Original Research Article

AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Sociology of Race and Ethnicity
1–19

DOI: 10.1177/2332649219854465
sre.sagepub.com
SAGE

Social Class and Educational Attainment: Do Blacks Benefit Less from Increases in Parents' Social Class Status?

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Abstract

Classic and contemporary studies show that greater social class status is associated with higher levels of education for youth. However, racialized processes might constrain the benefits blacks receive from increases in parents' social class. In this study the authors use the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 to estimate whether race moderates the relationship among three common measures of youths' social class during high school (parents' occupations, family income, and parents' level of education) and their college enrollment two years after high school and educational attainment eight years after high school. The results suggest that black youth receive lower benefits from social class than whites for both outcomes, and parents' gender plays a role in the racial differences in the link between social class and both outcomes. The authors also find a three-way interaction with family structure for mothers (among race, social class, and family structure); among youth not in two-parent households, blacks benefit less than whites from mothers' occupational prestige on enrollment. This study extends the literature on social class and racial inequality in education by explicitly testing whether black youth receive lower benefits from social class in their attainment. Doing so separately for mothers' and fathers' social class characteristics uncovers a nuanced pattern useful for understanding race as a moderator to social class.

Keywords

race, social class, education, inequality, educational attainment, students

In the United States, black Americans have made major strides toward greater educational attainment. Over a 30-year span, native blacks have experienced a 100 percent increase in the number of bachelor's degrees attained (from 11 percent in 1988 to 22 percent in 2015), which is greater than the 71 percent increase for whites during this same period (from 21 percent in 1988 to 36 percent in 2015) (Ryan and Bauman 2016). However, despite significant increases in educational attainment (henceforward attainment) by black Americans, the attainment gap between blacks and whites has not converged.

Social class is a major factor used to explain blacks' lower attainment. Historically, blacks have had lower socioeconomic origin than whites (Smith 2001), which strongly predicts youths' schooling experiences and academic outcomes (Biddle 2014). Although studies show that social class partially explains racial differences in attainment (Kao and Thompson 2003), we contend that differences might also persist because blacks do not benefit as much from increases in their parents' social class status as whites. Students of greater social class

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status attain higher levels of education than their lower social class counterparts (Blau and Duncan 1967; Stocké 2007). However, racialized processes might constrain the benefits blacks receive from increases in parents' social class relative to whites (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

Understanding whether the attainment gap between affluent and less affluent youth is smaller for blacks than whites is important for two reasons. First, a large body of research establishes the importance of attainment for predicting life-chance outcomes, such as labor market success or positive health outcomes (Goldin and Katz 2010; Lynch 2003). Therefore, increases in future outcomes related to well-being would be constrained for blacks if they benefit less from social class in their attainment than whites. Second, empirical models that do not properly account for race moderating the association between social class and attainment for black students could lead to erroneous conclusions about the role social class plays on attainment, particularly if blacks benefit less from their class status.

We address this issue using the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) to estimate whether race moderates the relationship between social class and attainment outcomes. We use three common measures of social class (parents' occupations, family income, and parents' level of education) during high school to predict college enrollment (henceforward enrollment) two years after high school and educational attainment eight years after high school. Furthermore, because research suggests that each parents' social class characteristics are important for predicting children's future attainment (Korupp, Ganzeboom, and van der Lippe 2002), we conduct analysis separately for mothers' and fathers' social class characteristics. Examining whether affluent blacks receive fewer benefits from one or both parents' characteristics than whites could uncover a nuanced pattern useful for understanding race as a moderator to social class. Therefore, this study extends the literature on social class and racial inequality in education by explicitly testing whether race moderates social class with regard to attainment and doing so separately for mothers' and fathers' social class characteristics.

STRATIFICATION THEORIES OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Both classic and recent research consistently finds that social class stratifies individuals into particular educational attainment levels. Blau and Duncan's (1967) classic *status attainment model* shows that fathers' occupational status predicts their sons' occupational status through educational attainment. Specifically, sons of low-status fathers generally attain lower levels of education and subsequently low-status occupations, whereas children of high-status fathers typically achieve higher levels of education, leading to higher status occupations. Studies continue to show that social class strongly predicts one's decision to pursue further education (Stocké 2007). For example, the *Breen-Goldthorpe model* links social class stratification to attainment levels by incorporating a rational-actor framework (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). These models posit that high social class status generally corresponds with greater (and low social class status corresponds with lower) attainment.

Explanations for the link between social class origin and educational attainment typically draw on three forms of capital (or resources): *economic, cultural*, and *social*. First, having *economic capital*—resources that can be converted into cash (Bourdieu 2008)—provides access to resources beneficial for learning; in contrast, economic disadvantage constrains parents' ability to supplement and intervene in children's education (Lareau 1987; Miller and Davis 1997; Reardon 2011). The Breen-Goldthorpe model posits that individuals make educational decisions on the basis of the availability of resources.

Second, *cultural capital* refers to knowledge of codes of appropriate conduct, preferences, and behaviors that stem from upbringing in a particular social class stratum (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Typically, familiarity with styles and dispositions of higher class groups is beneficial and therefore valued, particularly within schools (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Lareau and Horvat 1999). This is consistent with *organizational habitus theory*, which posits that schools reinforce cultural preferences of those from more advantaged backgrounds. Thus, schools provide a context around the college choice process beneficial for more socioeconomically advantaged students (McDonough 1997).

Finally, *social capital* refers to actual or potential resources derived from social networks or relationships (Bourdieu 2008). Greater social capital is associated with stronger bonds with teachers and other school personnel through which parents learn information about school policies and teacher expectations (Epstein 1987; Lareau 1987; Lareau and Horvat 1999). Thus, most explanations for the link between social class and educational attainment posit that students' schooling beliefs and

instinctive enactment of schooling behaviors (habitus) derive from the degree of parents' and families' knowledge about resources, rules, and norms of proper schooling behaviors, factors strongly related to their social class backgrounds (Bourdieu 1984; Robinson and Harris 2014).

Although numerous theories suggest a strong link between social class origin and attainment, they often assume that this link is similar across racial groups. However, research on racial inequality in education suggests that black students do not experience similar benefits to social class in the educational system (Feagin and Sikes 1994; O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller 2007). Because few studies test whether race moderates social class on educational attainment, it remains unclear whether the social class-attainment link differs by race.

BLACKS' LOWER BENEFITS FROM SOCIAL CLASS

The notion that blacks do not benefit from increases in social class dates back to early social science research. The paradox of race and class for black Americans was discussed by Du Bois (1899, 1903). Expanding on Du Bois, Warner (1936) noted,

> The Negro who has moved or been born into the uppermost group of his caste is superior to the lower whites in class, but inferior in caste. In his own personality he feels the conflict of the two opposing structures, and in the thinking and feeling of the members of both groups there is to be found this same conflict about his position. (p. 236).

