UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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Climbing the Social Ladder: Social Status and Status-Related Aspirations on College Students' Goal Engagement and Causal Beliefs About Mobility

DISSERTATION

To be submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Psychological Science

by

Jennica S. Power

Dissertation Committee:
Distinguished Professor Jutta Heckhausen, Chair
Professor Richard Arum
Professor Candice Odgers

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the Lip Gallaghers out there. A heartfelt thank you to the writers of *Shameless*, who brought the embodiment of status-based uncertainty to life through his character.

Lip's skepticism about his chances of climbing the social ladder by going to college—
"*I'm not afraid of hard work. I just don't see the point.*"

Lip's critiques of meritocratic ideologies—
"*The ghetto girl thinks she can live the American dream, huh*?" and "*Every Libertarian was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple."*

Lip's struggles with belonging during his pursuit into higher education—
"*Sometimes it feels like I'm pretending to be someone I'm not*" and "*You can't change who you are.*"

His character has profoundly inspired the following body of work.

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In lieu of my dissertation topic:

To past me – You will do it.
To current me – You did it, I am so very proud of you.
To future me – You can slow down now.

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Climbing the Social Ladder: Social Status and Status-Related Aspirations on College Students' Goal Engagement and Causal Beliefs About Mobility

by

Jennica S. Power

Doctor of Philosophy in Psychological Science

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Distinguished Professor Jutta Heckhausen, Chair

In recent years, social status has been re-conceptualized as a unique and dynamic social identity that shapes motivational processes, guiding pursuits of status-related goals. Therefore, social status is not a static social positioning, but instead a developing construct that informs cognitions and behaviors, particularly during status transitions. This dissertation, drawing from the Status-Based Identity Framework, was anchored within the context of young adults striving to achieve social mobility by attending college. Young adulthood is a distinguished developmental phase marked by heightened capacities for goal striving, representing a period where individuals are tasked with finding their own place on the social ladder. Status-related identities including a student's past, current, and aspired future social statuses can inform this pursuit. Thus, the following dissertation attempted to unravel the associations among status identities and status-related goals. The first study examined how past and current social statuses, as well as connections to status-based social groups, were associated with educational goal pursuits and commitment toward their education. The second study sought to understand how social status informed young adults' beliefs about what causes social status attainment, particularly regarding the endorsement of meritocratic belief systems and how they are associated with personal aspirations for attaining an elevated social status. The final study examined

how status aspirations are associated with changes in educational goal strivings, and whether more realistic compared to overambitious aspirations helped students remain properly engaged with their educational goals. Moreover, Study 3 examined whether stronger connections to peers at college helped students from lower social statuses remain engaged with their educational goals. Together, these three studies provide a better understanding of how young people's social mobility aspirations develop and inform status-related goal pursuits during critical life-course transitions.

Keywords: Status transitions; mobility aspirations; social status; mobility beliefs; status-based identity

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In recent years, the issue of social inequality in the United States has become increasingly relevant, prompting researchers to investigate how an individual's social status–comprised of educational attainment, job prestige, and wealth–shapes cognitions and motivation toward achieving social mobility. Perceiving social mobility as achievable is critical for maintaining a healthy democracy in the United States (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), as it promotes motivation to pursue status-related goals, including goals relevant to achieving higher education as a means to climb the social ladder (Browman et al., 2018; Browman et al., 2017; Destin, 2019; Kay et al., 2016).

Rooted in the Status-Based Identity Framework (Destin et al., 2017), upward social mobility is intertwined with personal identity formation. Perceptions about social status and social mobility affect behaviors related to engaging with status-based aspirations as they pertain to an individual's aspired future self (Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Destin, 2020). These perceptions are influenced by a collection of sources associated with social status, including an individual's past socioeconomic standing, their social interactions during status transitions, and goals associated with achieving social mobility.

Young adulthood is a unique developmental period where individuals begin to transition away from identifying with their family-of-origin's social status and are tasked with forging their own standings in society. Aspirations for an individual's future social status are mutually shaped by their past social status contexts and a desire to achieve independence. The social status context in which young adults grow up can shape their cognitions and behaviors associated with striving for their own position on the ladder, where experiences during pursuits for upward mobility can affect whether they remain

aligned with these goals. For example, the social status context individuals are embedded in until young adulthood largely informs their decisions about attending college as a means for climbing the social ladder (Black & Sufi, 2002; Cozzolino et al., 2018), and social identities formed within college largely impact whether motivation is sustained while striving toward these goals (Thibodeau, 2010; Diekman et al., 2020; Destin et al., 2017).

For many young adults born into lower social status contexts, earning a college degree is perceived to be a sure way to enter more prestigious careers and ultimately achieve a higher social standing in society. To actualize their status attainment goals, students pursuing college must be appropriately engaged in behaviors that align with their aspired future status self. Individuals act in accordance with their educational goals when these identities are salient, accessible, and relevant to their current self (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Destin et al., 2012; Oyserman et al., 2011; Oyserman et al., 2006; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

However, recent work finds that the pursuit of upward social mobility can destabilize a cohesive sense of identity due to the complexities of moving away from a past status identity into a new one in order to pursue a future aspired self (Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Destin et al., 2017). These changes associated with status transitions can elicit consequences for those from lower social status backgrounds, including a diminished sense of personal agency, maladaptive motivation, and poorer psychological health.

For instance, those from lower status backgrounds often set lower status-related goals for themselves due to feeling less control over climbing the social ladder (Laurin et al., 2019; Laurin & Engstrom, 2020; Kraus et al., 2009; Mijs et al., 2022; McCoy et al., 2013). Browman and colleagues (2019) review empirical work from economists and social

psychologists linking how facing inequalities growing up situates individuals to form beliefs that contrast with possible selves related to achieving a higher status in society (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2013). Similarly, expectancy-value models suggest that individuals lower their status-related goals because of uncertainties about their possibilities for climbing the ladder. These uncertainties can result in lower personal expectations or a devaluation of the positive implications that achieving higher status could have on their lives (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

For example, prior studies show that high school-aged children who faced inequalities engaged less in academic goals and experienced higher dropout rates due to signals that social mobility is out of their personal reach (Kearney & Levine, 2014). However, less is known about how past, current, and future possible status-based identities mutually influence engagement with status-related goals for individuals who have managed to persist through these inequalities by enrolling in college.

Despite efforts to reduce social inequalities, those born in the bottom tiers of the social status ladder face tremendous barriers that undermine their chances of acquiring a status near the top. In the face of this reality, individuals in the United States remain adamant that the "American Dream" is alive and well, believing that anyone–regardless of their starting position on the ladder–can achieve their aspired social statuses (Kraus & Tan, 2015). This belief in the attainability of upward mobility through effort and persistence is embedded in the American ethos, especially among those who have already achieved higher social status.

A significant amount of literature suggests that facing inequalities weakens beliefs about social mobility (Koo et al., 2023; Kraus et al., 2012; Kraus & Tran, 2015; Piff et al.,

2011; Davidai & Gilovich, 2018), particularly regarding academically-relevant identities (Browman et al., 2019; Browman et al., 2017; Destin, 2019; Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Kay et al., 2016). Those who have achieved higher statuses in society tend to endorse stronger meritocratic beliefs, which help youth remain engaged with their status-related goal pursuits. For example, these beliefs affect both educational engagement (Kay et al., 2016) and career-related engagement (Shane & Heckhausen, 2016; Shane et al., 2012).

Although most studies examine youth's beliefs about the chances of climbing the social ladder for others in society, less work has evaluated subjective perceptions of beliefs regarding oneself. Some work supports the notion that personal merit-based beliefs are more important for educational goal pursuits (Shane & Heckhausen, 2017) compared to career-related pursuits (Kay et al., 2016). However, the underlying process for how these beliefs change as individuals climb the social ladder is not well understood. Thus, while the majority of studies related to this topic focus on high school-aged youth and adults who have already established their place in society, less attention has been paid to young adults who are in the process of climbing the social ladder–particularly those from more humble beginnings.

Together, these insights underscore the importance of understanding how social status identities and beliefs about social mobility shape the educational and status-related goals of young adults, particularly during critical life-course transitions.

The Current Dissertation

This prior work collectively demonstrates how past socioeconomic contexts and aspired status-based identities inform cognitions about social mobility and status-relevant behaviors toward engagement with social mobility goals. Thus, the current dissertation

examined how college students' social status identities were associated with engagement with, and commitment to educational goals. Furthermore, how social status shaped beliefs about factors affecting their chances to ascend the social ladder across the first year of college was investigated. Drawing upon the Status-Based Identity Framework (Destin et al., 2017), this dissertation aimed to dissect the role of past, current, and aspired status-based identities on beliefs regarding status attainment and engagement with status-oriented goals. The following studies provide insights into these dynamics within the context of striving for education goals among university students.

The first study examined how past and current social statuses, along with connections to status-based social groups, are associated with students' pursuits of college education as a means for status-enhancement, and their commitment to their educational goals while in college. The second study examined how past, current, and aspired social-status identities were associated with causal beliefs about social mobility for oneself versus people in general, as well as whether these causal beliefs are associated with changes in status aspirations across the college years. The third study of this dissertation examined changes in social mobility aspirations as students progress through college, focusing on how this development influences and is influenced by effective educational goal engagement and motivational strivings. Additionally, study three examined whether stronger relations to current status-based social groups (i.e., peers at college) helped students from lower social statuses remain committed to their educational goal pursuits. The following sections include a more extensive review of the theoretical background and relevant literature.

Literature Review and Theoretical Orientations

Pursuing Education as a Means for Social Mobility

Social mobility, defined as an individual's ability to move up or down the social status ladder over time relative to their own (i.e., intragenerational mobility) or from their family's social status (i.e., intergenerational mobility), is a cornerstone of the American Dream (Corak, 2013; Adler, 2000). It is widely regarded as an indicator of a healthy society, reflecting the principle of equal opportunities to make this climb (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). However, the ability to achieve upward intergenerational mobility in the United States has been declining over the past few decades. Factors such as heightened income inequality, lack of access to education and healthcare, and discrimination based on race, gender, and/or socioeconomic status have impeded equal opportunities to make this climb (Kraus et al., 2015; Kraus et al., 2012; Corak, 2013). Even so, achieving a higher status in life is often a concrete goal for those born into lower socioeconomic statuses (Jury et al., 2018; Shane et al., 2013). For these individuals, achieving a higher social status is viewed as a measure of personal success and a pathway to better economic, social, and health opportunities. As a result, individuals from lower statuses often set highly ambitious goals to elevate their social standing, despite their awareness that real systemic barriers often impede on their chances (Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Kraus, 2015).

For many, earning a college degree is perceived as a primary means of climbing the social ladder. Higher education and attaining a high-paying job are considered key avenues for reaching elevated social statuses (Adler, 2000; Haven & Smeeding, 2006; Broekemier, 2002). This perspective is particularly pronounced among college students from lower-income families who see academic success as a way to enhance their economic prospects and land more prestigious jobs post-graduation. Students who are motivated to achieve a

higher status by means of earning a college degree are likely to invest more resources into the pursuit of their educational goals. For example, prior work has shown that setting higher social mobility goals led to better educational outcomes, such as greater academic goal engagement and continual persistence toward academic goals (Shane & Heckhausen, 2013; Phinney et al., 2006). Thus, the value placed on status enhancement has implications on engagement with status-related goals.

Growing up in lower status contexts often position youth to devalue the importance of achieving academically and can dampen expectations for personal success for climbing the social ladder (Eccles et al., 2004; Gao & Eccles, 2020). This has consequences for enrollment into college, lending to the enrollment gap seen across socioeconomic statuses (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009). However, how social status continues to inform beliefs about social mobility and personal engagement with education for students from lower statuses who enroll in college is important to understand.

Identity-Related Processes and Their Implications for Social Mobility

Social Class as a Salient Social Identity

According to Social Identity Theory, "identity" is conceptualized as the identification with a specific "social category" within the context of our past, current, and future aspired identities (Tajfel, 1982). Therefore, *social status* identity refers to an individual's identification, connection, and membership with their social status–whether that is to a past, current, or aspired social status group. Status-based identities shape personal attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. In this way, an individual's social status background can be considered a part of their culture (Snibbe & Markus, 2005).

Individuals have a plethora of varying identities, where some are considered more

salient–or more important to an individual's sense of self– than others. While previous research has found that social status identity is a central aspect of an individual's self-concept, the degree to which individuals identify with their social status of origin may depend on the individual. For example, the centrality of an identity or the connection to a desired identity can guide behaviors and motivation to act in accordance with that identity (Oyserman & James, 2011; Oyserman, 2015; Oyserman, 2013). The more meaning individuals ascribe to the importance of their identity, the more likely these identities are to impact their individual behaviors. That is because people are motivated to engage in behaviors that are more in line with who they are and who they want to be (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; 1994). Stryker and colleagues posit that the salience of any given identity can serve as the causal factor for the commitment to certain behaviors over other behaviors. Therefore, it seems that varying degrees of salience to an individual's personal social status as an identity can elicit differences in their motivation for striving for upward mobility. Additionally, whether status-based identities remain motivating depends on the construction of a status-based identity. The following sections review identity-based motivation theories.

Identity-Based Motivation Theory (IBM)

Identity-Based Motivation Theory signifies that students are motivated to reduce social identity discrepancies between who they are and who they want to be in order to adapt to the novelty of the college environment (Oyserman; 2013; Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman & Lewis, 2017; Oyserman et al., 2007; Oyserman, 2019). When students encounter obstacles that challenge their college student identity (e.g., poorer academic performances, less social belonging), these students internalize these

difficulties, ultimately challenging their personal identities related to their aspired academic selves. This can result in self-doubt due to the salience of their college student identity. However, when students understand that they have agency over developing their college student identities–that they are adaptable and congruent with their learning environments–students heed challenges as learning opportunities (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). As such, reducing student identity discrepancies and therefore promoting healthy student integration derives from the student's inherent capacity to control their learning opportunities. One way these discrepancies are reduced is when students acclimate into their environments through group-based identifications as a means of fitting into their new social identities that are congruent with who they want to be (Oyserman, 2007; 2013; Oyserman & Lewis, 2017; Oyserman et al., 2017). This premise is investigated in an educational context where students must be agentic in reducing discrepancies between their social identities and their aspired student identities.

Experimental studies have shown how cultivating a stronger sense of belonging leads to greater identity-congruence between students and their institutions, and the positive implications this has on student psychological health. Intervention efforts have attempted to artificially reduce social identity discrepancies for underrepresented students by changing the perception of the college campus's commitment toward these types of student's success. For example, Sladek and colleagues (2020) found that following a stress induced task, psychosocial stress and physiological stress (i.e., salivary cortisol levels) were both reduced for underrepresented Latino students who viewed a campus video highlighting the university's commitment to fostering inclusivity and promoting diversity compared to students who watched an ordinary campus tour video. Additionally,

participation in collectivistic learning environments that fostered group belongingness has been shown to impact whether students feel their identities fit within their school environment (Oyserman et al., 2015).Therefore, social identities often are created in terms of personal social relationships and feelings of fit within the institution (Oyserman & James, 2008; 2011). Although students from lower status backgrounds have high educational goals (Oyserman et al., 2007; Kao & Thompson, 2003)–contrary to prior work suggesting that the lack of exposure to those of higher social statuses (i.e., more educated) reduces their aspirations (Browman, 2019)–whether they bring their aspired status-based selves to fruition by achieving social mobility may depend on their relationships with status-based social groups. These social groups have the potential to promote identity-congruency when navigating their educational pursuits.

Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT)

Wigfield and Eccles' Situation Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT) provides a framework to understand how students' expectations for their educational pursuits–such as their goals and beliefs about what they can realistically achieve–and the value they place on those goals (i.e., why they want to achieve them) mutually influence academic behaviors and cognitions that help them reach their goals (Wigfield & Eccles, 2020). Students can derive value from four sources: attainment, intrinsic, utility, and cost. Attainment value, or the value students place on education as a means to achieve higher status, is crucial for maintaining identity congruence. This value influences their goal-oriented behaviors and thoughts about climbing the social ladder.

Attainment values are closely linked to a student's self-concept and identity, representing values that are personally significant for their sense of self. Empirical

research on attainment value, often conducted in college classrooms, reveal that the more value students placed on achievement, the more it contributed to forming a strong student identity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2020). Therefore, the greater the importance a student places on academic success to affirm their aspired status identities, the more likely they are to value attaining their educational goals. Consequently, students who see their education as vital to their identity are more likely to maintain positive beliefs in their ability to achieve their aspired status-based selves. For instance, a higher value placed on educational attainment is positively associated with students' beliefs in their learning abilities (von Keyserlingk et al., 2022). For students from lower status backgrounds, valuing education as congruent with their aspired status can significantly impact their beliefs in their ability to achieve upward mobility.

The following section will discuss the framework used to investigate social status as a unique social identity, highlighting the role of past, current, and future social statuses in shaping student motivation and cognition.

The Status-Based Identity Theoretical Framework

The Status-Based Identity Framework serves as the theoretical framework of this dissertation. It is a newer framework conceptualized by Destin and colleagues (2017) to understand how subjective experiences regarding an individual's status-based identity can either serve to undermine or promote identity-congruent behaviors. When subjective experiences evoke non-identity congruence, this results in "status-based uncertainty." Status-based uncertainty has negative implications on mental health and well-being (Destin et al., 2017; Destin, 2019), and is often felt when students experience changes in their social statuses–such as when students attend college to strive to attain upward social

mobility. These subjective experiences include not feeling like a salient member of a past status-based social group and not feeling like a salient member of a current status-based social group. This framework explains why students from lower social statuses are more susceptible to feeling less belonging to their institutions as well as to their prior status-related social groups from back home, including friends and family.

This framework takes a social-cognitive perspective, which suggests that social status is closely integrated with an individual's sense of self and influences behaviors and cognitions within contexts. Additionally, this framework is useful for understanding how cultivating strong feelings of in-group belonging to others within new status-based groups (e.g., peers and faculty within the college environment) is necessary for developing a strong identity-congruent self. First, a brief overview of the framework's key tenets are discussed. Next, the discussion focuses on explaining how personal connections to an individual's social status as well as in-group belonging within their institution serve as specific social identity processes. These processes can affect educational goal strivings, ultimately impacting their aspirations for achieving a higher social status in their future.

Although social mobility is used as a tool to reduce inequalities and is largely studied as it relates to the closing achievement gap in higher education, attaining upward mobility often evokes a destabilization of an individual's sense of self as it relates to a personal social class identity. This destabilization often leads to feelings of "otherness" or less belonging to new social class environments because of a developing disconnect between the student and their old relational ties. For example, a student who comes from a lower social status background may have strong connections to their family and community and may fear that pursuing upward mobility will lead to a loss of those

connections. This can result in feelings of guilt or a disconnection from their cultural roots. On the other hand, a student who comes from a higher social status background may feel pressure to maintain their status. Therefore, these students may feel more motivated to maintain mobility as it is congruent with their identity and societal expectations.

These feelings of disconnect and "otherness" can have negative impacts on academic achievement, psychological well-being, motivation, and social relationships (Strayhorn et al., 2021). This framework suggests that when individuals experience this sense of "otherness," it can result in a lack of motivation.

The status-based identity framework connects prior research on social status and is largely informed by other theoretical frameworks, such as IBM theory. A key premise of these frameworks is that subjective social status factors can produce a disequilibrium–or incongruence–between the student and their college environment, causing changes in behaviors and motivations conducive with attaining upward mobility. Consequently, this may have a negative impact toward students from lower social statuses in regards to their mobility aspirations as a future possible identity. Empirical findings validate this framework's tenet that challenges traditional assumptions that attaining upward mobility always leads to positive psychological outcomes. For example, one study found both groups of individuals who experienced downward and upward mobility report more negative depressive symptoms and academic distress than those who remained within their original social status (Kim et al., 2023).

This framework highlights the importance of considering individuals' subjective experiences and cultural backgrounds when examining their motivations for pursuing upward mobility. Overall, the status-based identity framework provides a valuable lens

through which researchers can work to understand the complex interplay between past and current social statuses and the pursuit of attaining a higher status as a possible future identity. Further research is needed to explore the nuanced ways in which status-based identity conflicts can impact motivation and behaviors for achieving upward mobility. The next section will explains how the current dissertation utilized status-based identity from Destin et al. (2017)'s framework to examine these questions (see Figure 1).

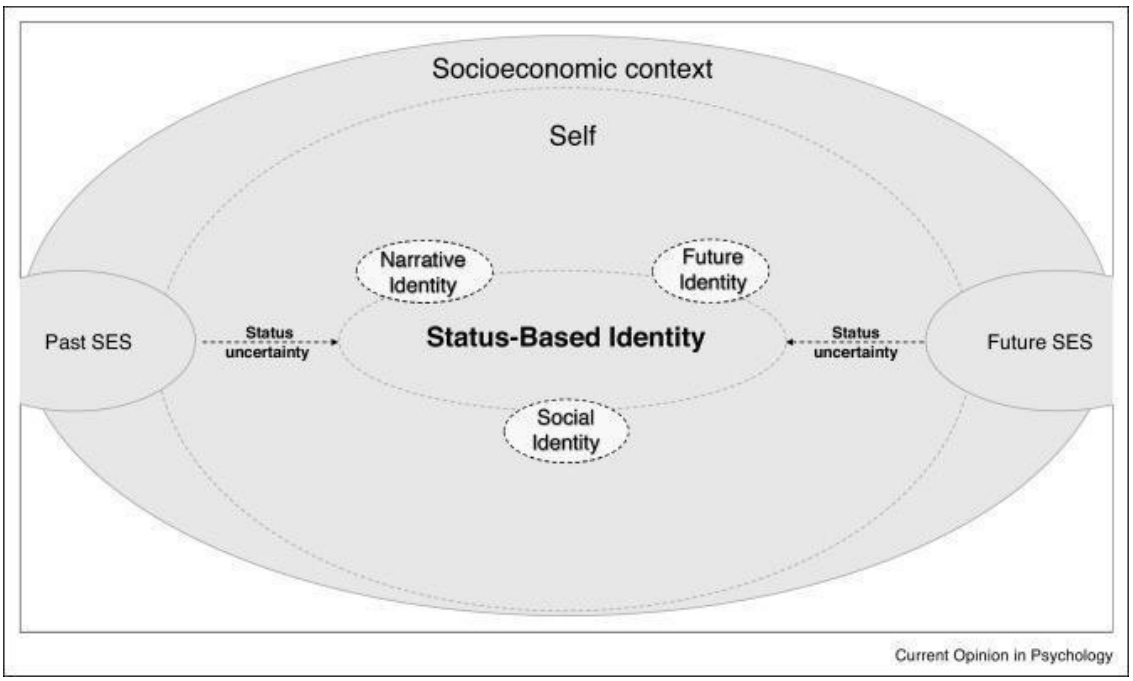

Figure 1. Status-Based Identity Theoretical Framework By Destin et al., (2017)

A student's social status of origin as well as their aspired social status identities can have implications on their narratives about their own chances of achieving upward mobility. Drawing upon various research regarding how individuals construct personal narratives about their lives and their capabilities (McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McClean, 2013), Destin and colleagues postulate that social statuses can affect personal

narratives about various social status-related experiences, including the process of attaining mobility. Personal narratives regarding social statuses largely inform beliefs about upward mobility and can therefore drive behaviors that are conducive with those beliefs (Browman, 2019). This would be evident over time if students continued to endorse more meritocratic beliefs about upward mobility, therefore perceiving greater control over their educational outcomes (Shane & Heckhausen, 2013).

