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by

Alison Blythe Shellman

June 2016

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF CLASSISM AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling Psychology

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Approved by Dissertation Committee:

_____
Dr. Consuelo Arbona, Chairperson

_____
Dr. Andrea Burridge, Committee Member

_____
Dr. Susan X. Day, Committee Member

_____
Dr. Lyle McKinney, Committee Member

_____
Dr. Robert H. McPherson, Dean
College of Education

June 2016

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Abstract

Education-related aspirations and expectations are strong predictors of postsecondary educational attainment, including college enrollment. A number of variables influence aspirations and expectations; chief among these is a young person's social class background. While scholars historically have focused on class-related structural barriers inhibiting the development of college-going aspirations and expectations, a more recent body of research has argued that the structural conditions related to an individual's class background must be tied to the ways in which social class is subjectively experienced and internalized, thereby influencing perceptions about opportunities and subsequent aspirations and expectations about the future. Social class-based discrimination, or classism, is one critical vehicle through which class is subjectively experienced. Although classism predicts a number of negative psychological and school-related outcomes, no research so far has considered the influence of classism on aspirations (Thompson & Subich, 2013). This study employed hierarchical multiple regression analyses to examine the relative contribution of three subdomains of classism (i.e., citational, institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting), measured by the Classism Experiences Questionnaire-High School (CEQ-HS; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, as adapted by Shellman, 2014), to variance in 300 10th graders self-reported educational aspirations and expectations. Data were drawn from a previous study, in which the CEQ-HS was adapted and validated among a sample of public high school students. Additionally, the mediating function of classism on the

relations between students' class background and aspirations and expectations was examined, utilizing Preacher and Hayes's (2008) approach for evaluating and comparing indirect effects in mediation models. Results revealed that greater endorsement of experiences of citational classism significantly predicted a decrease in aspirations among the participants sampled, after controlling for social class background, grade point average (GPA), and academic curriculum track. Further, social class background had an indirect effect on aspirations through experiences of citational classism, after controlling for GPA and curriculum track, although this mediating effect appeared to degrade in subsequent tests of simple mediation. No significant findings were demonstrated related to the other domains of classism or the role of classism in predicting educational expectations. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed, with a focus on key directions for future research in this domain.

Keywords: social class, classism, educational aspirations, educational expectations, postsecondary educational attainment

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Chapter I

Introduction

Completion of a college degree is strongly associated with such disparate outcomes as income, lifetime earning potential, access to more desirable jobs, access to health care and insurance benefits, physical health, satisfaction, and overall well-being across the lifespan (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Baum & Ma, 2007; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Doornbos & Kromhout, 1990; Feldman, Makuc, Kleinman, & Cornoni-Huntley, 1989; Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Ross & Wu, 1995). Acknowledging these outcomes in the first months of his presidency, Barack Obama set a goal for Americans: that by 2020, the United States would produce the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (Obama, 2009). However, despite an ongoing national dialogue about this "college for all" mandate, a college education remains to become a promise made equal to all citizens.

Decades-long efforts to democratize higher education have not remedied the significant underrepresentation of students from poor and working class backgrounds on four-year university campuses (Kahlenberg, 2008). In spite of a sustained period of enormous growth in university enrollment overall, social class disparities in college enrollment have remained relatively constant since the 1970s (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance [ACSFA], 2002). Students from low-income backgrounds are still less likely than similarly qualified higher income peers to complete college entrance exams and apply to college (Government Accountability Office, 1998). Nearly one-half of high school graduates from the nation's lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile do not enroll in college, compared to a non-enrollment rate of only 11% among high-SES students (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Even the most academically

competitive low-income high school students—those ranking in the top 5th percentile of their graduating class—are significantly less likely than their higher-income classmates to matriculate at four-year universities (Jordan & Plank, 2000). At the nation's most selective and highly ranked universities, in particular, low-income students are especially underrepresented when compared to their higher-income peers. Only 3% of students at these elite institutions come from the nation's bottom income quartile, while 74% come from the highest quartile (Carnevale & Rose, 2004). These figures support the impression that "access to American higher education is increasingly becoming a privilege for upper-class youth while low-SES youth are increasingly marginalized" (M. J. Smith, 2008, p. 18).

A substantial body of research has explored the multitude of variables associated with the relatively poor postsecondary educational attainment of students from low status social class backgrounds. Scholarship in this domain has documented a number of structural predictors of participation in higher education, including the influence of family-related indices of social status (e.g., Blau & Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1983; Haller & Portes, 1973; Nieto, 2005; Sewell & Hauser, 1972), cost-related barriers (e.g., ACSFA, 2001; Callender & Jackson, 2005; St. John, 2006), and school-related factors (Fine & Burns, 2003; Hoschschild, 2003; Jordan & Plank, 2000; Klugman, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Reese, 2008) that inhibit low-income students' postsecondary educational attainment. However, a parallel body of literature has emphasized that structural factors alone do not account fully for postsecondary attainment. This research highlights the strong association of psychological and behavioral variables—especially aspirations and expectations—to attainment, across both

educational and occupational domains.

What, then, predicts aspirations and expectations? Consistent with the available attainment-related literature, scholarship of this nature has suggested that family social status may be the strongest determinant of students' educational aspirations and expectations (see Calahan et al., 2006; Chung, Loeb, & Gonzo, 1996; Farmer, 1985; Kirk et al., 2012; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). Contemporary scholars who have explored this relationship have emphasized that aspects of a young person's social class background are subjectively experienced and integrated into his or her worldview, thereby influencing his or her perceived opportunities and subsequent aspirations and expectations about the future (see Appadurai, 2004; Bourdieu, 1973; Walpole, 2003). Relevant social class-related research (e.g., from Liu, Ali, et al., 2004) has clarified the complex processes by which individuals subjectively perceive and internalize their class status. However, no literature so far has considered if internalized aspects of social status influence the relationship between an individual's status and his or her postsecondary aspirations and plans (Deosaran, 1975). In particular, the role of social class-based discrimination (i.e., classism) in motivating or inhibiting the development of aspirations is yet to be determined (Thompson & Subich, 2013).

Classism has been found to be an important predictor of a number of negative psychological and school-related outcomes among university students (see Backhaus, 2010; Beagan, 2005; Dews & Law, 1995; Granfield; 1991; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Ritz & Hyers, 2005; Thompson & Subich, 2013; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). Further, Langhout, Drake and Rosselli (2009) found classism to be a mediating link between social class status and a wide range of

outcomes in the university setting. However, this research is limited by its focus on college students and thus offers no insights regarding whether or not classism may be associated with the experiences and outcomes of secondary school students. Research of this nature is particularly important given that high school is a critical time for postsecondary educational and occupational planning and development. Unlike university students, whose very participation in higher education may demonstrate success in overcoming social class and discrimination-related barriers to educational attainment, high school students are in the early stages of developing goals and making choices related to their educational futures. The present study therefore investigated the relationship between high school students' experiences of classism in the school setting and their postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations, including an examination of whether classism mediates the relationship between students' social class background and their postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations.

The above introduction provided a brief overview of the influence of aspirations and expectations on the relatively poor postsecondary educational attainment of students from low status social class backgrounds and identified the role of family social status in shaping students' education-related aspirations and expectations. The next chapter will provide a focused review of the existing scholarship in this broad domain. Specific attention will be drawn to the dearth of research regarding high school students' experiences of classism, in order to lay the groundwork for the investigation of the relationship of classism to postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations undertaken in the present study.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Predictors of Postsecondary Educational Attainment

A significant body of scholarship has investigated the myriad factors associated with the relatively low postsecondary educational attainment (i.e., college enrollment and completion) of students from low status social class backgrounds. This research highlights a wide range of variables that appear to predict eventual attainment, including both structural and psychological factors.

The Influence of Structural Factors on Educational Attainment

The notion that college should be attractive and attainable for all students is neither structurally supported nor resourced (Taylor, 2008). A substantial body of literature has explored the numerous structural disincentives to participation in higher education students from low-income backgrounds face. Scholarship in this domain has typically positioned family, financial, and school-related factors as the primary predictors of postsecondary educational achievement, or lack thereof. Perhaps the most widely cited among this research is Blau and Duncan's (1967) status attainment model, which posited a father's level of education and the prestige of his occupation as the primary determinants of the level of education and occupational prestige his child would later attain. Other related research has offered strong evidence that parents' income and children's early experiences with poverty predict educational and occupational attainments and subsequent continuity or discontinuity of low-income status into adulthood (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1983; Haller & Portes, 1973; Nieto, 2005; Sewell & Hauser, 1972).

In addition, research on the influence of cost-related barriers to postsecondary educational attainment abounds. Rising college tuition and high school students' fears of having unmet financial needs are also among the most prohibitive factors in low-income students' postsecondary educational attainment (ACSFA, 2002). Students from low-income backgrounds tend to perceive the greatest financial obstacles to higher education (St. John, 2006) and are significantly more likely to be deterred from enrolling in college because of their fears of student loan debt, compared to students from more privileged SES backgrounds (Callender & Jackson, 2005). Without a doubt, the exorbitant costs associated with higher education are a major problem demanding greater attention in public policy. However, financial constraints are by no means the only barrier to college faced by poor and working class students (Terenzini et al., 2001). Other scholarship has emphasized that youth from lower status class backgrounds experience a disproportionate number of school-related barriers that inhibit their postsecondary educational attainment. Social class background predicts the quality of schooling that American high school students receive, and disparities in the distribution of school-based resources and opportunities are well documented and ever widening (Fine & Burns, 2003; Kozol, 2005). School resources profoundly affect educational inequalities, such that students at low-income schools with fewer resources (e.g., advanced college-preparatory courses, as only one example) attend college less, or enroll in less selective colleges than more class privileged students from schools with more resources (Klugman, 2006). Low-income students are more likely to attend schools of lower quality than their higher-income peers, when quality is determined by such indicators as teacher experience, student/teacher ratios, budgetary allocations per student, curricular and extracurricular opportunities, and

other school environment factors (Hoschschild, 2003; Kozol, 2005). Similar research has focused on the poor quality of college counseling services in low-income schools, where some counselors fail to adequately assist students during the college application process and may direct poor students into non-college bound tracks (Reese, 2008). High-SES students, meanwhile, have access to more robust and effective college counseling and are often encouraged to attend college (Jordan & Plank, 2000).

Certainly, the benefits and risks associated with participation in higher education are not equally distributed or experienced across social class groups (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). Consequently, college often remains a more unknown, difficult, risky, and/or costly choice for students from less privileged class backgrounds (Taylor, 2008). However, while the relationship of status-related structural factors to postsecondary educational outcomes is well documented, an area of inquiry that remains unexplored is the role of students' subjective psychological experiences and internalizations of their social status background, and how such variables may be related to later attainment. The need for scholarship in this domain is the root of the questions explored in this study.

The Influence of Psychological Factors on Educational Attainment

A parallel body of literature has emphasized that structural factors alone do not account fully for postsecondary attainment. This research highlights the influence of psychological and behavioral factors on attainment, across both educational and occupational domains. At the crux of this scholarship is the so-called Wisconsin model of status attainment (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969), which expanded upon Blau and Duncan's (1967) earlier status attainment theory. The Wisconsin model lends key support to the mediating role of aspirations on the relationship between social status and

attainment; it will therefore be reviewed briefly here. Considering Blau and Duncan's (1967) finding that structural, family-related indices of status accounted for only 42% of the total variance in children's eventual attainment, Sewell and colleagues (1969) suggested that structural and social psychological factors together must determine attainment—or more accurately, that a few psychological variables mediate the influence of structural factors on attainment. In the Wisconsin model, an individual's cognitions and motivations (e.g., his or her expectations of him/herself and aspirations to succeed) develop in the structural context of his or her upbringing. Further, that individual's actions and eventual achievements are theorized as the direct results of the cognitive and motivational orientation he or she draws upon when working (or not working) toward those attainments. The Wisconsin model posits that: 1) a young person's initial position of social status (determined by parental education and occupation indices) and a network of psychological factors together affect both significant others' influences on the person and that person's observations of his or her own abilities; 2) subsequently, the influence of significant others (e.g., through encouragement to achieve and examples of achievement modeled by family and friends) and estimates of personal ability then shape that young person's aspirations to achieve; and 3) that these aspirations mediate eventual educational attainment, which 4) fundamentally affects eventual occupational attainments. The Wisconsin model assumes the relationships among these variables to be linear and indicates that social psychological factors, including aspirations, perform only mediating functions on attainment (Sewell et al., 1969). This assumption is supported by a number of similar, more recent studies demonstrating that students' educational aspirations mediate the effect of social status on postsecondary attainment outcomes (e.g.,

Buchmann & Dalton, 2002; Hanson, 1994).

Educational Aspirations and Expectations

The relevance of motivations to achievement has been an enduring focus of sociological and psychological scholarship on social stratification. Since the publication of the Wisconsin model, research has consistently demonstrated a strong positive relationship between educational aspirations and expectations and postsecondary educational attainment (see Alexander & Cook, 1979; Berzin, 2010; Duncan, Featherman, & Duncan, 1972; Marjoribanks, 2003a, 2003b; Morgan, 1998, 2004; Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003; Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970; Wilson & Portes, 1975). Students' educational expectations are closely linked to both high academic achievement and dropping out of school (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Rumberger, 1983, 1995). Similarly, low aspirations are likely to result in constrained perceptions of choices related to students' educational and occupational futures (Hou & Leung, 2011; Rojewski, 2005). According to MacBrayne (1987), in the absence of aspirations, low attainment is practically guaranteed.

Although aspirations and expectations are both relatively stable orientations of beliefs about one's future development and outcomes (Morgan, 2007), the constructs are distinct. Aspirations are typically conceptualized as the idealistic goals a person hopes or dreams to attain and what he or she would pursue if no real-life constraints existed (Arbona & Novy, 1991a, 1991b; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Morgan, 2007). Expectations, on the other hand, are the more realistic appraisals of one's future achievement, involving assessments of personal abilities and consideration of external reality factors (e.g., accessibility of opportunities and potential obstacles) that may temper attainment (Baly,

1989; Gottfredson, 2002; Jerrim, 2014). The two variables appear to interact reciprocally in that expectations may initially shape aspirations, while changing aspirations over time—likely a result of additional experiences, knowledge, and changes in attitudes—may then serve to raise or lower subsequent expectations (Koo, 2012).