Frazier (1957) documented the progress blacks made in the realms of economics, politics, and education since slavery but also found that the black middle class faced many challenges. For example, although he observed an increase in the number of black college-goers, particularly those raised in middle-class households, he suggested that middle-class blacks had psychological ambivalence about their class status and experience with racial discrimination. Moreover, he found that well-educated blacks, in contrast to their white counterparts, were often placed in lower status jobs not reflective of their academic skills. Therefore, he identified ways in which middle-class blacks benefited differently from their class status than whites.

More recent studies find that blacks do not reap the same benefits in life-chance outcomes as whites with similar socioeconomic characteristics. For example, blacks receive fewer promotions and wages even when they have similar socioeconomic background characteristics as whites (Anderson and Shapiro 1996; Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity 2006; Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas, and Johnson 2005). These results are consistent with those of Cose (1993) and Feagin and Sikes (1994), who documented how blacks with forms of capital signaling high levels of success receive fewer benefits from these forms of capital within the labor market. Moreover, black youth perceive that blacks receive lower benefits on factors that contribute to better life-chance outcomes than whites as early as adolescence (Harris 2011).

Because race shapes access to economic, cultural, and social resources, racial dynamics within the United States can compromise black youths' academic outcomes, as they have lower outcomes than whites net of social class (Feagin and Sikes 1994). Studies show that blacks experience greater difficulty than whites in converting resources into capital in schools (Lareau and Horvat 1999; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Moreover, blacks receive lower benefits from social class on academic achievement. Conley and Yeung (2005) found that unlike whites, blacks do not receive benefits from parental occupational prestige on early-childhood achievement. Although studies suggest that blacks' lower benefits from social class extend to high school achievement (Sirin 2005), it is unclear whether this applies to educational attainment in young adulthood.

Three racialized processes might explain why blacks receive lower benefits from social class on attainment: differences in wealth, discrimination, and segregation. Although not an exhaustive list, these factors have been well researched with regard to class and race on educational outcomes. First, numerous studies document vast wealth differences between blacks and whites (Conley 1999; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Shapiro 2003). "Middle-class" families are not middle class in the same way, because white families have greater household wealth than black families with the same income. Second, studies over the past two decades on pervasive discrimination have found that race shapes middle-class students' experiences in school, stemming from racialized tracking and parents' experiences with racial discrimination in the labor market (Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane 2004; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Lacy 2007; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lewis-McCoy 2015; Lewis and Diamond 2015; Tyson 2011). Finally, studies on residential segregation find that black middle-class

families are more likely than white families to live in working-class or poor neighborhoods (Pattillo 1999; Quillian 2012). Moreover, Davis and Welcher (2013) found that segregation has negative implications on the academic climate, behavioral environment, and physical facilities of the public schools black students attend. Although we do not directly examine these factors, they suggest that it is reasonable to expect black youth experience lower attainment benefits from increases in social class than whites.

GENDERED AND RACIALIZED ASPECTS OF PARENTS' SOCIAL CLASS

A major gap in Blau and Duncan's (1967) classic status attainment research is that it focused exclusively on fathers. In many ways, the omission of mothers was a reflection of the lower value placed on women's work in American society (Glenn 2002). One sociological perspective corresponding with the emphasis on fathers is the *dominance model*, which posits that only the dominant parent's characteristics matter for children's attainment (see Korupp et al. 2002). Although either parent could be the dominant parent, the typical presumption is that fathers hold the high-status position in households; therefore, only fathers' characteristics suffice in predicting children's attainment (Erikson 1984; Korupp et al. 2002). However, increases in mothers' labor force participation and position as primary breadwinners has shifted attention toward how mothers matter for children's life chances (Beller 2009; Goldthorpe 1980; Kramer, Kelly, and McCulloch 2013; Medved 2016; Rosenfeld 1978; Wright 1979). Moreover, a growing number of studies examine how mothers' social class characteristics matter for predicting children's educational attainment (Keith and Finlay 1988; Korupp et al. 2002; Monaghan 2017; Teachman 1987).

Contrary to the dominance model, Korupp et al. (2002) found that both parents' educational and occupational status matter for children's attainment. Their findings are consistent with the *modified-dominance model*: both parents contribute to the transfer of parental resources. Given that increases in educational attainment translate to greater skills necessary for higher paying jobs, mothers can transfer their human capital skills to their children after attaining a college degree, even if they are not the primary breadwinner (Becker 1964; Korupp et al. 2002; Monaghan 2017). These studies provide evidence that omitting mothers overlooks important ways parents' social class status matter for children's attainment.

It is also important for research on the class-attainment link to consider the intersection of gender and race (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Studies consistently show that gender and race separately have implications within the labor market. Recent audit studies have found that women and blacks receive lower benefits in the job market from increases in academic success (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Gaddis 2015; Quadlin 2018). However, *intersectionality theory*, popularized by Collins (1990) and Crenshaw (1989, 1991), posits that examining effects of gender and race separately does not accurately capture how the intersection of race and gender influences life chances. More specifically, singular social categories do not sufficiently capture the experiences of black women, who are uniquely marginalized on the basis of the intersection of their gender and race (Carbado et al. 2013; Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989, 1991). An important proposition of intersectionality theory is that "structures and institutions operate intersectionally, creating particular advantages and disadvantages for different groups of people" (McKinzie 2017:524).

A growing number of studies examine the intersection between gender and race to understand gendered and racialized processes in the labor market (Bell and Nkomo 2003; Wingfield 2013). Regarding black women, researchers find that they face a unique marginalization within the labor market, particularly within professional occupations (Bell and Nkomo 2003; Browne and Misra 2003). For example, Bell and Nkomo (2003) found that although black women are making inroads into higher paying professional positions, they still face increased isolation and career barriers relative to white women in similar positions. Bell and Nkomo refer to this marginalization as *double tokenism*. Research suggests that black women in the workplace experience discrimination, weathering (early health deterioration due to previous and repeated exposure to socioeconomic disadvantage), and job strain (psychological and physiological toll of working in jobs with high psychosocial demands and low locus of control) (Collins et al. 2004; Geronimus 1996; Oths, Dunn, and Palmer 2001). These factors contribute to the marginalization of black women and might limit the benefits their children receive from increases in their social class status.