Additionally, the degree of membership to status-related groups from the past and the present can change persistence intentions if these memberships are conflicting to their aspired status-based selves. For example, if students from lower statuses feel less connected to their friends and family from back home, this can have negative implications for their motivation for achieving upward mobility as it may evoke a feeling of otherness (Destin & Debrosse, 2019; McCoy et al., 2013). At the same time, feeling less belonging to a student's institution may result in the questioning of their status-based identities. Perhaps for students from lower status backgrounds, a greater feeling of in-group belonging to either status-based group can protect these students from disengaging with their aspired status-based goals.

Past and Aspired Social Statuses Inform Perceptions on Status-Based Social Group Membership and Affiliations. Social identities are typically formed by interactions with others that produce feelings of in-group membership and thus a strong sense of belonging, or out-group membership and no sense of belonging. Status-based social identities, therefore, are constructed within contexts where an individual's status identity is relevant and interpretations of an individual's status can contribute to the development of their current social identities (Destin et al., 2017; Spears, 2011).

Membership to status-related groups can effectively determine personal beliefs about possible future identities associated with their social status (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Oyserman et al., 2011). For example, an individual's past social status can inform goals about what they aspire for their future selves when it comes to a future social status. Individuals, particularly individuals from lower social class backgrounds (i.e., low-income families; first-generation students) are motivated to attend college in order to attain a higher status than their parents to afford them better opportunities (i.e., intergenerational upward mobility). However, the degree to which a student feels a strong connection to their social status of origin as part of their identity may produce consequences for these aspirations. Prior research has shown students from lower statuses tend to de-value the importance of their social statuses to their personal identities compared to higher-status students (Aries & Seider, 2007). Therefore, it is important to understand whether those with a greater degree of connection to their social status as an identity can elicit differences in striving toward status-based goals.

Understanding a student's sense of belonging to their institution as well as a sense of membership to peers and faculty within them is critical for understanding how their status-based identities inform educational experiences (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Status-based identities inform the development of a cohesive group-membership with the current college context. For students from lower social statuses, a greater sense of belonging to college would indicate a greater sense of group-membership. However, a lack of belonging to college could indicate greater out-group membership. The degree of membership students have toward their institutions informs whether their identities are "school-relevant", an important aspect of identity for lower status students seeking upward

mobility through college (Oyserman et al., 2013). Those who feel less belonging to their institution as a whole are at risk of experiencing a heightened awareness that they are different from their peers. Lower class students who feel more on the outside with regards to their institution are more at risk of experiencing negative well-being (Page-Gould et al., 2008; 2010). For example, when socializing with individuals from higher social statuses, those from lower social statuses report more discomfort and greater attempts to suppress their negative feelings (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2016; Cohen & Garcia, 2008). This indicates that heightened awareness of being an "other" in terms of one's social status has negative consequences for psychological functioning. However, this may largely vary depending on how connected a student feels their own social status as an identity.

Prior works have examined belongingness in racial and ethnic minority students. For example, Mendoza-Denton and colleagues (2002) examined the role of racial sensitivity on feelings of belonging in African American students. These authors found increased sensitization to their identity as an African American student at a predominantly White institution led to less feelings of belonging. Perhaps, then, having a greater degree of personal connection to an individual's own social status can be sensitizing for in-group belonging within the college environment for those from lower status backgrounds.

Past Social Statuses Inform Aspirations for Social Status Attainment by Creating a Salient Social Identity Within Context. Status-Based Identity is a useful framework for attempting to disentangle how status-related social identities influence aspired future identities (Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Destin et al., 2017). This dissertation draws attention to aspirations for a future social status as a possible future identity. "Status-based uncertainty" is the degree to which students feel stuck between their prior or

current status and their aspired status, consequently leading to lower feelings of belonging to both past and present identities. The degree of connection to a social status and the belonging to status-based groups within the context of higher education serve as important social identity processes. Using this framework, social mobility aspirations can be conceptualized as a *future identity*. Additionally, students' sense of connections to their social status as an identity as well as their sense of belonging to important status-related social groups (i.e., their peers at college versus peers from back home) can be conceptualized as *current social identities* (see Figure 1). These social identity processes have implications for how their aspired future selves as it pertains to their aspired social mobility goals come to fruition via pursuit of educational goals.

Many studies have shown students from lower socioeconomic statuses tend to distance themselves from identifying with their social class statuses (Martin, 2015), where they devalue their social status as a contributing factor to their personal success (Aries & Seider, 2007). As a result, students from lower social classes report their socioeconomic statuses as being less central to who they are. However, individual differences in the personal connections students have to their social statuses can dynamically inform their aspirations for their futures selves as they pertain to their social status in society. These connections to their social class systems will continue to inform their perceptions of themselves and their peers from higher socioeconomic statuses (Martin, 2015). Therefore, it is important to tease apart individual differences in social group connections to understand how these social identity processes inform goal pursuits as they pertain to an aspired status-based self. Specifically, how social group connections differentially impact student goal engagement needs further investigation.

Salient Status-Based Identities Within Social Contexts

Together, IBM theory, SEVT, and the Status-Based Identity Framework all describe the importance of 1) social group belonging with regards to one's identity, 2) positive academic experiences, and 3) persistence during academic challenges for helping students develop a strong, cohesive identity within the context of higher education. However, experiencing discrepancies between an aspired identity and a current identity can ultimately result in maladaptive behaviors regarding engagement with status-based goals. For lower status students, integrating socially into the college environment is important for creating their new status-based self (Destin et al., 2017). Challenges to this identity can lead to increased status-uncertainty, which are associated with lower group identification with important status-based groups (Choi & Hogg, 2020). Moreover, status-based uncertainty may result in students paying more attention to behaviors that signify that they do not belong to their institution instead of behaviors that indicate they do belong (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Oyserman, 2013; Oyserman & Johnson, 2011).

Therefore, understanding how these important social identity processes are associated with mobility outcomes is critical to cohesively understand how status-based social identity discrepancies can undermine beliefs about mobility attainment, including how students perceive their ability to control reaching upward mobility.

Status-Based Social Group Membership

Feeling a strong sense of in-group membership to others in a particular context is a critical identity process that informs individuals' motivations and behaviors (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Piff et al., 2018), where lack of membership between people and environments of varying social class hierarchies have implications on beliefs and aspirations on social

mobility (Piff et al., 2018; Kraus et al., 2012; Kraus & Stephens 2012; Stephens at al., 2014). Social psychologists have proposed that a lack of in-group membership between those of lower social status backgrounds and those of higher status backgrounds–who are inherently of a different class culture (Snibbe & Markus, 2005) is partially at the root of why economic inequalities persist in the United States (Kraus et al., 2012; Piff et al., 2018). For example, belonging to a particular social class context shapes individual behaviors, thoughts, and feelings across various contexts (Kraus et al., 2012; Piff et al., 2018). Individuals striving to attain a higher status in society must navigate through intricate systems where social interactions with others of higher statuses may catalyze psychological conflicts (Piff et al., 2018). This has largely been investigated within an educational setting–when young adults from lower status backgrounds attend college to achieve upward mobility. For these individuals, attending college in the United States is often seen as a vessel to attaining upward social mobility (Haven & Smeeding, 2006).

For example, low-income students are often motivated to attend college to earn a higher income, help their families financially, and to obtain the skills and credentials needed to enter higher-paying occupations. However, navigating the middle-class culture of higher education often evokes feelings of dissonance and marginalization, as they may encounter unfamiliar cultural norms and expectations that are inconsistent with their family-of-origin statuses (Stephens et al., 2012; Phillips et al., 2020; Sladek et al., 2020). For students of lower social classes, attending elite universities often experience stigmatization due to the class differences between their own identities and the culture of the campus at large (Johnson et al., 2011; Sladek et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2012; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Gillen-

O'Neel, 2021). This can markedly impact their academic fit and feelings of belonging (Johnson et al., 2011). Therefore, the extent to which students feel a sense of in-group membership with their peers, faculty, and the institution at large is an important identity process that may change lower status students' engagement with status goals and ultimately their long-term status-related aspirations.

The quantity and quality of social connections aid in the persistence to graduation (Robbins et al., 2004; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Bowman, 2010). This is important because graduating from college can lead to better occupational prestige and higher salaries, equating to higher social status than their pre-educated selves. These social connections are particularly important when students experience academic challenges that undermine the salience of their novel social identity–such as poorer academic performances. All in all, more work needs to investigate how membership to new status-based social groups that are aligned with their aspired selves can encourage effective educational control striving. In lower status college students, identity processes such as these can have important implications for status-related pursuits (Piff et al., 2018; Davidai & Wienk, 2021).

Discrepancies between the current self and the idealized future self are greatest in young adulthood, particularly for individuals who are working toward upward mobility goals (Ryff, 1991). For individuals of lower social classes and socioeconomic statuses, higher education is often used as a means to reach their future goals that are congruent with their idealized identities. For example, their current self (e.g., *lower class college student*) serves as a motivator to become the idealized self (e.g., *upper class college graduate*). Identity theorists posit the less discrepancy between one's current identity and

their aspired identity, the better their academic outcomes (Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman & Lewis, 2017). In fact, young adults who are of marginalized positions often discuss their identity discrepancies in more detail than those in more represented identities (McLean et al., 2017). Additionally, the more salient identity of the two will be the identity that influences self-regulatory behaviors the most (Berkman et al., 2017). While pursuing higher education is important to develop a salient college student identity, those who do not feel a strong connection to their institutions as a whole, program, major, or to their peers, are at risk for feeling like an "other." This, consequently, can have negative implications for their mobility-related goal strivings.

Measuring Status-Based Social Group Memberships as An Aspect of Status-Based Uncertainty

Social identity researchers argue students are motivated to reduce social identity uncertainty by forming positive social group memberships with social groups that are congruent with their desired social identities (Choi & Hogg, 2020; Hogg et al., 2007; Hogg, 2000). Validated scales attempting to capture identity-uncertainty find two sub-categories are relevant for reliably measuring uncertainty; both the uncertainty about one's own social identity as well as the uncertainty about belonging to a social group, are both important aspects of identity uncertainty (Wagoner et al., 2017). Destin and colleagues (2017) developed their own status-based uncertainty scale to capture the first category–an individual's uncertainty about their own social status. Lower social status students who feel uncertain about their status-based identities because of the pursuit for upward mobility can make it harder to form these group memberships. Therefore, students who manage to still form positive group memberships with social groups within their

institutions may have better mobility outcomes than those who feel membership uncertainty. More work needs to be done to uncover how membership uncertainty can undermine educational control strivings. Thus, I argue that in order for lower status college students to remain aligned with their aspired status-based identities, they must effectively perceive strong group memberships to their new status-based groups within college. The social identity component of the Status-Based Identity Framework alludes to this process (Destin et al., 2017).

There are three relevant social group memberships that are important to understand. They include feeling a sense of membership to, 1) social groups from past status-based contexts, 2) social groups from current status-based contexts, and 3) social groups for future status-based contexts. The current dissertation examined differences in perceptions of how an individual's status-based identity is referenced against these status-based social groups, and if this had implications for their educational goal strivings. This study will therefore use the terminology "status-based social group membership" to capture these social group relations. Specifically, for social group relations to others in their current status-based social groups, measures of belongingness and perceptions of fit to others at their institution, and to the institution as a collective were used. Additionally, to measure social group relations to others from a past status-based social groups, measures of connections to others from before college (e.g., friends and family) as well as feelings of membership to others in one's own social status were used.

Quantitative and qualitative research finds that a lack of membership to old identity ties such as community members, family, and friends has negative consequences for psychological functioning (Diener, 2012; Cohen, 2004). In the context of status-based

membership ties, qualitative research finds first generation college students experiences relational strains with family members and old friends as a result of attending college (Longwell-Grice, et al., 2006; 2016; Chang et al., 2020), where students feel stuck in between their social group memberships and their group memberships in college, thus are at odds for what this uncertainty means for their collective identities (Orbe, 2007). Destin and colleagues (2017) argue more research needs to attempt to uncover these social identity processes in terms of their implications on social mobility related outcomes. The process of moving out of and away from a past status identity and into a new status identity can be destabilizing for their sense of self due to a lack of membership to old status-related ties, as well as not fitting into their new higher status-related social groups, such as the case for lower status students attend elite universities (Johnson et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2002). Specifically, lower status students need to feel a strong sense of membership to their institution as a collective, including feeling a sense of belonging to important groups of people such as peers and faculty in order to stay aligned with their aspired status-based identities and educational goals.

Mobility-Related Cognitions – Merit-Based Beliefs and Educational Pursuits

Apart from aspirations for climbing the social ladder and forming strong relationships with important status-related groups, a plethora of work has confirmed that beliefs about social mobility shape academic goal pursuits. Within the United States, opportunities for achieving upward mobility are often attenuated by systemic social structural limitations for those of lower social statuses–despite the fact most citizens believe achievement is the result of hard work and individual efforts (Kraus & Tan, 2015; Kraus, 2015). These beliefs are referred to as meritocratic beliefs (Davidai & Gilovich,

2014), and are perpetuated by those who have achieved higher social statuses (Kay et al., 2017). Although it is relatively consistent in the literature that attaining mobility is largely due to societal structures and other uncontrollable factors, endorsing meritocratic beliefs seems to be important to keep students from lower status backgrounds motivated to succeed academically. Although attaining a higher education is seen as this vessel to attain upward mobility for those from lower status backgrounds in society, the growing social inequalities over the last several decades makes moving up the social ladder more difficult to achieve (Blossfeld et al., 2007).

Psychologically, the perception of having equal and fair chances to succeed as anyone else is associated with greater persistence and investments in goals (Laurin et al. 2011). In this way, meritocratic beliefs are inherently seen as controllable because they assume individuals are agents to their own mobility regardless of environmental constraints, such as social inequalities. College students who endorse these meritocratic mobility beliefs as opposed to endorsing beliefs that mobility is uncontrollable (i.e., due to luck or privilege), as a result, are more engaged with their academic goals (Shane & Heckhausen, 2013; 2017; Im & Shane, 2022).

Empirical research indicate that college students' beliefs about social mobility attainment are associated with varying self-regulatory goal engagement or goal disengagement strategies (Shane & Heckhausen, 2013; Heckhausen, 2018). For example, Shane and Heckhausen (2013) find that college students who are the first in their families to attend college endorse less meritocratic beliefs whereas those who have a parent with a college degree endorse more meritocratic beliefs. Additionally, these authors find these beliefs have strong indications for whether students will remain engaged with their

academic goals or will disengage from them. Specifically, stronger meritocratic beliefs are beneficial for academic goal engagement whereas attributing the possibility of attaining upward mobility to external factors such as luck and privilege leads to disengaging with their academic goals. This is consistent with prior literature that suggests that students who endorse more meritocratic beliefs are better equipped to navigate academic challenges (Browman et al., 2017). Therefore, students from lower statuses may particularly reap the benefits from continually endorsing meritocratic beliefs over time in order to continue to strive toward their educational goals.

Differences in Mobility Cognitions by Social Status

Believing it is possible to attain mobility–both for the self and for others in society–is a strong academic motivator, particularly for young adults from lower social status backgrounds (Laurin et al. 2011; Browman et al., 2017). In a series of studies, Browman and colleagues (2017) attempted to understand attributions for why others in society achieve upward mobility, and how these attributions were associated with differential motivational mechanisms for students from lower and higher status-based groups. In both cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies, students from lower social status backgrounds who endorsed the belief that attaining upward mobility is achievable were more motivated to continue engaging with their academic goals, even during times of academic challenges (Browman et al., 2017). Therefore, students from lower social status backgrounds who believe mobility is personally achievable are more likely to stay engaged with their status-based goals – such as finish their college education. However, students from lower status backgrounds often attribute mobility attainment to contextual, uncontrollable factors, such as privilege and luck. Thus, social status backgrounds shape

individual beliefs about mobility. The context of growing up in a less educated household and having less economic advantages can socialize these individuals to believe that their personal efforts will not help them climb the social ladder because of the beliefs that mobility chances are already pre-determined by societal constraints (Browman et al., 2019; Heckhausen, 2021; Laurin & Engstrom, 2020; Laurin et al., 2019).

Unlike their lower status peers, individuals from higher status backgrounds are more likely to attribute their successes to their personal efforts and hard work–the, "good ol' American Dream" (Mijs et al., 2022; Laurin & Engstrom, 2020). For example, the belief that an individual has personal control over attaining their mobility goals is often endorsed by those who are already in higher social status groups due to a self-serving bias (Laurin, et al., 2019). These individuals tend to reject the belief that their personal statuses are the result of external factors, including systemic privileges afforded to those born into economically well-off families. However, lower social status individuals are more aware of these external roots that impact personal opportunities for social mobility.

Moreover, meritocratic beliefs pertaining to the "self" appear to be more flexible compared to beliefs about others in general (Shane & Heckhausen, 2017). A study examining youth causal beliefs about their personal success found those from higher status families and more privileged high schools are less likely to believe their success is due to external uncontrollable factors such as luck (Kay et al., 2017). However, these authors did not find differences in meritocratic beliefs by status-based backgrounds. These authors postulate meritocratic beliefs are more unstable than beliefs that mobility is due to external, uncontrollable factors.

Two points can be deduced so far. The first is that studies on mobility beliefs using

adult samples consistently find lower status individuals are less likely to endorse meritocratic beliefs, whereas studies using samples with youth find no differences in these beliefs by social status. Therefore, there is a developmental process underlying these beliefs. The second point is personal beliefs seem to be more unstable than societal beliefs, where those from lower status backgrounds may be more susceptible to social-contextual cues that can contribute to changes in their personal beliefs over time. Therefore, how these beliefs unfold over the course of time differentially for those from lower and higher statuses who are striving to attain mobility by a means of earning a college degree is an important developmental process to uncover.

In summary, endorsing more meritocratic beliefs gives students from lower social status backgrounds a greater sense of control over their own mobility in society (McCoy et al., 2013; Laurin et al., 2019). However, lower status students perceive having less personal control, which in turn, is negatively associated with endorsement of meritocratic beliefs (Kraus et al., 2009).

Summary

Overall, the relationship between status-based social identities, educational goal engagement, and beliefs about social mobility is complex and multifaceted. The Status-Based Identity Framework suggests that students from lower social statuses may be more sensitized to their climb up the social ladder while at college, resulting in negative implications for important motivational processes important for achieving their mobility goals over time. Thus, the following dissertation sought to understand how students' past, current, and future aspired status-based identities inform commitment toward their

education as an avenue for social mobility, their cognitions about social mobility, and their engagement with their own educational goals.

CHAPTER 2

Study 1

Status-Related Goal Pursuits and Educational Goal Commitment: The Role of Social Status Identities and Status Group Connections

Abstract

An individual's social status is theorized to serve as a unique aspect of an individual's identity, where subjective interpretations of social status can influence status-related goal pursuits throughout the lifespan. Social-psychological status-based identity factors such as belonging and connectedness to past and present status-based groups are critical processes that may change engagement with status-related goals. One context this can be studied in is striving for social mobility through attaining a higher education. The current study examines the role of social status as an identity on pursuing education to achieve status-related goals, and commitment toward education during college. This study finds that students from lower social status backgrounds were more motivated to attend college for status enhancement purposes, but were less committed toward their education. The degree of belonging to a status group and the salience of their social status did not change this association. However, for students from higher status backgrounds, a weak sense of belonging toward their social status group was demotivating for pursuing college for status purposes. Moreover, a stronger connection to peers at college compared to peers from before college was associated with stronger commitment toward their education, but only for students who attended college for status enhancement purposes. These findings provide insights into how differences in status identity processes keep students who strive for upward mobility aligned with their status-related goals, including their educational goals.

Keywords: social status; status identity; educational goals; belonging

Theoretical Background and Introduction

Having higher status-based goals, such as the desire to achieve social mobility, motivates students to achieve academically, especially for students from lower social status backgrounds (Arum & Roksa, 2014; Browman et al., 2017). For example, students from lower social status backgrounds are more likely to report mobility-related factors such as wanting to increase their earnings as a main motivator for attending college (CIRP, 2015). However, the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and economically advantaged students persists, where students from lower social statuses report experiencing greater academic challenges and are less likely to persist to graduation (Pascarella et al., 2004; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Ishitani, 2006).

A plethora of literature suggests social integration is critical for student persistence and continual engagement with education goals, particularly amongst those of disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Estrada et al., 2011; Ishitani et al., 2016; Rubin et al., 2016). More recent work has begun to examine specific social-psychological processes related to social status as a contributor for these gaps, including the role of status-based identity processes on academic experiences and the pursuit of educational goals (Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Destin et al., 2017; Browman et al., 2019; Piff et al., 2018; Kraus et al., 2012; Kraus & Stephens 2012; Stephens at al., 2014). According to Destin's Status-Based Identity Framework, a student's past, current, and future social status, along with social identities related to status-based groups, mutually shape motivation for status-related goal pursuits.

Social identities related to an individual's social class are important because they guide students' academic behaviors, including how they navigate academic challenges and

whether they continue to strive for their status-related goals – including achieving their college degree. A growing number of studies interested in social class identities have begun to empirically examine how mobility-related goals and aspirations are related to academic persistence and engagement. Staying persistent and continuing to engage with academic goals has important implications for whether students continue to feel in control of their status-related goals over time. For example, students who have high aspirations for achieving social mobility are more likely to engage in behaviors that are conducive with reaching their aspired status-based selves (Destin et al., 2017; Oyserman, 2013; Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman & Lewis, 2017; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006; Oyserman, 2019). However, whether status-based goals remain motivating can depend on several status-based identity processes, including how salient a social status is to a student's identity, how much belonging they feel toward their social status group, and the degree of connection to current versus past social status groups.

Students who come from lower past social status backgrounds tend to minimize the importance of their social status as a measure of their current self, allowing them to remain motivated to pursue status-related goals due to the cognitive distancing of their past identities (Oyserman & James, 2021; Oyserman, 2015; Oyserman, 2013). Students from lower social statuses who feel their past social status is an important part of their identity are at risk of engaging in behaviors that are not congruent with their newly aspired status-based selves, such as graduating from college (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Thus, it is possible that lower status students who feel their past social status is an important part of who they are and feel more belonging to that social status group will be more likely to question whether college is the right path for them.