The empirical literature traditionally has indicated that young persons' educational and occupational aspirations are higher than their expectations in these domains (Kirk et al., 2012; MacBrayne, 1987; Thomas & Cosby, 1975). Studies which have investigated these variables longitudinally have found that while young persons' expectations tend to decline with age, aspirations remain relatively high and may even increase over time (Coleman, 1976; Cosby, 1978; Sollie & Lightsey, 1975). Studies with young persons of color have demonstrated that these youth report high aspirations equivalent to or even exceeding their white peers, but are more likely to expect to encounter barriers hindering the attainment of their idealistic goals (DeBord, Griffin, & Clark, 1977; Thomas & Cosby, 1975). Further demonstrating the gap between aspirations and expectations, Arbona and Novy (1991a) found that female college freshmen reported more traditional gender-typed occupational expectations than aspirations (e.g., indicating 'housewife' as an expected occupation but not an ideal, aspired-to goal). Educational expectations ultimately may be a better predictor of future attainment outcomes than aspirations, since in theory they are more consistent with past behaviors and performances which influence achievement (Goyette, 2008; Rumbaut, 2005). Even so, some high school students' expectations of their ultimate attainment may still be unrealistically high, since students may overestimate their preparedness and realistic likeliness to attend college (e.g., Jerrim, 2014; Kalogrides & Grodksy, 2011;

Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sischo, 2006; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

The Relationship of Family Social Class to Aspirations and Expectations

Given their strong association with attainment, scholars have repeatedly attempted to identify variables predicting aspirations and expectations. Research of this nature has clearly positioned family status-related variables as among the most influential determinants of aspirations and expectations. In fact, family SES may be the strongest predictor of students' educational aspirations and expectations (Calahan et al., 2006; Chung et al., 1996; Farmer, 1985; Kirk et al., 2012; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). Underscoring the pronounced differences between social class groups, students from higher SES backgrounds have greater expectations for college attainment and are more likely to aspire to complete a postsecondary degree, while individuals from lower SES backgrounds have relatively lower aspirations to attend college (Bozick, 2007; Valadez, 1998). In general, both the aspirations and expectations of low-SES students nearly always fall well below those of their more class-privileged peers (Deosaran, 1975). Hansen and McIntire (1989) observed that nearly 25% of students in the lowest (i.e., first) SES quartile expected to attain no more than a high school diploma, compared to less than 4% of students in the highest (i.e., fourth) SES quartile. At the other extreme, students from fourth quartile (i.e., high status) SES backgrounds were two to three times more likely to expect to complete a Ph.D., compared to students from third and first quartile SES backgrounds, respectively (Hansen & McIntire, 1989). Within group differences in aspirations and expectations are also evident. In particular, while aspirations universally tend to exceed expectations, the aspirations-expectations gap appears to be largest among students from low status class backgrounds, who likely

aspire to achieve much more than they actually expect to achieve (Boxer, Goldstein, DeLorenzo, Savoy, & Mercado, 2011; Deosaran, 1975).

Certainly, parents play a role in the development of children's own educational aspirations, expectations, and achievements. However, one of the central claims of the Wisconsin model of attainment—that significant others, including parents, could raise a young person's aspirations and thus his or her eventual attainments simply by imposing higher expectations on him or her—has lost credibility in contemporary research (Morgan, 2007). Critics of the Wisconsin model have argued that "structural constraints embedded in the opportunity structure of society should be at the center of all models of educational attainment, and hence that concepts such as aspirations and expectations offer little or no explanatory power" on their own (Morgan, 2007, p. 1530). Further, recent research has emphasized that the structural conditions related to an individual's social status must be tied to the ways in which status is subjectively experienced and integrated into his or her worldview, thereby influencing his or her perceived opportunities and subsequent aspirations and expectations about the future (see Appadurai, 2004; Bourdieu, 1973; Walpole, 2003). One key area of scholarship in this vein is Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concept of habitus, understood as an individual's acquired dispositions, beliefs, and behaviors that are the result of subjective perceptions of the structural constraints in his or her environment. Walpole (2003) defined habitus even more clearly as a person's web of perceptions about opportunities. Habitus is chiefly associated with an individual's social class background (Bruce & Yearly, 2006) and may be generated in the context of and in response to experiences of discrimination on the basis of one's class status (Brown & Szeman, 2000). Habitus develops as an individual internalizes aspects of the social

structure and the class position into which he or she was born, resulting in beliefs and conclusions made about what is possible and not possible in his or her life (Dumais, 2002). Among these emerging beliefs are an individual's aspirations and expectations, which develop consistent with that person's habitus (Dumais, 2002). Previous research has demonstrated that students' education-related decisions and choices are thus made within the context of their habitus (Walpole, 2003). According to Dumais (2002), students from less privileged class backgrounds seem to be aware that other students from similar backgrounds are less likely to succeed educationally and may subsequently "self-select themselves out of the college-going track on the basis of their views of what is possible and what is not" (p. 47).

One key vehicle through which messages about a person's position in the social status hierarchy are transmitted, perceived, and internalized is social class-based discrimination, or classism. Classism appears to be a critical dimension of habitus not explicitly identified by Bourdieu, but a construct which has been considered in a discussion of the relation of a young person's social class background to his or her web of perceptions about opportunities. The next section will review evidence that classism influences individuals' understandings of themselves and their class position, as well as findings indicating that classism plays a mediating link between class background and a range of outcomes. It should be noted, however, that the role of classism in motivating or inhibiting the development of aspirations is yet to be determined (Thompson & Subich, 2013). Considering this gap in the literature, this study investigated the relationships between experiences of classism and high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. To begin, a clearer definition of classism is warranted.

Conceptualizing Classism

Social class scholarship has provided strong conceptual and empirical support for the objective structural role of class status in determining access to resources, opportunities, and supports that shape development and outcomes throughout the lifespan (e.g., Bourdieu, 1973, 1984; Sewell et al., 1969, 1970). However, a parallel body of research has simultaneously explored concerns about the limitations of objective, structurally based conceptualizations and measurements of class status (e.g., Jackman & Jackman, 1973; Kluegel, Singleton, & Starnes, 1977; Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). Contemporary scholars (e.g., Appadurai, 2004; Blustein, 2006; Fine & Burns, 2003; Karvonen & Rahkonen, 2011; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004) have emphasized that the material conditions related to an individual's social class background must be connected to the ways in which social class is subjectively experienced, thus affecting the development and trajectory of an individual's life. In this domain, cultural production scholars (e.g., Lareau, 2003; Willis, 1977) have suggested that dimensions of an individual's social class background are "manifested in one's culture and are therefore internalized into one's beliefs and values system" (Blustein, 2006, p. 173).

Operating from this framework, Liu and colleagues proposed a social class worldview model (SCWM; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004) evocative of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, to illuminate the complex processes by which individuals subjectively perceive and internalize their class status. The SCWM assumes that individuals' subjective perceptions of and experiences with social class fundamentally influence a broad range of psychosocial, educational, and occupational processes and

outcomes, including behaviors, attitudes, emotional responses tied to social class, interpersonal relationships, goal development, and educational and occupational decision-making. This model is well supported by earlier research demonstrating the relatedness of individuals' summative perceptions of their relative social standing to both mental and physical health outcomes (Adler, Epel, Castellazo, & Ickovics, 2000; American Psychological Association [APA] Task Force, 2007). The SCWM draws heavily from Bourdieu (1984), who regarded social class as a function of varying and unequal distributions of capital, defined along economic, social, and cultural dimensions. According to Pharris-Ciurej (2011), in an educational context, cultural capital is characterized by the possession of values, attitudes, and knowledge of certain norms and customs that promote increased educational aspirations and expectations. The SCWM framework clarifies that as privileged individuals attempt to maximize and enhance their ability to accumulate capital, they employ a key behavioral and attitudinal strategy through which social inequities are maintained and exacerbated. This strategy is classism.

In the social class worldview model (SCWM; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Liu, Soleck et al., 2004), social class and classism are co-constructed, interdependent constructs, akin to the relationships between race and racism and gender and sexism. Classism is not merely a function of disparities in structural conditions, but an attitudinal variable by which these disparities become psychologically meaningful (APA Task Force, 2007). Specifically, classism is discrimination based on social class, in which people with less privileged class statuses are treated in ways that exclude, separate, devalue, or discount them (Lott, 2002). Classism may be expressed overtly (e.g., through disparaging remarks), or

through subtle, even invisible cues and assumptions about individuals from lower status class backgrounds (L. Smith, 2010). For example, Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001) found that college students were significantly more likely to stereotype poor people, compared to members of the middle class, as lazy, unmotivated, stupid, uneducated, dirty, unpleasant, immoral, weak, angry, violent, mentally and physically ill, abusive, alcoholic, criminal, unkind, depressed, promiscuous, drug abusing, inconsiderate, unlucky, and embarrassed. Illustrating the insidious and often invisible nature of classism, Bourdieu (1973, 1984) argued that modern educational systems perpetuate classism by favoring students from more privileged social class backgrounds.

Experiences of Classism and Psychosocial and Educational Outcomes

Academic and public policy-related discourse has long considered how discrimination on the basis of dimensions of an individual's identity influences functioning and outcomes throughout his or her life. Yet while this literature has often addressed variables associated with racism (e.g., Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Sanchez & Brock, 1996) and sexism (e.g., Klonoff & Landrine, 1995, 1997, 1999; Williams, 2002), classism remains an underexplored phenomenon in the theoretical and empirical psychological literature (APA Task Force, 2007; Barone, 1999; Bullock, 1995; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Lott, 2002; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; L. Smith, 2005, 2008; Thompson & Subich, 2013). The discipline's comparative inattention to classism is often attributed to the treatment of social class as little more than a background variable, with research frequently using demographic indices (e.g., income, occupation, and level of education) as proxies for class (Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; L. Smith, 2010). Consequently, the subjective psychological implications of social class,

and thus classism, historically have been overlooked. This research highlights the need for increased efforts to understand how classism affects in individuals' daily experiences, including high school students' aspirations and expectations regarding attending college. Research of this nature is particularly important given that high school is a critical time for postsecondary educational and occupational planning and development. Unlike university students, whose very enrollment in college may demonstrate an ability to overcome social class- and discrimination-related barriers to educational development and attainment, high school students are in the early stages of developing goals and making choices related to their educational futures. The present study therefore explored the relationship between high school students' experiences of classism and postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations.

Nevertheless, a small but growing body of research has provided insights useful for this area of inquiry. Reviewing the existing literature in this domain, Liu, Ali, and colleagues (2004) emphasized the fundamental influence of classism on people's daily lived experiences. To illustrate, the depression and anxiety some individuals feel upon failing to meet the demands of their economic culture (e.g., living up to the expectations of social and cultural capital acquisition prescribed by the local school and/or community environment) represent internalizations of classism (Liu, Ali et al., 2004; Liu, Soleck et al., 2004). Research has also consistently offered strong evidence that experiences of classism predict college students' negative self-perceptions and understandings of their class position relative to others, including feelings of being different and difficulty belonging (Ostrove, 2003; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Ostrove & Stewart, 1994; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001), social isolation, alienation, and marginalization (Cohen, 1998; Dews

& Law, 1995; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005), feelings of inadequacy, intimidation, and a sense of being devalued (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993), and a negatively stereotyped (Croizet & Claire, 1998) and stigmatized view of self (Granfield, 1991). Although few of these studies explicitly labeled the negative experiences of college students as examples of classism, the results directly correspond with how classism was defined in the present study.

Research has also lent support to the mediating function of classism in the relationship between social class and a number of outcomes. Drawing from a sample of 950 undergraduate students at an elite private liberal arts college, Langhout and colleagues (2007) operationalized classism in university settings along three dimensions: stereotype citation (i.e., citational classism), institutionalized classism, and interpersonal classism through discounting. The first dimension, citational classism, was defined as class-based discrimination based on stereotypes and/or disparaging jokes or stories told about people who are working class or working poor (e.g., offensive remarks made about how people who are poor dress, act, or speak). Institutionalized classism referred to organizational structures, policies, and procedures that differentially affect students based on their social class background (e.g., being unable to take a class or participate in an extracurricular activity due to fees). Interpersonal classism through discounting was composed of intentionally dismissive behaviors directed to individuals perceived as lower social class status (e.g., others' lack of appreciation for an individual's financial burdens or encouraging that individual to buy things he or she cannot afford). The authors found that students from lower status backgrounds reported experiencing higher levels of classism than students from higher status backgrounds. Both citational and interpersonal

classism through discounting were related to lower social and academic adjustment in college, while institutionalized classism was related to a greater desire to leave school, fewer positive feelings about school, and lower levels of academic adjustment. In a follow-up study, classism as a higher-order construct (captured by the three subdomains of classism) partially mediated the relationship between college students' social class and outcomes such as school belonging, schooling intentions, and psychosocial outcomes (e.g., psychological distress and well-being) (Langhout et al., 2009).

Importantly, studies that have explicitly examined the relation of classism to psychosocial functioning and outcomes have relied primarily on university student samples (Thompson & Subich, 2013;). Overall, these findings indicate that university students from low status backgrounds are more likely to encounter, recognize, and experience classism than their higher status peers (Backhaus, 2010). Research with undergraduates (Ritz & Hyers, 2005) and medical students (Beagan, 2005) has demonstrated that students from impoverished or working class backgrounds routinely experience class-based discrimination, including feelings of social alienation and exclusion, marginalization due to insensitive jokes and derogatory comments made about people who are poor, experiences with others who flaunt their material wealth, and encountering middle-class assumptions in conversations with peers, instructors, and school staff. Other empirical research has indicated that everyday experiences of classism on university campuses predicted increased depression, anxiety, and stress, and lower levels of wellness and self-esteem among undergraduates (Thompson & Subich, 2013), again suggesting that classism may play a intervening role in the relation of class status to outcomes.

The Present Study

Previous research in this area has provided a deeper understanding of the relation of classism to college students' experiences and outcomes. However, this scholarship is clearly limited by its restricted focus on university student samples. Subsequently, although it is reasonable to expect that classism may be associated with the experiences and outcomes of secondary school students, this line of inquiry remained unconsidered in the existing literature until now. Moreover, although results from Langhout and colleagues (2009) indicated that classism plays a mediating function on the relationship between college students' class background and various school-related outcomes, no prior studies have investigated the mediating role of classism in the relationship between secondary students' class background and outcomes, including their aspirations and expectations regarding attending college. Research of this nature is crucial given that high school is a key time for educational and occupational development and decision-making. Unlike college students, whose very participation in higher education suggests success in surmounting structural and discrimination-related obstacles to educational attainment, high school students are still in a nascent period of goal development and decision-making related to future schooling and work. Given that the educational attainments of low-income high school students overall continue to fall below those of higher-SES youth (United States Department of Education, 2006), investigating the relation of classism to educational aspirations and expectations remains a critical but previously unconsidered area of research.