Some studies show that black men also face a unique marginalization within the labor market on

the basis of being male and black (Blau and Duncan 1967; Thomas 1993; Wingfield 2009, 2013). For example, Wingfield (2013) found that black men in professional occupations face social isolation and barriers to advancement, which places them at a disadvantage relative to white men. She contended that black men face *partial tokenism*; they incur advantages on the basis of their gender relative to women but are disadvantaged in other ways relative to white men. Therefore, black youth might benefit less from increases in their fathers' social class characteristics than whites. Recent research from Chetty et al. (2018) found that the differences in downward mobility between racial groups are driven largely by differences between black and white men rather than by differences between white and black women.

Numerous studies suggest that parents' intersectional experiences in the labor market are important because they shape students' experiences, particularly black students' perception of parents' experiences with discrimination (Diamond et al. 2004; Lareau and Horvat 1999). However, despite the insights of intersectional theory surrounding the labor market, it is unclear whether the unique experiences of high-status black women and men translate to lower benefits of educational attainment for their children. Given the intersectionality of gender and race in the labor market, it is important to examine whether benefits in attainment from parents' social class status depend on parents' gender, particularly for black youth.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data Source

Data for this study are from the ELS, a nationally representative sample of youth collected by the National Center for Education Statistics. The sample consists of 15,362 students in grade 10 from 752 schools obtained in 2002 using a two-stage stratified sampling design. Students were surveyed again in 2004, 2006, and 2012. Thus, given the interest in enrollment and attainment, the ELS is ideal for this study because it contains data based on the most recent nationally representative sample of youth as they transition from high school through the period when people traditionally pursue postsecondary education and as late as eight years after high school (2012).

This study is restricted to whites (n = 8,682) and blacks (n = 2,020) present in each wave of the ELS. We focus our analysis exclusively on blacks relative to whites because black Americans have the unique history of being the largest minority group and the primary group used to document race relations throughout most of U.S. history. They also have a long history of facing challenges to benefiting from both social class and education (for a review, see Anderson 1988; Litwack 1998; Williams 2005).

All analyses are based on weighted data using the appropriate ELS panel weights, which yield unbiased population estimates by adjusting for sampling design (i.e., stratification, disproportionate sampling of certain strata, and clustered, multistage probability sampling), sample attrition, and nonresponse (Ingles et al. 1994). The sum of the sample weights are adjusted to equal the unweighted sample size, which accounts for extremely small standard errors and inflated likelihood of finding significance because of panel weights' adjustment of the sample size to the national population (Harris 2011). We use multiple imputation ($m = 20$) on predictors with missing values and drop cases missing on the dependent variables (von Hippel 2007).

Measures

Dependent Variables. We examine two separate measures as dependent variables (see Table 1 for a description of measures). The first is a dichotomous variable for college enrollment two years after high school (a precursor to attaining at least a bachelor's degree) and the second is a seven-category variable for educational attainment eight years after high school ranging from less than a high school diploma to a doctoral degree.

Independent Variables. We use three separate social class measures (parental occupation, total family income, and parents' educational attainment) and a race measure. We construct three separate measures of occupation from the 16 response options in the ELS: professional, blue-collar, and "other" occupations. Table 2 shows that unambiguously professional occupations (e.g., teachers, accountants) are part of the "professional" category, and occupations that can reasonably be regarded as blue collar (e.g., construction workers, plumbers) are in the "blue-collar" category. Occupations with somewhat ambiguous classification are grouped as "other" (e.g., clerical or sales professionals) (see Table 2). It is reasonable to expect that a person with a clerical occupation in a law firm or university setting would socialize children differently than someone in an occupation we treat as blue

Table 1. Descriptions, Means, and Standard Deviations.

Variable Name	Description	Metric	Mean (SD)	
			Whites	Blacks
Outcome				
College enrollment	Attended college two years after high school	1 = yes	.77	.67
Educational attainment	Youths' attainment eight years after high school	1 = <HS, 7 = PhD/MD/JD	3.97 (1.27)	3.47 (1.17)
Social class indicators[a] (grade 10)				
Mothers' occupation (see Table 2)				
Blue collar	Mothers' occupation: blue collar	1 = yes	.31	.53
Professional	Mothers' occupation: professional	1 = yes	.42	.26
Other	Mothers' occupation: other	1 = yes	.27	.21
Fathers' occupation (see Table 2)				
Blue collar	Fathers' occupation: blue collar	1 = yes	.48	.69
Professional	Fathers' occupation: professional	1 = yes	.36	.21
Other	Fathers' occupation: other	1 = yes	.16	.10
Family income				
Family income	Total family income: all sources	1 = none, 13 = $200,000 or more	9.57 (2.03)	7.78 (2.57)
Parents' education				
Mom education	Mothers' highest level of education	1 = <HS, 8 = PhD, MD, other advanced	3.89 (1.93)	3.45 (1.85)
Dad education	Fathers' highest level of education	1 = <HS, 8 = PhD, MD, other advanced	3.99 (2.12)	3.37 (2.02)
Race measure[a]				
Black	Proportion of sample white/black	—	.82	.18
Controls[a]				
Prior achievement	Students' 10th grade math standardized scores	19–83	52.91 (9.21)	43.90 (8.23)
Parents' aspirations	Parents' educational aspirations for youth	1 = <HS, 7 = PhD, MD, other advanced	5.24 (1.23)	5.60 (1.32)
Two parent	Two parents or two guardians	1 = yes	.81	.53
Family size	How many people in student household	2 = 2 people, 9 = >8 people	4.42 (1.52)	4.91 (1.71)
Female	Student sex: female	1 = yes	.50	.48
Urban	School in urban area	1 = yes	.19	.48
Suburban	School in suburban area	1 = yes	.54	.42
Midwest	School in the Midwest	1 = yes	.30	.17
South	School in the South	1 = yes	.33	.61
West	School in the West	1 = yes	.17	.08

[a]Taken from base year.

Table 2. Parents' Occupational Classifications for This Study.

Professional	Blue Collar	Other
Manager/administrator	Craftsperson	Clerical
Teacher	Farmer	Sales
Professional	Homemaker	Proprietor/owner
	Laborer	No job
	Military	
	Operative	
	Protective services	
	Service	
	Technical	

collar. Similarly, sales can range from door-to-door salesperson to real estate agents who sell million-dollar listings. Given the ambiguity of these occupations, we include them as separate from professional and blue collar. Furthermore, the focus of this study is on examining differences between the less ambiguous measures of parents' occupation. Unambiguously blue-collar and professional occupations reflect a cleaner and more straightforward examination of how social class, measured as parents' occupation, predicts attainment.

We use a 14-category ordinal measure for family income and an 8-category ordinal measure of parents' educational attainment for each parent separately. The race measure reflects whether respondents report their race as black or white.