Moreover, for students from lower social status backgrounds, striving for upward social mobility results in moving away from prior status-based social groups composed of people associated with their past social status, and successfully transitioning into the middle-class culture of their colleges by forming new social group memberships. This comes at a cost, where feeling less membership to past status-based groups can result in uncertainty about their newly developing status-based identities within college. This can have negative implications on their academic motivation and persistence (Strayhorn et al., 2021; Destin & Debrosse, 2017, Destin et al., 2017, Destin, 2020; Wagoner, et al., 2017), and ultimately their continual engagement with their status-related goals. However, students from lower social status backgrounds who feel stronger membership uncertainty to those in their new status-related context (i.e., their peers and faculty at their institutions) may also question whether college is the right path for them. According to Destin's Status-Based Identity Framework, individuals' strength of group membership to past status-related social groups and more current status-related social groups can inform the understanding of an individual's status-based social identity. Social identity theorists all conclude the importance of social group membership with regards to one's identity as being critical for student achievement, motivation, and psychosocial development (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Destin et al., 2017; Wigfield & Eccles, 2020).

The Current Study

Remaining aligned with academic goals is critical for students from lower status backgrounds to continue to invest their motivational resources to stay engaged with their larger status-based goals (Laurin et al., 2019). Thus, the first study of this dissertation sought to examine how social status–both past and current–and status-based identity

processes shape educational goal pursuit as a means for social mobility, as well as commitment toward educational goals. Specifically, the following study examined:

(1) The direct effects of social status on status-related motivation to attend college.

(2) The moderating effect of status group belonging and identity salience on this motivation.

(3) The influence of social status on deliberation of educational goals, and whether discrepancies between past and current statuses change this relationship for lower status students.

(4) How status-related motivation is associated with goal deliberation depending on strength of connections to current status social groups.

RQ1: The Effect of Past and Current Social Status on Status-Related Motivation to Attend College

I predicted there would be an association between social status on motivation to attend college to achieve status enhancement such that those of lower social statuses would experience greater motivation to go to college for status enhancement. Those of lower social statuses have less to fall back on in terms of economic stability, and may have weaker social connections than higher status peers. This may position them to place a greater importance on education as a means to upward social mobility.

1.a. Moderation Effect of Status Group Belonging and Salience

Whether stronger belonging to a student's social status group promotes or demotivates students from lower status backgrounds from pursuing education remains understudied. On the one hand, students from lower status backgrounds who feel a greater sense of belonging to their social status as an identity, and whose social status is more

salient to them could experience enhanced motivation to attend college to achieve status enhancement due to the increased awareness these students have to their place on the social ladder. However, this awareness and sense of belonging to that status-based group may also demotivate these students due to the uncertainty elicited by shifting away from a social group. Thus, this research question was largely exploratory.

1.b. Does salience and belonging differ by social status?

Consistent with prior literature (e.g., Aries & Seidler, 2007), I predicted that the salience of a social status to a student's identity would be lower for those of lower statuses, as would their sense of belonging to their social status.

RQ2: The Effect of Past and Current Social Status on Educational Goal Deliberation

I hypothesize that social status will predict educational goal deliberation such that those of lower social statuses will have greater goal deliberation.

2.a Does a greater discrepancy between past and current social status groups change this association?

A stronger connection toward current social status groups as opposed to past social status groups (i.e., friends at college versus friends from back home) for students from lower social statuses were expected to help them stay on the path toward their educational goals. Therefore, I predicted there would be a general positive effect of social status on educational goal deliberation such that students from lower social statuses would experience more educational goal deliberation regardless of their connections to status-based social groups. However, I predicted this association would vary as a function of strength of connections to peers at college, where stronger connections for those from lower status groups would attenuate this association.

RQ3. The Effect of Motivation to Attend College for Status-Enhancement on Educational Goal Deliberation

I hypothesized that students who pursued college to achieve status enhancement would have less educational goal deliberation, and thus would be more engaged with their status-based goals.

3.a. Does a larger discrepancy between strength of connection to past and current status-based groups change this association?

I hypothesized that this association would be strongest for those with less discrepancies between their past and current social status groups.

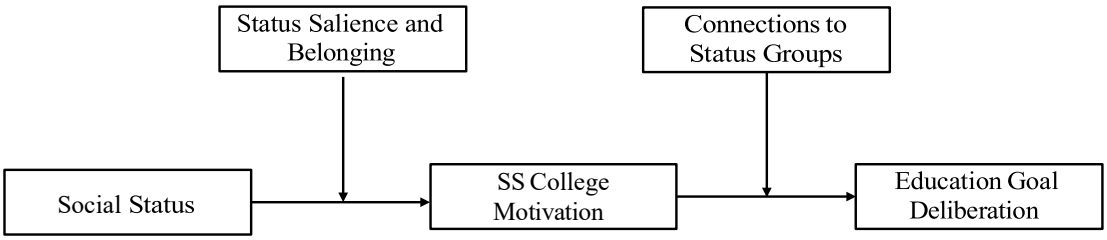

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Model of Hypothesized Associations.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Study one used a secondary dataset that was deployed in November of 2015 with the goal of assessing college student experiences. Five liberal arts colleges were selected in the state of Minnesota, where a stratified random sampling technique was used to specifically sample a.) underrepresented college students and b.) the remaining enrolled full-time undergraduates. Students on the first list met one or more of the following criteria: from an underrepresented ethnic group (domestic students with Latino, African

American, or Native American heritage), from a lower-socioeconomic background (defined as Pell-Grant recipients), or first-generation college attendees (students whose parents had not completed a four-year degree). After both groups of students were collected, 85 students from each group per school were randomly sampled to participate in this study. The total of recruited participants included 850 students (underrepresented students = 425; well-represented students = 425). All students were contacted via email in the beginning of November 2015, inviting them to partake in a "Study of Daily Life in College." The final response rate was 35.6%, with 305 students invited to participate in the study.[1]

A final sample of 303 students (64.1% females; M_{age} = 20.35 years, SD_{age} = 1.35) participated in a large cross-sectional survey in November 2015, where students reported on items assessing their perceptions and feelings of their various identities (e.g., social class, socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic identity), reasons for attending college (e.g., career/personal, proving self-worth to others, helping family, etc.). Participants were compensated $11 for their participation. The majority of the final sample were White (71.3%), and the remaining third were 10.9% Asian, 4% Latino, 4.60% Black, 8.60% Multiracial, and 0.70% of another ethnic background. Out of 295 students who reported their social class, 33 (11.2%) described themselves as working class, 12 (4.1%) described themselves as lower class, 51 (17.3%) as lower middle class, 102 (34.6%) as middle class, 75 (15.3%) as upper middle class, 12 (4.1%) as upper class, and 10 (3.4%) of students' social classes were unknown. Working class, lower class, and lower middle-class students were categorized as "lower social class" (32.5%); middle class was kept as "middle social

[1] The total response rates per school ranged between 25.9% to 45.3%. No differences in response rates were observed between underrepresented and well-represented students.

class" (34.6%), and upper middle class and upper class were considered "upper class" (29.5%) (see Current Social Status in Measures).

Measures

Past Social Status

A composite measure of past social status was created using three items: parent education attainment, family income, and financial assistance given to families. Parents' highest educational attainment ranged from some elementary school to a graduate from medical, law, or graduate school. Family income was assessed by having participants choose one of 12 categories of income brackets, ranging from "less than $10,000" to "more than $750,000). The average family income of 5.97 corresponds to an average family income between (5) $50,001 - $75,000 to (6) $75,001 - $100,000. Students reported whether they contributed financially toward their families. For those who did (n = 54), they then reported how much they contributed ranging from less than $500 to $15,000 – $19,999. This was recoded before creating the composite measure, where higher values indicated higher family support and therefore served as one indicator of past social status. These items were then standardized before creating a composite measure of past status, where higher values were indicative of higher past status (i.e., higher parent education, higher parent income, less financial support given toward family).

Current Social Status

Participants were asked to report in a free response text box what they consider their SES to be. This data was coded where responses such as "lower class" and "poor" were given a code of 1 (n = 15); "lower middle class/working class" were given a code of 2 (n = 83); "middle class" were given a code of 3 (n = 105); "upper middle class" were given a

code of 4 (n = 76); and "upper class" were coded as 5 (n = 12) as these were the range of responses. After assessing the distribution, the final current social status measure was re-coded to where the two lower ends were combined, and the two higher ends were combined. Thus, responses distinguished between lower and upper levels of lower, middle, and upper class where 33.7% of the sample considered themselves "lower social class" versus 36.1% as "middle social class" and 30.2% "upper social class."

Motivation to Attend College for Status Enhancement

The revised version of the Student Motivation for Attending University (SMAU) scale was used to measure attending college for status enhancement on a 1 (*strongly disagreed*) to 7 (*strongly agreed*) scale (Cote & Levine, 1997). The SMAU scale contains five domains for measuring different motivates to attend university, including personal-intellectual development, humanitarian, expectation-driven, career and materialism, and default reasons. Items from the career and materialism domain were pulled to create a composite measure of status enhancement motivation. Questions regarding aspirations to attain a higher status in life, to make more money, to get a satisfying career, and to obtain the finer things in life were indexed. These four items were factor loaded onto the latent construct of status enhancement. These items were expected to be more indicative of intragenerational upward mobility aspirations as opposed to intergenerational mobility aspirations. CFA analyses revealed three items were best representative of status enhancement motivation, and thus a composite average was created using these three items.

Educational Goal Deliberation

Students were asked to report how often they wonder whether college is really right for them on a 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*) scale, and to what degree did they

plan to stay at their college until they finished their degree on a 1 (*definitely not*) to 5 (*definitely yes*) scale. Both items were intended to serve as indicators of goal deliberation, however, the second item was heavily skewed where very few students planned to leave college. Therefore, only the first indicator was used.

Connections to Status-Based Social Groups

Participants reported how connected they felt toward their friends from high school and their friends at college on a 1 (*not at all connected*) to 5 (*extremely connected*) scale. Cronbach alphas were used to ensure the 5-items had internal validity, and then the averages were calculated to create a measure of past social status group connections (i.e., friends from high school) and a measure of current status group connections (i.e., friends at college). A difference score was then computed by subtracting the average past status connections from the average current social status group connections, where higher scores were indicative of stronger connections to current status-based groups.

Status-Based Salience

Salience of a status identity was assessed using an adapted version of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Scottham et al., 2008), adapted to assess social status as an identity. Specifically, one item from this scale asked students to report how much they agreed or disagreed that, "if I were to describe myself to someone, one of the first things that I would tell them is my SES" on a 1 (c*ompletely disagree),* to 7 (*completely agree*) scale. This variable was positively skewed, therefore log transformations were used.

Status-Based Group Belonging

Using an adapted version of the MIBI scale (Scottham, 2008), two items were used to assess how much belonging students felt to their social status as a social group. For example, students were asked to report how much they agreed or disagreed that they felt a: (1) strong sense of belonging to other people in their SES group, and (2) how close they felt to others in their SES group.

Covariates

A trait-like measure of belonging which captures an individual's need to belong was used as a covariate in each model. Items assessed for example, the need to be cared about, be accepted, and to be included on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. Moreover, because status-based identity uncertainty is most likely to affect lower status students in their first year of college, it was expected that semester completion would need to be taken into consideration in the models. Additionally, because group membership to past status groups may depend on how far away students are from home, a measure in miles of how far away their college was from their homes was used as a covariate.

Analytic Approach

Little missing data was observed across variables, and thus, missing data was handled case by case. A path model using a structural equation modeling framework was used to assess the hypothesized associations among covariates, social status, status enhancement motivation to attend college, connections to status groups, and educational goal deliberation. One-way ANOVAs and independent samples t-tests were used to address whether status belonging and salience varied by students' social status. Next, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted to examine whether the effect of social status on status motivation and goal deliberation varied as a function of social status belonging and

salience above and beyond covariates. Hayes PROCESS macro in SPSS (model 1, Hayes, 2013) was used to examine significant interactions, and to compute the simple slopes tests at high (+1SD), average, and low (-1SD) levels of the moderator of interest. For clarity of these moderations, the focal predictor and moderator variable were flipped as subsequent analyses and reported in tables. All analyses included a trait-like measure of need for belonging, number of semesters completed, and the distance students were living from their home as covariates. In the models assessing current social status as the focal predictor, past social status was included in subsequent models as a covariate to test whether results held when accounting for the variation it had on the outcomes.

Current social status was effect coded to where the mean of students who subjectively considered their current status as being lower class was compared to the grand mean, and also where the mean of those who considered themselves upper class were compared to the grand mean. All continuous predictors were mean centered prior to analyses.

Prior to analyses, normality of errors was assessed using Q-Q plots and histograms. Variables that violated the normality assumption were transformed using log transformations. Additionally, boxplots were used to visually assess the presence of outliers, and Cook's Distance was used to estimate the influence of each data point using leverage and residuals. The presence of outliers in each model were considered by removing them and comparing the new model to the old model. If no differences were observed between the model with outliers and the model without outliers, the original model was kept utilizing the entirety of the data. However, if the presence of outliers significantly changed the model, the model without outliers was reported. For all

regression models, Durbin-Watson tests were used to test for the assumption of independence of residuals (Durbin, 1950). Bootstrapping was performed and bootstrapped coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are reported.

Results

Descriptive statistics for key variables are reported in Table 1.1. Because status-based salience was positively skewed, log transformations were used to normalize the distribution. The transformation of status-based salience was thus used in the regression analyses.

Table 1.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Key Variables in Study 1

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Family Income	5.97	1.96								
2. Status Salience+	.651	0.60	-.10							
3. Status Group Belonging	4.50	1.32	.08	.33**						
4. Connections Friends Before College	3.13	1.32	.11	-.05	.05					
5. Connections Friends At College	3.90	0.93	.13*	.07	.03	-.24**				
6. College Belonging	3.93	0.70	.21**	-.04	.03	-0.04	.46**			
7. Status Enhancement Motivation	3.78	0.92	-.13*	-.02	.14*	.14*	-.10	-.06		
8. College GPA[1]	3.44	0.37	.21**	-.08	-.06	-0.03	.06	.35**	-.15*	
9. Education Goal Deliberation	2.30	1.23	-.18**	.04	.02	0.09	-.34**	-.50**	.08	-.27**

+The log of status salience was used when reporting correlations
[1]College GPA was only reported for students in their sophomore, junior, or senior years.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
Note. Family income is used as an indicator in a composite measure of past social status with parent education, and students' financial contributions toward their families. Connections to friends before and during college were used to create the discrepancy score between past and current social status groups.

Objective Family Income and Parent Education by Current Social Status

A series of one-way ANOVAs were used to assess how distinct current status responses were from objective measures of past status (i.e., parent education and family income). Average family income varied by current social status, $F(2, 396.88) = 149.70$, p

<.001, such that those who considered their current status to be lower class had an average family income of 4.15 ($25,001 - $50,000), those who considered themselves middle class had an average family income of 5.74 (between $50,000 and $75,001) and those who considered themselves upper class had an average family income of 8.32 ($150,000 - $200,000). Post-hoc comparisons revealed that those who considered themselves to be lower class had an average family income of 1.58 (between <$10,000 and $10,001 - $15,000) lower than those who considered themselves middle class, and 4.16 ($25,001 - $50,000) lower than those who considered themselves upper class (see Figure 1.2).

Similarly, parent education levels varied by current status, $F(2, 182.37) = 68.47$, $p <$ .001, partial $eta^2 = .32$, such that those who considered themselves to be from a lower social class had a parent with an average education of 7.34 (i.e., between some trade or vocational school and some college). Those who considered themselves middle class had a parent with an average education of 8.91 (i.e., between some college and graduated from college). Those who considered themselves upper class had a parent with an average education of 10.14 (i.e., some medical, law, or graduate school). Results were similar for the second parent. Figure 1.3 shows the overlap between current subjective social status and parent education.

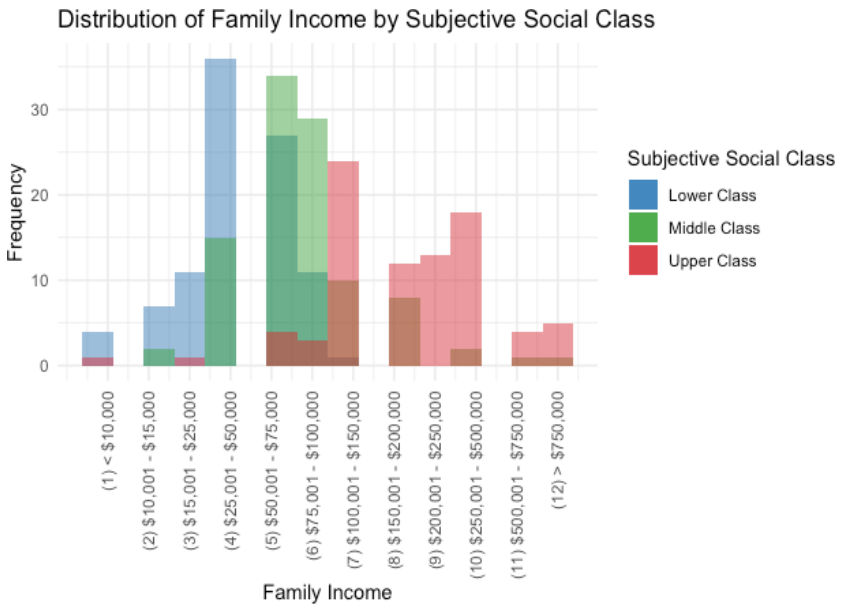

Figure 1.2. Family Income by Subjective Social Class

Note. Those who considered themselves lower class (blue) objectively had lower family incomes compared to those who considered themselves to be middle or upper class, but variation existed such that some of those who considered themselves upper class fell into lower objective family income ranges. The distribution of family income levels for those who considered themselves lower class was smaller than those who considered themselves middle or upper class.

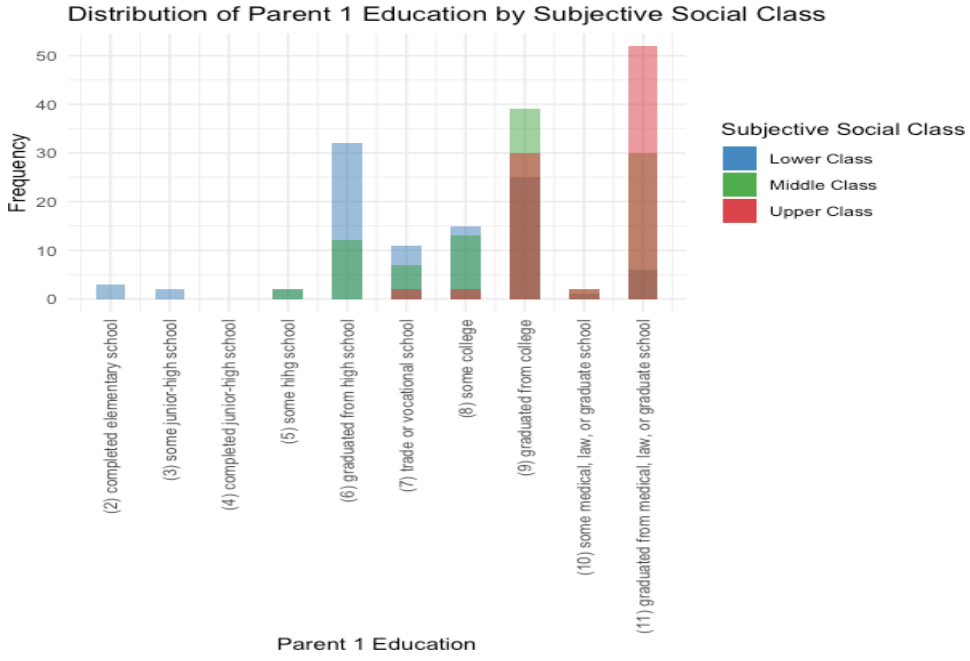

Figure 1.3. Parent Education by Subjective Social Class

Note. Current social class was largely associated with parent education levels. However, there was some overlap between subjective reports of current social class and parent education levels where there was

a wider range of education levels for those who considered their current status as lower and middle class compared to upper class.

Social Status On Status-Related Motivation To Attend College and Educational Goal Deliberation

First, a path model investigated the associations amongst covariates and social status on status enhancement motivation and educational goal deliberation simultaneously. The structural model demonstrated an adequate fit to the data. The chi-square test of model fit was non-significant, $\chi^2(52) = 65.94$, $p = .093$, suggesting that the model did not significantly differ from the observed data. This interpretation was supported by a robust chi-square value, $\chi^2(52) = 65.62$, $p = .097$, which utilized a scaling correction factor of 1.005 for the Yuan-Bentler correction (Mplus variant). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) were both high (.988 and .984, respectively), with the robust estimates yielding a CFI of .989 and a TLI of .984, indicating excellent fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .031 with a 90% confidence interval ranging from .000 to .052. Similarly, the Robust RMSEA stood at .031. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was .044, aligning with the generally accepted criteria for good model fit.

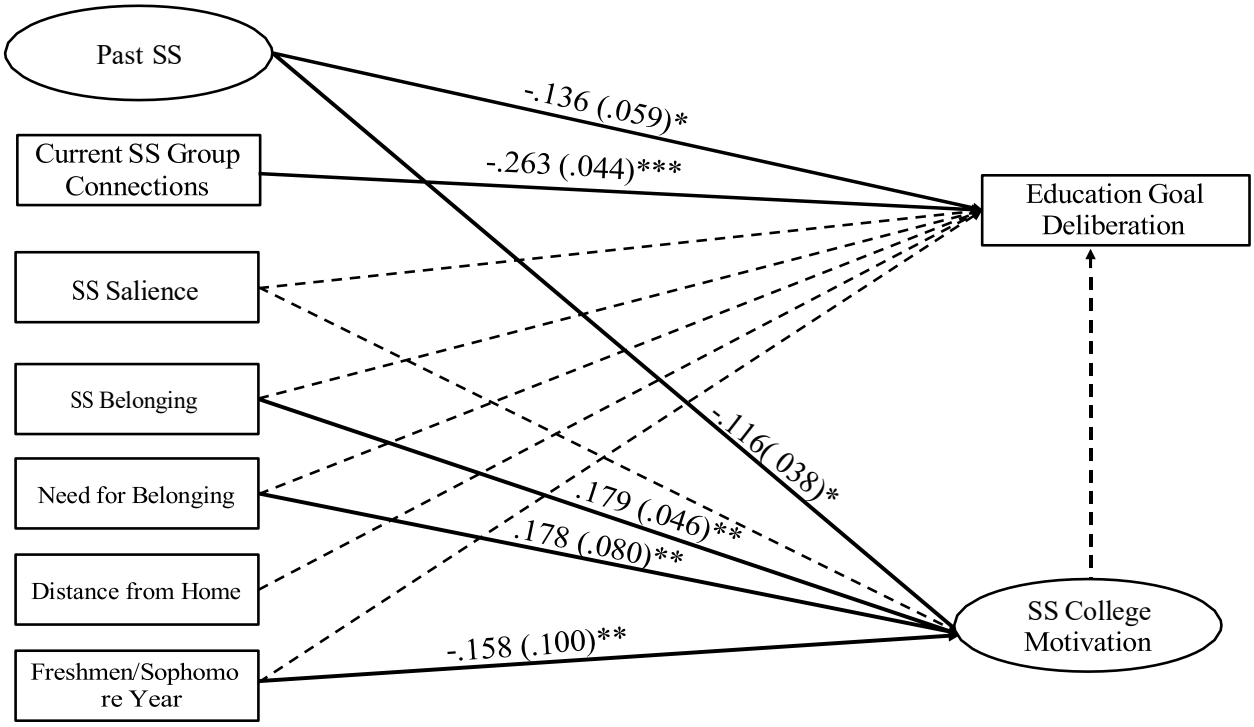

Figure 1.4. Study 1 Path Model

Coming from a higher social status was negatively associated with attending college for status enhancement, β = -.116, *SE* = .100, p = .046, indicating that coming from a lower past social status was associated with stronger pursuit of education as a means for enhancing their social status. A stronger sense of belonging toward an individual's social status group was associated with stronger motivation to attend college for status enhancement, β = .179, *SE* = .080, p = .006, suggesting a main effect of higher sense of status group belonging on educational goal pursuits, despite the effect of status-based salience on motivation being non-significant, β = -.107, *SE* = .089, p = .148. Moreover, being in an earlier year in college (i.e., freshman or a sophomore) compared to later years (i.e., junior or senior) was negatively associated with attending college for status enhancement.