The current study therefore sought to evaluate the unique and shared contribution of experiences of classism—captured by the three subdomains of the construct proposed

by Langhout and colleagues (2007; i.e., citational, institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting)—to variance in high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. The mediating function of experiences of classism in the relationship between students' class background and aspirations and expectations was also investigated. Given substantial a priori evidence of the relationship of aspirations and expectations to social class background and to students' participation in a rigorous academic curriculum track (see Akos, Lambie, Milsom, & Gilbert, 2007; Buchmann & Dalton, 2002; Callahan, 2005; McCracken, Barcinas, & Wims, 1991), it was anticipated that evidence would be found to control for these variables when performing the regression and meditational analyses later in the present study. The following questions and related hypotheses were thus investigated:

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1. First, is there a difference between high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations?

Hypothesis 1. A difference is predicted between high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. Specifically, students' postsecondary educational aspirations will be higher than their postsecondary educational expectations.

Research Question 2. To what extent do the three subdomains of classism proposed by Langhout and colleagues (2007; i.e., citational classism, institutionalized classism, and interpersonal classism through discounting) contribute unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling

for students' social class background, academic curriculum track, and any other significant fixed factors and/or covariates (if found)?

Hypothesis 2. After controlling for social class background, academic curriculum track, and any other significant fixed factors and/or covariates, experiences of classism will contribute unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations. No specific predictions were made regarding the unique contributions of the three subdomains of classism.

Research Question 3. To what extent do the three subdomains of classism proposed by Langhout and colleagues (2007) contribute unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational expectations, after controlling for students' social class background, academic curriculum track, and any other significant fixed factors and/or covariates (if found)?

Hypothesis 3. After controlling for social class background, academic curriculum track, and any other significant fixed factors and/or covariates, experiences of classism will contribute unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational expectations. No specific predictions were made regarding the unique contributions of the three subdomains of classism.

Research Question 4. Do experiences of classism mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and their postsecondary educational aspirations?

Hypothesis 4. Experiences of classism will mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations. No specific predictions were made regarding the unique mediating function of each of the

three subdomains of classism.

Research Question 5. Do experiences of classism mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and their postsecondary educational expectations?

Hypothesis 5. Experiences of classism will mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational expectations. Again, no specific predictions were made regarding the unique mediating function of each of the three subdomains of classism.

Chapter III

Method

Participants

High school students (*N* = 315) were recruited from a large and diverse suburban public high school in Central Texas. Data from 15 participants were excluded from the study due to ineligibility on the basis of grade level and/or excessive missing data, bringing the final sample to 300 participants. Among these participants, female students made up a slight majority (53.7%), and the average age of participants was 15.72 years (*SD* = .56; range = 14-18 years). Fifty-two percent of participants identified as Latino/Hispanic American (*n* = 157), 23.7% as White (*n* = 71), and 3.3% as Black/African American (*n* = 10). Other participants included three students who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (1%), two students who identified as Asian/Asian American (.7%), and one student each who identified as Middle Eastern/Arab American and Native Hawaiian. The remainder of participants (18.1%) reported other or multiracial/multiethnic backgrounds, and one student did not respond to the item assessing racial/ethnic identity.

Among the sample, responses on the Hollingshead measure of social status (described below) revealed that only 6.42% of participants (*n* = 14) who completed these items reported a family status ranking in the lowest quintile of scores, based on the traditional objective status indices of parental occupation and level of education (scores ranging from 8-19). These participants were characterized as having the lowest status of the five social class groups proposed by Hollingshead (1975/2011). Using this same measure, 12.39% of participants (*n* = 27) were classified as belonging to the second

lowest status social class group (scores 20-29), while 18.35% (*n* = 40) were classified as belonging to the middle status group (scores 30-39). Over 31% of participants (31.19%; *n* = 68) were characterized as belonging to the second highest quintile of scores and thus a relatively high social strata (scores 40-54). A slightly higher margin of participants (31.65%, *n* = 69) reported statuses in the highest quintile of scores and were thus classified as belonging to the highest social strata (scores 55-66). A sizeable number of participants (27.33%; *n* = 82) provided invalid or missing responses to these items, and their objective status scores were not calculated. It should thus be noted that only *N* = 218 provided calculable responses to the Hollinsghead items.

The sample was composed exclusively of high school sophomores (i.e., Grade 10). Among participants, 53.3% were enrolled in a regular and 45.3% in an advanced (i.e., pre-Advanced Placement) English II class, treated as a proxy for academic curriculum track. Four students (1.3%) provided missing or invalid responses to the item assessing English II enrollment. The mean self-reported grade point average (GPA) among participants was 3.51 (*SD* = .47; range = .6 – 4.0), although 23.3% of participants (*n* = 70) reported not knowing their GPA or did not respond to this item. Further, 46.7% of participants reported qualifying for free or reduced price lunch (*n* = 140), while 9% reported being unsure of whether they qualified (*n* = 27). Participants who reported current employment in a part-time paid position made up 19.7% of the total sample (*n* = 59), while the majority of the sample identified as unemployed (79.3%). See Table 1 for additional information regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample.

The high school data collection site serves grades 9-12, with a total enrollment of 2,104 students (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2013). The current sample is generally

representative of the student body at this institution, where students are predominantly Latino/Hispanic (69.7%), White (23.1%), and Black/African American (4.7%), and where 48% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch ("San Marcos High School," 2015). The sample is also roughly comparable to public school demographics across the state of Texas, where 51.3% of all students are Latino/Hispanic, 30% are White, and 12.7% are African American (TEA, 2013).

Table 1

Sample Demographic Characteristics

	N	% of Sample	Mean	SD
Age	296	98.7%	15.72	.562
Grade Level				
Sophomore/Grade 10	300	100%	-	-
Gender				
Female	161	53.7%	-	-
Male	139	46.3%	-	-
Race/Ethnicity				
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	1.0%	-	-
Asian/Asian American	2	.7%	-	-
Black/African American	10	3.3%	-	-
Latino/Hispanic American	157	52.3%	-	-
Middle Eastern/Arab American	1	.3%	-	-
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	.3%	-	-
White/Caucasian/European American	71	23.7%	-	-
Other or Multiracial/Multiethnic	54	18.1%	-	-
Missing	1	.3%	-	-
English II Curriculum Track				
Regular English II	160	53.3%	-	-
Pre-Advanced Placement English II	136	45.3%	-	-
Missing	4	1.3%	-	-
GPA	230	76.7%	3.51	.473
Missing	70	23.30%	-	-
Social Class Status				
Group 1 (scores 8-19); lowest status	14	6.42%	-	-
Group 2 (scores 20-29)	27	12.39%	-	-
Group 3 (scores 30-39)	40	18.35%	-	-
Group 4 (scores 40-54)	68	31.19%	-	-
Group 5 (scores 55-66); highest status	69	31.65%	-	-
Missing	82	27.33%	-	-
Qualification for Free or Reduced Lunch				
Yes	140	46.7%	-	-
No	133	44.3%	-	-
I don't know	27	9%	-	-
Employment Status				
Currently has a paid job	59	19.7%	-	-
Currently unemployed	238	79.3%	-	-
Missing	3	1%	-	-

Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures

Institutional approval to collect cross-sectional survey data was granted by the school district's Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the University of Houston's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). Sophomore students were targeted for recruitment and participation based on the rationale that these students could reasonably begin to consider college as an option, but unlike high school upperclassmen (i.e., juniors and seniors) were not actively involved in the process of applying to college. Additionally, unlike freshman students, sophomores were more likely to have had at least one year of experience in this setting and thus were regarded as able to realistically assess aspects of the school environment. The school principal at that time indicated English II classes would offer the researcher the greatest opportunity for study participation, for two reasons: a) English II is a core course requirement for all sophomore students, allowing greater opportunities for study recruitment; and b) English II teachers were reported to likely be most receptive to study recruitment and administration during class time.

Participants were recruited during their required English II periods on a school day exactly one week before the day of survey administration. Because the majority of high school students are adolescent minors under age 18, students received letters of information, provided both in English and Spanish, to take home for review by their parents and/or guardians. Participants also received a similar informational letter in English. English II teachers distributed additional letters of information to students who were not present at the time of recruitment. To note, documentation of parental consent and student assent were waived by CPHS, as this study was determined to present no

more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involved no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside the research context. Further, CPHS review also determined that requiring documentation of parental consent and/or student assent would jeopardize study anonymity, on the basis that signed documents would enable the researcher to know the names of those students who participated in the study. Participants were given the opportunity to enter a random drawing of six $25 Wal-Mart gift cards as incentives for participation, facilitated by the school principal immediately following data collection. On the day of survey administration, all English II teachers escorted their entire class to participate in the study, excluding only those students who either (a) chose not to participate, and/or (b) who had not received letters of information one week prior (documented through a master list maintained by teachers in collaboration with the school principal).

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was used to gather information about participants' gender, age, racial/ethnic background, qualification for free or reduced lunch, employment status, English II curriculum designation (i.e., English II Regular or Pre-Advanced Placement curriculum), and self-reported grade point average (GPA).

Measure of educational expectations. A single-item, continuous self-report index of educational expectations was adapted from Ojeda and Flores (2008). Expectations were identified with the following question: "In an ideal world, you could achieve everything you want. Realistically, however, how far do you think you will actually go in school?" Participants indicated the highest level of education they

expected to complete. Responses were scored on an 8-point scale ranging from 1 ("Some high school") to 8 ("Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D.) or doctoral-level professional degree (e.g., J.D. [lawyer]"). Although reliability and validity data cannot be provided for a one-item measure, the study's measurement of expectations has face validity with similarly worded measures of academic (e.g., Ojeda & Flores, 2008) and occupational (e.g, Arbona & Novy, 1991a) expectations available in the literature.

Measure of educational aspirations. A single-item, continuous self-report index of educational aspirations was also adapted from Ojeda and Flores (2008). Aspirations were identified by the following question: "In an ideal world, you could achieve everything you want. Ideally, how far do you hope to go in school?" Participants indicated the highest level of education they aspired to complete, along an 8-point scale identical to the expectations item. Again, although reliability and validity data cannot be provided for a one-item measure, the study's aspirations measurement has face validity with similarly worded measures of educational and occupational aspirations available in the literature.

The Classism Experiences Questionnaire-High School (CEQ-HS). The Classism Experiences Questionnaire-High School (CEQ-HS; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, as adapted by Shellman, 2014) is a recently adapted version of the Classism Experiences Questionnaire-Academe (CEQ-A; Langhout et al., 2007), designed to tap into high school students' experiences with classism. Items on the CEQ-HS were modified to parallel the CEQ-A, capitalizing on the established psychometric utility of the original measure. While the CEQ-A has demonstrated utility in assessing experiences of classism in university settings, the instrument has limited generalizability to other

educational settings such as high schools.

Similar to the original scale, the CEQ-HS includes 21 behaviorally based self-report items assessing classism along three subscale dimensions: citational classism (nine items), institutionalized classism (six items), and interpersonal classism through discounting (six items). These items are prefaced with the statement, "During your time at [this high school], were you ever in situations where…." Sample items include: "[W]ere you ever in situations where students, teachers, administrators or staff told stories or jokes about people who are poor?" (citational classism); "[W]ere you ever in situations where you could not join a sports team because you could not afford the associated expense?" (institutionalized classism); and "[W]ere you ever in situations where students, teachers, administrators or staff were dismissive of your financial situation?" (interpersonal classism through discounting). Participants respond to each of these 21 items along a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Many times*), with higher scores indicating more experiences of classism in each of the three subscale domains (range of scores: 9-45, citational classism scale; 6-30, institutionalized classism scale; 6-30, interpersonal classism through discounting scale). Results of confirmatory factor analyses performed during scale validation also indicated evidence for calculating an overall score of students' experiences of classism (range of scores 21-105), with higher scores indicating more experiences of classism overall. Responses to a final labeling item assessing the extent to which participants perceive their experiences as constituting classism are not scored (see Appendix A for scale items).

To develop the CEQ-HS, a few minor but critical revisions were made to the language of some of the CEQ-A subscale items, in consultation with Dr. Regina

Langhout, the original scale's primary author. To illustrate, the word "university" was replaced with "high school" in all item prompts. It was then determined that one item from the original institutionalized classism subscale (i.e., "You had to live in the dorms because you could not afford another housing option") and one item from the interpersonal classism through discounting subscale (i.e., "Professors did not put books on reserve for a class") had no relevance in high school settings. These items were subsequently removed. Two institutionalized classism subscale items explicitly relevant to high school experiences were developed. These items were intended to tap into institutionally reinforced barriers to participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., fees to join art or photography clubs) and students' (in)ability to attend school-related trips/field trips. All items were developed in language suitable to 8th grade-level readers and above.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) performed during the development of the CEQ-HS indicated that correlations between the three latent subscale factors ranged from .27-.69 in the original tested model. The three-factor adapted model as proposed was found to fit adequately with the observed data, although minor misspecifications observed in the CFA and subsequently modified in a series of exploratory models yielded improvements in fit after the covariance between three pairs of error terms were freed from constraint (Shellman, 2014). As indicated above, results also yielded evidence for treating experiences of classism as a higher-order variable captured by the three subdomains of classism. Future evaluations of the construct validity of the instrument were determined to be warranted.

Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status. The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1975/2011) provided an objective and

indirect estimate of social class. The Hollingshead Index assumes that the primary indicators of social class status are the years of schooling an individual has completed and the occupation he or she engages in, or, for minors, the education level and occupation of parents or guardians. The first item, assessing level of education, prompts participants to indicate the highest level of schooling completed by their parents or guardians, as applicable. Responses are provided on a seven-point ordinal scale ranging from 1 (*Less than 7th grade*) to 7 (*Graduate professional training [graduate degree]*). The second item assesses the occupations of parents/guardians and ranks them according to social prestige. In a space provided, participants indicated the occupation of their father, mother, and/or guardian, as applicable. Responses are coded from 1 (Farm laborers and menial service workers) to 9 (Higher executives, proprietors of large businesses, and major professionals), based on occupational categorizations from the 1970 U.S. census. The two factors are weighted and combined into a composite social status score (range = 8-66) for each parent/guardian, with higher scores indicating higher social status. To note, composite status scores are derived using indices from one parent in single-parent homes or homes in which only one parent works. For families with multiple working caretakers, scores for both parents are averaged to obtain a single composite status score.