Controls. We control for covariates that potentially confound the relationship between social class and the outcomes (henceforward background factors). These factors include prior math achievement, parents' educational aspirations for their children, family structure, family size, students' gender, urbanicity, and region (see Table 1 for variable coding).

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

This study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Do black students receive fewer benefits from increases in mothers' or fathers' social class status in their college enrollment relative to white students?
2. Do black students receive fewer benefits from increases in mothers' or fathers' social class status in their educational attainment relative to white students?

To address research question 1, we use logistic regression to regress college enrollment on social class factors, race, and the social class–race interaction as such:

$$log\left[\frac{Pr\left(Enrollment_i=1\right)}{1-Pr\left(Enrollment_i=1\right)}\right] = \beta_0+\beta_1 SC_i+\beta_2 Black_i+\beta_3\left(SC_i * Black_i\right), \quad (1)$$

where the log odds of enrolling in college is a function of SC, which is a row vector of social class indicators measuring occupation, family income, and educational attainment for the *i*th child, being Black (versus white), and SC * Black is the interaction between social class indicators and race. This model estimates whether the association between social class indicators and youths' enrollment varies by race. We estimate two versions of equation 1, one using mothers' social class characteristics and another based on fathers' social class characteristics. Given our discussion above, we expect a negative β_3, indicating that black students have lower benefits to social class indicators than white students.

To address research question 2, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to regress youths' educational attainment on social class factors, race, and the social class-race interaction:

$$Attainment_i = \beta_0+\beta_1 SC_i+\beta_2 Black_i + \beta_3\left(SC_i * Black_i\right)+\varepsilon_i, \quad (2)$$

where attainment is a function of a row vector of the social class indicators (SC), race (Black), the interaction between social class indicators and race (SC * Black), and an individual error (ε_i). Equation 2 estimates whether the implications of the social class indicators for attainment vary by race. We estimate equation 2 separately for mothers' and

fathers' indicators of social class. We estimated all regression models predicting attainment using both ordered logit models and OLS and found similar results. Thus, we report OLS estimates because their interpretation is more straightforward.

There are three additional points worthy of note. First, we estimate two models for each research question. In model 1 we regress enrollment and attainment on social class factors, race, and the social class–race interactions. In model 2 we include the aforementioned background factors, which might relate to social class, race, and enrollment and attainment. Second, although we focus on mothers and fathers with professional occupations relative to their blue-collar counterparts, all models control for the "other" occupations category. Third, we use total family income because the ELS does not contain income of mothers and fathers separately. Given our focus on estimating the implications of mothers' and fathers' social class characteristics separately, we include family income in each model rather than estimate separate models for family income.

RESULTS

College Enrollment

Table 3 contains the main effects and interactions of race and social class for youths' college enrollment. We report both unstandardized logistic coefficients and odds ratios. The first main effect (model 1a, first row) shows that black students have 1.18 log odds and 3.24 greater odds of attending college two years after high school than whites net of student background factors. This finding is consistent with that of Kao and Thompson (2003), who found that family background accounts for blacks' disadvantage in educational attainment relative to whites. The next set of main effects (second to fourth rows) shows that white youth with professional mothers have greater odds of enrolling in college than those whose mothers have blue-collar occupations, and higher levels of family income and mothers' education are associated with increases in enrollment. Therefore, these findings suggest that greater social class status of mothers reflects greater odds of enrolling in college for white students. The next three rows (labeled "interactions") directly address research question 1. They show that blacks experience 13 percent lower odds of college enrollment for the same increases in family income as whites. Moreover, this pattern persists after controlling for background factors in model 2a. Therefore, these findings suggest that black students are not benefiting from increases in family income as much as white students.

The next panel contains findings for fathers' indicators of social class. Similar to analyses based on mothers' characteristics, black students have greater odds of college enrollment net of fathers' social class characteristics (first row for both models). Also, all indicators of social class are positively associated with enrollment for white students (second to fourth rows for models 1b and 2b). However, the interactions show that black students benefit less from increases in family income and from increases in fathers' educational attainment than white students (model 1b), even net of background factors (model 2b). For both models, black students experience about 10 percent lower odds of enrollment for similar increases in family income and fathers' educational level.

Educational Attainment

Table 4 contains findings for attainment. The interaction estimates in models 1a and 2a show that lower benefits to family income for black youth persists six years after the college enrollment measure, even net of background factors. Regarding fathers' characteristics, Model 1b shows that blacks benefit less from both family income and fathers' education. Controlling for background factors in model 2b shows that blacks benefit less from fathers' occupation and family income relative to whites, but the lower benefits from increases in fathers' education becomes nonsignificant. These models provide evidence that blacks receive lower benefits in attainment from social class indicators, particularly fathers' social class characteristics.

Although there might be problems in comparisons and interpretations of logistic coefficients for interactions between group dummies (i.e., measure of *black*) and other predictors (e.g., income) for enrollment in Table 3 (Allison 1999), Table 4 suggests that these problems might not be a major concern for the overall interpretation that blacks benefit less in enrollment and attainment from increases in social class. Table 4 provides evidence that the lower benefits for blacks are robust to different model specifications. Because the attainment outcome is ordinal, we estimated all regression models in Table 4 using both ordered logit and OLS and found similar results with one exception: ordered logit yields a significant coefficient for the interaction between fathers' occupation and race in model 1b. We report results on the basis of OLS in Table 4 because they are more conservative and have greater ease of interpretation.

Table 3. Logistic Coefficients and Odds Ratios for College Enrollment Two Years After High School: Race and Social Class Main Effects and Interactions.

	Mothers' Characteristics				Fathers' Characteristics			
Models	1a	Odds	2a	Odds	1b	Odds	2b	Odds
Race								
Black (reference: White)	1.175*** (.197)	3.24	1.353*** (.215)	3.87	1.059*** (.202)	2.88	1.287*** (.219)	3.62
Social Class Indicators								
Mom/Dad Professional (reference: Blue Collar)	.506*** (.068)	1.66	.462*** (.073)	1.59	.245*** (.069)	1.28	.180* (.073)	1.20
Family Income	.224*** (.014)	1.25	.164*** (.016)	1.18	.222*** (.014)	1.25	.164*** (.016)	1.18
Mom/Dad Education	.242*** (.017)	1.27	.173*** (.019)	1.19	.267*** (.016)	1.31	.198*** (.018)	1.22
Interactions								
Black × Mom/Dad Professional	−.190 (.140)		−.254 (.148)		−.088 (.148)		−.125 (.158)	
Black × Family Income	−.140*** (.025)	.87	−.118*** (.026)	.89	−.089*** (.024)	.92	−.079** (.025)	.92
Black × Mom/Dad Education	−.029 (.036)		.000 (.038)		−.122*** (.032)	.89	−.081* (.033)	.92
Constant	−2.063*** (.124)		−6.659*** (.245)		−1.999*** (.125)		−6.648*** (.246)	
χ^2 (*df*)	1,314 (11)		2,534 (21)		1,337 (11)		2,529 (21)	
Controls	No		Yes		No		Yes	

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. All models control for the other category for parents' occupation. Controls consist of 10th grade math test scores, parents' college aspirations, two-parent household, family size, school urbanicity, region, and youths' sex. Unweighted $N = 9{,}449$.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Table 4. Unstandardized Ordinary Least Squares Coefficients for Educational Attainment Eight Years After High School: Race and Social Class Main Effects and Interactions.