When investigating predictors of educational goal deliberation, coming from a higher past social status was negatively associated with educational goal deliberation, β = -.136, SE = .059, p = .049. Additionally, there was a negative association of discrepancies between past social status and current social status friends on educational goal deliberation, such that the stronger connection students had toward their friends at college compared to their friends from back home, the less they deliberated college as a goal, β = -.263, SE = .044, p <.001.

Status Salience and Belonging by Past and Current Social Status

The salience of an individual's social status did not significantly vary by current status, $F(2,288) = .982$, p = .376, nor was it significantly correlated with family income. Similarly, the degree of status group belonging did not vary by current status, $F(2, 284) = 2.73$, p = .067, nor was it significantly correlated with family income.

Additional analyses examined whether status salience and belonging differed by students' year in school, gender, and ethnicity. Although they did not differ by year in school, status-based salience did vary by gender, $t(292) = 2.12$, p = .035, where female students on average rated their statuses to be less salient to their social identities (M = 2.16, SD = 1.43) compared to male students (M = 2.54, SD = 1.54). White students on average also rated their statuses to be less salient to their personal identities (M = 2.21, SD = 1.40) compared to non-white students (M = 2.70, p = 1.73), $t(79.92) = 2.04$, p = .045.

Social Status, Belonging, and Salience on Attending College for Status Enhancement

Interaction of Past Social Status and Status Salience

After controlling for covariates, R^2 = .058, p = <.001, and adding the main effects of past social status and social status belonging, the main effect of past social status, b = -.18, p

= .009 was significant. The main effect of the log transformed social status salience was non-significant, b = .01, p = .954, , $\Delta R2$ = .017, p = .078. However, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction of past social status and status salience, b = .22, p =.036, $\Delta R2$ = .013, p = .049. The probing of the conditional effects revealed that coming from a higher past social status was negatively associated with motivation to attend college for status purposes, for those with low levels of status salience b = - .32, p = .003, 95%CI[-.525,-.108]. However, at high levels of social status salience, past social status was not significantly associated with status enhancement motivation, b = -.06, p = .539, 95%CI[-.233, .122]. When reversing the focal predictor and moderator, the association of social status salience on status-related motivation to attend college was non-significant at low levels of social status, b = -.13, p = .251, 95%CI[-.357, .094], average levels, b = .027, p = .760, 95%CI[-.148, .202], and high levels of social status, b = .186, p = .138, 95%CI[-.060,.432].

Interaction of Past Social Status and Social Status Belonging

Similarly, the model that included social status belonging as the moderator was also significant. After controlling for covariates, R^2 = .10, p = .001, and adding the main effects of past social status and social status belonging, the main effect of past social status, b = -.17, p = .017, and the main effect of social status belonging, b = .10, p = .009, were significant. However, the main effects were qualified by the significant interaction of past social status and social status belonging on status enhancement motivation, b = .13, p = .013, $\Delta R2$ = .020, p = .013. The probing of the conditional effects revealed that among students who had low levels of social status belonging (-1SD), past social status was significantly negatively associated with status enhancement motivation, b = -.33, p = .002, 95%CI[-.528, -.127].

Similarly, for students with average levels of status belonging, past social status was significantly associated with status enhancement motivation, b = -.16, p = .03, 95%CI[-.297,
-.015]. However, at high levels of status belonging, past social status was not significantly associated with status enhancement motivation, b = .02, p = .879, 95%CI[-.178, .208]. When reversing the order of the focal predictor and moderator, status belonging was not a significant predictor of status enhancement motivation to attend college for those who had low levels of past social status, b = .004, p = .941, 95%CI[-.101, .109], but was significantly positively associated with status enhancement motivation for those with average past, b = .10, p = .014, 95%CI[.020, .175], and high levels of past social status, b = .19, p = .001, 95%CI[.081, .302].

Interaction of Current Social Status and Status Salience

When controlling for covariates, $R2$ = .057, p = <.001, and adding the main effects of current social status and status salience on status enhancement motivation, $\Delta R2$ = .014, p = .242, current status and status salience were non-significant predictors. The interactions between current status and status salience were also non-significant.

Interaction of Current Social Status and Status Belonging

The model that included status belonging as the moderator was significant. After controlling for covariates, R^2 = .055, p = <.001, and adding the main effects of current status and status belonging, the main effect of being lower class was significant, b = .25, p = .042, whereas the main effect of being upper class was non-significant, b = -.04, p = .744. Additionally, the main effect of status belonging was significant, b = .10, p = .008, ΔR^2 = .045, p = <.001. These main effects were qualified by the significant interaction of current lower social class and status belonging on status enhancement motivation, b = -.21, p = <.001, and

current upper class and status belonging on status enhancement motivation, b = .19, p = .001, $\Delta R2$ = .058, p = <.001. The probing of the conditional effects revealed that considering oneself as lower class was significantly associated with higher status enhancement motivation at low levels of status belonging, b = .41, p = <.001, 95%CI[.211, .611], but not average levels of status belonging, b = .13, p = .069, 95%CI[-.010, .278] nor at high levels of status belonging, b = -.14, p = .157, 95%CI[-.343, .056]. However, considering oneself higher social class was significantly negatively associated with higher status enhancement motivation at low levels of status belonging, b = -.30, p = .003. 95%CI[-.507, -.102], but not at average levels, b = -.05, p = .506, 95%CI[-.198, .098] nor high levels, b = .20, p = .07, 95%CI[-.017, .426], though trending in the opposite direction. When reversing the moderator and the focal predictor, status belonging was a significant predictor of status enhancement motivation for those who consider themselves upper class, b = .31, p <.001, 95%CI[.168, .457], but not for those who consider themselves as lower, b = - .09, p = .142, 95%CI[-.205, .030], or middle class, b = .14, p = .065, 95%CI[-.007, .283].

A subsequent model was conducted to test whether these effects held when controlling for past social status. After including past social status as a covariate along with distance from home, semesters completed, and the trait-like measure of need for belonging, R^2 = .085, p = <.001, adding in the main effects of status belonging and past status did not explain additional variation, $\Delta R2$ = .016, p = .179. The main effects of lower social status and higher social status were non-significant, whereas the main effect of status belonging was. When including the interaction terms, the interaction of lower social class and status belonging was significant, and the interaction of upper social class and status belonging was significant (see Table 1.2). Thus, controlling for past social status in these models made

the significant main effect of considering oneself lower class disappear, however the interactions remained significant. When probing the significant interaction, the same pattern was observed, as seen in Figure 1.5.

Table 1.2. Hierarchical Regressions Examining Status Group Belonging as a Moderator of the Association Between Current SS and Status Motivation For Attending College

		Status-Related Motivation		
Predictors		***b***	***SE***	**95%CI**
Step 1 R^2	.085***			
Constant		4.03		
Past SS		-.18*	.07	[-.31, -.04]
Semesters		-.13**	.05	[-.22, -.04]
Distance From Home		.00	.00	[.-00, .00]
Need For Belonging		.23**	.08	[.07, .39]
Step 2 ΔR^2	.016			
Status Belonging		.09*	.04	[.00, .16]
Current Lower Class		.06	.09	[-.14, .23]
Current Upper Class		.00	.09	[-.18, .18]
Step 3 ΔR^2	.056***			
Status Belonging x Lower Class		-.21***	.00	[-.31, -.11]
Status Belonging x Upper Class		.19***	-.01	[.06, .31]

Note. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
All reported coefficients and parameters are bootstrapped.

Table 1.3.
The Conditional Effects of Current Lower Status on Status-Related Motivation at Values of the Moderator (Status Belonging)

Status Belonging	*Effect*	*SE*	*p*	95%CI	
Low	.14	.07	.065	-.008	.282
Average	-.09	.06	.130	-.208	.027
High	.30	.07	.000	.160	.449

Figure 1.5. Current Social Class on Attending College for Status Enhancement by Status Belonging

Note. The significant interaction between status belonging and current social status when controlling for past social status. At low levels of status belonging, those who consider themselves as lower social class have higher status-related motivation to attend college compared to those who consider themselves upper class. However, at high levels of status belonging, this difference is no longer significant. When evaluating the significance of the slopes, those who consider themselves lower social class have similar status-related motivation despite their sense of belongingness to their status group. However, for those who consider themselves upper class, status-related motivation to attend college is highest for those who feel a strong sense of belonging to their social status groups. Tables 1.3 and 1.4 show the conditional effects.

Table 1.4.
The Conditional Effects of Status Belonging on Status Enhancement Motivation at Values of the Moderator (Current SS)

Current SS	*Effect*	*SE*	*p*	95%CI	
	Low Levels of Status Belonging				
Lower Class	.33	.12	.005	.101	.564
Upper Class	-.22	.12	.061	-.460	.011
	Average Levels of Status Belonging				
Lower Class	.06	.09	.544	-.127	.241
Upper Class	.02	.09	.793	-.160	.210
	High Levels of Status Belonging				
Lower Class	-.22	.12	.061	-.447	.010
Upper Class	.27	.12	.028	.030	.518

Social Status, Belonging and Salience on Education Goal Deliberation

The interaction between past social status and status belonging was non-significant, b = -.03, p = .634, 95%CI[-.177, .108]. Similarly, the interaction between current social status and status belonging was non-significant for those who considered themselves lower social class to middle class, b = .01, p = .989, 95%CI[-.146, .147], and lower class to upper social class, b = -.05, p = .552, 95%CI[-.210, .112].

The interaction between past social status and status salience was also non-significant, b = .05, p = .749, 95%CI[-.248, .344]. Similarly, the interaction between current social status and status salience was non-significant for those who consider themselves lower social class compared to middle class social class, b = .07, p = .678, 95%CI[-.255, .391], nor those who consider themselves lower class to upper class, .03, p = .864, 95%CI[-.319, .379].

When examining current social class, students had similar connections to their peers at college compared to their peers from before college across current social classes, $F(2, 285) = .060$, p = .942. When looking at connections to friends before college, there was no significant difference in students' connections to their friends before college by current social status, $F(2, 285) = 1.35$, p = .262, *partial eta-squared* = .01. However, students' connections to friends at college did vary by students' current social status, $F(2, 285)$ = 3.77, p = .024, such that students who consider themselves lower class felt less connected to their friends at college compared to those who considered themselves middle class ($M_{difference}$ = -.332, SE = .130, p = .029). Family income was weakly correlated with connections to current status-based groups (r = .13, p = .029), but was not associated with past status-based groups (r = .11, p = .065).

The Effect of Social Status on Educational Goal Deliberation as a Function of Discrepancies Between Status Group Connections

After controlling for covariates R^2 = .09, p = <.001, there was a significant main effect of past social status on goal deliberation such that coming from a higher past social status was negatively associated with goal deliberation, b = -.280, 95%CIboot[-.465, -.103], p = .003. When investigating the main effects of a larger discrepancy between connections to friends from back home and friends from college (i.e., higher scores equal greater connection to current status group), feeling more strongly connected to peers at college was negatively associated with goal deliberation, such that students who felt a stronger connection to their friends at college had lower goal deliberation, b = -.161, 95%CIboot[-.239, -.081], p<.001. However, the interaction between past social status and stronger connections to friends at college was non-significant, b = .074, 95%CIboot[-.014, .166], p = .159.

Status Enhancement Motivation on Educational Goal Deliberation

After controlling for covariates, the main effect of feeling more connected to friends at college compared to friends from back home was significant, b = -.17, p = <.001, where feeling more connected to friends at college was negatively associated with educational goal deliberation. However, there was no significant main effect of status-related motivation to attend college on educational goal deliberation, b = .02, p = .828. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction of strength of this discrepancy between peer groups and status enhancement, b = - .08, p = .038.

When probing the significant interaction, conditional effects revealed that the effect of status enhancement motivation on goal deliberation was non-significant at low levels of

connections to peers at college, *effect* = -1.67, 95%CI[-.074, .338], p = .209, as well as at high levels, *effect* = 2.00, 95%CI[-.381, .046], p = .123. When reversing the focal predictor and the moderator for clarity, conditional effects revealed that the effect of strength of connections to peers at college compared to friends from back home was not associated with goal deliberation at low levels of status enhancement motivation, *effect* = -.10, p = .091, 95%CI[-.207, .016]. However, strength of connection to peers at college compared to friends from back home was significantly negatively associated with educational goal deliberations at high levels of status enhancement motivation, *effect* = -.25, p = <.001, 95%CI[-.354, -.138] (see Figure 1.6).

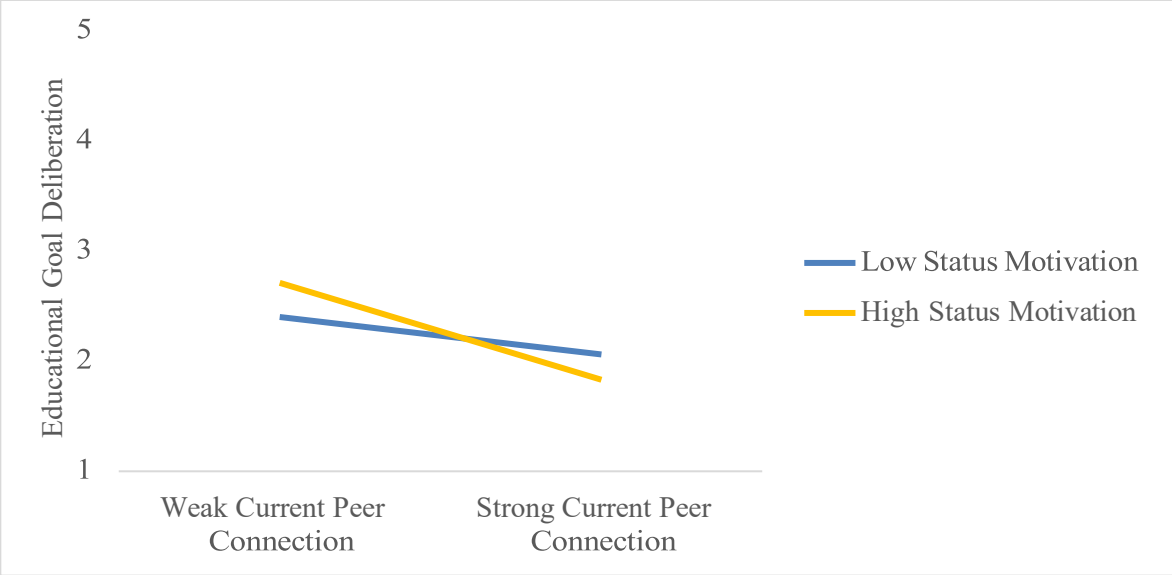

Figure 1.6. Status Group Connections on Educational Goal Deliberation by Status Enhancement College Motivation

Note. Contrary to the hypothesized relationship, status group social connections does not moderate the association status motivation on educational goal strivings. Figure 1.6. plots the significant association when status motivation served as the moderator.

Table 1.5.
Hierarchical Regression Examining Moderating of Connections to Current Status-Based Groups and Educational Goal Deliberation

	Educational Goal Deliberation		
Predictors	***b***	***SE***	**95%CI**
Step 1 R^2: Covariates			
Constant	2.38	.15	[2.09, 2.67]
Past Social Status	-.25**	.09	[-.444, -.081]
Semesters	-.05	.06	[-.172, .068]
Distance From Home	.00	.00	[-.00, .00]
Need For Belonging	.20	.11	[-.016, .417]
Step 2 R^2 change: Main Effects			
Connections to Current Status Group	-.18***	.05	[-.267, -.089]
Status Enhancement Motivation	-.01	.09	[-.180, .163]
Step 3 change: Interaction			
Connections to Current Status Group X Status-Related Motivation	-.08*	.04	[-.160, .007]

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
All reported coefficients and parameters are bootstrapped.

Table 1.6.
The Conditional Effects of Status Enhancement Motivation on Goal Deliberation at Values of the Moderator (Current Status-Based Group Connections)

Connections to Current Status-Based Groups	*Effect*	*SE*	*p*	95%CI
Low	.14	.11	.190	[-.071 .354]
Average	.00	.08	.954	[-.161, .152]
High	-.15	.10	.145	[-.354, .052]

Table 1.7.
The Conditional Effects of Connections to Current Status-Based Groups on Goal Deliberation at Values of the Moderator (Status Enhancement Motivation)

Status Enhancement Motivation	*Effect*	*SE*	*p*	95%CI
Low	-.10	.06	.069	[-.212 .008]
Average	-.18	.04	<.001	[-.259, -.094]
High	-.25	.05	<.001	[-.358, -.145]

Social Status and Status-Related Social Groups on Educational Goal Deliberation

After controlling for covariates, $R^2 = .109$, $p < .001$, both higher past social status $b = -.29$, $p = .003$, 95%CI[-.478, -.100], and greater connections to peers at college, $b = -.17$, $p < .001$, 95%CI[-.257, -.092], were negatively associated with educational goal deliberation.

These main effects were not qualified by a significant interaction between the two, b = .06, p = .291, 95%CI[-.030, .147]. Thus, stronger connections to current status-related groups did not reduce goal deliberation for those of lower social statuses. Similarly, when examining current social class, stronger connections to peers at college did not moderate the association amongst lower social class on goal deliberation, b = -.03, p = .647, 95% CI[-.134, .083], nor upper social class on goal deliberation, b = -.04, p = .461, 95% CI[-.153, .070].

Exploratory Analyses

Ethnic Identity Group Belonging and Salience

Because status-based identities largely overlap with ethnic identities, whether they overlapped with status-based identity processes (i.e., group belonging and identity salience) was explored.

Status-based group belonging and ethnic group belonging were moderately correlated (r = .28, p <.001). Similarly, the salience of social status and the salience of ethnicity to an individual's identity were moderately correlated (r = .32, p <.001), indicating that status-based and ethnicity identity processes are associated with each other, but still remain separate constructs. However, the majority of the sample (n = 239) were ethnically well-represented students in terms of the university's' populations (i.e., White) whereas the remaining sample were ethnically underrepresented students (n = 64).

Salience of Status-Based and Ethnic Identities

Using independent means t-tests, ethnically underrepresented students on average had a greater status-based salience (M = 2.70, SD = 1.73) compared to ethnically well-represented students (M = 2.21, SD = 1.40), but inferential statistics revealed larger

confidence intervals, $t(79.92) = -2.30$, $p = .05$, 95%CIboot[-1.01, .01], Cohen's $d = -.33$. Similarly, ethnic identity salience on average was higher for ethnically underrepresented students ($M = 4.70$, SD = 2.00) compared to ethnically well-represented students ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.80$), $t(293) = -6.39$, $p < .001$, 95%CIboot[-2.26, -1.14], Cohen's $d = -.93$.

Group Belonging to Status-Based and Ethnic Identities

T-tests revealed that a sense of group belonging to status-based groups and sense of belonging to ethnic identity groups did not significantly differ by whether a student was ethnically well-represented or ethnically underrepresented. Though not statistically significant, those who were ethnically well-represented on average had a weaker sense of belonging to their social status groups ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.49$) compared to those who are ethnically underrepresented ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.66$), $t(293) = -1.50$, $p = .148$, 95%CIboot(-.70, .07), Cohen's $d = -.22$. Similarly, though not statistically significant, those who were ethnically well-represented on average report a weaker sense of belonging to their ethnic group (i.e., White) ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.66$) compared to those who were underrepresented ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.71$), $t(293) = -1.78$, $p = .10$, 95%CIboot(-.92, .01), Cohen's $d = -.26$.

Study 1 Discussion

Rooted in Destin and colleagues' (2017) Status-Based Identity Framework, the current study suggests that social identities related to past and current social statuses are important for student motivation. Drawing from the existing literature on expectancy-value (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), social identity (Spears, 2011), and future identity (Nurra & Oyserman, 2018), an individual's personal understanding and the value placed on their social status is important for behavior and motivation (Destin & Oyserman, 2010; Destin et al., 2017). This study finds that it is important to also investigate the degree of an individual's sense of belonging to their social status groups when assessing status-related goal pursuits commonly associated with social mobility (i.e., attending college).

These findings support other research that suggest that students from lower social status backgrounds are more likely to report pursuing college for status enhancement compared to their higher status peers. This motivation is critical given the broader societal barriers these students face (Laurin et al. 2011; Browman et al., 2017), underscoring the importance of seeing education as a means for social mobility as a motivational drive for striving for a college degree. However, there is not a direct association between attending college for status enhancement purposes and deliberating whether college is right for them, despite other studies finding that goals related to enhancing one's social standing plays a role in how committed students are to their education (Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Oyserman, 2015).

Furthermore, the current study extends upon prior work by evaluating the nuances of status-based social identity properties and whether they result in differences in status enhancement motivation. Contrary to what was hypothesized, a stronger sense of

belonging to an individual's social status group does not impact motivation for status enhancement via college for lower status students. Lower status students seem to be resilient toward their status-based pursuits regardless of their sense of belonging to their social status as a social group. Instead, there seems to be a sensitizing effect of social status group belonging for students from higher social statuses. Those from higher status groups seem to be sensitive to the degree to which they feel they belong to that social status group. For example, feeling a weak sense of belonging to their social status seems to demotivate higher status students from pursuing college as an avenue for their own status enhancement. This indicates that a stronger group membership to their status-based groups may motivate higher status students to attend college for status-related reasons, whereas feeling less belonging to their status group results in lower motivation to pursue college as an avenue for their own status enhancement. The family unit has substantial impacts on educational goal pursuits (Haven & Smeeding, 2006), where interest in a child's academic performances is associated with stronger educational pursuits. This finding advances this notion by suggesting the importance of interpretations of belongingness to their family in terms of their financial and educational privileges.