The Hollingshead Index is the most widely cited measure of social status (Adams & Weakliem, 2011). Research has indicated the instrument demonstrates significant and substantial interrater reliability (Pearson's $r = .91$) and agreement (Cohen's $\kappa = .68$) when considering a sample of two- and one-wage earner families, and even higher in a sample of two-wage earner families only (Pearson's $r = .95$; Cohen's $\kappa = .82$) (Cirino et al.,

2002). The scale shows strong convergent validity with similar measures of social status also using 1970 census occupational codes, such as the Revised Duncan Socioeconomic Index (r = .79) and the Siegel Prestige Scale (r = .73) (Gottfried, 1985), and other SES indices (e.g., the 1989 Socioeconomic Index of Occupations [Pearson's r = .81) (Cirino et al., 2002]).

Data Analysis Procedures

Testing Hypothesis 1. In pursuit of Research Question 1, the present study used a dependent samples t-test to evaluate whether a significant difference existed between high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. A dependent samples t-test, also known as a matched or paired-samples t-test, assesses if a mean difference between paired or matched observations is significantly different from zero (e.g., if there is a significant difference between the means of the educational aspirations and educational expectations). Statistical probability was evaluated using a standard alpha level of $p < .05$. Findings from this analysis are described in detail in the Results section of this manuscript.

Testing Hypotheses 2 and 3. The present study used a correlational research design with two primary continuous predictor variables (i.e., social class and experiences of classism) and two continuous outcome variables (i.e., postsecondary educational aspirations and postsecondary educational expectations). In pursuit of Research Questions 2 and 3, two hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to examine the unique and combined contribution of the three subdomains of experiences of classism to variance in high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations (Question 2) and expectations (Question 3). Any significant fixed factors and/or covariates (e.g.,

potentially including participants' social class status and English II curriculum track, as anticipated) were controlled for by entering these variables into the first step of each regression analysis. Next, the classism variables were entered in the second step of the regression analysis. It was expected that experiences of classism would contribute variance to both high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations, after controlling for participants' academic curriculum track and social class background (as anticipated) and any other significant fixed factors and/or covariates. Findings from these analyses are described in detail in the Results section of this manuscript.

Testing Hypotheses 4 and 5. Finally, to test Hypotheses 4 and 5, the SPSS PROCESS macro for evaluating a multiple mediation model, developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008), was used. The goal of these analyses was to examine the mediating function of experiences of classism in the relationship between high school students' social class background and their postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. Separate meditational models were tested for aspirations and expectations, independently. These models are depicted in Figures 1 and 2 below. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), to test mediation, there must be a significant effect of the predictor variable on the proposed mediator (pathway 'a') and a significant effect of the proposed mediator on the outcome variable (pathway 'b'). In this model, the *a* coefficient (i.e., for pathway 'a') quantifies how much two cases that differ by one unit on X (the predictor variable) are estimated to differ on M (the proposed mediator). The *b* coefficient quantifies how much two cases that differ by one unit on M but that are equal to X are estimated to differ on Y. These pathways together denote the indirect effects of X on Y. If all 'a' and 'b' paths are

significant, mediation may be tested. Additionally, the direct effect of X of Y is estimated by the 'c'' pathway, which can be interpreted as how much two cases that differ by one unit on X but that are equal to M are estimated to differ on Y. A significant effect of the predictor variable on the outcome variable without the inclusion of the mediator in the model (pathway 'c', or how well X estimates Y alone) is not required, as in other less contemporary tests of mediation (Hayes, 2013).

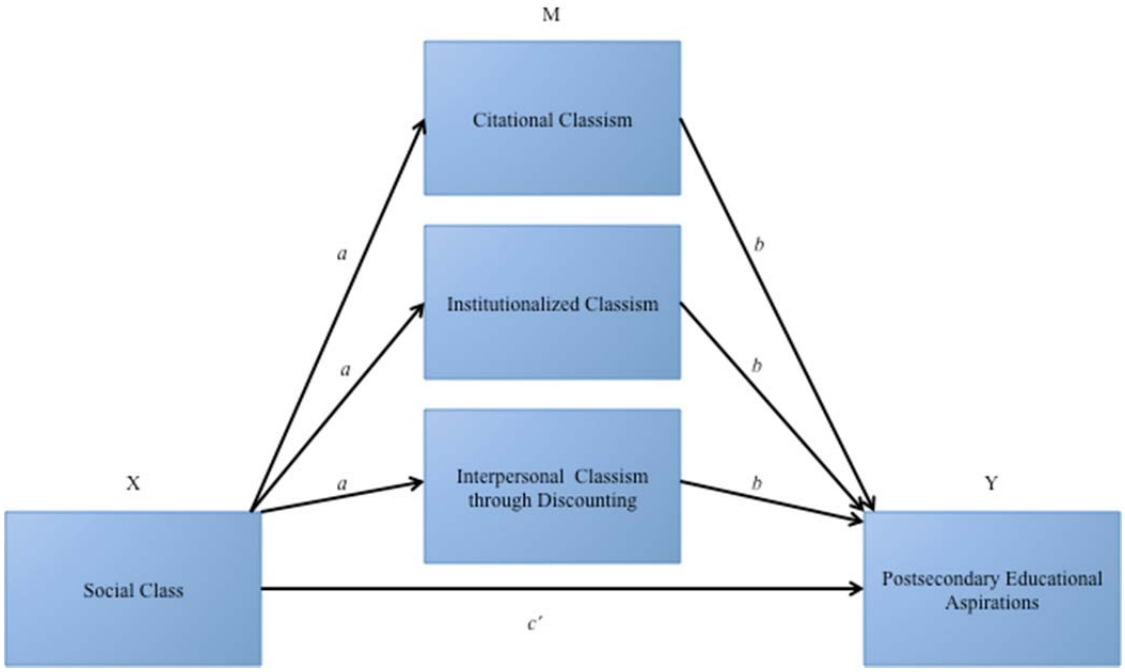

Figure 1. Hypothesis 4: Simple mediation model proposed.

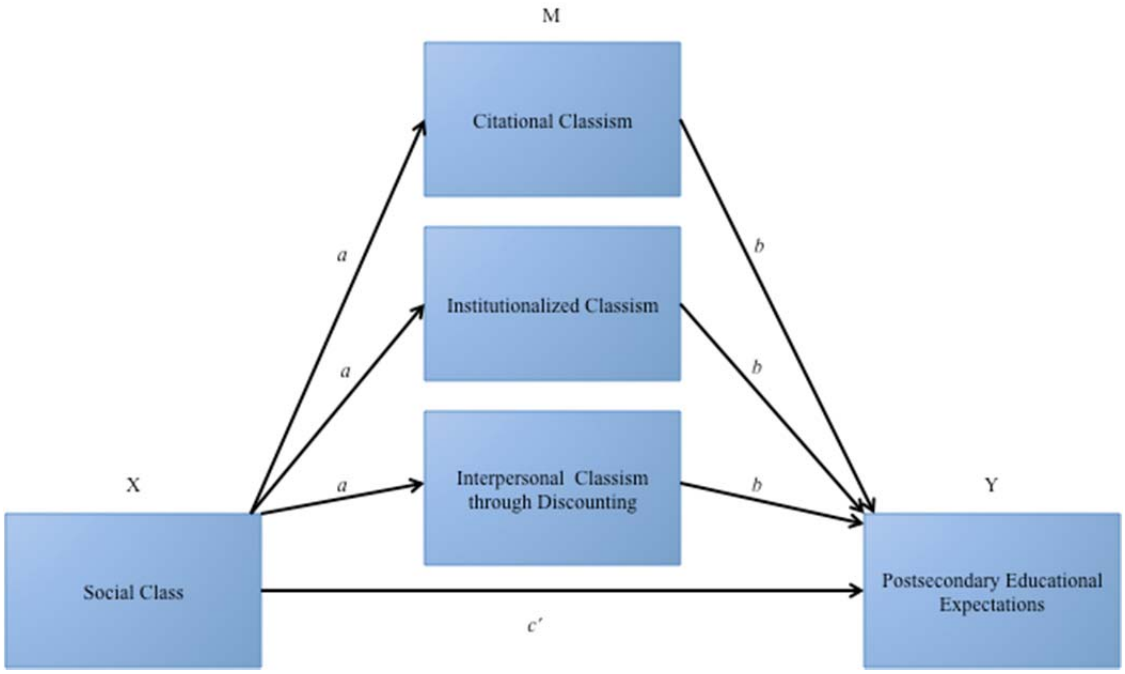

Figure 2. Hypothesis 5: Simple mediation model proposed.

Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrap sampling procedures were performed for each combination of predictor, outcome, and mediator variables with significant 'a' and 'b' pathways. Specifically, Preacher and Hayes's (2008) PROCESS approach employs an ordinary least squares or logistic regression-based path analysis framework to estimate the direct and specific indirect effects of multiple mediators M (e.g., experiences of classism) on the relationship between a predictor variable X (e.g., social class status) and outcome variable Y (e.g., first aspirations, then expectations). Bootstrapping is considered a superior approach to testing mediation in that it is more powerful, reduces the number of statistical tests used, and quantifies the effects of mediation, relative to other, more traditional tests of mediation (Hayes and Preacher, 2010). Studies have also demonstrated Preacher and Hayes's technique to be superior to Sobel's method of testing the significance of a mediation effect, as it adjusts all paths in the model to accommodate the potential influence of covariates not proposed to have mediating functions in the

model (Hayes, 2014). Further, the bootstrapping approach does not require that regression variables be normally distributed, as it utilizes sampling with replacement to draw a large number of samples from a given data set *k* number of times (*k* = 1,000 in the present study) to compute correlations for pathways a, b, c, and c' for each proposed mediation relationship (Hayes and Preacher, 2010). According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), the 1,000 bootstrap samples for each proposed mediation model generate both the mean direct relationship of a predictor variable to a specific outcome variable, as well as the specific indirect effects on this pathway after mediators are added to the model. The mean direct and indirect effects and their confidence intervals are then calculated and used to determine if the observed effect was significant. Specifically, the PROCESS macro produces confidence intervals (CI) using bootstrapping techniques to estimate whether the effects observed are statistically significant at $p < .05$. Using a 95% CI, as in the present study, if the value of zero does not fall within the respective CI range for the indirect effect, that effect is significant at the .05 level and mediation is supported.

Chapter IV

Results

Initial Data Screening

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 20 (SPSS) was used to store and analyze data. Preliminary data screening was performed to inspect for entry errors and outlying and/or missing cases, and to evaluate the suitability of data for analysis. This screening revealed a small number of cases (n = 15) requiring exclusion due to ineligibility and/or excessive missing data. Specifically, one participant was ineligible to participate due to his or her class designation as senior-level student, while the remaining problematic cases included excessive missing values across items being evaluated. These cases appeared to be random in nature and were subsequently deleted listwise during early analyses. Such a procedure was deemed acceptable given that the number of cases to be excluded was small and was found to have minimal effect on the power of the analysis.

Several additional steps were taken in order to test the assumptions of regression, performed later in these analyses. First, data were screened for normality through the use of SPSS graphical methods and by calculating the skewness (symmetry) and kurtosis (peakedness) of the distribution, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). The skewness and kurtosis values obtained were subsequently compared with zero using the z-distribution. An alpha value of .001 was used to assess the significance of skewness and kurtosis. Using these methods, several violations of normality were evident. Specifically, participants' total scores for each of the three subdomains of experiences of classism, as well as their overall CEQ-HS scores, all appeared highly positively skewed

and kurtotic. To evaluate these findings further, analysis of CEQ-HS item frequencies indicated that for some items, few participants endorsed experiencing a particular event *often* or *many times*, thus resulting in a non-normal distribution for some items. In particular, results from the CEQ-HS indicated a mean overall experiences of classism score of 37.66 (s = 13.61), with scores ranging from 21-102 out of possible total scores. The median overall experiences of classism score was 34.5. Among the subscales, the mean citational classism subscale score was 17.25 (s = 8.21), out of possible scores ranging from 9-45 (median = 14.5), while the mean institutionalized classism subscale score was 8.70 (s = 3.75, median = 7), with scores ranging from 6-29. Results also indicated a mean interpersonal classism through discounting subscale score of 11.72 (s = 5.31), with scores ranging from 6-30. The median interpersonal classism through discounting subscale score was 10. Finally, although responses to a final labeling item assessing the extent to which participants perceive their experiences as constituting classism are not scored, less than 20% of participants endorsed having experienced classism (19.7%, n = 59); the remainder reported never having been the recipient of classism (57.7%, n = 173) or not knowing if their experiences constituted classism (21.7%, n = 65). Descriptive statistics for all primary study variables are presented in Table 2 below. It should be noted that distribution of this nature is commonly observed in other behaviorally-based measures of discrimination (see Cortina, 2001; Klonoff & Landrine, 1995, 1999; Langhout et al., 2007). In their original validation of the CEQ-A, Langhout and colleagues (2007) elected to dichotomize responses to the scale items into responses of "never" and "all other responses." This data transformation procedure was considered for the present study; however, review of recent statistical literature suggested

that dichotomization is problematic as it may result in biased data, loss of effect size and power, and impaired reliability (Irwin & McClelland, 2003; MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002; Royston, Altman, & Sauerbrei, 2006). Instead, the appropriateness of transforming the CEQ-HS data from the present sample was evaluated by using a log10 transformation. However, transformation did not improve data normality, as the CEQ-HS data remained significantly positively skewed despite transformation. It was subsequently determined that no transformation procedures would be used. This decision was further supported by Preacher and Hayes's assertion that the PROCESS bootstrapping method overcomes limitations of other statistical tests in that it is a nonparametric (i.e., distribution-free) approach that does not require regression variables to be normally distributed, as indicated previously.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Primary Study Variables

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Aspirations	300	1	8	6.59	1.515	-
Expectations	300	1	8	5.89	1.690	-
Institutionalized Classism	300	6	29	8.70	3.748	.780
Citational Classism	300	9	45	17.25	8.205	.917
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	300	6	30	11.72	5.313	.833
Overall Experiences of Classism (6)	300	21	102	37.66	13.611	.903
Social Class Background	218	13	69	44.33	15.020	-

Note: Cronbach's alpha could not be calculated for the single-item aspirations or expectations measures or responses on the Hollingshead Index.