	Mothers' Characteristics		Fathers' Characteristics	
Model	1a	2a	1b	2b
Race				
Black (reference: White)	.593*** (.107)	.544*** (.099)	.414*** (.108)	.424*** (.101)
Social Class Indicators				
Mom/Dad Professional (reference: Blue Collar)	.237*** (.033)	.184*** (.030)	.170*** (.032)	.114* (.029)
Family Income	.127*** (.007)	.073*** (.007)	.115*** (.007)	.064*** (.007)
Mom/Dad Education	.130*** (.008)	.076*** (.007)	.142*** (.007)	.091*** (.007)
Interactions				
Black × Mom/Dad Professional	.033 (.072)	−.036 (.066)	−.139 (.075)	−.146* (.069)
Black × Family Income	−.087*** (.013)	−.059*** (.012)	−.047*** (.013)	−.034** (.012)
Black × Mom/Dad Education	−.021 (.018)	−.001 (.017)	−.047** (.016)	−.015 (.015)
Constant	2.046*** (.062)	−.354*** (.098)	2.145*** (.061)	−.274** (.098)
R^2	.15	.29	.15	.29
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. All models control for the other category for parents' occupation. Controls consist of 10th grade math test scores, parents' college aspirations, two-parent household, family size, school urbanicity, region, and youths' sex. Unweighted $N = 8{,}936$. Fathers' occupation interaction in model 1b is significant at the 5 percent level using ordered logit.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Social Class, Race, and Family Structure Interaction

One concern about the previous analyses is that family structure might obscure the "true" interactions of the results. Specifically, the interaction might depend on whether students are in two-parent households or not. Therefore, we report results by family structure in Table 5. The results show that previous findings do not vary by family structure for analyses based on fathers' social class characteristics. However, results for mothers' characteristics on youths' college enrollment varies by whether youths are in two-parent households. Whereas Table 3 shows little evidence of an interaction between mothers' occupation and race, Table 5 shows a negative interaction for mothers not in two-parent households. Blacks who do not live in two-parent households benefit less from mothers' occupation than whites.

Standardized Results

To compare estimates for each outcome, in Table 6 we show the proportion changes for results in Tables 3 and 5 and the standardized coefficients for Table 4. These estimates allow a comparison of how a change in one predictor is associated with a change in the outcome relative to other predictors in the model. The top panel of Table 6 contains linear probability models for college enrollment, which allow findings based on logistic regression in Table 3 to be interpreted as proportions. For example, model 1a shows that 15 percent more blacks enroll in college than whites net of background factors, and 8.6 percent more youth whose mothers have professional occupations attend college than those whose mothers hold blue-collar occupations (coefficients are 0.150 and 0.086, respectively). Regarding interactions, the estimates across all models show that blacks receive from 0.2 percent to 2.3 percent lower benefits from several social class indicators than whites. Although this might seem negligible, the difference between white youth at the opposite ends of the scale for family income ranges from nearly 34 percent (0.026 in models 2a and 2b × 13 categories for income) to 54 percent (0.042 in model 1a × 13). However, the advantage for black youth at the top of the scale for family income relative to those at the bottom of the scale ranges from only 13 percent (0.026 main effect − 0.016 interaction term in

Table 5. Logistic Coefficients and Odds Ratios for College Enrollment Two Years After High School for Mothers' Social Class Characteristics: Race and Social Class Main Effects and Interactions by Family Structure.

Models	Fewer Than Two Parents	Odds	Two Parents	Odds
Race				
Black (reference: White)	1.566*** (.320)	4.79	1.416*** (.348)	4.12
Social Class Indicators				
Mom Professional (reference: Blue Collar)	.578*** (.149)	1.78	.442*** (.084)	1.56
Family Income	.192*** (.029)	1.21	.163*** (.020)	1.18
Mom Education	.114** (.039)	1.12	.184*** (.021)	1.202
Interactions				
Black × Mom Professional	–.628** (.241)	.534	–.018 (.197)	
Black × Family Income	–.172*** (.043)	.842	–.119** (.040)	.89
Black × Mom Education	.075 (.063)		–.023 (.050)	
Constant	–6.651*** (.466)		–6.648*** (.290)	
χ^2 (*df*)	601/20		1,831/20	

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Models control for the other category for parents' occupation, 10th grade math test scores, parents' college aspirations, two-parent household, family size, school urbanicity, region, and youths' sex. Mothers' occupation three-way interaction is significant at the 10 percent level ($p = .057$). Unweighted $N = 2{,}168$ and 7,281 for fewer than two parents and two parents, respectively.
**$p < .01$ and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

model 2a × 13) to 38 percent (0.040 – 0.011 in model 1b × 13) percent. Similarly, model 2b shows that whereas whites with the most educated fathers enjoy an 18.4 percent advantage in college enrollment relative to those whose fathers have the least education (0.023 × 8 categories for education), this advantage for blacks is 16.8 percent ([0.023 – 0.002] × 8).

The second panel in Table 6 shows standardized coefficients for estimates predicting attainment. Given that 1 standard deviation in attainment for the full sample is 1.27 levels of attainment, a standardized coefficient of 0.10 translates to a 0.127 (1.27 × 0.10 standardized coefficient) increase in actual points on attainment, which is equivalent to slightly more than a quarter of the black-white gap in attainment. This panel shows that more than half of the positive standardized coefficients (12 of 16) for the attainment panel are above 0.10, which suggests that the magnitude of the estimated effect of most factors in the model are similar to at least 25 percent of the black disadvantage in educational attainment relative to whites. Regarding interactions, half of the negative estimates (3 of 6) are greater than 0.10. Thus, the lower benefits from social class for blacks are quite meaningful. For example, the lower benefits from family income for blacks in the first panel are *greater* than the benefits from family income for whites.