Future research should investigate whether this motivation for higher status students is instead transferred into other sources, such as going to college because it is expected out of them, or for more humanitarian reasons. Status-enhancement as a motivator to attend college may also be more important for ethnic minority students, highlighting the importance of exploring how ethnic identity interacts with status identities to shape status-related motivation (Dennis et al., 2005).

Moreover, status salience and status-group belonging do not differ by past or current social statuses. However, social status identities are more salient for non-White students, highlighting the need for future work to investigate intersecting identities when examining their role on status related pursuits. Additionally, The negative relationship between coming from a higher past social status on attending college for status enhancement was only significant for students with less salient status-based identities and low levels of belonging to their status group. This association was non-significant for students who perceived their status as salient. Thus, for lower status students, salience and belonging do not seem to deter students from attending college to enhance their social standings. Instead, less salience and less belonging seem to matter for higher status students, where feeling like their status is less salient to their identities and feeling less belonging to others in their higher status group seem to be less motivated to attend college to enhance their social statuses.

Despite attending college for status enhancement, this does not translate into commitment toward education. However, the association between strength of connections to peers at college on goal deliberation was only significant for students who attended college to enhance their social standings. Therefore, moving away from a past status group (i.e., friends from high school) and being more integrated into a current social status group (i.e., friends at college) is important for remaining engaged with status-based goals such as graduating college, but only for students who came to college to enhance their social standings in society. This indicates that for students who attended college to attain a higher status in life, having stronger connections to current status-based groups is important for remaining engaged with their status-based goals.

By exploring these relationships, this study sheds light on underlying status-based psychological mechanisms that gives additional context for *when* status-related background characteristics such as coming from higher or lower status backgrounds is associated with status-based motivation, and for *who*. This study provides a foundation for understanding when status-related goals are strong academic motivators for achieving mobility-related goals such as graduating college, and how status-based identity processes can undermine their motivating role on student goal commitment.

Limitations and Future Directions

The ambiguity for what status-based groups students are referencing when reporting their sense of belonging – their past or current groups, warrants a need for further investigation. It is unknown whether students who come from higher past social status backgrounds were referencing the same status-based groups as those who come from lower social status backgrounds when reporting how much belonging they felt toward their status group. However, since status belonging was not correlated with connections to past social status related groups nor current status related groups, it is unclear. All in all, results seem to indicate that those who come from past lower social status backgrounds are motivated to achieve a higher status by attending college regardless of their sense of belonging to their past or current social status group.

Because status-based identities unfold in rich and dynamic ways (Destin et al., 2017; Destin et al., 2019), it would be pertinent to assess changes in status identities as a result of academic experiences. Additionally, investigating these processes longitudinally could aid the understanding of how status-based social groups change over time, as students from lower status backgrounds continue to navigate their ways throughout college and interact

more with their higher status peers. In the current study, there was a significant association among being a freshman or sophomore versus a junior or senior on attending college for status enhancement. For example, earlier years of college was associated with lower status motivation compared to those in their later years of college. However, there was also a significant correlation amongst the number of semesters students had completed and status-related motivation such that for students who had completed more semesters, their status-related motivation for attending college decreased. These conflicting results underscore the importance of investigating how beliefs about social mobility–and perceptions on how college helps an individual reach mobility goals– change as students get closer to graduation. Perhaps this could be suggestive of a de-valuing effect of receiving a college education as a means of achieving a higher status in life. On the other hand, this could be the result of students in the latter years of their education retrospectively reporting their motivation to attend college.

Moreover, it would be critical to investigate more concrete educational goals when examining the role that social status identities have on students' commitment to them. The following study uses a single item to assess how much students feel that college is right for them as a measure of how much they deliberate their goal of pursuing college. Assessing actual GPA performances and personal engagement with GPA goals would be an important avenue of empirical exanimation.

Study 1 Conclusions

Differences in young adults' sense of belonging to their social status, and strength of connections to status-related groups is associated with differences in educational motivation. In a sample of primarily white private liberal arts college students, the degree

of belongingness and salience of a social status does not seem to deter students from lower status backgrounds–nor those who perceive their current social status as lower class–from seeking out a college degree as a means of achieving upward mobility. Interestingly, students from higher past status backgrounds seem to only be motivated to attend college for status-related reasons when they feel a strong sense of belonging to their social status. However, this higher motivation to attend college for status-related reasons does not seem to alleviate educational goal deliberations, except for those who feel stronger connections to their new status-based social groups (i.e., their friends at college) compared to their old status-based groups (i.e., friends from high school). Thus, it seems that for those who came to college as a means to achieve their mobility-related goals, feeling more connectedness to current status-based social groups is important to help them stay committed to these goals. For those who came to college for non-status related reasons, other means keep them aligned with their achievement goals. Although the study relies on retrospective reports, it contributes to the literature suggesting that social status, both past and current, are associated with level and degree of commitment to social mobility goals.

CHAPTER 3

Study 2

Enduring Beliefs, Shifting Aspirations: The Stability of Strong Merit-Based Beliefs Across Social Status

Abstract

Individuals who believe social mobility is attainable both at the societal level and for themselves personally are more likely to remain engaged with their status attainment goals. Those who have successfully reached higher statuses in life tend to endorse more merit-based beliefs–that social status is attained through personal abilities and individual efforts–compared to those lower in social status. Receiving a college degree is often touted as a path to social mobility in the United States. Yet, little work has investigated whether young adults pursuing social mobility through education experience a change in these beliefs as they work to establish themselves on the social ladder. Using latent growth curve techniques, this study examined initial differences in beliefs about social status attainment, and whether they changed over the course of the first year of college. Additionally, this study sought to understand whether stronger endorsement of merit-based beliefs helped students from lower statuses maintain high aspirations for their future social statuses. Using a sample of freshmen college students attending a highly selective R1 university, we found that merit-based beliefs about social status attainment are similarly endorsed for lower and higher social status students. However, first-generation student status seemed to be a unique status-based identity that positions students to believe social status attainment is achieved through individual efforts. These beliefs remain relatively stable over the course of the first year of college, whereas aspirations for a future social status decrease marginally over time. However, this decrease in status aspirations is not associated with a matching trajectory in merit-based beliefs.

Keywords: social status beliefs; social status attainment; social status aspirations; university students

Introduction

The way that individuals think about their chances to achieve social mobility has been shown to impact their actual pursuits for social mobility, especially among those who come from lower social status backgrounds. Prior research has demonstrated that high school aged youth who believe that social mobility is achievable in society are more likely to put themselves on a path toward mobility through education (Destin, 2019; Browman et al., 2019; Browman et al., 2017). Furthermore, youth who believe that those who climb the social ladder did so because of uncontrollable factors including systemic barriers and individual privilege earn less income and hold less job prestige down the road compared to their peers who endorsed strong meritocratic ideologies about social mobility (Kay et al, 2016; Kraus et al., 2012). Thus, beliefs about social status attainment play a pivotal role in shaping educational aspirations, much more than an individual's past social status background (Kraus et al., 2012). For individuals that come from lower income backgrounds, the endorsement of merit-based beliefs can keep them on the path toward their status-based goals, allowing them to form a more cohesive status-based self within the context of pursuing social mobility (Destin et al., 2017).

Study 2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The second study of this dissertation presents the findings from an investigation of first year college student social status attainment aspirations and their beliefs about status attainment. Specifically, this study sought to examine:

(1) Freshmen college students' beliefs regarding social status attainment, particularly comparing beliefs about their own potential for status attainment against their perceptions of others' opportunities within society.

(2) The stability of these beliefs over time, and whether beliefs are less stable for those of lower past and current social statuses.

(3.) Predictors of initial social-status attainment beliefs and aspirations.

(4.) The changes in students' social status aspirations across time, exploring how these aspirations are shaped by students' social statuses.

Given the complexity of these objectives, a comprehensive analytical strategy was employed to dissect the nuances of social status attainment beliefs and aspirations. The following methods were utilized:

Statistical Analysis

Causal beliefs about social status attainment were measured where the sum of the five causes equal 100%. Thus, this compositional data (CoDa) has inherent constant sum constraints that pose significant analytical challenges, inducing spurious correlations and statistical artifacts that undermine traditional statistical methodologies (Greenacre, 2021). Compositional Log-Ratio (CLR) transformations are effective in transforming this data to effectively neutralize these constraints by converting data into log-ratios. This facilitates a space where standard statistical techniques regain their validity (Flismoser et al., 2018; Greenacre, 2021). This transformation not only enhances interpretability, providing a clearer view of the relative importance among composition parts, but also significantly improves statistical properties such as normality and homoscedasticity, thereby enabling more reliable hypothesis testing and regression modeling.

Predictive models with Dirichlet regression techniques are often used to account for the compositional nature of the data (0% to 100%). The Dirichlet regression analyses aimed to examine the relative influence of past and current status-based identities, prior

academic achievements, and academic motivation on freshmen college students' endorsement of causal beliefs for status attainment–regarding personal ability, effort, privilege, help of influential people, and luck in social status attainment. The first model assessed past and current social status, initial status attainment aspirations, political ideology, gender, and the COVID student cohort. The second model added academic predictors (i.e., prior high school achievement, academic self-efficacy, and educational control strivings). The interactions between status-based identities and social status aspirations were added to predict these beliefs. For correlations and descriptive statistics, centered log-ratio (CLR) transformations were used before entering into predictive models to mitigate the compositional constraints. Dirichlet regression analyses used raw scores, as it is equipped to handle the compositional nature of the data.

All continuous variables were mean centered prior to regression analyses. Normality of errors assumptions were checked, and outlier analyses were conducted with Cook's Distance, and were excluded from analysis if significant.

Longitudinal Analysis

Latent growth curve modeling (LGCM) techniques via a structural equation modeling framework was primarily used to capture 1) the underlying growth trajectories cross-collapsing across status-based groups (i.e., no growth, linear with unconstrained or constrained residual variances, and piecewise growth models), 2) whether these underlying trajectories varied by status-based groups (i.e., first-generation status; past and current status identities), and 3) conditional predictors of initial beliefs and aspirations as well as their rate of change over time. These analyses involved meticulous assessments of the model fit indices (i.e., chi-squared statistics, p-values, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR, and

changes in log-likelihood) to select the best fitting model before interpretations. A thorough inspection of both the intercepts and slopes offers insight into whether there is significant variation in the starting point and changes in beliefs and status aspirations over time. Additionally, when significant between and within-persons variation was observed, models were extended to examine conditional predictors to explain the variation. These estimations were carried out in Rstudio, version 4.1.2, using the mimic = "Mplus" command to parallel the procedures commonly used in Mplus software. Additionally, robust standard error estimation was used. Mixed-linear effects models were estimated when concerns about model fit arrived in the LGCMs.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

The Measuring Undergraduate Student Trajectories (MUST) project is a large and ongoing project with the goal of understanding the value of various educational experiences and to develop student-success models to better promote undergraduate student outcomes (Arum, et al., 2021). This dissertation primarily uses administrative student data and the survey data collected over a 2-year longitudinal span over the course of multiple cohorts of students, beginning in the fall of 2020 and fall 2021. Each cohort of students were followed over the course of two years. Weekly surveys were administered each academic term throughout the first year, and end of term surveys were administered at the end of each term the second year.

The following study draws upon the second and third cohort of students who participated in this project, commencing in fall of 2020 and 2021 respectively. Data were collected across two years. Core surveys were administered at the beginning of the first

academic term of the first and second year of college (2 total) for a larger sample, followed by weekly surveys across the first academic year for a subset of the initial sample. Beliefs about social status attainment were measured in week four of the weekly surveys, whereas aspirations were measured in both the core and weekly surveys (see Figure 2.1).

Freshmen Sample

The following study encompassed a multi-cohort investigation of first-year freshmen students at a Research-1 (R1) university who participated in the MUST project. The total sample size utilized was 360, distributed across two cohorts: Cohort 2 (n = 187) from the academic year (AY) 2020-2021 and Cohort 3 (n = 173) from AY 2021-2022 who participated in both the core and weekly surveys. The participants in this sample were ethnically diverse (25.5% Chicano/Mexican-American; 5.5% Latino/Other Spanish American; 18.9% Chinese/Chinese American; 6.7% Filipino/Filipino American; 16.1% Vietnamese; 1.1% Japanese/Japanese American; 2.5% Thai or Other Asian; 2.2% Korean; 5% East Indian/Pakistani; 4.2% Black/African American; .55% American Indian; and 11.1% White). A great proportion of the sample was female (70.6%), and a majority of the sample were US Citizens (17.8% non-U.S. citizens, 12.5% international students). 24.2% reported that English was not their first language. Additionally, 40.6% were low-income, and 55% were first-generation college students. Notably, the sample had high prior academic achievements, with a mean high school of GPA of 4.01. Additionally, educational attainment goals were high, with a notable 81% expecting to earn a Master's degree, and 44.4% anticipate pursuing an advanced degree. In sum, this sample of students were ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, primarily consisting of females, demonstrating high prior academic achievement, and holding ambitious educational expectations.

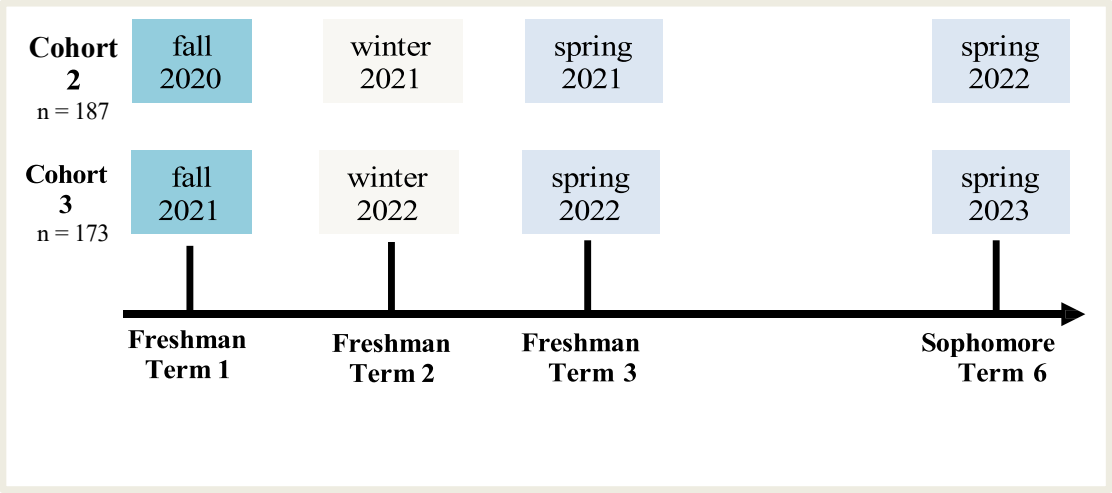

Figure 2.1. Longitudinal Procedure for Study 2

Note. All measures were taken from each of these time points. Personal social status beliefs were measured across the first three waves of data, encapsulating changes in beliefs over the first year of college. Social status aspirations were captured across all four waves.

Attrition and Sample Selection

Out of the initial 360 students, complete data for causal beliefs and aspirations included 327 participants (90.8%) in the winter term (T2), 272 participants (75.6%) in the spring term (T3), and 239 participants (66.4%) in the spring term of the second year for aspirations only (T4). 169 students (46.9%) responded to each wave of data collection, including the 2-year follow-up assessment. Consequently, 53.1% of the original sample was lost due to attrition. Given that personal social status beliefs constituted the primary variables of interest, analyses looking at the changes of these beliefs over time were restricted to individuals with data for at least two out of the three waves. This led to a final sample size of 278 participants. Additionally, participants who completed at least three out of the four waves of data for social status aspirations were included in models that assessed their changes over time, leading to a sample size of 227 participants.

The attrition rates and sample selection process were carefully considered to ensure the robustness and reliability of the analyses conducted on the causal beliefs of social status attainment over the designated time periods. In the final analyses, 80.6% of all observations were present, with 19.4% missing. Full Information Maximum likelihood estimation techniques were used in final models.

Measures

"Other" Social Status Beliefs

During the first week of the first academic term (i.e., fall) and the fourth week of the following terms (i.e., winter and spring), participants were given a series of attributions for why they thought others in society (i.e., *societal beliefs)* reach the position on the social ladder that they strive for. Participants were asked to rate 3 non-merit-based explanations and 2 items for merit-based explanations on a scale of 0% influential to 100% influential, where all five items equaled 100%. The 3 *non-merit-based* items included privileges due to family background, the help of influential people, and luck or chance influences. The 2 *merit-based* items included competence and abilities, and effort and hard work.

"Self" Social Status Beliefs

During the first week of the first academic term (i.e., fall) and the fourth week of the following terms (i.e., winter and spring), participants were given a series of attributions for why they themselves (i.e., *personal beliefs)* reach the position on the social ladder that they strive for. Participants asked to rate 3 non-merit-based explanations and 2 items for merit-based explanations on a scale of 0% influential to 100% influential, where all five items equaled 100%. The 3 *non-merit-based* items included privileges due to family background,

the help of influential people, and luck or chance influences. The 2 *merit-based* items included competence and abilities, and effort and hard work.

Past, Current, and Future Aspired Social Status

Across their first two years in school, participants were given The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler, et al., 2000; Shane & Heckhausen, 2013) to report their subjective past, present, and future social statuses. Specifically, in the fall, winter, and spring terms in the first year and spring term of the second year, students were asked to report where on a 10-rung ladder they thought best represented their family growing up (i.e., *past*), where on the ladder best represented them currently (i.e., *current*), and where on the ladder they wanted to be in fifteen to twenty years from now (i.e., *future*). Instructions for using the social ladder included the explanation that the very top of the ladder represents people in the United States who are the best off: having the most money, highest amount of education, and well-respected jobs; the very bottom of the ladder represented people in the United States who were worse off: having the least amount of money, little or no education, and no jobs or a job that nobody wants or respects. Reports of past subjective social status are referred to as *family-of-origin Social Status*. Future social status was measured by taking the absolute placement on the ladder regarding where they wanted to be in 15 to 20 years.

First Generation Status

Parent education was evaluated on a continuous scale, where higher scores equated to higher levels of education. Students whose parents had not earned a four-year degree were classified as first-generation and given a code of 1 whereas if at least one parent had earned a four-year degree, they were given a code of 0.

Academic Self-Efficacy

On a scale of 0 (*not good at all*) to 100 (*exceptional*), students were asked to rate how good they were on 10 academic behaviors (e.g., finding strategies to succeed in class; scheduling time to accomplish academic tasks; studying even when there are other things to do). $Cronbach\ alpha$ = .868.

Educational Goal Striving

Students were told that people face different educational obstacles, and were asked to rank on a scale of 0 (*no effort at all*) to 100 (*as much effort as I can*), how much effort they would put into working hard to get a good education, to not give up on their educational goals, and to try harder when things got difficult. *Cronbach alpha* = .873.

Covariates for Causal Beliefs

Prior Academic Achievement. Prior academic achievement was measured using administrative data collected at admissions on students' prior high school GPA.

Political Ideology. Students were asked to report how they would characterize their political views on a scale of 0 (*completely liberal/far left*) to 100 (*completely conservative/far right*).

Gender. Gender was collected during admissions where female students were coded as 1 to serve as the reference group, and male students were coded as 0.

Results

Initial "Self" Beliefs

On average, the belief that achieving an aspired social status that they themselves strive for was due to their own abilities (M = 28.21, SD = 13.68) was endorsed less than the belief that it was due to their personal efforts (M = 36.05, SD = 16.89). Non-merit-based

beliefs such as the belief that an aspired social status is achieved because of one's own privileges due to their family background (M = 11.00, SD = 12.16) was endorsed less highly than ability and effort beliefs, and similarly to other non-merit-based beliefs, including the belief in the help of influential people (M = 13.47, SD = 11.41) and luck (M = 11.27, SD = 10.45). Table 2.1 reveals descriptive statistics and significant differences in "self" social status beliefs between first and non-first generation students. When thinking about themselves, first generation students were more likely to endorse effort beliefs while being less likely to endorse privilege beliefs compared to non-first generation students. A description of these beliefs by past social status rung is seen in Figure 2.2.

Table 2.1. T-Tests for "Self" Social Status Beliefs by Generation Status

	Non-First Generation		**First Generation**			
Personal Beliefs	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Ability	27.59	14.81	29.12	-	-	-
Ability (t)	1.19	2.27	1.73	2.32	-1.90	0.059
Effort	33.95	15.62	36.98	-	-	-
Effort (t)	**1.33**	**2.13**	**2.01**	**2.52**	**-2.43**	**0.016**
Privilege	13.76	13.99	8.76	-	-	-
Privilege (t)	**-1.32**	**3.60**	**-2.34**	**3.61**	**2.32**	**0.021**
Influential People	13.38	9.95	13.69	-	-	-
Influential People (t)	-0.60	2.89	-0.97	3.20	1.00	0.317
Luck	11.32	8.72	11.46	-	-	-
Luck (t)	-0.60	2.83	-0.43	2.84	-0.51	0.612

Note. (t) are the centered log-ratio (CLR) transformations in order to account for the compositional nature of the data.

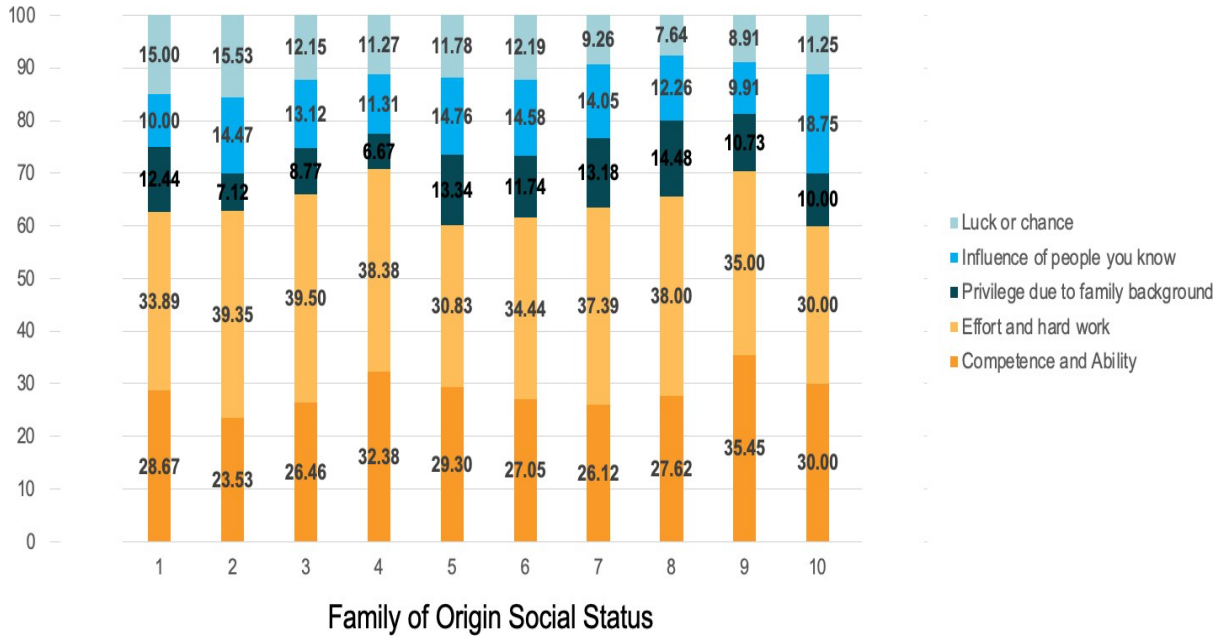

Figure 2.2. Proportion of "Self" Status Beliefs by Past Social Status Ladder Rung

Initial "Other" Beliefs

On average, the belief that others in society achieve their aspired social status due to abilities (M = 22.27, SD = 11.07) was endorsed less than others' efforts (M = 28.66, SD = 15.16). Notably, the non-merit-based belief that others in society achieve their aspired social status because of privileges due to their family backgrounds (M = 22.95, SD = 15.28) was similarly endorsed compared to the endorsement of merit-based beliefs of ability. The belief that others in society achieve their aspired social status due to the help of influential people (M = 16.05, SD = 8.37) was more endorsed compared to the belief in luck (M = 10.07, SD = 7.52). Table 2.2 reveals descriptive statistics and significant differences in others' social status beliefs between first and non-first generation students. When thinking about others in society, first generation students were more likely to endorse ability beliefs compared to non-first generation students.