Additionally, participants' responses to the aspirations item indicated that these data were significantly negatively skewed and kurtotic. These data were also tentatively transformed using a log10 transformation. Again, however, transformation did not

approximate normality. It was subsequently determined that no transformation procedures would be used for these data. In any case, results from the aspirations measure in the present study were consistent with previous findings in other empirical studies, which have indicated that young persons' aspirations regarding future educational and occupational choices and outcomes are consistently high. These results will be discussed in further detail below.

Finally, to evaluate for the presence of multicollinearity of the variables being investigated, a bivariate correlation matrix was generated using SPSS software. Consistent with recommendations in the available literature, a correlation of .90 in the correlation matrix was regarded as problematic. No correlations of this magnitude were found (see Table 3 for bivariate correlations between study variables). Next, variance inflation factors (VIF) were calculated to provide a more stringent diagnostic test of the potential multicollinearity of predictor variables used in the analyses. A VIF provides an index of the degree to which the variance of an estimated regression coefficient is increased due to collinearity problems. According to Field (2013), a VIF in excess of a value of 10 indicates definite cause for concern regarding multicollinearity, while a VIF greater than 4 is considered problematic. As expected, results indicated strong intercorrelations between subscale scores on the CEQ-HS, as well as strong correlations between CEQ-HS subscale scores and overall experiences of classism scores. However, no additional VIFs were found to be greater than 10 (all other VIFs ≤ 3.3), suggesting no concerns regarding multicollinearity in the data.

Results from Bivariate Analyses

To better understand the relationships between the variables tested in later

regression and meditational analyses, the bivariate correlation matrix was analyzed (again, see Table 3 for bivariate correlations among study variables). Results indicated that social class was significantly related to both aspirations (r = . 267**; N = 218) and expectations (r = . 290**; N = 218), consistent with what would be expected given previous theoretical and empirical findings in this domain. Social class background was also significantly associated with experiences of institutionalized classism (r = -.160*), suggesting that a higher status background predicted endorsement of fewer experiences of classism in this domain in the present sample. This finding was also consistent with what would be expected a priori given a theoretical understanding of these constructs. Further, social class background was significantly correlated with students' experiences of citational classism. This relationship was positive (r = .192**), suggesting that a higher social status actually predicted endorsement of more frequent experiences of class-based discrimination in this domain among the present sample. It was therefore tentatively assumed that significant 'a' pathways might be found between social class and experiences of both institutionalized and citational classism, after controlling for the influence of significant covariates in later multivariate analyses. On the other hand, no significant relationship between students' social class background and experiences of interpersonal classism through discounting was demonstrated (r = -.042). Similarly, no significant relationship was found between students' social class background and endorsement of overall experiences of classism (r = .060).

The relationships between experiences of classism and the study's criterion variables (i.e., postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations) were then considered. As indicated in Table 3, correlation analyses revealed no significant

relationships of any of the three classism subdomains or overall experiences of classism to students' aspirations; Pearson correlations ranged from $r = -.055$ to $r = .077$. However, a significant relationship was found between institutionalized classism and expectations ($r = -.161^{**}$). Therefore, it was tentatively concluded that a significant 'b' pathway might be found between institutionalized classism and expectations in later analyses, after controlling for the influence of significant covariates. Actual findings from those analyses are discussed in detail in later sections of this chapter.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations between Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Aspirations (1)	1.00												
Expectations (2)	.655**	1.00											
Institutionalized Classism (3)	-.055	-.161**	1.00										
Citational Classism (4)	-.012	-.015	.245**	1.00									
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting (5)	.077	-.064	.594**	.424**	1.00								
Overall Experiences of	.008	-.078	.655**	.836**	.809**	1.00							
Age (7)	-.075	-.045	.212**	.066	.117*	.144*	1.00						
Gender (8)	.024	.015	.044	.097	-.001	.070	.048	1.00					
GPA (9)	.291**	.431**	-.153*	.085	.009	.014	-.144*	-.132*	1.00				
English Class Curriculum (10)	.225**	.280**	-.257**	.083	-.065	-.048	-.096	.021	.331**	1.00			
Free or Reduced Lunch (11)	-.055	-.097	.150**	-.098	.053	.003	.037	-.135*	-.122	-.304**	1.00		
Employment Status (12)	-.012	.055	.180**	.099	.115*	.154**	.280**	.095	-.045	-.064	-.039	1.00	
Social Class Status (13)	.267**	.290**	-.160*	.192**	-.042	.060	-.192**	.058	.171*	.342**	-494**	-.081	1.00

*$p < .05$ (2-tailed)

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Results from Main Analyses

Hypothesis 1: High school students' postsecondary educational aspirations will be significantly higher than their postsecondary educational expectations. In pursuit of Research Question 1, a dependent samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether a difference existed between high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. Statistical probability was evaluated using a cut-off alpha level of $p < .05$. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, results indicated a statistically significant difference between high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and postsecondary educational expectations, with students reporting significantly greater aspirations ($\bar{x} = 6.59$, $s = 1.52$) than expectations ($\bar{x} = 5.89$, $s = 1.69$); $t(299) = 9.12$, $p < .001$, $d = .53$.

Conclusion. Hypothesis 1 was supported. A statistically significant difference between high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations and postsecondary educational expectations was found, in that aspirations were significantly higher than expectations.

Hypothesis 2: After controlling for any significant fixed factors and/or covariates, experiences of classism will contribute unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations. First, to determine if any demographic variables were related to particular measures included in the regression equations used to test Hypotheses 2-5, bivariate correlations and repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed, depending on whether the demographic variable was continuous or categorical. Participant age and grade point average (GPA) were the only continuous demographic variables, and a bivariate correlations matrix was

generated to evaluate the relations of these variables to the various predictor, proposed mediator, and criterion (i.e., outcome) variables included in the present study. The study's continuous predictor variable (social class status) was also evaluated. A standard alpha level ($\alpha = .05$) was used to determine any significant relationships between variables. Results indicated that GPA and social class status covaried significantly with several study variables, and these variables were subsequently controlled for in later regression and mediation analyses so as not to confound results. Additionally, participants' gender, racial/ethnic background, qualification for free or reduced lunch, employment status, and English II curriculum designation (treated as a proxy for academic curriculum track) were all categorical variables included in the present study. Repeated measures ANOVAs were performed using these variables as the independent variables, again employing a standard alpha level ($\alpha = .05$). It was determined that the variable assessing participants' racial/ethnic background would be excluded from subsequent analyses because of disproportionate racial/ethnic group sizes and lack of variability between groups, making it statistically inappropriate to run further analyses with this variable. However, as expected, statistically significant differences were found across measures when factoring in participants' academic curriculum track. This variable was also controlled for in later analyses so as not to confound results. Conversely, no differences were found in self-reported aspirations or expectations on the basis of participants' gender, qualification for free/reduced lunch, or employment status, and these variables were not controlled for in later analyses.

In pursuit of testing Hypothesis 2, a hierarchical multiple regression model was tested to evaluate the extent to which the three subdomains of experiences of classism

proposed by Langhout and colleagues (2007; i.e., citational classism, institutionalized classism, and interpersonal classism through discounting) contributed unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations. All significant fixed factors and/or covariates identified previously (i.e., participants' social class status, academic curriculum track, and GPA, as indicated above) were controlled for by entering these variables into the first step of the regression analysis. Next, the three experiences of classism variables were entered in the second step of the regression analysis. It was expected that experiences of classism would contribute significant variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for participants' academic curriculum track, social class background, and GPA. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA together contributed significantly to regression model 1 and accounted for 9% of the variability in participants' educational aspirations ($R^2 = .105$; adjusted $R^2 = .090$; $F[3, 177] = 6.928$, $p < .001$). In model 2, the three experiences of classism variables also contributed significantly to the regression model ($F[6, 174] = 4.703$, $p < .001$). However, model 2 explained only an additional 3.5% of variance in aspirations, and this change was not significant ($F[3, 174] = 2.322$, $p = .077$). Further, results from model 1 indicated that GPA ($\beta = .254$, $p = .001$) alone significantly predicted aspirations, as did social class status ($\beta = .167$, $p = .027$). However, English curriculum track was not a significant predictor of aspirations in model 1 ($\beta = -.007$, $p = .926$). After introducing the three experiences of classism variables in model 2, GPA again significantly predicted aspirations ($\beta = .253$, $p = .001$), as did social class status ($\beta = .214$, $p = .006$). Among the classism variables, only citational classism significantly predicted

participants' aspirations (β = -.194, *p* = .016); the direction of this relationship was negative, indicating that experiences of citational classism contributed to declined aspirations. Conversely, neither academic curriculum track, institutionalized classism, or interpersonal classism through discounting were significant predictors of aspirations in model 2; standardized beta weights for these variables ranged from -.037 to .175, and all *p* values ranged from .081 to .992. These results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Hypothesis 2: Contributions of the Three Subdomains of Experiences of Classism to Variance in High School Students' Postsecondary Educational Aspirations

	Step 1			Step 2		
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
English II Curriculum Track	-.020	.211	-.007	.002	.212	.001
GPA	.725	.214	.254**	.723	.215	.253**
Social Class Background	.016	.007	.167*	.021	.007	.214**
Institutionalized Classism	-	-	-	-.015	.039	-.037
Citational Classism	-	-	-	-.032	.013	-.194*
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	-	-	-	.044	.025	.175
R^2		.105			.140	
Adjusted R^2		.090			.110	
ΔR^2		.105			.034	
F for ΔR^2		6.928***			2.322	

Note.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

The contribution of overall experiences of classism scores (i.e., total CES-HS score) to variance in participants' aspirations was also explored, as an adjunct analysis to Hypothesis 2. Specifically, a hierarchical multiple regression model was tested to evaluate the extent to which overall experiences of classism accounted for unique and shared variance in aspirations scores. As before, participants' social class status, English II curriculum designation, and GPA were controlled for by entering these variables into the first step of the regression analysis. Next, the overall CEQ-HS variable was entered

in the second step of the regression analysis. Consistent with earlier findings, results of this analysis indicated that social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA together contributed significantly to regression model 1 and accounted for 9% of the variability in participants' educational aspirations ($R^2 = .105$; adjusted $R^2 = .090$, $F[3, 177] = 6.928$, $p < .001$). The overall CEQ-HS variable also contributed significantly to regression model 2 ($F[4, 176] = 5.269$, $p < .001$). However, this change was not significant ($F[1, 176] = .365$, $p = .546$). In fact, the introduction of the overall experiences of classism variable in model 2 actually resulted in only a marginal change of the total amount of variance in aspirations explained by the three demographic constants alone (R^2 in model 2 = .107; adjusted $R^2 = .087$). Results of this nature are seen when a predictor variable improves the regression model by less than what would be expected by chance. Further, as before, GPA and social class status significantly predicted aspirations in model 1, while English curriculum track was again not a significant predictor of aspirations. After introducing the experiences of classism variable in model 2, GPA again significantly predicted aspirations ($\beta = .256$, $p = .001$), as did social class status ($\beta = .168$, $p = .026$), while both English track and overall experiences of classism poorly predicted variability in aspirations. Standardized beta weights for these latter two variables ranged from -.043 to -.011, and all p values were equal to .546 to .892. Thus, it was concluded that overall experiences of classism did not contribute significant variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations. Additional details of this analysis are presented in Table 5 below.

Conclusion. Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported. After controlling for social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA, experiences of citational

classism did contribute significant variance to high school students' postsecondary educational aspirations. Alternatively, neither institutionalized classism nor interpersonal classism through discounting contributed significant variance to aspirations, after controlling for social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA. Further, overall experiences of classism scores (i.e., total CES-HS score) also did not explain significant variance to postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for social class background, English curriculum track, and GPA.

Table 5

Hypothesis 2: Contribution of Overall Experiences of Classism to Variance in High School Students' Postsecondary Educational Aspirations

	Step 1			Step 2		
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
English II Curriculum Track	-.020	.211	-.007	-.029	.212	-.011
GPA	.725	.214	.254**	.731	.214	.256**
Social Class Background	.016	.007	.167*	.016	.007	.168*
Overall Experiences of Classism	-	-	-	-.004	.007	-.043
R^2		.105			.107	
Adjusted R^2		.090			.087	
ΔR^2		.105			.002	
F for ΔR^2		6.928***			.365	

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Hypothesis 3: After controlling for social class background, English II curriculum track, and GPA, experiences of classism will contribute unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational expectations. In pursuit of testing Hypothesis 3, a hierarchical multiple regression model was tested to evaluate the extent to which the three subdomains of experiences of classism contributed unique and shared variance to high school students' postsecondary educational expectations. All significant fixed factors and/or covariates identified previously (i.e.,

participants' social class status, academic curriculum designation, and GPA, as indicated above) were controlled for by entering these variables into the first step of the regression analysis. Next, the three experiences of classism variables were entered in the second step of the regression analysis. It was expected that experiences of classism would contribute significant variance to high school students' postsecondary educational expectations, after controlling for participants' social class backgrounds, academic curriculum track, and GPA. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA together contributed significantly to regression model 1 and accounted for 20% of the variability in participants' educational aspirations ($R^2 = .215$; adjusted $R^2 = .202$; $F[3, 177] = 16.200$, $p < .001$). In model 2, the three experiences of classism variables also contributed significantly to the regression model ($F[6, 174] = 8.119$, $p < .001$). However, this change was not significant ($F[3, 174] = .244$, $p = .865$). In fact, the introduction of the three experiences of classism variables in model 2 resulted in only a marginally change in the amount of total variance in expectations explained by the three demographic constants alone (R^2 in model 2 = .219; adjusted $R^2 = .192$). Again, results of this nature are seen when a predictor variable improves the regression model by less than what would be expected by chance. Further, results from model 1 indicated that GPA ($\beta = .403$, $p = .000$) alone significantly predicted postsecondary educational expectations, as did social class status ($\beta = .187$, $p = .008$). However, English curriculum track was again not a significant predictor of expectations in model 1 ($\beta = -.023$, $p = .750$). After introducing the three experiences of classism variables in model 2, GPA again significantly predicted expectations ($\beta = .399$, $p = .000$), as did social class status ($\beta = .182$, $p = .013$). Neither