The final panel shows estimates for analysis of the link between social class and college enrollment by family structure shown in Table 5 converted from logistic coefficients into proportions. The negative occupation-race interaction for mothers has a greater magnitude than the negative income-race interaction. Table 6 suggests that testing for racial differences in the association between social class and postsecondary academic outcomes is worth considering when analyzing the intersection of race and class on attainment.

Visual Illustration of Results

To further illustrate the extent to which blacks receive fewer benefits from social class than whites, we graph predicted probabilities of college enrollment and the expected level of attainment in Figure 1 (on the basis of family income) and Figure 2 (by parents' education and occupation). The top panel of Figure 1 shows a dramatic increase in the predicted probability of college enrollment for white students as family income increases (gray line). Conversely, the predicted probability for black students does not increase as rapidly (black

Table 6. Proportion Changes (Enrollment) and Standardized Coefficients (Attainment) for Mothers' (Left Panel) and Fathers' (Right Panel) Social Class Characteristics.

	College Enrollment[a]			
	1a	2a	1b	2b
Race: Black	.150	.148	.111	.128
Social Class Indicators				
Professional	.086	.068	.034	.017
Family Income	.042	.026	.040	.026
Mom/Dad Education	.036	.019	.039	.023
Interactions				
Black × Professional	x	x	x	x
Black × Family Income	–.023	–.016	–.011	–.008
Black × Parents' Education	x	x	–.009	–.002
	Educational Attainment[b]			
	1a	2a	1b	2b
Race: Black	.180	.165	.125	.128
Social Class Indicators				
Professional	.090	.070	.063	.042
Family Income	.224	.128	.203	.113
Mom/Dad Education	.196	.114	.233	.151
Interactions				
Black × Professional	x	x	x	–.022
Black × Family Income	–.218	–.148	–.119	–.085
Black × Parents' Education	x	x	–.058	x
	College Enrollment[c]			
	Fewer Than Two Parents	Two Parents	1b	2b
Race: Black	.239	.154	—	—
Social Class Indicators				
Professional	.097	.063	—	—
Family Income	.034	.025	—	—
Mom/Dad Education	.014	.020	—	—
Interactions				
Black × Professional	–.106	x	—	—
Black × Family Income	–.030	–.015	—	—
Black * Parents' Education	x	x	—	—

Note: Coefficients are presented for significant estimates in Tables 3, 4, and 5. Nonsignificant estimates are denoted by "x."

[a]Ordinary least squares coefficients.

[b]Standardized coefficients.

[c]Ordinary least squares coefficients for mothers' characteristics only.

line); although black students at lower income levels have an advantage in college enrollment net of background factors, white students' enrollment converges with black enrollment at higher levels of income. This pattern is similar for both mothers' and fathers' social class characteristics. The bottom panel shows a dramatic increase in the expected attainment for white students as family income increases, while black students receive lower benefits from increases in family income. Although

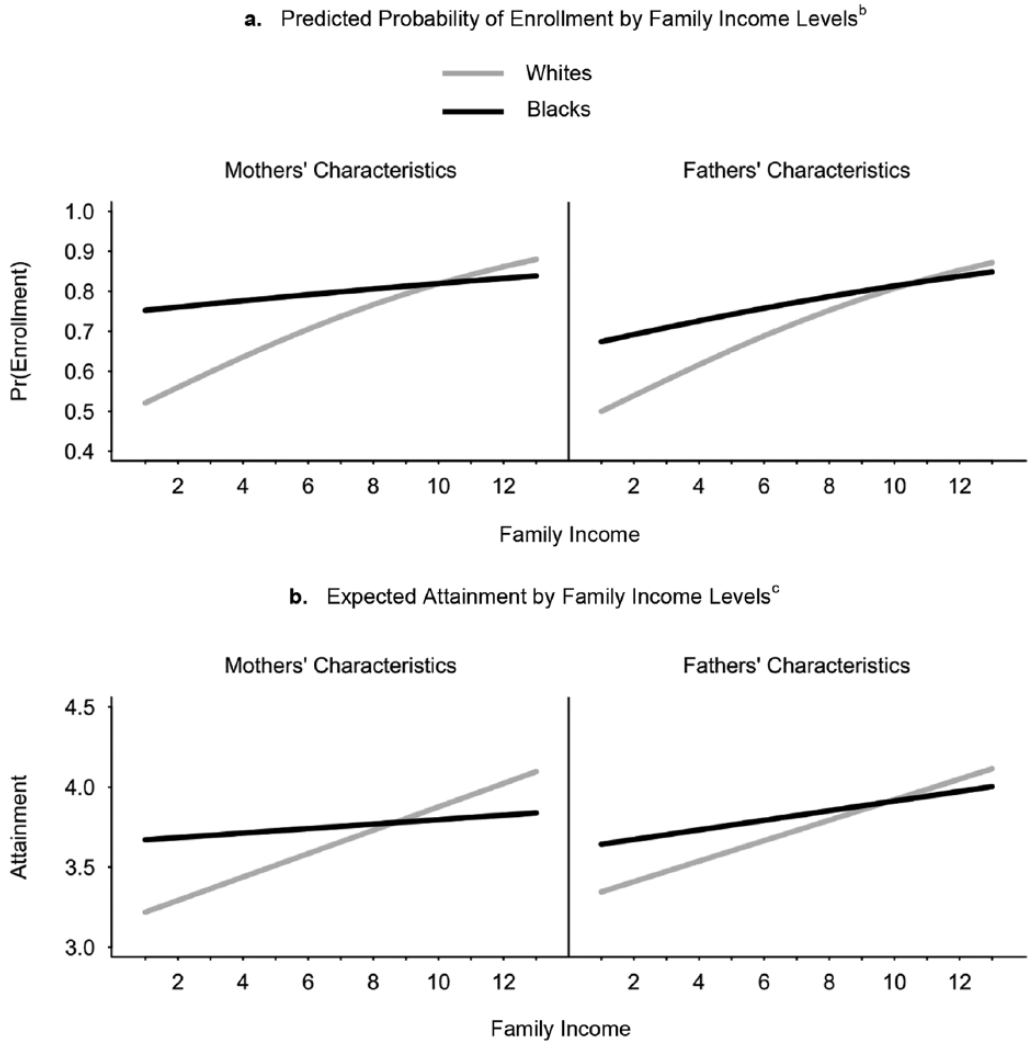

Figure 1. Racial Differences in Benefits from Family Income for College Enrollment and Attainment.[a]
[a]Nonsignificant covariates are not included in prediction, significant continuous covariates are held at means, and nominal covariates are as observed in the sample.
[b]Predictions are estimated using models 2a (mothers) and 2b (fathers) in Table 3.
[c]Predictions are estimated using models 2a and 2b in Table 4.

blacks have higher attainment net of background factors, the benefits from social class are significantly larger for whites, resulting in the convergence in attainment between whites and blacks as family income increases.

