develop the most comfortable interactions with, and are most influenced by, counselors who are similar (Erickson, 1975; Schmidt and Strong, 1971). Given that most counselors in the San Francisco district are non-minority and middle class, even the direction of our results is impressive.

What would explain the patterns of results? One possible explanation can be found in the work of Knox and his associates (1974). They found that students who were planning to work after high school were more oriented to counselors than were students who planned to go to college. Since low-achieving and lower status students would be more likely to be seeking work after high school, this higher orientation toward counselors might produce the perception of counselors as more influential.

Furthermore, low-achieving students may be more dependent on counselors for information about their future options. If low achieving students are in middle class homes, they may be more influenced by counselors because their

families are not likely to have the types of information most appropriate to their needs. If low achieving students are in lower social class environments, they may be more likely to respect the counselor's authority and therefore be more influenced by her. Thus we can speculate about some possible explanations of the perceptions of low achieving students as more influenced by counselors. But why would these students perceive the counselor as warmer?

The relatively high perceptions of counselor warmth on the part of low-achieving students and students from lower-achieving ethnic groups may be attributable to a phenomenon similar to a pattern among teachers described by Fernandez, et al. (1975) and Massey, et al. (1975). They found higher student perceptions of teacher warmth among students from lower-achieving ethnic groups compared to students from higher-achieving ethnic groups. These researchers argued that teachers may be warm toward low-achieving students without using challenging academic standards which motivate these students to improve their performances. Similarly, counselors may be warmer for lower-achieving students, i.e. provide emotional support for these students, without using the counseling relationship to encourage improved performance. The extent to which counselor interactions with students conforms to the models for teachers presented by Fernandez, et al. (1975) and Massey, et al. (1975) is a subject for future investigation.

One additional note about the low social class effect in our analysis. As mentioned earlier, past literature on counselors suggested that students from lower social classes are more likely to be influenced by counselors than are students from higher social classes (Armor, 1969). Our analysis suggests that this effect is not present when simultaneously controlling for achievement or ethnicity. However, since our social class measure was based on student report of parents' occupations, these findings should be replicated with more reliable social class measures.

To summarize, this study found that counselor interactions with most students are infrequent and focused on program planning. Most students do not view counselors as a major influence on their future plans, at least when compared to family. But counselors are influential when they have an opportunity to have non-routine interactions with students. Furthermore, for some students, counselors are perceived as warmer and more influential independent of interaction patterns.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper began with a review of past sociological research on the effects of counselors. Most of this past research views the counselor as a "gatekeeper", perpetuating the social status ordering by giving students advice which is compatible with their social status. This gatekeeping conception is the predominant image used even where it is shown that counselors are more sensitive to student achievement test scores than to social status measures (Rehberg and Rosenthal, 1974).

The research reported in this paper takes a different approach to counselor-student interaction by looking at the processes which predict student perceptions of the strength of counselor influence. The outcomes of this research address the earlier literature in two ways. First, the process outlined in this paper indicates that the channeling of students, if it occurs, may occur in an atmosphere in which counselors are regarded as warm and concerned about the welfare of the student. Those students who, in the gatekeeping literature are most likely to have their aspirations lowered by counselors, are also those who, in this study are most likely to report the counselor as warm (friendly and concerned).

Secondly, this study actually strengthens the impact of the channeling argument. While past studies have indicated that counselors affect students in the direction of lowering the aspirations of certain students, this study adds that counselors are also most likely to have a strong impact on these students' thinking about the future.

Of course, this study also leaves a number of areas unexplored and open to further research. The low correlations of all student characteristics with either the frequency or quality of counselor-student interactions points to the need for more studies about how counselors spend their time and with whom. One flaw in this study was the interactions initiated by counselors could not, in our data, be separated from interactions initiated by students. Such a separation would provide more precise information about patterns of counselor-student interactions.

Another area which needs to be explored in depth is the relationship between student perceptions of counselor influence and counselor effects on the level of the students aspirations. While this relationship has been inferred from the findings of past research, better data on student aspirations, counselor interaction and perceived counselor influence needs to be gathered from the same group of students. Longitudinal data would be extremely helpful to disentangle the impact of counselors on students.

Finally, this study has implications for counselors in the high schools. In the face of the large numbers of students for whom they are responsible and the many duties they are called upon to perform, high school counselors often question their own impact. The results of this study indicate that characteristics of the counseling relationship can have a strong effect on some students. When counselors relate to students in a non-routine manner, students are more likely to perceive counselors as warm. Counselor warmth is, in turn, the major determinant of counselor influence on student plans for future careers.