English curriculum track nor any of the three classism variables significantly predicted participants' educational expectations; standardized beta weights for these variables ranged from -.052 to -.006, and all *p* values were equal to .568 and greater. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Hypothesis 3: Contributions of the Three Subdomains of Experiences of Classism to Variance in High School Students' Postsecondary Educational Expectations

	Step 1			Step 2		
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
English II Curriculum Track	-.067	.210	-.023	-.096	.215	-.033
GPA	1.224	.213	.403***	1.211	.218	.399***
Social Class Background	.019	.007	.187**	.019	.007	.182*
Institutionalized Classism	-	-	-	-.022	.039	-.052
Citational Classism	-	-	-	-.001	.013	-.008
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	-	-	-	-.002	.025	-.006
R^2		.215			.219	
Adjusted R^2		.202			.192	
ΔR^2		.215			.003	
F for ΔR^2		16.200***			.244	

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

The contribution of overall experiences of classism scores to variance in participants' educational expectations was also explored, as an adjunct analysis to Hypothesis 3. Specifically, a hierarchical multiple regression model was tested to evaluate the extent to which overall experiences of classism accounted for unique and shared variance in expectations scores. As before, participants' social class status, English II curriculum designation, and GPA were controlled for by entering these variables into the first step of the regression analysis. Next, the overall CEQ-HS variable was entered in the second step of the regression analysis. Consistent with earlier findings, results of this analysis indicated that social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA together contributed significantly to regression model 1 and

accounted for 20% of the variability in participants' educational aspirations (adjusted R^2 = .020, $F[3, 177] = 16.200$, $p < .001$). The overall CEQ-HS variable also contributed significantly to regression model 2 ($F[4, 176] = 12.228$, $p < .001$). However, this change was not significant ($F[1, 176] = .461$, $p = .498$). In fact, the introduction of the overall experiences of classism variable in model 2 actually resulted in a marginal reduction of the total amount of variance in expectations explained by the three demographic constants alone (adjusted R^2 in model 2 = .200). Further, as before, GPA and social class status significantly predicted expectations in model 1, while English curriculum track was again not a significant predictor of expectations. After introducing the experiences of classism variable in model 2, GPA again significantly predicted expectations ($\beta = .405$, $p = .000$), as did social class status ($\beta = .188$, $p = .008$), while both English track and overall experiences of classism poorly predicted variability in expectations. Standardized beta weights for these latter two variables ranged from -.045 to -.027, and all p values were equal to .498 and greater. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 7 below.

Conclusion. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. After controlling for social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA, neither institutionalized, citational, nor interpersonal classism through discounting contributed significant variance to high school students' postsecondary educational expectations. Further, overall experiences of classism together also did not contribute significant variance to postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for social class background, academic curriculum, and GPA.

Table 7

Hypothesis 3: Contribution of Overall Experiences of Classism to Variance in High School Students' Postsecondary Educational Expectations

	Step 1			Step 2		
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
English II Curriculum Track	-.067	.210	-.023	-.077	.211	-.027
GPA	1.224	.213	.403***	1.230	.214	.405***
Social Class Background	.019	.007	.187**	.019	.007	.188*
Overall Experiences of Classism	-	-	-	-.005	.007	-.045
R^2		.215			.217	
Adjusted R^2		.202			.200	
ΔR^2		.215			.002	
F for ΔR^2		16.200***			.461	

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Hypothesis 4: Experiences of classism will mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations. In pursuit of testing Hypothesis 4, a multiple mediation model was conducted using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping analysis to investigate the mediating effects of the three subdomains of experiences of classism on the relationship between social class background and students' educational aspirations. More specifically, the total and direct effect of social class on aspirations, as well as the indirect effect of social class on aspirations through experiences of classism, were tested. To review, in the PROCESS approach, both the mean direct relationship of a predictor and a criterion variable are yielded based on 1,000 random bootstrapped samples, as is the indirect effect of these relationships once mediators are introduced into the model. If the value of zero does not fall within the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI), mediation is supported based on both the statistically significant indirect effects *and* a significant relationship found between the predictor and criterion variables.

Recall that in this approach, to test mediation, there must be a significant effect of

the predictor variable on the proposed mediator (pathway ‘a’) and a significant effect of the proposed mediator on the criterion variable (pathway ‘b’). A significant effect of the predictor variable on the criterion variable (pathway ‘c’) is not required. Results from the hierarchical multiple regression analyses performed previously indicated that only citational classism significantly predicted participants’ aspirations ($\beta = -.194$, $p = .016$), after controlling for participants’ social class background, English II curriculum, and GPA. This indicated the likely presence of a significant ‘b’ pathway between citational classism and aspirations. Further, because a significant bivariate correlation existed between social class and citational classism, it was previously predicted that a significant ‘a’ pathway might be found, thus supporting the inclusion of these variables in a mediation analysis. However, as mentioned previously, those results did not account for the influence of other variables—specifically, participants’ social class status, English II curriculum designation, and GPA—which previous analyses indicated must be controlled for given evidence that these variables covaried significantly with the primary study variables. Given this, all proposed mediation models involving aspirations were tested using Preacher and Hayes’s PROCESS approach.

Mediation analyses with aspirations. Table 8 depicts results of the bootstrapping mediation analysis to evaluate whether experiences of classism mediated the relationship between high school students’ social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations in the present sample. After controlling for English curriculum and GPA, the indirect effects for experiences of institutionalized, citational, and interpersonal classism through discounting were estimated to lie between -.0011 to .0054, -.0110 to -.0001, and -.0080 to .0001, respectively. Social class was not included as a control variable, given its

inclusion in the model being tested. Because the value of zero fell within the 95% bias-corrected CI for institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting, evidence was not found to support the mediating function of these variables. Specifically, social class background was not a significant predictor of either institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting (i.e., no significant 'a' pathways were found). Alternatively, because the value of zero did not fall within the 95% CI for citational classism, an indirect effect of citational classism was found ($p < .05$). Interestingly, results indicated that higher status social class backgrounds predicted more frequent experiences of citational classism, which in turn predicted lower educational aspirations. R^2 for this model was .1051, indicating that approximately 11% of the variability in aspirations was accounted for by the overall model.

Table 8

Summary of Mediation Results for Hypothesis 4: Experiences of Classism as the Mediator (M) between Social Class (Predictor Variable X) and Postsecondary Educational Aspirations (Criterion Variable Y)

Standardized Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors) from Bootstrap Procedure				
Mediator	Effect of X on M	Effect of M on Y	Direct Effect of X on Y	Total Effect of X on Y
Institutionalized Classism	-.0246 (.0181)	-.0149 (.0387)	.0205 (.0073)**	.0160 (.0072)*
Citational Classism	.0957 (.0455)*	-.0317 (.0130)*		
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	-.0421 (.0299)	-.0440 (.0251)		

Indirect Effects of Social Class Background on Aspirations				
Mediator	Point Estimate	Bootstrap SE	Lower 95% BC CI	Upper 95% BC CI
Total	-.0045	.0030	-.0123	.0001
Institutionalized Classism	.0004	.0013	-.0011	.0054
Citational Classism	-.0030	.0025	-.0110	-.0001
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	-.0019	.0018	-.0080	.0001

Note. M = mediator; X = social class; Y = postsecondary educational aspirations; SE = standard error; BC CI = bias-corrected confidence intervals.
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

A supplemental test of simple mediation was subsequently performed, with citational classism as the single mediator between social class background and aspirations. These results are presented in Table 9 below. After controlling for English curriculum track and GPA, the indirect effect of citational classism in this model was not significant, suggesting the mediating function of this variable degraded without the inclusion of the other two experiences of classism variables. In particular, although social class background again significantly predicted experiences of citational classism in this model (i.e., pathway 'a'), no significant 'b' path was found between citational classism and aspirations. Despite being relatively weak predictors of aspirations on their own, it appears institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting may have acted as suppressor variables in the previous multiple mediation model by suppressing error variance in that model, thus raising the regression coefficient of citational classism.

Conclusion. Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported. Overall, neither experiences of institutionalized classism nor interpersonal classism through discounting mediated the relationship between students' social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. On the other hand, social class had an indirect effect on aspirations through experiences of citational classism, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. Interestingly, however, this effect degraded after a subsequent model was tested excluding experiences of institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting from the analysis. Further, given a lack of indirect effects for experiences of institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting, no evidence was found for testing the mediating function of overall experiences of classism (i.e., total CEQ-HS scores).

Table 9

Summary of Mediation Results for Hypothesis 4: Citational Classism Only as the Mediator (M) between Social Class (Predictor Variable X) and Postsecondary Educational Aspirations (Criterion Variable Y)

Standardized Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors) from Bootstrap Procedure				
Mediator	Effect of X on M	Effect of M on Y	Direct Effect of X on Y	Total Effect of X on Y
			.0180 (.0072)*	.0160 (.0072)*
Citational Classism	.0957 (.0455)*	-.0208 (.0118)		
Indirect Effects of Social Class Background on Aspirations				
Mediator	Point Estimate	Bootstrap SE	Lower 95% BC CI	Upper 95% BC CI
Citational Classism	-.0020	.0019	-.0076	.0003

Note. M = mediator; X = social class; Y = postsecondary educational aspirations; SE = standard error; BC CI = bias-corrected confidence intervals.
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Hypothesis 5: Experiences of classism will mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational expectations. In pursuit of testing Hypothesis 5, a second multiple mediation model was conducted using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping analysis to investigate the mediating effects of experiences of classism on students' postsecondary educational expectations. Mean direct and specific indirect effects were again generated based on 1,000 random bootstrapped samples.

Results from the earlier bivariate correlational analysis indicated a significant relationship between students' experiences of institutionalized classism and postsecondary educational expectations. However, after controlling for social class background, academic curriculum track, and GPA in hierarchical multiple regression analyses, this relationship became non-significant. Further, earlier regression results also indicated that experiences of classism across citational and interpersonal domains failed to contribute significant unique variance to postsecondary educational expectations, after controlling for social class background, academic curriculum, and GPA. Nonetheless, all proposed mediation models involving expectations were tested using Preacher and Hayes's PROCESS approach.

Mediation analyses with expectations. Table 10 depicts results of the bootstrapping mediation analysis to evaluate whether experiences of classism mediated the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational expectations in the present sample. After controlling for English curriculum and GPA, the true indirect effects for experiences of institutionalized, citational, and interpersonal classism through discounting were estimated to lie between -.0011 to .0053,

-.0037 to .0029, and -.0023 to .0037, respectively. Social class was again not included as a control variable, given its inclusion in the model being tested. Given that each confidence interval contained zero, the indirect effects of experiences of institutionalized, citational, and interpersonal classism through discounting were not significant.

Conclusion. Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Overall, experiences of institutionalized, citational, and interpersonal classism through discounting did not mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational expectations, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. Given a lack of indirect effects for experiences of classism across domains, no evidence was found for testing the mediating function of overall experiences of classism (i.e., total CEQ-HS scores).

Table 10

Summary of Mediation Results for Hypothesis 5: Experiences of Classism as the Mediator (M) between Social Class (Predictor Variable X) and Postsecondary Educational Expectations (Criterion Variable Y)

Standardized Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors) from Bootstrap Procedure				
Mediator	Effect of X on M	Effect of M on Y	Direct Effect of X on Y	Total Effect of X on Y
Institutionalized Classism	-.0246 (.0181)	-.0225 (.0393)	.0186 (.0074)*	.0191 (.0072)**
Citational Classism	.0957 (.0455)*	-.0014 (.0132)		
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	-.0421 (.0299)	-.0016 (.0254)		

Indirect Effects of Social Class Background on Expectations				
Mediator	Point Estimate	Bootstrap SE	Lower 95% BC CI	Upper 95% BC CI
Total	-.0005	.0023	-.0036	.0058
Institutionalized Classism	.0006	.0015	-.0011	.0053
Citational Classism	-.0001	.0016	-.0037	.0029
Interpersonal Classism through Discounting	.0001	.0014	-.0023	.0037

Note. M = mediator; X = social class; Y = postsecondary educational expectations; SE = standard error; BC CI = bias-corrected confidence intervals.
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Chapter V

Discussion

The present study examined the relation of high school students' experiences of social class-based discrimination to their postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations, including an examination of whether classism mediated that relationship. Previous research has indicated that classism significantly predicts a number of psychological and education-related outcomes among samples of college student populations. However, although it is reasonable to expect that classism may likewise be associated with the experiences and outcomes of secondary school students, this line of inquiry remains unexplored in the literature until now. Further, no research so far has considered the influence of classism on aspirations, although calls have been made for investigation in this specific area of study. This chapter includes a discussion of the results of the present study, its strengths and limitations, and the implications of these findings for future research in this domain.

Consistent with the literature, social class background was found to be significantly predictive of both participants' postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. These relationships were positive, indicating that students from higher status social class backgrounds did indeed report both higher aspirations to attend college and greater expectations regarding the realistic likelihood of their college attainment, relative to those from lower status backgrounds. Multiple possible factors contributing to this trend were reviewed in detail in Chapter 2 of this manuscript; those not will not be repeated here. Further, results indicated that high school students' aspirations regarding their future educational attainment were significantly higher than their expectations in

this domain, as predicted in Hypothesis 1. These results are in keeping with previous empirical findings indicating that young persons' educational and occupational aspirations involve more idealistic goals that are untempered by—and therefore exceed—their expectations of what they are realistically likely to achieve.

Social class background was also significantly associated with participants' experiences of classism, though not across all domains of the construct or in ways that might have been anticipated a priori. First, a significant negative relationship was found between social class and experiences of institutionalized classism. This finding suggests that the higher one's family social status, the less likely he or she was to report having been excluded from full school participation on the basis of structures, policies, and/or procedures that differentially affect students based on their social class background (e.g., being unable to take a class or participate in an extracurricular activity due to fees). Results of this nature are consistent with what would be expected given a theoretical understanding of classism, defined as discrimination in which people with less privileged class statuses are treated in ways that exclude, separate, devalue, or discount them (Lott, 2002). To note, just over 38% of students indicated experiencing at least one incident of institutionalized classism in the school setting. In contrast, nearly 60% of students endorsed at least one experience of citational classism, which was also determined to be significantly correlated with students' social class background. That relationship was positive, indicating that the higher an individual's social status, the more likely he or she was to have been in situations where students, teachers, school administrators, or staff made stereotypic or offensive remarks about people who are poor. This pattern initially appeared to contradict previous conceptual and empirical evidence pointing to an inverse

or negative relationship between social class and endorsement of experiences of classism (see Langhout et al., 2007). However, this finding actually makes conceptual sense, considering that classism is characterized as a strategy enacted by more privileged individuals upon those from lower status groups. Therefore, it is unsurprising that students from higher status class backgrounds would be more likely to be exposed to more frequent disparaging comments about people who are poor, or perhaps even make such remarks themselves.