Table 2.2. T-tests for "Other" Social Status Beliefs by Generation Status

	Non-First Generation		First Generation			
Societal Beliefs	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Ability	21.05	11.11	23.16	-	-	-
Ability (t)	**0.19**	**1.09**	**0.51**	**1.23**	**-2.31**	**0.022**
Effort	29.26	15.72	27.63	-	-	-
Effort (t)	0.67	1.28	0.57	1.59	0.52	0.602
Privilege	22.90	15.09	23.37	-	-	-
Privilege (t)	0.00	1.86	0.07	1.69	-0.29	0.774
Influential People	16.58	8.57	15.73	-	-	-
Influential People (t)	-0.04	1.01	-0.10	1.14	0.50	0.615
Luck	10.21	7.65	10.11	-	-	-
Luck (t)	-0.82	1.86	-1.05	2.28	0.92	0.357

Note. (t) are the centered log-ratio (CLR) transformations in order to account for the compositional nature of the data.

Correlates Among Meritocratic and Non-Meritocratic Beliefs in Social Status Attainment Over Time: A Comparative Analysis of Self Versus Others in Society

"Self" Social Status Beliefs

As seen in Table 2.3, past social status was not significantly associated with merit and non-merit-based beliefs about social status attainment, except for a small, negative association amongst effort beliefs in the spring term of the first year (r = -.13, p <.05, CI[-.25, -.01]). However, past social status was positively associated with social status aspirations across the first year of college, but not at the end of the second year of college. Current social status was positively associated with personal aspirations across the two years of college (rs = .24 to .40).

"Self" Merit-Based Belief Over Time. Personal beliefs in ability was positively correlated with effort beliefs at each point of time, with the strongest association occurring at the beginning of college (r = .62, p <.001, CI[.54, .69]). A stronger belief in personal ability at the beginning of college is positively associated with social status aspirations at the

beginning of college (r = .14, p <.05, CI[.02,.25]), and in the spring term of the second year of college (r = .20, p <.05, CI[.03, .26]). Similarly, a stronger belief in effort at the beginning of college is positively associated with personal aspirations at the beginning of college (r = .14, p <.05, CI[.03, .26]), and in the spring term of the second year (r = .24, p <.01, CI[.07, .39]).

"Self" Non-Merit-Based Beliefs Over Time. Aspirations at the beginning of college were not significantly associated with any of the non-merit-based beliefs. However, stronger beliefs in luck in the spring term of the first year was negatively associated with aspirations in the spring term of the first year (r = -.16, p <.05, CI[-.28, -.03]), and in the spring term of the second year (r = -.19, p <.05, CI[-.35, -.02]). Furthermore, stronger luck beliefs in the beginning of college was negatively associated with aspirations in the spring term of the second year (r = -.21, p <.05, CI[-.37, -.05]). Past social status was positively associated personal beliefs in privilege across the first year of college (r_s = .15 to .19), but was not significantly associated with the help of influential people or luck beliefs. Beliefs about personal privilege was also positively associated with the help of influential people over time, with the associations becoming stronger over time, with strongest correlation occurring in the spring term of the first year (r = .24, p <.01, CI[.13, .35]).

Table 2.3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for **Merit-Based "Self" Status Beliefs**

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Past SS	5.25	2.10											
2. Current SS	5.34	1.85	.50**										
			[.41, .59]										
3. Ability T1 (t)	1.59	2.10	-0.02	0.00									
			[-.14, .10]	[-.13, .12]									
4. Ability T2 (t)	1.83	2.26	-0.07	-0.02	.80**								
			[-.19, .05]	[-.14, .10]	[.75, .84]								
5. Ability T3 (t)	1.73	2.08	-0.09	-0.03	.52**	.52**							
			[-.21, .03]	[-.15, .09]	[.42, .60]	[.43, .60]							
6. Effort T1 (t)	1.90	1.98	-0.12	-0.07	.62**	.67**	.62**						
			[-.24, .00]	[-.18, .06]	[.54, .69]	[.60, .73]	[.54, .69]						
7. Effort T2 (t)	1.42	2.23	-0.09	-0.11	.54**	.40**	.49**	.39**					
			[-.21, .03]	[-.23, .01]	[.45, .62]	[.30, .50]	[.40, .58]	[.29, .49]					
8. Effort T3 (t)	1.69	2.10	-.13*	-0.10	.47**	.52**	.53**	.67**	.66**				
			[-.25, -.01]	[-.21, .02]	[.37, .55]	[.43, .60]	[.44, .61]	[.60, .73]	[.59, .72]				
9. SS Aspirations T1	7.47	1.60	.32**	.40**	.14*	.18**	0.07	.14*	0.09	0.10			
			[.21, .42]	[.29, .49]	[.02, .25]	[.06, .29]	[-.05, .19]	[.02, .26]	[-.03, .21]	[-.02, .21]			
10. SS Aspirations T2	7.27	1.62	.22**	.27**	-0.02	0.03	0.08	0.09	-0.04	.16**	.59**		
			[.09, .33]	[.14, .38]	[-.14, .10]	[-.09, .15]	[-.04, .20]	[-.04, .21]	[-.16, .09]	[.04, .28]	[.51, .67]		
11. SS Aspirations T3	7.40	1.57	.28**	.32**	0.03	0.07	.13*	0.06	.14*	.17*	.67**	.76**	
			[.15, .39]	[.20, .44]	[-.10, .16]	[-.06, .20]	[.00, .26]	[-.07, .18]	[.01, .26]	[.04, .29]	[.59, .74]	[.69, .81]	
12. SS Aspirations T4	7.06	1.87	0.17	.24**	.20*	.20*	0.10	.24**	.21*	.26**	.69**	.64**	.70**
			[-.00, .33]	[.07, .39]	[.03, .35]	[.03, .36]	[-.07, .26]	[.07, .39]	[.05, .37]	[.09, .41]	[.59, .77]	[.52, .73]	[.60, .78]

Table 2.4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for **Non-Merit-Based "Self" Status Beliefs**

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Past SS	5.25	2.10														
2. Current SS	5.34	1.85	.50**													
			[.41, .59]													
3. Privilege T1 (t)	-1.74	4.06	.15*	0.09												
			[.03, .27]	[-.03, .20]												
4. Privilege T2 (t)	-1.81	4.12	.16*	0.08	0.1											
			[.04, .27]	[-.04, .20]	[-.01, .22]											
5. Privilege T3 (t)	-1.65	4.00	.19**	0.04	0.03	.27**										
			[.08, .31]	[-.08, .16]	[-.08, .15]	[.16, .38]										
6. Influential People T1 (t)	-0.73	3.52	0.01	-0.07	.16**	-.12*	-0.12									
			[-.11, .13]	[-.18, .06]	[.04, .27]	[-.23, -.00]	[-.23, .00]									
7. Influential People T2 (t)	-1.36	3.77	-0.06	0.02	-0.04	.21**	-0.05	0.10								
			[-.18, .06]	[-.10, .14]	[-.16, .08]	[.10, .32]	[-.17, .07]	[-.02, .21]								
8. Influential People T3 (t)	-0.73	3.38	-0.04	0.03	-0.06	-0.09	.24**	0.06	0.07							
			[-.16, .09]	[-.09, .15]	[-.17, .06]	[-.21, .03]	[.13, .35]	[-.06, .17]	[-.05, .19]							
9. Luck T1 (t)	-0.41	3.15	-0.04	0.04	-0.02	-.23**	-.24**	0.07	-.17**	-0.08						
			[-.16, .08]	[-.08, .16]	[-.13, .10]	[-.34, -.11]	[-.35, -.12]	[-.05, .19]	[-.28, -.05]	[-.19, .04]						
10. Luck T2 (t)	-0.85	3.65	-0.03	-0.04	-0.11	-.20**	-.28**	-.14*	-0.07	-.12*	.27**					
			[-.15, .09]	[-.16, .08]	[-.23, .00]	[-.31, -.08]	[-.39, -.17]	[-.26, -.03]	[-.18, .05]	[-.23, -.00]	[.15, .37]					
11. Luck T3 (t)	-0.88	3.55	-0.11	-0.02	-.16**	-.13*	0.03	-.13*	0.01	-0.02	0.02	.12*				
			[-.23, .01]	[-.14, .10]	[-.27, -.04]	[-.25, -.02]	[-.09, .14]	[-.24, -.01]	[-.11, .12]	[-.14, .09]	[-.09, .14]	[.01, .24]				
12. SS Aspirations T1	7.47	1.60	.32**	.40**	-0.04	-0.11	0.00	-0.05	-0.12	0.04	0.00	-0.01	-0.09			
			[.21, .42]	[.29, .49]	[-.16, .08]	[-.23, .01]	[-.12, .12]	[-.17, .07]	[-.23, .00]	[-.09, .16]	[-.12, .12]	[-.13, .11]	[-.21, .03]			
13. SS Aspirations T2	7.27	1.62	.22**	.27**	0.03	-0.02	-0.04	0.01	-0.04	-0.07	0.04	0.00	-0.07	.59**		
			[.09, .33]	[.14, .38]	[-.09, .15]	[-.14, .10]	[-.16, .09]	[-.12, .13]	[-.16, .08]	[-.19, .05]	[-.08, .16]	[-.13, .12]	[-.19, .05]	[.51, .67]		
14. SS Aspirations T3	7.40	1.57	.28**	.32**	0.02	-0.02	0.04	0.01	-0.02	-0.03	-0.09	-0.13	-.16*	.67**	.76**	
			[.15, .39]	[.20, .44]	[-.11, .15]	[-.15, .11]	[-.09, .17]	[-.12, .14]	[-.15, .11]	[-.16, .10]	[-.22, .04]	[-.25, .00]	[-.28, -.03]	[.59, .74]	[.69, .81]	
15. SS Aspirations T4	7.06	1.87	0.17	.24**	-0.06	-0.06	0.03	-0.10	-0.10	-0.01	-.21*	0.02	-.19*	.69**	.64**	.70**
			[-.00, .33]	[.07, .39]	[-.23, .11]	[-.23, .10]	[-.14, .20]	[-.26, .07]	[-.26, .07]	[-.18, .15]	[-.37, -.05]	[-.14, .19]	[-.35, -.02]	[.59, .77]	[.52, .73]	[.60, .78]

"Other" Social Status Beliefs

"Other" Merit-Based Beliefs Over Time. "Other" beliefs in ability was positively correlated with effort beliefs at each point of time, with the strongest association occurring in the spring term of the first year (r = .60, p <.001, CI[.52, .67]). The belief that others in society achieve their desired social status based on their abilities was not significantly associated with aspirations at any time, not with past or current social status. Initial effort beliefs, on the other hand, were positively associated with social status aspirations across the first two years of college (rs = .13 to .32). Additionally, effort beliefs across the winter and spring term were positively associated with social status aspirations in the winter and spring terms of the first year, and the spring term of the second year (rs = .17 to .32) (see Table 2.6).

"Other" Non-Merit-Based Beliefs Over Time. Unlike merit-based beliefs, students' past and current social statuses were associated with non-merit-based beliefs. Having a higher past social status was negatively associated with the belief that others in society achieve their aspired social status because of privilege at the beginning of college (r = -.13, p <.05, CI[-.25, -.01]). Higher past social status was also negatively associated with attributing others' social status attainments to the help of influential people in the winter term (r = -.18, p < .001, CI[-.29, -.06)]. Similarly, current social status was negatively associated with attributing others' social status attainments to the help of influential people in the winter term (r = -.15, p <.05, CI[-.27, -.03]).

Generally, higher privilege beliefs for others in society were positively associated with help of influential people beliefs across time, negatively associated with luck beliefs, and negatively associated with personal social status aspirations. Notably, the help of

influential people belief at the beginning of college was negatively associated with social status aspirations across the first year (T1: r = -.16, p <.001, CI[-.28, -.04]; T2: r = -.18, p <.001, CI[-.29, -.06]; T3: r = -.15, p <.001, CI[-.27, -.02]). Moreover, personal social status aspirations were negatively associated with privilege beliefs at the end of the first year (r = - .15, p <.05, CI[-.26, -.03]), and privilege beliefs at the beginning of college was negatively associated with personal aspirations in the spring term of the first year of college (r = -.19, p <.001, CI[-.32, -.07]), and in the spring term of the second year (r = -.23, p <.001, CI[-.38, -.06]).

Predictors of "Self" Beliefs

The baseline log ratios in the first model indicated a significantly positive inclination towards attributing success to one's own ability (b = 0.58, SE = 0.15, p < .001) and effort (b = 0.57, SE = 0.15, p < .001), suggesting that these personal merit-based factors are proportionally more emphasized when considering pathways to personal social status. Conversely, there was less emphasis on non-merit-based factors such as privilege, the help of influential people, and luck, as indicated by non-significant intercepts.

Notable predictors included future status aspirations, which was positively associated with the proportional belief in ability (b = 0.16, SE = 0.04, p < .001) and effort (b = 0.22, SE = 0.04, p < .001), reinforcing the perspective that higher status-based goals place greater weight on personal merit. Furthermore, a more conservative political ideology incrementally increases the proportion of belief in ability and effort (Ability: b = 0.01, Effort: b = 0.01, p < .001 for both). Students who began college in the midst of COVID-related educational disruptions placed a greater emphasis on their own personal efforts (b = 0.47, SE = 0.12, p < .001) as well as luck (b = 0.33, SE = 0.13, p <.05).

The second model (as seen in Table 2.5) which incorporates academic contextual predictors, retains the significance of future status aspirations for ability and effort, underscoring a consistent emphasis on personal merit. High school GPA emerges as a predictor for ability ($b = 0.61$, $SE = 0.29$, $p < .05$), indicating that past academic performances shape beliefs in personal competencies as drivers of social status.

Interaction Effects. The introduction of interaction terms between past and current social status and future status aspirations, and first-generation status and future status aspirations were entered into a subsequent model after removing academic self-efficacy and selective primary control. There were no significant interactions among past or current social status and future status aspirations (ps <.05). However, as seen in Figure 2.3, the interactions between first generation status and aspirations was significant for beliefs in ability ($b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .038$), effort ($b = 0.32$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .002$), and luck ($b = .172$, $SE = .086$, $p = .046$).

Table 2.5. Coefficients of the Dirichlet Regression Model: Initial Predictors of "Self" Social Status Beliefs

	Ability		**Effort**		**Privilege**		**Influential People**		**Luck**	
	b (SE)		***b (SE)***		***b (SE)***		***b (SE)***		***b (SE)***	
(Intercept)	**0.58**	**(0.15)*** **	**0.57**	**(0.15)*** **	-0.26	(0.16)	0.01	(0.16)	-0.09	(0.16)
Future status aspiration	**0.16**	**(0.04)*** **	**0.22**	**(0.04)*** **	0.01	(0.04)	0.04	(0.04)	0.08	(0.04)
Past SS	-0.05	(0.04)	-0.04	(0.04)	0.05	(0.04)	0.00	(0.04)	-0.06	(0.04)
Current SS	-0.05	(0.04)	-0.07	(0.04)	0.00	(0.04)	-0.04	(0.04)	0.02	(0.04)
First generation	0.05	(0.13)	0.04	(0.14)	-0.23	(0.14)	-0.07	(0.15)	-0.16	(0.15)
Political ideology	**0.01**	**(0.00)*** **	**0.01**	**(0.00)*** **	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.01	(0.00)
Female	0.18	(0.14)	**0.28**	**(0.13)***	0.17	(0.15)	0.05	(0.15)	0.04	(0.14)
COVID cohort	**0.34**	**(0.12)** **	**0.47**	**(0.12)*** **	0.11	(0.13)	0.06	(0.13)	**0.33**	**(0.13)***
High school GPA	**0.61**	**(0.29)***	0.25	(0.28)	0.37	0.325	0.58	(0.33)	0.28	(0.33)
Academic self-efficacy	0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Ed. control striving	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)

Note. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05. High school GPA, academic self-efficacy, and educational control strivings were added as subsequent predictors.

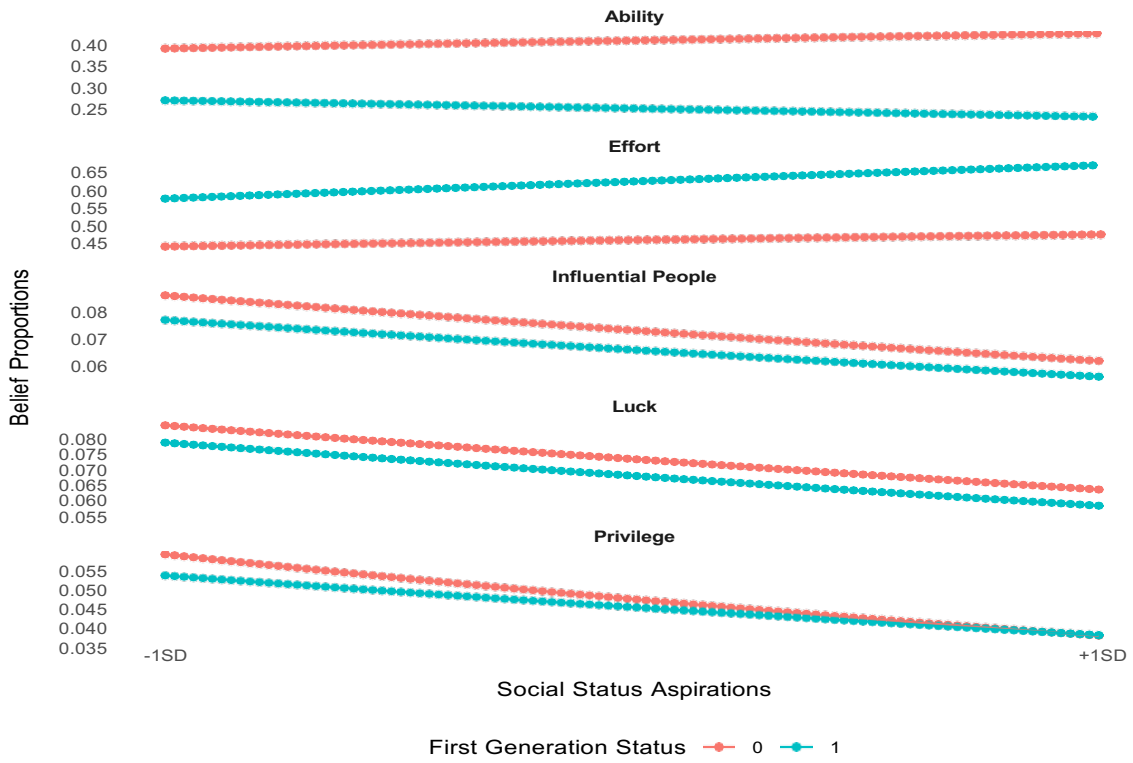

Figure 2.3. The Effect of Aspirations on "Self" Beliefs as a Function of Generation Status

Predictors of "Other" Beliefs

When examining the baseline log ratios from the Dirichlet regression model, participants have a significant inclination towards attributing personal success to ability (b = .675, SE = .151, $p < .001$) and effort (b = .846, SE = .145, $p < .001$). These findings suggest a robust, merit-based interpretation of social status when thinking about other people in society.

Notably, first-generation students displayed a significantly higher belief in the importance of ability for social status (b = .273, SE = .139, $p < .05$). Similar to personal beliefs, a more conservative ideology modestly but significantly correlated with a stronger belief in ability (b = .006, SE = .002, $p < .05$) and effort (b = .008, SE = .003, $p < .01$).

Furthermore, the cohort affected by COVID-related disruptions to their education placed less emphasis in effort as a factor in social status for others in society (b = -.267, SE = .117, p < .01). When adding in academic predictors of status beliefs for others in society, those with higher high school GPAs placed a greater emphasis in ability (b = .574, SE = .285, p <.05). However, one's own academic self-efficacy and goal-oriented control was not significantly associated with any of the societal beliefs. Please see Tables 2.9.

Interaction Effects. The introduction of interaction terms between past social status and future status aspirations, and first generation status and future status aspirations were entered into a subsequent model after removing academic self-efficacy and selective primary control. There were no significant interactions amongst past social status and future status aspirations (ps <.05). However, the interaction between first generation status and aspirations was almost significant for beliefs in ability (b = .18, SE = .093, p = .053); significant with effort (b = .31, SE = .12, p = .009), privilege (b = .21, SE = .097, p = .030), help of influential people (b = .222, SE = .087, p = .010), and luck (b = .215, SE = .094, p = .022)(See Figure 2.4).