Counselors must be especially careful of the advice they give to those students who are more likely to perceive counselors as warm and influential, independent of the non-routine frequency or quality of their relationship. Our data indicate that some students, notably those with low achievement or those from lower-status ethnic groups, are especially likely to see counselors as warm and influential. For such students, counselor advice about career plans would weigh more heavily. Counselors must not misuse their power by either providing false encouragement or crushing discouragement for low achieving students.

Table 1

Student Reports of Frequency of Interaction With Counselors, In General and By Content of Interaction (In Percent)

Subject	Frequency of Interaction					
	Never	Once	2 or 3 Times	4 or 5 Times	6 or More Times	N
In General	6	15	41	21	17	755
Assignment to specific classes and courses	23	28	38	7	4	763
Planning your school program in general	16	30	40	9	5	765
Your future after high school	40	29	20	6	5	747
Problems with your school work	58	19	14	4	5	747
Problems in your personal life	84	8	5	1	2	756

Table 2

Student Reports of Perceived Influence on Thinking About Their Future Work - Family, Friends, Teachers and Counselors (In Percent)

How Influential?

	Not at All	Somewhat	Moderately	Very	Extremely	N
Family	4	8	15	33	40	766
Friends	24	21	25	20	10	760
Teachers	27	26	23	16	8	769
Counselors	28	22	25	16	9	767

Table 3

Zero-Order Correlations of Student Characteristics, Dimensions of Counselor-Student Interaction and Counselor Influence on Student Thinking About Future Work

	Social Class	Being Spanish Surname	Being Black	Being Asian	Grades (English)	10th Grade Achievement (Reading)	Frequency of Interaction With Counselor	Quality of Interaction (Guttman Scale)	Perceived Counselor Warmth	Perceived Counselor Influence
ocial Class	1.00	-.03	-.19***	-.02	.11**	.22***	-.02	-.02	.01	.09*
eing Spanish urname +		1.00			-.12***	-.12***	-.07*	.00	.04	.09**
eing Black +			1.00		-.27***	-.36***	.11**	.04	-.09**	.14***
eing Asian +				1.00	.21***	.07*	-.13***	-.04	-.07*	-.07*
rades (English)					1.00	.36***	-.10**	-.12***	-.07*	-.09**
0th Grade Achieve-ent (Reading)						1.00	.03	-.08*	-.13***	-.23***
requency of nteraction							1.00	.44***	.32***	.19***
uality of nteraction								1.00	.30***	.20***
erceived ounselor Warmth									1.00	.43***
erceived ounselor Influence										1.00

* .01 < p ≤ .05
** .001 < p ≤ .01
*** 0 < p ≤ .001

+ These variables were dichotomous, or "dummy" variables

Table 4

Results of Regression Analysis Predicting Student Perceptions of Counselor Warmth (N=544) +

Independent Variables	B	Beta	(F)
Frequency of Interaction	.43	.24	27.99***
Quality of Interaction	.28	.19	18.16***
10th Grade Achievement (Reading)	-.01	-.10	4.15*
Being Spanish Surname	.36	.07	2.01
Being Black	.25	.06	1.04
Grades (English)	.05	.03	.59
Social Class	.04	.03	.43
Being Asian	.03	.01	.01
Total			11.89***

$R^2 = .15$

* $.01 \leq p \leq .05$
** $.001 < p \leq .01$
*** $0 < p \leq .001$

+The sample size in the regression analyses is smaller than the total sample size because missing data for achievement tests eliminated cases from analysis

Table 5

Results of Regression Analysis Predicting Student Perceptions of Counselor Influence On Student Thinking About Future Work (N=544) +

Independent Variables	B	Beta	F
Counselor Warmth	.26	.37	81.26***
10th Grade Achievement	-.01	-.15	10.46**
Being Spanish Surname	.33	.09	4.07*
Being Black	.27	.08	2.75
Frequency of Interaction	.04	.06	2.04
Quality of Interaction	.04	.04	.95
Social Class	.03	.03	.76
Grades (English)	.03	.03	.50
Being Asian	.09	.03	.42
Total			18.03***

R^2 = .23

* $.01 < p \leq .05$
** $.001 < p \leq .01$
*** $0 < p \leq .001$

+ See note on Table 4

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