Alternatively, no significant relationship between students' social class background and experiences of interpersonal classism through discounting was demonstrated. Items on the interpersonal classism scale are intended to capture intentionally dismissive/discounting behaviors directed at individuals perceived as being from a lower social class status. Considering base rates of experiences of classism in this domain, only 34% of participants endorsed experiencing at least one incident of class-related discounting in the school setting, making this the least frequently endorsed of all the classism subdomains. Viewing the items comprising this subscale (again, see Appendix A for scale items), it may be that high school sophomores lack a robust enough understanding of their family's financial situation to be able to perceive being dismissed on account of it, for example, and/or that students in 10th grade rarely imagine others might make assumptions about their ability to transport themselves someplace independently (since many are not even of legal driving age). Finally, social class background also did not significantly predict students' endorsement of overall experiences of classism, likely because of the lack of significant relationships or low correlation strengths (despite significance) between social class and the individual

subdomains of experiences of classism just reviewed.

Results from these bivariate correlation analyses also indicated that none of the three subdomains of subdomains of experiences of classism, or experiences of classism overall, demonstrated statistically significant relationships with participants' postsecondary educational aspirations. Alternatively, a significant negative relationship was found between institutionalized classism and expectations, indicating that greater experiences of classism in this domain did indeed relate to diminished expectations regarding future college attainment. This finding is congruent with a conceptual understanding of these constructs and their anticipated relationships. However, it is important to note that these simple correlational results did not include consideration of any factors which were ultimately found to covary significantly with these key study variables. Findings from those preliminary analyses, conducted prior to testing the proposed regression models and in which three control variables were identified, are discussed herein. First, social class status covaried significantly with several main study variables. This was an anticipated finding given prior strong conceptual and empirical evidence of the association between class status and the regression variables, as well as the multiple significant interrcorrelations between many of these variables found earlier in the study and just reviewed in this discussion. Social class was subsequently controlled for in the regression analyses so as not to confound results. Grade point average (GPA) and academic curriculum track (i.e., English class designation) were also significantly positively correlated with both aspirations and expectations. This was also an unsurprising finding given that prior strong academic performance and participation in a more rigorous academic curriculum are well supported to predict the development of

future schooling goals (again, see Akos, Lambie, Milsom, & Gilbert, 2007; Buchmann & Dalton, 2002; Callahan, 2005; McCracken, Barcinas, & Wims, 1991). Interestingly, it is worth noting that a higher social status background also predicted higher GPA and enrollment in a more advanced English class. The Wisconsin model of status attainment (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969) provides a good support for this trend in its supposition that a young person's initial position of social status (determined by parental education and occupation indices) influences his or her aspirations to achieve (in this case, perhaps evident in increased efforts to earn a high GPA and be challenged in a more advanced curriculum track), in turn influencing eventual attainments (e.g., higher grades). A deeper exploration of these relationships is beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice to say, these findings lend additional evidence to the profound effect one's social class background has on educational attainment outcomes even as early as one's 10th grade year. Additionally, both GPA and English curriculum were significantly negatively related to endorsement of experiences of institutionalized classism. Likely, students who are performing best in the school setting and are exposed to a more challenging curriculum are also those who may perceive themselves as taking the most advantage of available opportunities at school, and therefore would naturally be less likely to endorse having been excluded from full school participation for any reason. Further, given that these students' social class statuses were also as a whole higher than those students with lower GPAs and/or those enrolled in regular English classes, the various structural and psychological implications of class background on high school performance also appear to gain support here. Again, examining these findings in closer detail exceeds the scope of the present study; however, this is certainly an area worthy of

additional research. Finally, and on the contrary, no significant relationships were found between GPA or academic curriculum track and experiences of citational, interpersonal, or overall classism. Nevertheless, sufficient support was found to control for GPA and English class designation in the regression and later mediation analyses, so as not to confound study results.

The Contribution of Classism to Aspirations and Expectations

It was predicted in Hypotheses 2 and 3, respectively, that experiences of classism would contribute unique and shared variance to both postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations, after controlling for participants' social class background, GPA, and academic curriculum track. Results indicated that only citational classism significantly predicted only postsecondary educational aspirations, among all variables considered. This relationship was negative, indicating that greater endorsement of citational classism predicted a decrease in aspirations among the participants sampled. Thus, Hypothesis 2 (regarding aspirations) was partially supported. Given the absence of previous research in this domain, only speculations can be made regarding this pattern of findings. It is noteworthy that citational classism was the most frequently endorsed experience across all classism domains, with nearly 60% of students endorsing at least one item on this subscale. This high base rate of endorsement, relative to other domains of the classism construct, may suggest that citational classism was the most easily perceived of all the three subdomains, since it appears to have been experienced most frequently by the high school students sampled. It may also be that the overt nature of citational classism—hearing stereotypic or disparaging remarks, stories, and/or jokes made about people who are poor—means that these forms of discrimination are more

immediately internalized, thereby shaping students' self-perceptions and even their most desired-to goals. Steele and Aronson's (1995) notion of stereotype threat may help illuminate these findings. Stereotype threat involves an individual's being at risk of underperforming—in particular on tests—when negative stereotypes are elicited about that individual's group. This research highlights that as performance declines under stereotype threat, and as the stereotypes elicited frame underperformance as an indicator of the inferiority of that individual's group, expectations about one's ability and future performance also decline, thereby further undermining subsequent performance secondary to additional declines in motivation and effort. Steele and Aronson (1995) noted, "It is precisely a process of stereotype threat fostering low expectations…that we suggest leads eventually to disidentification" with high performance in a particular domain (p. 809). Of course, these findings highlight the relation of stereotype threat to expectations rather than aspirations; however, the construct of expectations was not clearly defined in Steele's and Aronson's research and appears to have been conflated with aspirations. It is thus reasonable to expect that aspirations may also be negatively implicated when stereotypes about one's group are elicited, as the present study's findings suggest. Several conclusions may potentially be drawn from these results. Because the direction of the relationship between citational classism and aspirations was negative, it appears that greater exposure to disparaging stereotypic remarks made about those from lower status backgrounds in turn contributed to declines in students' idealistic goals of attainment. These findings are correlational rather than explanatory in nature; therefore, it could also be that having lower aspirations related to college attainment makes someone more vulnerable to internalizing negative stereotypes expressed about

one's group—that is, more likely to perceive and be harmed by experiences of citational classism. Further, given the interrelatedness of social class (including the structural, resource-related qualities of the construct) and aspirations, it could be that individuals who have fewer resources have lower aspirations in general, or that those who endorse lower aspirations tend to perceive themselves as having fewer resources. Piecing apart these questions alone could be the focus of a sizeable body of future research in these domains.

Alternatively, neither institutionalized classism nor interpersonal classism through discounting contributed significant shared variance to aspirations, after controlling for social class background, GPA, and academic curriculum track. Further, no domains of experiences of classism were significantly related to postsecondary educational expectations, after controlling for the variables just named. No evidence was thus found to support the predictions made in Hypothesis 3 (regarding expectations). Several possible conclusions may be drawn from this largely nonsignificant pattern of results. Before exploring those conclusions in detail, however, the results of subsequent multiple mediation analyses will be reviewed.

Examining the Mediating Function of Classism

The mediating function of classism on the relation between students' class background and aspirations and expectations was also examined. It was predicted in Hypotheses 4 and 5, respectively, that experiences of classism would mediate the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. No specific predictions were made regarding the unique mediating function of each of the three subdomains of classism. The results of

Hypothesis 4 will be reviewed first. Overall, neither experiences of institutionalized classism nor interpersonal classism through discounting mediated the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. However, social class had an indirect effect on aspirations through experiences of citational classism, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. It was thus concluded that citational classism did in fact appear to mediate the relationship between social class background and aspirations, consistent with overall predictions. Hypothesis 4 was thus partially supported. Specifically, results indicated that higher status social class backgrounds predicted more frequent experiences of citational classism (as discussed previously), which in turn predicted lower educational aspirations. This is a counterintuitive finding, and the possible mechanisms for the varying directions of these relationships are not easily explained by the available data. It was previously assumed in this discussion that students from higher status class backgrounds may be more likely to be exposed to more frequent disparaging comments about people who are poor, or perhaps even make such remarks themselves, perhaps explaining the positive relationship between these variables. Further, the direct relationship of social class to aspirations was also positive. However, no clear explanation for why the direction of this relationship was reversed upon introduction of the citational classism variable to the mediation model. Future qualitative research—for example, a focus group with high school students—may clarify the nature of the direction of these findings.

Interestingly, in a supplemental test of simple mediation with citational classism as the single mediator between social class background and aspirations, the mediating

effect of classism degraded without the inclusion of the other two experiences of classism variables. In particular, although social class background again significantly predicted experiences of citational classism in this model, no effect was found between citational classism and aspirations. Despite being relatively weak predictors of aspirations on their own, these results suggest that institutionalized and interpersonal classism through discounting appear to have acted as suppressor variables in the previously tested multiple mediation models (in which all three subdomains of classism were tested simultaneously) by suppressing error variance in that model, thus raising the regression coefficient of citational classism. This may indicate that the mediating function of citational classism in the relationship between social class background and aspirations is actually relatively weak. Thus, although some evidence was found to partially support Hypothesis 4, this noteworthy caveat suggests it may be premature to conclude that citational classism has a true mediating effect on the variables considered. Additional investigations of these relationships are warranted to better understand the interrelatedness of the three classism variables and the degree to which citational classism, specifically, functions as an independent mediator in the model tested herein.

Finally, neither experiences of institutionalized classism nor experiences of interpersonal classism through discounting mediated the relationship between high school students' social class background and postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. Further, no domains of experiences of classism were found to mediate the relationship between students' social class background and postsecondary educational expectations, after controlling for English curriculum track and GPA. Thus, no evidence was thus found to support the predictions

made in Hypothesis 5 (regarding expectations).

Possible Conclusions and Limitations of the Present Study

A number of possible conclusions may be drawn from these largely nonsignificant patterns of results. On one hand, this overall pattern of nonsignificance was unexpected, considering the substantial conceptual support for the potential influence of institutionalized and interpersonal classism on aspirations and expectations, previously reviewed in earlier chapters of this manuscript. On the other hand, these results are also somewhat unsurprising, particularly when considered in context of results from preliminary data analyses undertaken in this study. As indicated previously, evaluations of data normality performed prior to the main analyses indicated that participants' total scores for each of the three subdomains of experiences of classism, as well as their overall scores on the Classism Experiences Questionnaire-High School (CEQ-HS), all appeared highly positively skewed and kurtotic. Specifically, few participants endorsed experiencing a particular event *often* or *many times*, thus resulting in a non-normal distribution for some items. This pattern is consistent with previous research indicating that few university students reported experiencing classism often or many times in the university setting (see Langhout et al., 2007). In fact, distributions of this nature are commonly observed in responses to other behaviorally-based measures of discrimination, across a range of populations and settings (see Cortina, 2001; Klonoff & Landrine, 1995, 1999; Langhout et al., 2007). Additionally, the following is also related and worthy of note. Despite the diversity of the student population at the large, public high school at which data were collected, sample demographic results clearly depicted a more homogeneous range of self-reported family status backgrounds than was anticipated. In

particular, over 62% of participants described their families as belonging to the two highest of the five social class groups proposed by Hollingshead (1975/2011). Although the remainder of participants who responded to the Hollingshead items reported family status rankings in the middle and lower ends of the status continuum, the sample was more concentrated at the higher ends of this spectrum than was expected. These findings do not likely underscore changing demographics in the community in which the high school data collection site is located. Rather, they may suggest limitations related to the study sample or design (discussed below). It is important to view study results and conclusions with these limitations in mind.

A number of possible conclusions may be made in light of the overall failure to find consistent evidence supporting Hypotheses 2 and 3. First, this trend may point to possible social desirability bias among the study sample, with inflated estimates of family status reflecting students' reluctance or unwillingness to disclose their parents' actual occupations and levels of education. Similarly, it is possible that participants underreported their experiences of classism due to concerns regarding the negative implications of acknowledging that events of this nature occur in their school environment. On the other hand, it may be that high school sophomores genuinely overestimate their families' status backgrounds, perhaps due to their lack of awareness or poor understanding of their parents' occupations or levels of schooling. This speculation is supported by the finding that a sizeable number of participants (27.33%; $n = 82$) provided invalid or missing responses to Hollingshead items, perhaps suggesting that these students either did not know or could not clearly report on the occupation or education of their parent(s). Similar results suggesting possible participant over-

reporting of socioeconomic background have also been found among college student samples (e.g., Backhaus, 2010), suggesting this trend may not be unique to the high school students sampled in the present study, or even to secondary students in general. Nonetheless, it must be considered that the generalizability of these findings may be limited outside this specific high school setting or among high school students of a different grade level. It is possible that students' perceptions and experiences in the high school context differ as grade level advances, and that research with more advanced high school students (i.e., 11th and 12th graders) may produce a different pattern of results. Further, because participants indicated relatively high social class backgrounds overall, it may make sense that students would likewise not endorse experiencing classism *often* or *many times*, perhaps because their relatively high family status backgrounds serve to protect them from the negative effects of class-based discrimination typically directed at those from lower status backgrounds. It is also possible that the 10th grade students sampled simply do not experience classism, possibly because of some characteristic of this particular school environment. For example, it may be that the high school at which data were collected is actually a relatively homogenous environment with regards to the social class makeup of the student population. After all, the large majority of both the sample and school population is Latino/Hispanic. Perhaps students who identify as belonging to that particular ethnic group are actually more similar than different on other dimensions of their cultural identity—namely, family status. It is also possible that the unique demographic makeup of the data collection site may have contextually shaped participants' experiences in and impressions of that setting. Likewise, students in other high school settings may report experiencing classism to a greater or lesser degree

overall, or may be more or less inclined to label their experiences as constituting classism. Because these questions have never been examined in other high school settings, the lack of basis for comparison makes it difficult to further speculate as to why results of this nature were found. In any case, what fails to make for compelling research findings may otherwise reveal an encouraging trend among the high school students sampled. Specifically, lack of awareness of and/or failure to actually experience class-based discrimination may serve as protective factors in defending students against the negative outcomes found to have been associated with experiencing classism in other settings.