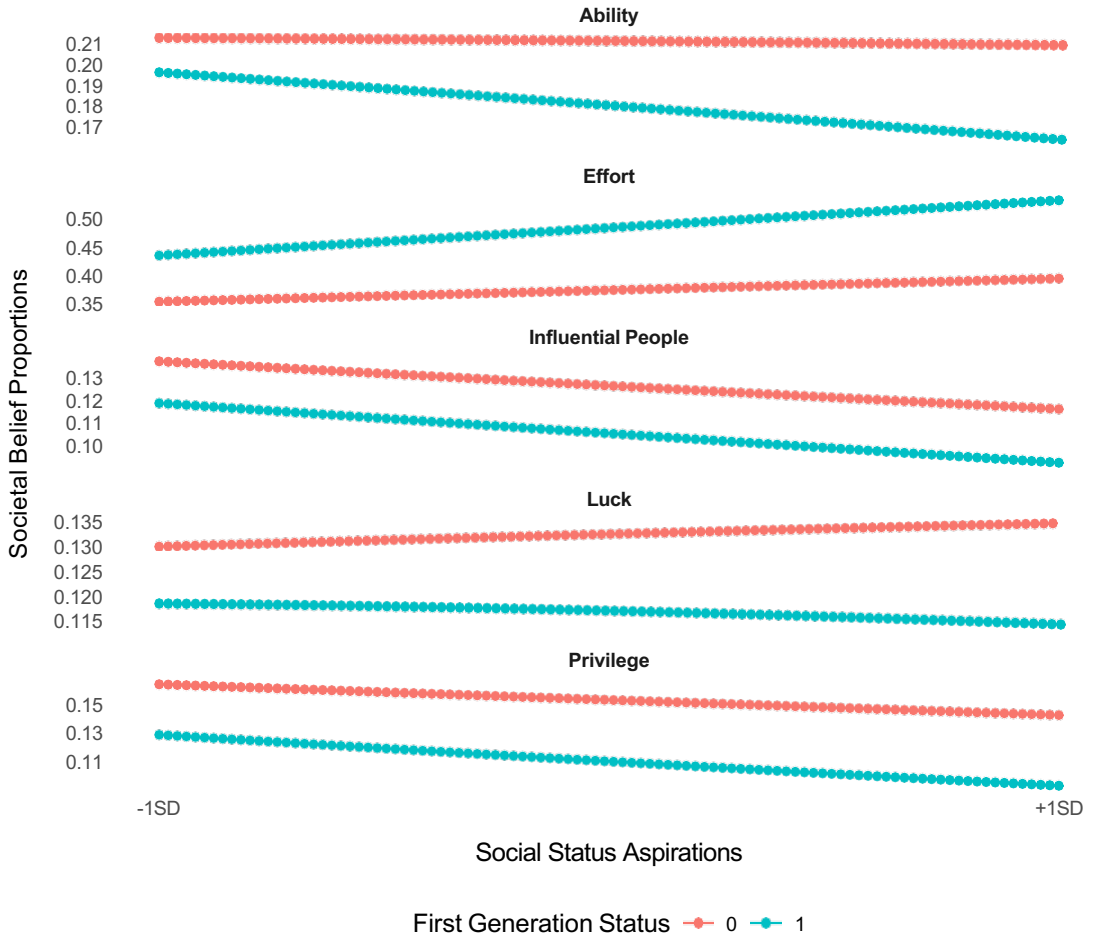

Figure 2.4. The Effect of Status Aspirations On "Other" Beliefs as a Function of Generation Status

Table 2.6. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with Confidence Intervals for **Initial "Self" Social Status Beliefs**

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Ability (t)	1.48	2.29										
2. Effort (t)	1.72	2.37	.82** [.78, .86]									
3. Privilege (t)	-1.85	3.61	-.56** [-.63, -.47]	-.55** [-.63, -.47]								
4. Influential people (t)	-0.84	3.07	-.49** [-.57, -.39]	-.48** [-.56, -.38]	-.08 [-.20, .04]							
5. Luck (t)	-0.52	2.83	-.26** [-.37, -.15]	-.28** [-.39, -.17]	-.28** [-.38, -.16]	-.19** [-.30, -.07]						
6. Past SS	5.25	2.10	-.05 [-.17, .07]	-.09 [-.21, .03]	.15* [.03, .27]	-.01 [-.13, .11]	-.07 [-.19, .05]					
7. SS aspiration	7.47	1.60	.10 [-.02, .22]	.14* [.02, .26]	-.07 [-.18, .06]	-.08 [-.20, .04]	-.02 [-.14, .10]	.32** [.21, .42]				
8. High school GPA	4.03	0.23	.05 [-.07, .16]	-.06 [-.18, .06]	.00 [-.12, .12]	.05 [-.07, .17]	-.05 [-.16, .07]	-.08 [-.20, .04]	-.20** [-.31, -.08]			
9. Academic self-efficacy	69.15	14.04	.02 [-.11, .14]	.06 [-.06, .18]	.08 [-.05, .20]	-.05 [-.17, .08]	-.11 [-.23, .01]	.17** [.04, .29]	.39** [.28, .49]	.01 [-.12, .14]		
10. Selective primary control	90.91	11.21	.09 [-.03, .20]	.12* [.00, .24]	-.07 [-.19, .05]	-.08 [-.20, .04]	.01 [-.11, .13]	-.00 [-.12, .12]	.28** [.17, .39]	.03 [-.09, .15]	.46** [.35, .55]	
11. Conservative political ideology	30.59	20.59	.08 [-.05, .20]	.08 [-.05, .20]	-.07 [-.20, .05]	-.02 [-.15, .11]	-.01 [-.14, .11]	.10 [-.03, .22]	.07 [-.06, .19]	.04 [-.09, .17]	.09 [-.04, .22]	.09 [-.04, .21]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. Compositional beliefs were transformed using centered-log-ratio (CLR) transformations (t). Sample size (n = 277).

Table 2.7. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for **Merit-Based "Other" Social Status Beliefs**

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Past SS	5.26	2.10											
2. Current SS	5.35	1.85	.51**										
			[.41, .59]										
3. Ability T1 (t)	0.37	1.17	-0.04	0.01									
			[-.16, .08]	[-.11, .13]									
4. Ability T2 (t)	0.70	1.72	.12*	0.05	.24**								
			[.00, .24]	[-.07, .17]	[.12, .34]								
5. Ability T3 (t)	0.75	1.89	0.09	0.05	.32**	.41**							
			[-.03, .21]	[-.07, .17]	[.21, .42]	[.30, .50]							
6. Effort T1 (t)	0.63	1.44	0.09	0.03	.39**	.28**	.26**						
			[-.04, .20]	[-.09, .15]	[.29, .49]	[.17, .38]	[.15, .37]						
7. Effort T2 (t)	0.82	1.72	0.10	0.04	.21**	.37**	.34**	.33**					
			[-.02, .21]	[-.08, .16]	[.10, .32]	[.26, .47]	[.24, .44]	[.22, .43]					
8. Effort T3 (t)	0.78	1.75	0.00	0.00	.38**	.25**	.60**	.39**	.54**				
			[-.12, .12]	[-.12, .12]	[.28, .48]	[.14, .36]	[.52, .67]	[.28, .48]	[.45, .62]				
9. SS Aspirations T1	7.47	1.59	.32**	.40**	-0.04	0.06	0.09	.22**	0.08	0.11			
			[.21, .42]	[.29, .49]	[-.16, .08]	[-.06, .18]	[-.03, .21]	[.10, .33]	[-.04, .20]	[-.01, .22]			
10. SS Aspirations T2	7.27	1.62	.22**	.27***	0.04	0.04	-0.06	.13*	.18**	.20**	.59**		
			[.09, .33]	[.14, .38]	[-.08, .16]	[-.09, .16]	[-.18, .06]	[.00, .25]	[.05, .29]	[.08, .32]	[.51, .67]		
11. SS Aspirations T3	7.40	1.57	.28**	.32**	0.03	.16*	0.11	.24**	.17*	.24**	.67**	.76**	
			[.15, .39]	[.20, .44]	[-.10, .16]	[.04, .29]	[-.02, .24]	[.11, .36]	[.04, .29]	[.12, .36]	[.59, .74]	[.69, .81]	
12. SS Aspirations T4	7.06	1.87	0.17	.24**	0.04	0.17	0.13	.32**	.19*	.32**	.69**	.64**	.70**
			[-.00, .33]	[.07, .39]	[-.13, .21]	[-.00, .32]	[-.03, .30]	[.16, .46]	[.03, .35]	[.16, .46]	[.59, .77]	[.52, .73]	[.60, .78]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. Compositional beliefs were transformed using centered-log-ratio (CLR) transformations (t). Sample size (n = 276)

Table 2.8. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for **Non-Merit-Based "Other" Social Status Beliefs**

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Past SS	5.26	2.10														
2. Current SS	5.35	1.85	.51**													
			[.41, .59]													
3. Privilege T1 (t)	0.04	1.75	-.13*	-0.10												
			[-.25, -.01]	[-.22, .02]												
4. Privilege T2 (t)	0.01	2.20	-0.10	-0.01	.37**											
			[-.22, .02]	[-.13, .11]	[.26, .47]											
5. Privilege T3 (t)	-0.03	2.00	-0.02	-0.02	.22**	.50**										
			[-.14, .10]	[-.14, .10]	[.10, .32]	[.41, .59]										
6. Influential People T1 (t)	-0.07	1.07	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.08	.16**									
			[-.07, .17]	[-.11, .13]	[-.09, .15]	[-.04, .20]	[.04, .27]									
7. Influential People T2 (t)	0.02	1.51	-.18**	-.15*	.20**	.30**	.14*	.14*								
			[-.29, -.06]	[-.27, -.03]	[.09, .31]	[.19, .40]	[.02, .25]	[.02, .25]								
8. Influential People T3 (t)	-0.28	1.61	0.00	0.01	.19**	.18**	.14*	.22**	.31**							
			[-.12, .12]	[-.11, .13]	[.08, .31]	[.06, .29]	[.02, .25]	[.10, .33]	[.20, .41]							
9. Luck T1 (t)	-0.97	2.14	0.05	0.06	-.34**	-0.10	0.04	-.35**	-0.07	-0.09						
			[-.07, .17]	[-.07, .17]	[-.44, -.23]	[-.21, .02]	[-.08, .16]	[-.45, -.24]	[-.18, .05]	[-.21, .03]						
10. Luck T2 (t)	-1.55	3.08	0.03	0.03	-.16**	-.44**	-.18**	-0.11	-.49**	-0.09	.29**					
			[-.09, .15]	[-.09, .15]	[-.27, -.04]	[-.53, -.34]	[-.30, -.07]	[-.22, .01]	[-.57, -.39]	[-.21, .02]	[.18, .40]					
11. Luck T3 (t)	-1.22	2.61	-0.06	-0.03	-0.04	-0.08	-.26**	-.16**	-.17**	-0.1	.35**	.45**				
			[-.18, .06]	[-.15, .09]	[-.16, .08]	[-.20, .04]	[-.37, -.15]	[-.27, -.04]	[-.28, -.05]	[-.22, .02]	[.24, .45]	[.35, .53]				
12. SS Aspirations T1	7.47	1.59	.32**	.40**	-0.11	-0.01	-.15*	-.16**	0.01	-0.06	0.05	-0.07	0.01			
			[.21, .42]	[.29, .49]	[-.23, .01]	[-.13, .11]	[-.26, -.03]	[-.28, -.04]	[-.11, .13]	[-.18, .06]	[-.07, .17]	[-.19, .05]	[-.11, .13]			
13. SS Aspirations T2	7.27	1.62	.22**	.27**	-0.07	-0.1	-0.04	-.18**	-0.12	0.00	0.04	0.01	-0.06	.59**		
			[.09, .33]	[.14, .38]	[-.19, .05]	[-.22, .02]	[-.16, .08]	[-.29, -.06]	[-.24, .01]	[-.12, .12]	[-.08, .17]	[-.11, .14]	[-.18, .06]	[.51, .67]		
14. SS Aspirations T3	7.40	1.57	.28**	.32**	-.19**	-0.11	-0.10	-.15*	-0.07	-0.05	0.02	-0.09	-.14*	.67**	.76**	
			[.15, .39]	[.20, .44]	[-.32, -.07]	[-.23, .03]	[-.22, .03]	[-.27, -.02]	[-.20, .06]	[-.18, .08]	[-.11, .15]	[-.22, .04]	[-.27, -.01]	[.59, .74]	[.69, .81]	
15. SS Aspirations T4	7.06	1.87	0.17	.24**	-.23**	-0.13	-0.12	-0.16	0.03	-0.05	0.01	-0.12	-.20*	.69**	.64**	.70**
			[-.00, .33]	[.07, .39]	[-.38, -.06]	[-.29, .04]	[-.28, .04]	[-.32, .01]	[-.14, .19]	[-.21, .12]	[-.16, .17]	[-.28, .05]	[-.36, -.03]	[.59, .77]	[.52, .73]	[.60, .78]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. Compositional beliefs were transformed using centered-log-ratio (CLR) transformations (t). Sample size (n = 276)

Table 2.9. Coefficients of the Dirichlet Regression Model: Predictors of "Other" Social Status Beliefs

	Ability		**Effort**		**Privilege**		**Influential People**		**Luck**	
	b (SE)		***b (SE)***		***b (SE)***		***b (SE)***		***b (SE)***	
(Intercept)	**.675**	**(.151)*****	**.846**	**(.145)*****	**.557**	**(.157)*****	**.421**	**(.151)****	.152	(.166)
Future status aspiration	-.029	(.038)	.059	(.037)	-.036	(.039)	-.067	(.038)	.018	(.041)
Past SS	.048	(.036)	.028	(.033)	-.018	(.032)	.027	(.037)	.001	(.038)
Current SS	.065	(.039)	.030	(.033)	.015	(.041)	.057	(.040)	**.084**	**(.042)***
First generation	**.273**	**(.139)***	.034	(.136)	-.106	(.135)	-.013	(.147)	-.012	(.151)
Political ideology	**.006**	**(.002)***	**.008**	**(.003)****	**-.007**	**(.003)****	.002	(.003)	.004	(.003)
Female	.039	(.132)	.189	(.132)	.189	(.136)	.199	(.134)	-.012	(.142)
COVID cohort	.225	(.118)	**.267**	**(.117)***	**.443**	**(.120)*****	.193	(.119)	.234	(.122)
High school GPA	**.574**	**(.285)***	.413	(.413)	.197	(.229)	.401	(.308)	.106	(.320)
Academic self-efficacy	.004	(.005)	.008	(.005)	-.001	(.005)	.001	(.006)	.007	(.006)
Educational cont. striv.	-.011	(.007)	-.007	(.006)	-.004	(.007)	-.013	(.007)	-.008	(.007)

Note. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05. High school GPA, academics self-efficacy, and educational control strivings were added as subsequent predictors.

Table 2.10. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with Confidence Intervals for Initial **Societal Social Status Beliefs**

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Ability (t)	0.37	1.17										
2. Effort (t)	0.63	1.44	.39**									
			[.29, .49]									
3. Privilege (t)	0.04	1.75	-.43**	-.39**								
			[-.52, -.33]	[-.48, -.28]								
4. Influential people (t)	-0.07	1.07	0.07	-.32**	0.03							
			[-.05, .19]	[-.42, -.21]	[-.09, .15]							
5. Luck (t)	-0.97	2.14	-.50**	-.41**	-.34**	-.35**						
			[-.58, -.40]	[-.51, -.31]	[-.44, -.23]	[-.45, -.24]						
6. Family origin SS	5.26	2.10	-0.04	0.09	-.13*	0.05	0.05					
			[-.16, .08]	[-.04, .20]	[-.25, -.01]	[-.07, .17]	[-.07, .17]					
7. SS aspiration	7.47	1.59	-0.04	.22**	-0.11	-.16**	0.05	.32**				
			[-.16, .08]	[.10, .33]	[-.23, .01]	[-.28, -.04]	[-.07, .17]	[.21, .42]				
8. High school GPA	4.03	0.23	0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.08	-.20**			
			[-.11, .12]	[-.15, .08]	[-.11, .13]	[-.11, .13]	[-.11, .13]	[-.20, .04]	[-.31, -.08]			
9. Academic self- efficacy	69.15	14.04	-0.03	.14*	-.13*	-.16*	0.10	.17**	.39**	0.01		
			[-.16, .09]	[.02, .26]	[-.25, -.01]	[-.28, -.03]	[-.03, .22]	[.04, .29]	[.28, .49]	[-.12, .14]		
10. Selective primary control	90.91	11.21	-0.02	0.08	-0.02	-.12*	0.04	0.00	.28**	0.03	.46**	
			[-.14, .10]	[-.04, .19]	[-.14, .10]	[-.24, -.00]	[-.08, .15]	[-.12, .12]	[.17, .39]	[-.09, .15]	[.35, .55]	
11. Conservative political ideology	30.65	20.56	0.12	0.11	-.18**	0.03	0.00	0.10	0.07	0.04	0.09	0.09
			[-.01, .24]	[-.01, .24]	[-.30, -.05]	[-.10, .16]	[-.13, .12]	[-.03, .23]	[-.06, .19]	[-.09, .16]	[-.04, .22]	[-.04, .21]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. Compositional beliefs were transformed using centered-log-ratio (CLR) transformations (t). Sample size (n = 276).

Subsequent Analysis: Ethnicity and Aspirations at the Start of College

In order to assess whether the associations among these predictors (apart from URM status) on initial status aspirations held above and beyond the effect of a student's ethnicity, a subsequent hierarchical regression was conducted. Ethnicity was effect coded prior to this analysis, and was entered into the first step of the regression. However, ethnicity did not explain a significant amount of variation in status aspirations, $F(2,227) = 1.39$, $p = .251$, $R^2 = .003$. Asian/Asian American students did not have higher status aspirations compared to White students, $b = -.248$, 95%CI[-.463, .052] , $p = .100$, nor did Hispanic students versus White students, $b = .160$, 95%CI[-.148, .468], $p = .307$. Entering the main predictors into the next step explained an additional 30.3% of the variation in status aspirations, $\Delta F(7,227) = 15.12$, $p < .001$.

Changes in "Self" Social Status Beliefs Across the First Year of College

Prior to analyses, belief variables were transformed using centered log-ratio (CLR) transformations to account for the compositional nature of the data. When log likelihood ratio tests conducted on the growth models indicate no significant differences between no-growth and linear models, and when there is not significant rate of change, beliefs are interpreted as stable.

"Self" Merit-Based Beliefs Over Time

For all participants regardless of status-based backgrounds, the no-growth model, $\chi^2(4) = 12.29$, $p = .015$, with fit indices CFI = .921, RMSEA = .087, and SRMR = .062, and the linear, non-constrained residuals model, $\chi^2(1) = 6.14$, $p = .013$, CFI = .951, RMSEA = .136, SRMR = .041, both demonstrated a good fit. However, there was no significant improvement in model fit when comparing the no-growth with the linear model, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 6.15$, $p = .104$. There was almost a significant reduction in model fit when estimating the

linear model with constrained residuals, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 5.71$, $p = .057$. The stability of this belief was evidenced by a non-significant rate of change ($b = -.043$, $p = .575$), and non-significant variance in the intercept (1.00, $SE = .586$, $p = .086$) implying no considerable differences at the beginning of college. The rate of change variance (*est.* = -.036, $SE = .317$, $p = .908$) was also non-significant. The R^2 values ranged from .192 and .523.

Models for effort and hard work beliefs for all participants fit well, with the no-growth model ($\chi^2(4) = 5.50$, $p = .239$, CFI = .989, RMSEA = .037, SRMR = .033), and the linear, non-constrained residuals model ($\chi^2(1) = 4.31$, $p = .038$, CFI = .975, RMSEA = .109, SRMR = .031) showing no significant improvement over each other, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 1.19$, $p = .775$. The linear, non-constrained model was similar to the linear, non-constrained model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = .338$, $p = .845$. There was a non-significant rate of change ($b = .003$, $p = .974$). However, there was significant within-person variation in the intercept (2.70, $SE = .473$, $p < .001$) and almost, but non-significant within-person variation in the rate of change (.360, $SE = .192$, $p = .061$), indicate that freshmen believe in the importance of effort from the outset and maintain that belief consistently. The R^2 values ranged from .458 to .496, indicating that the proportion of observed variability in this belief explained by the underlying growth factors ranged from 45.8% to 49.6%.

First Generation Students. For first-generation students, the latent growth curve model for abilities with a linear, constrained residuals approach best captured the data ($\chi^2(3) = 1.55$, $p = .671$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .028), although the rate of change was not significant for between-person ($b = -.008$, $p = .938$) or within-person variability for the intercept ($SE = 1.18$, $p = .075$) or the slope ($SE = .302$, $p = .166$). For non-first-generation students, the linear, non-constrained residuals model best captured the data, ($X^2(1) = 7.33$, $p = .007$, CFI = .839, RMSEA = .228, SRMR = .071), though it did not fit the data well. The rate of change being non-significant for between-person ($b = -.124$, $p = .281$)

or within-person variability in the slope (*SE* = .345, *p* = .394). There was non-significant within-person variability in initial effort beliefs (*SE* = .807, *p* = .310), indicating no significant differences in the start of college.

For first-generation students, the no-growth model, linear, non-constrained model, and the linear, constrained model for effort beliefs all fit the data similarly. When assessing the linear, constrained residuals model, ($X^2(3) = 1.09$, $p = .779$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .038), the rate of change was non-significant (*b*= -.020, *p* = .864), nor was the within-person variation in the rate of change (*SE* = .319, *p* = .285). However, there was significant within-person variability in the intercept (*SE* = .725, *p* < .001). For non-first-generation students, the no-growth model, linear, non-constrained model, and the linear, constrained model all fit the data similarly. When assessing the linear, constrained model, ($X^2(3) = 13.86$, $p = .003$, CFI = .805, RMSEA = .172, SRMR = .082), the rate of change was non-significant for between-person (*b* = .042, *p* = .703) or within-person variability in the rate of change (*SE* = .244, *p* = .238). However, there was significant within-person variability in the intercept (*SE* = .587, *p* <.001).

"Self" Non-Merit-Based Beliefs

For beliefs about privilege, there was a significant improvement in model fit between the no-growth and linear, non-constrained model, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 12.23$, $p = .007$. However, there was a significant reduction in model fit for the linear, non-constrained and linear, constrained model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 13.75$, $p = .001$. When assessing the linear, non-constrained residuals model, ($X^2(1) = .000$, $p = .992$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .000), there was no significant change over time (*b* = .114, *p* = .374), with significant within-person variation in the intercept (*SE* = 1.44, *p* = .003) and in the rate of change (*SE* = .712, *p* = .012), suggesting that the rate of change varies amongst individuals. However, when entering status-based predictors into this model, neither past social status (*b* = .064, *p* =

.362) nor first-generation status (b = -.061, p = .460) predict the change in these beliefs. The R^2 values ranged from .330 to .744, indicating that the proportion of observed variability in this belief explained by the underlying growth factors ranged from 33.0% to 74.4%. When estimating latent growth curve models for the belief in the help of influential people you know for personal social status attainment, the linear, non-constrained model fit the data similarly to the no-growth model, ($\Delta X^2(3) = 2.00$, p = .573), and the linear, non-constrained model fit the data similarly to the linear, constrained model, ($\Delta X^2(2) = 3.65$, p = .161). There was no significant improvement in model fit between the no-growth and the linear, non-constrained residuals model ($\Delta X^1(3) = .862$, $p = .835$). However, neither model fit the data particularly well (CFIs < .90), where the no-growth model had better RMSEA and SRMR values (RMSEA = .064, SRMR = .051).