The top panel of Figure 2 shows the predicted probability of enrollment for whites and blacks on the basis of parents' level of education. The figure shows that the percentage point difference in college enrollment between youth whose mothers' highest level of education is high school completion versus a bachelor's degree is similar for whites (10.6) and blacks (10.1). However, the same comparison on the basis of fathers' education shows that the percentage difference in college enrollment between youth with high school educated fathers and college educated fathers is 12.9 for whites and 7.2 for blacks. White youth receive nearly twice the benefit in college enrollment from having a college educated father than blacks. The bottom panel shows that the difference in attainment between youth whose mothers have a blue-collar occupation and a professional occupation is similar for whites (0.18) and blacks (0.19). However, whereas whites

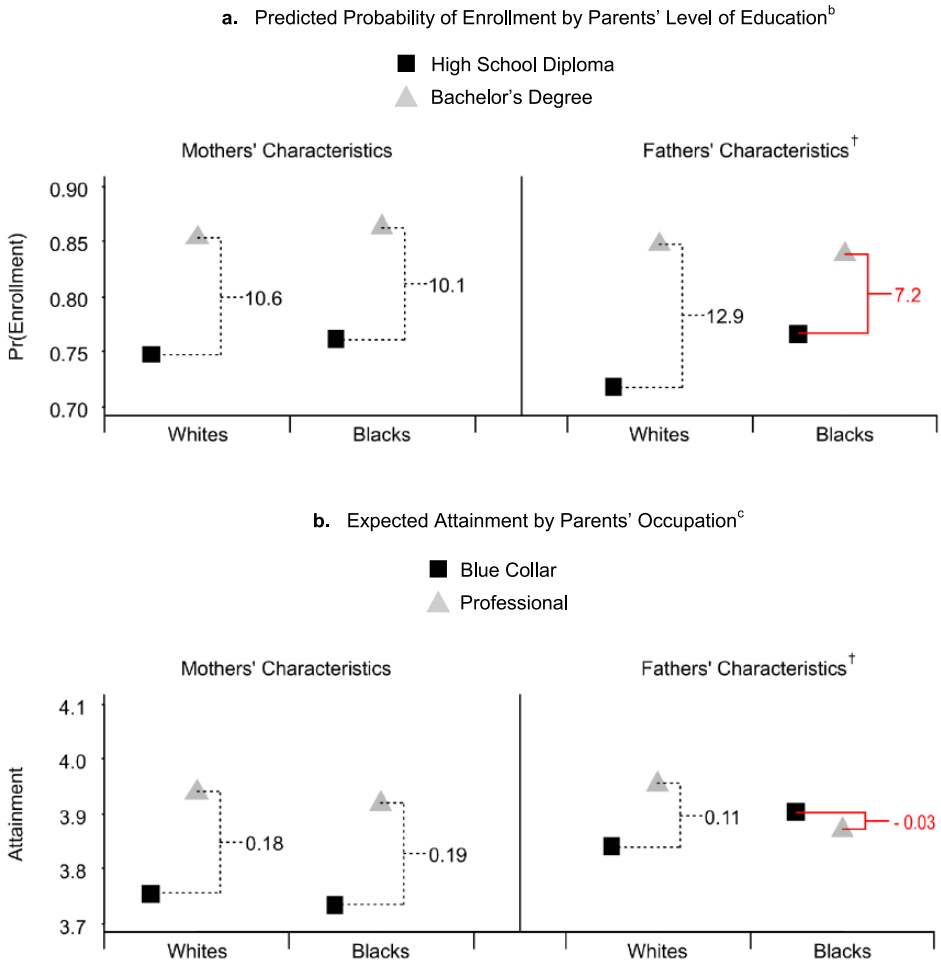

Figure 2. Racial Differences in Benefits from Parents' Education (Enrollment) and Occupation (Attainment).[a]

[a]Nonsignificant covariates are not included in prediction, significant continuous covariates are held at means, and nominal covariates are as observed in the sample. Numbers in figure denote percentage point increase in predicted probability associated with increase in parents' educational attainment.

[b]Predictions are estimated using models 2a (mothers) and 2b (fathers) in Table 3.

[c]Predictions are estimated using models 2a and 2b in Table 4.

[†]Racial differences in benefits from fathers' characteristics are statistically significant at the .05 level.

experience an increase in attainment from having fathers with professional rather than blue-collar occupations, for black youth having professional fathers is associated with lower attainment relative to having fathers with blue collar occupations. These findings suggest that blacks with higher social class benefit from their class status less than whites with higher social class. Last, Figure 3 illustrates that among youth not in two-parent households, increases in mothers' occupational prestige is associated with increases in enrollment for whites but a slight decrease for blacks.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine whether black students receive fewer benefits in college enrollment and educational attainment from increases in social class status than white students using three common indicators of social class:

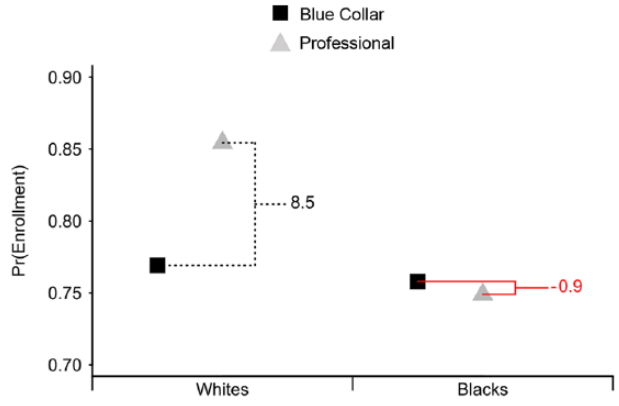

Figure 3. Racial Differences in Percentage Increase in Predicted Probability of Enrollment Associated with Parents' Occupation for Mothers who are not in Two-Parent Households.
Note: Predictions are estimated using the model for fewer than two parents in Table 5. Nonsignificant covariates are not included in prediction, significant continuous covariates are held at means, and nominal covariates are as observed in the sample.

parents' occupation, family income, and parents' level of education. We find evidence of lower benefits from social class for blacks relative to whites for both outcomes. Below we highlight three major results from this study.