There may be other reasons for these nonsignificant patterns of findings. It could be that there is something non-random about the study sample—perhaps that there was some characteristic of these particular participants that made them systemically less likely to experience classism. For example, it may be that those 10th grade students who responded to the study questionnaire truly came from higher status backgrounds, and thus genuinely had fewer experiences of classism than students who either (a) did not participate, or (b) were not at school on the day of survey administration. Perhaps those students who elected to participate in this study generally had more motivation than those students who did not participate. Motivation was not directly assessed in the study design, but could certainly have an effect on self-reported aspirations and expectations regarding future schooling, thereby influencing study results. It could also be that school attendance is directly related to the key study variables (i.e., that students who attended class on the day of survey administration were different than those who were not in class that day, along dimensions of family status, experiences of class-based discrimination,

and/or school-related goals). Since students present on the day of survey administration had obviously not dropped out of high school, it could be that those students had more resources, more capital along some dimension, or some other characteristic that defended them against endorsing or experiencing classism to a greater degree. Certainly, dropping out of high school may be related to decreased postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations. In this vein, it is well known that poverty and low-income family status are among the strongest—if not *the* strongest—predictors of students dropping out of high school (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Rumberger, 2013). Therefore, simply attending school likely serves as a protective factor for the present study's participants, which may have resulted in greater homogeneity of the study sample than was considered when this study was designed. It is important to evaluate study results and conclusions with possible limitations of the potential presence of a prior pruning or selection effect in mind. Future research in this domain may involve controlling for such factors as motivation and school attendance, in order to address these potentially confounding factors.

Another possible explanation for these largely nonsignificant findings could be that the students sampled have indeed experienced classism, but simply are not aware of and/or do not perceive those experiences as being discriminatory in nature. Although base rates of experiences of classism (i.e., endorsement of at least one experience of classism in a particular domain) ranged from 34% to nearly 60%, few students in the present sample (<20%) labeled their experiences as constituting classism. The remainder of participants either did not label their experiences as examples of classism and/or reported feeling unsure if they had ever been harassed or discriminated against on the basis of their family status. A considerable body of research has previously suggested

that in general, people perceive a greater level of discrimination directed at the group to which they belong than at themselves, as individual members of that group (e.g., Crosby, 1984). Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, and Lalonde (1990) labeled this phenomenon as the personal/group discrimination discrepancy and offered three possible explanations for it: first, that individuals in minority groups may deny or minimize the extent to which they personally experience discrimination (see also Major et al., 2002); second, that individuals may exaggerate the degree of discrimination directed at the larger group to which they belong (e.g., in service of promoting social change to elevate the status of the minority group), thereby biasing judgments of their own personal discrimination; and third, that some cognitive process biases individuals against recognizing their own experiences of discrimination (e.g., dismissing concrete discriminatory events as being less extreme than those events portrayed in the media, and therefore not really constituting discrimination). Other research as suggested that individuals may avoid attributing incidents of mistreatment to group-based discrimination because doing so may make them feel powerless (Hall & Ibaraki, 2016). Together, this scholarship lends support for the possibility that the present study's participants may have perceived class-based discrimination as happening to others, but not to themselves.

Given the potential reasons for the pattern of nonsignificant results, the possibility exists that one or more of the factors just discussed (e.g., social desirability, level of awareness of parents' occupation, vulnerability to stereotype threat, and/or some cognitive, information-processing variable, among other factors) may moderate the interrelationships between social class background, experiences of classism, and postsecondary educational goals. Considering evidence that GPA and academic

curriculum track contributed significant variance to the regression models tested in the present study, these variables certainly warrant additional attention in future research in this domain. Alternatively, it may be that some other, as yet identified factor actually influences the relationship between these variables—for example, some aspect of the school environment or some other characteristic of the study sample (e.g., to speculate, self-efficacy or motivation). Future research could determine what variables, if any, moderate the relations between these variables. A specific direction for such research is difficult to identify at this juncture, given the dearth of prior scholarship in this area and the subsequently limited conceptual support for these questions in the available literature. Likely, future scholarship in this domain would be best facilitated through qualitative research, in order to achieve a better understanding of how high school students experience and understand the concepts of social class and classism.

Ultimately, limited variability in students' endorsement of experiences of classism overall appears to be the most likely explanation for why most domains of classism were unrelated to either aspirations or expectations. However, the manner in which these constructs were assessed could also account for these largely nonsignificant findings. First, the relatively homogeneous social class makeup of the participant sample—which likely contributes to the positively skewed distribution of responses to the experiences of classism items—may highlight a limitation of the present study's design, specifically related to the inclusion of the Hollingshead measure. Despite its well-established utility, Hollingshead's Index draws from occupational categorizations over 40 years old. Anecdotally, this researcher found that participants' responses regarding their parents' occupations were sometimes difficult to code according to the job titles and

classifications proposed by Hollingshead in 1975 (in some cases because some contemporary occupations such as "web designer" did not exist and were therefore not reflected in 1970 U.S. census codes). To overcome this and other potential limitations inherent in using an objective and indirect estimate of social class with the Hollingshead measure, scholars have recently called for the use in research of subjective measures of social status (e.g., APA Task Force, 2007; Karvonen & Rahkonen, 2011; Ostrove, Adler, Kupperman, & Washington, 2000). Subjective status may be a more precise measure of social position, as it involves an individual's cognitive averaging of standard markers of socioeconomic status as well as a consciousness of family resources, opportunities, and perceptions of life chances which shape later outcomes (Singh-Manoux et al., 2003). The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status-Youth Version (Goodman et al., 2001) may be one such instrument. It may also be that including parent rather than child reports of status, or obtaining school records regarding status indicators such as school meal plan, would allow for a more accurate depiction of the sample's demographic characteristics. Scholars interested in social class-related research with youth would be wise to consider these alternative ways of measuring participant status.

Other limitations of the study design must also be considered. The use of a self-report measure of experiences of classism over other methodological designs may be one such limitation. Although the CEQ-HS operationalizes classism with unambiguous, behaviorally-based items, it remains the task of the individual participant to determine the nature and degree of his or her experiences with classism. As such, it is possible that results may reflect measurement error due to subjective, self-report response bias or inaccurate reporting, in general. Although more burdensome, one potential future study

could involve gathering observational assessments of students' experiences of classism in the school setting. Observational assessments offer a number of potential benefits relative to self-reported data, including a reduction in the potential influence of social desirability, a comparatively 'natural' sampling of behavior, and the capacity to record behavioral events which individuals may not perceive or otherwise report (Schwartz et al., 2012). Behavioral observations may yield different results and conclusions than these self-report data. It may also be that the CEQ-HS does not accurately capture experiences of classism in the high school setting. As indicated previously, factor analyses performed during the development of the measure pointed to need for additional evaluations of the construct validity of the instrument. In particular, some items were highly correlated, and one item appeared to cross-load on two latent factors (see Shellman's [2014] unpublished paper). Modest evidence was found during in that scale development study for combining and/or rewriting these potentially problematic items. Such revisions were beyond the scope of the present study; however, these would likely be useful next steps for future research utilizing this measure. Further, analysis of CEQ-HS item frequencies indicated that responses all appeared highly positively skewed and kurtotic. Although several data transformation procedures were considered, attempts at transforming the CEQ-HS data using a log10 transformation did not improve data normality. Dichotomization was one such transformation procedure considered, particularly given the original scale authors' use of this procedure in the development and validation of the parent questionnaire, the Classism Experiences Questionnaire-Academe (CEQ-A; Langhout et al., 2007). It was ultimately determined that the bootstrapping parameter estimates employed in the present study's multiple mediation analyses negated the need

for regression variables to be normally distributed (see Chapter IV of this manuscript for a more detailed explanation). However, the benefits of accounting for non-normal distribution of CEQ-HS items should be considered in future research using this instrument.

Potential limitations of the study's single-item measures of aspirations and expectations must also be considered. Although these measures closely corresponded with similarly worded assessments of academic and occupational expectations available in the literature, the psychometric utility of these one-item measures is undetermined. It is certainly possible that these single-item instruments overlook other critical dimensions of these constructs that were not considered in the present study. Future research related to postsecondary educational aspirations and expectations may utilize more robust assessments of these constructs. Although no such instruments were found by this researcher while designing the present study, inclusion of more multidimensional measures may offer a broader understanding of aspirations and expectations and allow for greater identification of other variables and mechanisms that may be influencing their development.

Other Implications and Directions for Future Research

Despite a largely nonsignificant pattern of findings, evidence was found to fully or partially support several study hypotheses. To review, results indicated that high school students' aspirations regarding their future educational attainment were significantly higher than their expectations in this domain, as predicted. Further, experiences of citational classism did contribute unique and shared variance to students' postsecondary educational aspirations, after controlling for social class background,

grade point average, and academic curriculum track. This relationship was negative, indicating that greater endorsement of citational classism predicted a decrease in aspirations among the participants sampled. Finally, citational classism did appear to mediate the relationship between social class background and aspirations, although this effect degraded in subsequent tests of simple mediation.

Correlational results from the present study are also compelling and lend additional support to previous research regarding the profound relationship of social class status to the development of college-going goals. In particular, this study offers evidence that social class background plays a role in the development of educational aspirations and expectations, even as early as 10th grade. Although results indicated that experiences of citational classism contribute to aspirations, additional research in this domain may clarify this and other mechanisms by which education-related goals develop, especially among students from less privileged class backgrounds. Further, as expected, social class background was also significantly associated with participants' experiences of classism in both institution- and stereotype-related domains. Interestingly, the direction of these relationships varied across subdomains of the classism construct. Future research investigating the positive association between class status and experiences of citational classism, in particular, would be an interesting area of closer investigation.

One compelling finding from the present study was that although many students endorsed having had at least one experience of classism across institutionalized, citational, and/or interpersonal domains, relatively few participants labeled those experiences as constituting discrimination. Several possible explanations for this trend were considered earlier in this chapter; however, the factors contributing to this

discrepancy remain unknown. It appears that the most productive direction for future research related to experiences of classism among high school students may be qualitative in nature. For example, interviewing secondary students may offer important clarification regarding how young persons experience and understand the concepts of social class and classism. Research of this nature may also help identify other variables that potentially influence the relationship between family status and experiences of class-based discrimination. Studies of this nature could reinforce the possibility, speculated upon earlier in this chapter, that high school students simply do not perceive classism as being a relevant construct in their daily lived experiences. If this speculation is supported by additional research, such findings could have valuable implications for how to promote resiliency and attenuate the negative effects of discrimination among other populations. Alternatively, if high school students do indeed experience classism—suggesting that this study's generally nonsignificant findings could be attributable to some failing of the present study design or some other factor not directly assessed in this research—it would be important for educators and other professionals who work in the secondary school setting to identify strategies to increase awareness and intervene against any potential negative effects of these experiences in the school setting. Certainly, the finding that students experience even one event of class-based discrimination on account of the school institution, or as a result of hearing discriminatory remarks made by persons at school, suggests that efforts are needed to reduce the frequency with which such events occur. High school is a critical time for postsecondary educational and occupational planning and development, and any efforts made to ameliorate the negative effects of discrimination in this period would no doubt be timely. Considering that the school-

related goals and attainments of low-income high school students continue to fall well below those of higher-status youth, it is crucial that educators and researchers alike work to better understand and address any barriers to optimal development that may exist in this setting. It is also important to remember that aspirations and expectations are only a few among many factors which predict later attainment, and that structural disparities between students must also be addressed.

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Appendix A

Classism Experiences Questionnaire-High School (CEQ-HS)

Classism Experiences Questionnaire-High School (CEQ-HS)
(Shellman, 2014; adapted from Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007)

During your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in situations where:

1. You could not take a class (e.g., art, debate, Tech Prep, dual-credit courses, etc.) because you could not afford the costs of the class (for supplies, materials, travel, etc.)? *Check one*.
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

2. You could not join a sports team because you could not afford the costs and/or equipment?
   Check one.
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

3. You could not join an extracurricular activity (e.g., art or photography clubs, cheerleading, etc.) because you could not afford the fees and/or materials? *Check one*.
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

4. You could not afford social activities (e.g., dances or football games) because of the fees? *Check one*.
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

During your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in situations where:

5. You could not join an activity (for example, sports teams, extra-curricular activities, after-school events) because your job hours consistently conflicted with the activity meetings/practices/events? *Check one.*
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

6. You could not attend school-related trips/field trips because of the costs? *Check one.*
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

During your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in situations where students, teachers, administrators, or staff:

7. Told stories or jokes about people who are poor? *Check one.*
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

8. Made stereotyping remarks about people who are poor? *Check one.*
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

9. Made offensive remarks about people who are poor? *Check one.*
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Once or twice
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Many times

During your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in situations where students, teachers, administrators, or staff:

10. Made offensive remarks about the way people who are poor look? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

11. Made offensive remarks about the way people who are poor act? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

12. Made offensive remarks about the way people who are poor speak? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

13. Made statements suggesting that people who are poor are inferior? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

14. Made statements suggesting that rich people are superior? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

During your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in situations where students, teachers, administrators, or staff:

15. Made offensive remarks about people on welfare? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

16. Did not consider or seemed to dismiss your (or your family's) financial situation? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

17. Invited you to events/outings that you could not afford? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

18. Didn't seem to understand your (or your family's) financial problems or difficulties? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

19. Encouraged you to buy things you couldn't afford? *Check one*.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

During your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in situations where students, teachers, administrators, or staff:

20. Assumed you could afford things that you couldn't (e.g., dinner at an expensive restaurant)?
    Check one.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

21. Assumed you could provide your own method of transportation to get someplace?
    Check one.
    - ☐ Never
    - ☐ Once or twice
    - ☐ Sometimes
    - ☐ Often
    - ☐ Many times

22. **Finally, during your time at (THIS) High School, have you ever been in a situation where any students, teachers, staff, or administrators harassed or discriminated against you because of your socioeconomic class?** *Check one.*
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ I don't know