First, blacks receive fewer benefits from family income than whites. This finding holds for both enrollment and attainment. Second, parents' gender plays a role in the racial differences in the link between social class and both outcomes. Specifically, in addition to benefiting less from family income, black youth appear to benefit less from fathers' level of education (in enrollment) and fathers' occupational prestige (in attainment). Interestingly, we find that black students do not benefit from fathers' occupational prestige on attainment. That is, not only do black students experience lower benefits from fathers' occupational prestige than whites, those with professional fathers have similar (or perhaps lower) attainment as blacks with blue collar fathers. Third, we find evidence of a three-way interaction with family structure for mothers (among race, social class, and family structure); among youth not in two-parent households, blacks benefit less than whites from mothers' occupational prestige on enrollment. This finding is particularly meaningful because it applies to half of the population of black youth (U.S. Census Bureau 2016).

This study makes important contributions to social stratification theories of educational attainment. The benefits of being in a higher social class status do not apply equally across racial groups. Overlooking this pattern can lead to erroneous conclusions about the role of social class in ameliorating racial differences in college enrollment and educational attainment. Our results contribute to a broader discussion on the ways in which social class and race work together to shape life chances (Pattillo 1999; Thomas 1993; Wilson 1978, 2011).

Implications for Major Forms of Capital

The findings of this study suggest that the major forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural) should be reassessed in the context of racialized social processes. Access to economic capital is not the same across racial groups, because of significant wealth gaps. The 2009 median wealth of white households ($113,149) was 20 times higher than for black households ($5,677) (Kochhar, Fry, and Taylor 2011); black households have a nickel for every dollar of wealth typical for white households. Black families face a wealth ceiling relative to white households (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Shapiro 2003). Darity et al. (2018) found that the median household net worth for household heads with postcollege degrees is $455,212 for whites and $141,115 for blacks. Moreover, blacks with postcollege degrees have wealth values more similar to whites with less than a college degree than to whites with the same level of education. Racial discrimination faced by black parents might also compromise their access to economic capital. Audit studies consistently find that blacks are far less likely to receive job interviews than whites, even

with the same résumé (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager 2003). Thus, the lack of wealth and experiences of discrimination might explain why black youth benefit less from their parents' social class; the benefits of social class are constrained for black parents.

Regarding social capital, Seidel, Polzer, and Stewart (2000) found that a lack of social ties partially explains the racial gap in salary increases between blacks and whites. Although social ties might reflect an indirect influence of discrimination, the authors also identified direct interpersonal discrimination as a possible mechanism for this salary gap. Although we are unaware of studies directly testing the interaction between social ties and race on salary increases, there is evidence that affluent, well-educated blacks perceive negative consequences of discrimination more than their less advantaged counterparts (Cose 1993; Hochschild 1995). Perhaps perceptions of discrimination are directly linked to experiences with discrimination that compromise the extent to which the capital black parents possess can help their children.

Finally, studies find that black students are disproportionately tracked into lower level courses, regardless of social class (Lewis and Diamond 2015; Tyson 2011). Thus, the benefits of cultural capital should be understood in the context of racialized tracking. Studies find that school tracking and academic outcomes leading to tracking are linked to cultural capital (Barg 2015; Jaeger and Mollegaard 2017). Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) found that black students receive lower benefits on academic achievement from cultural capital and speculated that this is due to the "micropolitical evaluative processes at the school and classroom levels." These studies provide evidence that black students benefit less from cultural capital than whites, which could explain why they receive fewer benefits from social class on attainment.

Implications for Understanding Racial Inequality

Although the focus of this study is on social class and racial interactions for educational attainment, these findings have broader implications for understanding race in education and downward social mobility for blacks. If middle-class socioeconomic characteristics translate into lower benefits on life-chance outcomes for blacks relative to whites, then patterns in this study might highlight a means by which racial inequality in socioeconomic status in general is perpetuated. Although we do not directly test whether race is more important than social class in explaining racial differences in attainment, this study reinforces the notion that race still matters in important ways and has consequences for black children (Conley and Yeung 2005; Wilson 2011). This is consistent with studies finding that middle-class blacks benefit less than whites from their social class position (Anderson and Shapiro 1996; Goldsmith et al. 2006; Pattillo 1999; Thomas 1993). As Pattillo (1999) noted, middle-class blacks are less affluent; live in more dangerous, socioeconomically heterogeneous, and racially segregated neighborhoods; have less wealth; and are embedded in family contexts and other social networks that experience more disadvantages and challenges than middle-class whites.

The findings of this study are consistent with research suggesting that differences in downward mobility between racial groups are driven largely by differences between black and white men (Chetty et al. 2018), which provides a nuanced picture for understanding how black youth receive lower attainment benefits from social class. Middle- and upper-class black men appear to have unique experiences that prevent them from conferring benefits of their social class status to their children. However, our findings are also consistent with research around weathering and job strain for single black mothers (Collins et al. 2004; Geronimus 1996; Oths et al. 2001). Despite the successes of single black mothers with greater occupational prestige, they appear to be unable to transmit this success to benefits for children's attainment. This study recognizes the unique challenges single black mothers face and burdens they hold that previous analysis overlooks (Collins 2005).

Consistent with intersectionality theory, this study suggests that researchers should examine how the advantages or disadvantages of particular categories (e.g., white women, black men) might differ by context. This study shows that, in general, black youth benefit less from increases in fathers' social class status but benefit less from mothers when in single-parent households. Although partial and double tokenism might be relevant for describing marginalization in the labor market, further theorization is necessary to appropriately explain marginalization in the transmission of educational attainment. Finally, our findings partially explain the paradox of blacks' greater reverence toward education but lower achievement (Mickelson 1990); blacks are not receiving full benefits from higher values on measures that typically serve as academic resources for youth.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several ways in which future research could address some limitations of this study. First, future studies should repeat our analysis using separate measures of income for mothers and fathers. Second, researchers should examine whether differences in the benefits to social class on enrollment and attainment exist between whites and other racial groups. Third, future studies should use other methods to provide more theoretical insight into the interpersonal dynamics and aspects of the parent-child relationship that might serve as mechanisms to explain the findings from this study (Hancock 2007), which our use of quantitative data does not allow. Fourth, studies should directly test whether aforementioned factors such as the racial wealth gap or racial discrimination (e.g., racialized tracking, parents' labor market experiences) explain why race moderates social class with regard to the educational attainment of black students. The public ELS lacks data on these factors. Researchers should also examine factors not discussed in this study, such as parenting styles, which differ by race (Robinson and Harris 2014). Finally, researchers should consider some of the controls in this study as potential mechanisms. For example, parental aspirations might shape family investment in children's education differently depending on students' social class status and race.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Guang Guo, Emily Persons, and Jessi Streib for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. We also thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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