Beliefs in luck for all participants were best captured by a linear, non-constrained model, ($X^2(4) = .161$, p = .688, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .007), fitting the data better than the no-growth model ($\Delta X(3) = 8.53$, $p = .036$) and better than the linear, constrained model ($\Delta X^1(2) = 16.42$, $p < .001$). The average rate of change was non-significant (b = -.175, p = .119). However, there was with significant within-person variation in the intercept (SE = 1.20, p <.001) and the rate of change (SE = .568, p = .041). The R^2 values ranged from .262 to .656 (.656, .262, .312 respectively), indicating that the proportion of observed variability in this belief explained by the underlying growth factors ranged from 26.2% to 65.6%. When fitting the conditional model, status-based backgrounds including past social status (b = -.028, p = .658) nor first-generation status (b = -.034, p = .898) explained this rate of change over time.

First Generation Students. Similar patterns were observed between first and non-first generation students for the belief in privilege, with linear, non-constrained models fitting the data best for first-generation, ($X^2(1) = .322$, $p = .570$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .013), and for non-first-generation students, ($X^2(1) = .632$, $p = .427$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .019). There was no significant variation in the intercept for first-generation students ($SE = 1.95$, $p = .392$), nor the rate of change ($SE = 1.24$, $p = .254$). However, there was significant variation in the intercept for non-first-generation students ($SE = 2.21$, $p = .002$), and the rate of change ($SE = .929$, $p = .005$). However, when entering status-based predictors into this model, past social status background did not explain this significant rate of change ($b = -.013$, $p = .324$).

When examining whether the pattern in the endorsement of the help of influential people was similar across generation status, each model fit the data particularly well, with no significant changes in chi-squared values. When assessing the linear, constrained model, ($X^2(3) = 1.78$, $p = .619$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .036), the rate of change was non-significant ($b = .125$, $p = .451$), as was the within-person variation in the rate of change ($SE = .636$, $p = .478$). However, there was significant within-person variation in initial social connections beliefs ($SE = 1.29$, $p = .013$). A no-growth model fit the data poorly for non-first-generation students, ($X^2(4) = 11.65$, $p = .020$, CFI = .649, RMSEA = .125, SRMR = .087), and the models did not improve when allowing for a linear, non-constrained pattern ($\Delta X^1(3) = 1.60$, $p = .660$), nor from the linear, non-constrained to the linear, constrained model ($\Delta X^1(2) = 1.34$, $p = .511$).

For first-generation students' beliefs in luck, a linear, non-constrained model ($X^2(4) = .918$, $p = .338$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .000) did not fit the data better than the no-growth model ($\Delta X^1(3) = 3.67$, $p = .299$), but did fit better than the linear, constrained model ($\Delta X^1(2) = 11.36$, $p = .003$). On average, there was no significant

rate of change in luck beliefs (b = -.161, p = .295), nor within-person variation in the rate of change (SE = .833, p = .985). However, there was significant within-person variability in the intercept (SE = 4.73, p = .002). A similar effect was observed for non-first generation students, where the linear, non-constrained model fit the data best ($X^2(1) = .185$, p = .667, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .011). On average, there was not a significant rate of change over the first year of college in luck beliefs (b = -.181, p = .294), and almost, but no significant within- person variation in this rate of change over time (SE = .802, p = .053).

The Relationship Between Mobility Beliefs and Status Attainment Aspirations Over Time

Social status aspirations across the first two years of college remained strong and positively associated with one another (rs = .64 to .69, ps <.001). Students' past social status (i.e., family of origin social status) was positively associated with social status aspirations at the beginning of college (r = .32, p <.01, CI[.21, .42]), the winter term (r = .22, p <.01, CI[.09, .33]), and the spring term (r = .28, p <.01, CI[.21, .42]) of the first year, whereas students' current social status (i.e., where they are now) was positively associated with social status aspirations more strongly at the beginning of college (r = .40, p <.01, CI[.29, .49]) compared to in the winter term (r = .27, p <.001, CI[.14, .38]), the spring term (r = .32, p <.01, CI[.20, .44]), as well as the spring term at the end of their second year (r = .24, p <.01, CI[.07, .21]).

Prior literature suggests young adults remain highly optimistic when it comes to their future social status attainments. Thus, a non-linear growth model was hypothesized to fit the data best. To assess the changes in aspirations over time, and whether merit-based and non-merit based beliefs predict these aspirations, a conditional growth model of aspirations across the first year (i.e., three time points) was modeled, where beliefs were entered as covariates at each point in time.

A no-growth model and linear growth model fit the data well, where the linear growth parameter estimates showed non-significant rate of change in status aspirations over time (see Table 2.11 and 2.12). There was significant amount of variability in the intercept of absolute status aspirations, but not the rate of change over the first year (b = -.026, p = .524) or the variability in the rate of change (SE = .167, p = .706).

Table 2.11. Model Fit Indices for Absolute Status Aspirations Over Time

Model	χ^2 (df)	p-value	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf), p-value
No Growth	χ^2 (4) = 9.22	.056	.978	.087 [.135, .184]	.142	-
Linear Growth (non-constrained)	χ^2 (1) = 6.33	.012	.985	.142 [.053, .255]	.033	$\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 4.56, p = .207
Linear Growth (constrained)	χ^2 (3) = 22.21	.000	.919	.191 [.121, .268]	.118	$\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 15.42, p <.001

Note. n = 222; only participants who completed two out of three surveys. Changes in chi-squared statistic and degrees of freedom is compared to the linear growth (non-constrained) model. The piecewise growth model with the knot located at the third time point best captured the data. Models were estimated using robust errors.

Table 2.12. Parameter Estimates of the Linear Growth Model

Parameter	*Est.*	*SE*
Level (y0)	**7.39*** **	.108
Level variance	**1.44*** **	.398
Slope First Year	-.026	.041
Slope First Year variance	.063	.167
Covariance Intercept <-> Slope	.109	.159

Note. R^2 values ranged from 55.1% in the fall to 90.5% in the spring.

Subsequently, two cross-lagged path models (CLPMs) were modeled to understand the bi-directional associations amongst "self" beliefs and status aspirations over the first academic year. However, due to poor model fit, these models were not interpreted (see Figures C.2.2 and C.2.3 in Appendix C).

Because there was no significant rate of decline in aspirations for this sample, beliefs were not added as time-varying covariates. Instead, linear-mixed modeling techniques were used to assess how merit and non-merit based beliefs interacted with aspirations at each time point.

A linear mixed-effects model (LMM) where intercepts and slopes of status-attainment aspirations were allowed to vary was conducted to assess changes over time in aspirations for participants who participated in at least three time points over the four assessments ($n = 224$), after Box-Cox transformations were applied to social status aspirations across time due to non-normality. Because models did not significantly deviate in reported effects compared to the non-transformed models, original models are reported. Maximum Likelihood estimations were used to handle missing data.

The baseline model assessing if status attainment aspirations varied by time revealed notable decreases from the beginning of college to the winter term (b = -.253, SE = .094, p = .007, 95%CI[-.436, -.069]), and from the beginning of college to the end of the second year (b= -.352, SE = .109, p = .001, 95%CI[-.567, -.138]). The second model included COVID cohort as a predictor to assess whether starting college during the pandemic was associated with decreased aspirations. The next model assessed generation status and past and current social status as predictors, allowing for the intercepts and slopes to vary at each time point. On average, higher past social status was associated with significantly higher aspirations (b = .226, SE = .048, p <.001, 95%CI[.101, .281]). Similarly, higher past social status and being a first generation students was associated with higher aspirations. Table 2.13 contains predictors added into this model and their significance.

Additionally, models investigating the role of merit-based beliefs on aspirations over time were added. As seen in Table 2.14, when estimating the effect of initial merit-based beliefs on aspirations while allowing the intercepts of these merit-based beliefs to vary by participant, the effect of time was significant in the baseline model, $F(3, 569.62)$ = 4.56, p = .004. There was a significant interaction between initial ability beliefs and time, $F(3, 558.63)$ = 3.60, p = .013), where higher initial ability beliefs was associated with less steep decreases in status attainment aspirations during the winter term of students' first

academic year, but at no other point. However, there was not a significant interaction between initial effort beliefs and time, F (3,559.23) = 2.04, p = .107, indicating that the effect of effort beliefs on social status aspirations on each time point was non-significant at any time during the first two years of college.

Table 2.13. Mixed-Effects: Fixed Effects Results of Aspirations Over Time by Cohort and Status-Based Identities

Model 1: Baseline Model	***b (SE)***	**95%CI**
Social Status Aspirations fall Y1	7.50 (.106)***	[7.29, 7.71]
Social Status Aspirations winter Y1	-0.252 (.094)**	[-.436, -.069]
Social Status Aspirations spring Y1	-0.140 (.095)	[-.325, .046]
Social Status Aspirations spring Y2	-0.352 (.109)**	[-.567, -.138]
Model 2: COVID Cohort	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
COVID Cohort Participants	-.545 (.188)**	[-.914, -.176]
Model 3: Social Status	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
Past Social Status	.226 (.048)**	[.133, .319]
Current Social Status	.200 (.053)***	[.095, .305]
First-Generation Status	.404 (.206)*	[.002, .807]
Model 4: Interactions with Cohort	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
Past Social Status x COVID Cohort	.046 (.096)	[-.232, .139]
First-Generation Status x COVID Cohort	.723 (.411)	[-1.52, .076]
Model 5: Interactions with Time	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
Past Social Status x winter Y1	-.066 (.044)	[-.151, .020]
Past Social Status x spring Y1	-.056 (.044)	[-.143, .031]
Past Social Status x spring Y2	-.106 (.050)*	[-.203, -.008]
Model 6: Interactions with Time	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
Current Social Status x winter Y1	-.141 (.049)**	[-.236, -.045]
Current Social Status x spring Y1	-.084 (.050)	[-.182, -.014]
Current Social Status x spring Y2	-.154 (.057)**	[-.266, -.042]
Model 7: Interactions with Time		
First Generation x winter Y1	-.290 (.191)	[-.665, .086]
First Generation x spring Y1	-.097 (.193)	[-.476, .283]
First Generation x spring Y2	-.102 (.226)	[-.547, .342]
Model 8: Interactions with Time		
COVID Cohort x winter Y1	-.500 (.184)**	[-.862, -.139]
COVID Cohort x spring Y1	-.548 (.186)**	[-.913, -.182]
COVID Cohort x spring Y2	-.531 (.215)*	[-953, -.110]

Note. Each model allowed for intercepts and slopes to vary for each participant, and allowed intercepts to vary by status-based predictor. fall Y1 (fall Term, Year 1); winter Y1 (winter Term, Year 1); spring Y1 (spring Term, Year 1); spring Y2 (spring Term, Year 2). All models were estimated using maximum likelihood.

Table 2.14. Mixed-Effects: Fixed Effects Results of Aspirations Over Time by Merit-Based Causal Beliefs

Model 1: Baseline Model	***b (SE)***	**95%CI**
Social Status Aspirations fall Y1	7.50(.109)***	[7.29, 7.71]
Social Status Aspirations winter Y1	-.257 (.093)**	[-.436, -.069]
Social Status Aspirations spring Y1	-.142 (.094)	[-.325, .046]
Social Status Aspirations spring Y2	-.363 (.108)*	[-.567, -.138]
Model 2: Merit-Based Beliefs	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
Ability	.054 (.061)	[-.069, .177]
Effort	.106 (.055)	[-.004, .215]
Model 3: Interactions with Time	***b (SE)***	***95%CI***
Ability x winter Y1	-.110(.042)*	[-.191, -.028]
Ability x spring Y1	-.045(.041)	[-.125, .036]
Ability x spring Y2	.034 (.049)	[-.062, .129]
Model 4: Interaction with Time	***b (SE)***	**95%CI**
Effort x winter Y1	-.088 (.039)*	[-.164, -.012]
Effort x spring Y1	-.047(.038)	[-.123, .027]
Effort x spring Y2	-.005(.044)	[-.092 .081]

Note. Each model accounted for within-person variability, and allowed for the intercepts of merit-based beliefs to vary. fall Y1 (fall Term, Year 1); winter Y1 (winter Term, Year 1); spring Y1 (spring Term, Year 1); spring Y2 (spring Term, Year 2). All models were estimated using maximum likelihood.

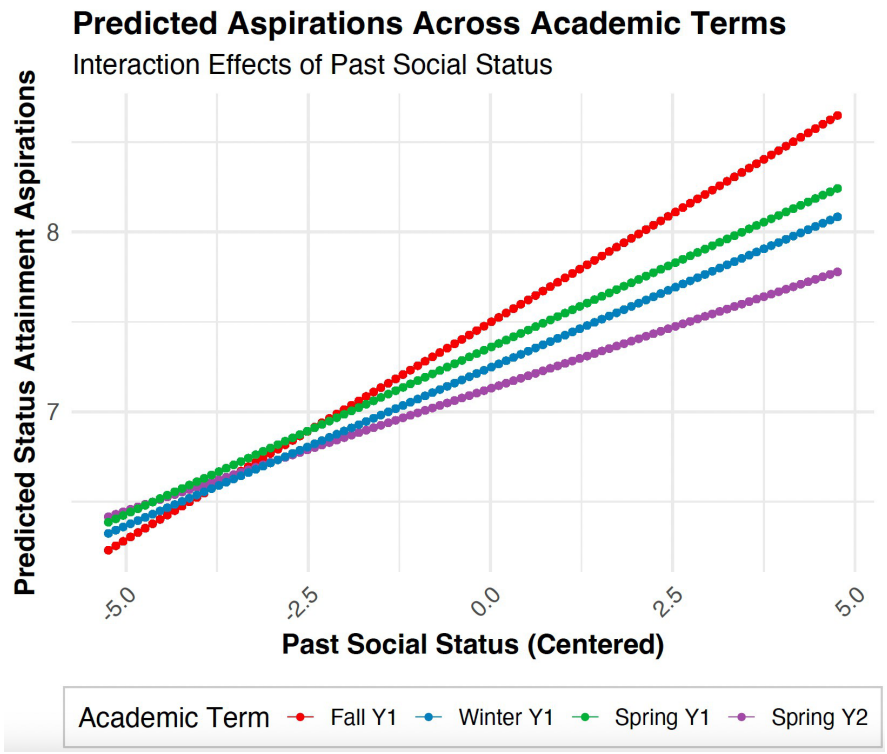

Figure 2.5. Past Social Status on Status Attainment Aspirations as a Function of Time

Note. Past social status is less important for status-based aspirations at the end of students' second year of college compared to over the first year, suggesting students' status-based backgrounds lose influence as students advance through college.

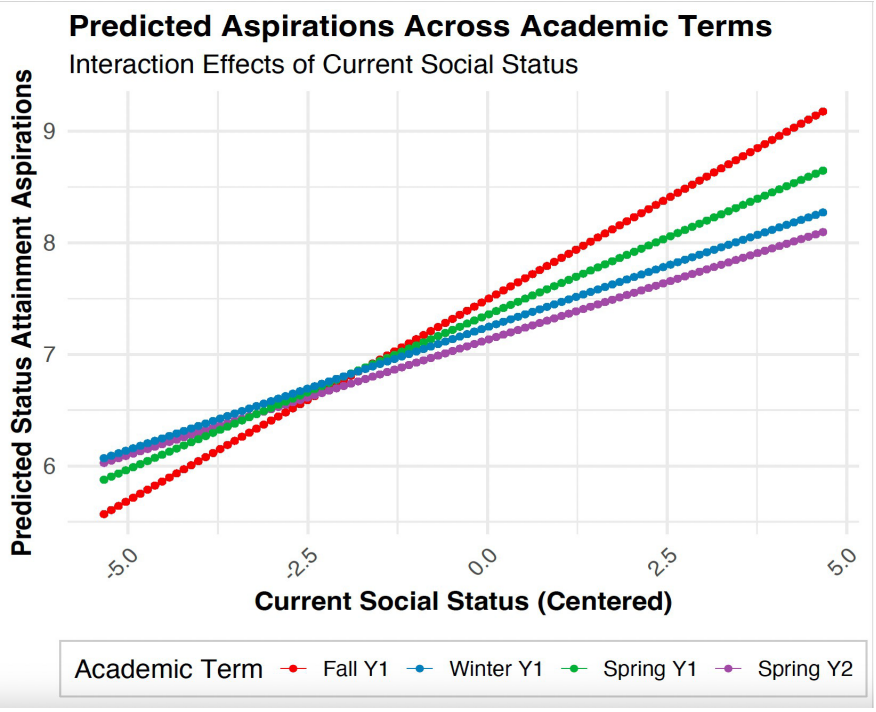

Figure 2.6. Current Social Status on Status Attainment Aspirations as a Function of Time

Note. Current social status is less important for status-based aspirations in the winter term of the first year, and the end of students' second year of college compared to in their first term of college.

Subsequent Analyses: Aspirations Over First Two Years and Last Two Years – Comparing Freshmen versus Junior Students

Because latent growth models that modeled aspirations for freshmen across the weekly surveys did not find that aspirations declined over the first year of college for freshmen, an exploratory analysis was conducted to determine whether this pattern was similar for Junior students. Students in their Junior year of college are closer to facing the job market, and subsequently may show more calibrated aspirations for their future status attainment. This analysis utilized a larger sample of freshmen and junior students who participated in core surveys in the initial fall term (T1), end of the spring term (T2), and then one year later at the end of the next spring term (T3).

When estimating model fit for both freshmen and juniors, the linear model with constrained errors fit the data best, χ^2 (3) = 4.29, CFI = .992, RSMEA = .041, 90%CI[.000, .121], SRMR = .027.

Freshmen Students

As seen in Table 2.15., the linear, constrained variances model fit the data best, with a significant rate of decline in aspirations across time for freshmen students, but no significant variation in this rate of decline among certain groups.

Table 2.15. Model Fit Indices for Freshmen Students Across the First and Second Academic Year

Model	χ^2 (df)	p-value	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)
No Growth	χ^2 (4) = 12.32	.015	.941	.111 [.044, .184]	.160	-
Linear Growth (non-constrained)	χ^2 (1) = .281	.596	1.00	.000 [.000, .133]	.006	$\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 10.90*
Linear Growth (constrained)	χ^2 (3) = .628	.890	1.00	.000 [.000, .062]	.028	$\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = .383

Note. n = 147; only freshmen participants who participated in all 3 surveys across the 2 years.

Junior Students

As seen in Table 2.16., for Junior students, a linear, constrained residuals model fit the data best. However, no significant differences were observed between the no growth model and the linear models, with the rate of decline being non-significant in each model.

Table 2.16. Model Fit Indices for Junior Students Across the First and Second Academic Year

Model	χ^2 (df)	p-value	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)
No Growth	χ^2 (4) = 6.24	.182	.966	.061 [.041, .199]	.089	-
Linear Growth (non-constrained)	χ^2 (1) = 3.96	.047	.968	.125 [.000, .264]	.044	$\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 3.09
Linear Growth (constrained)	χ^2 (3) = 4.07	.254	.987	.046 [.000, .146]	.032	$\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = .563

Note. n = 149; only junior students who participated in all 3 surveys across the 2 years.

Table 2.17. Parameter Estimates for Freshmen and Junior Linear Slopes Models

	Freshmen		**Juniors**		**All**	
	est. (SE)	*sig*	*est. (SE)*	*sig*	*est. (SE)*	*sig*
Factor Means						
Intercept	7.40 (.129)	<.001	7.31 (.117)	<.001	7.41 (.085)	<.001
Slope	-.079 (.055)	.002	-.152 (.078)	.051	-.184 (.044)	<.001
Factor Variances						
T1 (constrained)	1.10 (.256)	<.001	1.16 (.252)	<.001	.961 (.134)	<.001
T2 (constrained)	1.10 (.256)	<.002	1.16 (.252)	<.001	.961 (.134)	<.001
T3 (constrained)	1.10 (.256)	<.003	1.16 (.252)	<.001	.961 (.134)	<.001
Intercept	1.58 (.445)	<.001	1.21 (.379)	.001	1.34 (.269)	<.001
Slope	.005 (.022)	.829	.109 (.195)	.575	.099 (.087)	.251
Factor Covariances						
Intercept ~~ Slope	.063 (.059)	.280	-.130 (.207)	.529	.079 (.094)	.403

Note. Time was coded such that coefficients represented a change per academic year.

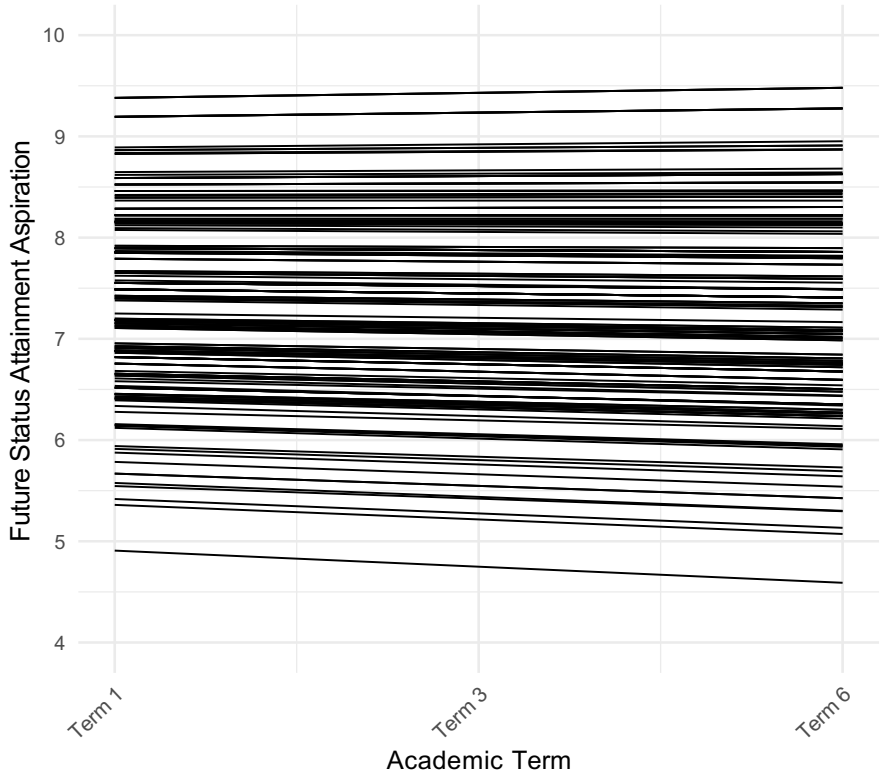

Figure 2.7. Spaghetti Plot of Predicted Means for Status-Attainment Over Time: All Participants

Differences in Aspirations Over Time by Cohort and Grade Level

A linear mixed effects model was conducted to investigate the impact of cohort and year of study on aspirations over time, considering both the initial level of aspirations and their rate of change within individuals. The linear mixed-effects model revealed significant variability in initial aspirations and the rate of change over time (ICC = .676). This suggest that approximately 67.6% of the variation in aspirations at each time point could be attributed to differences *between* individuals. There was no main effect of year of study (b = -.332, p = .087, 95%CI[-.713, .049]), indicating that students in their last two years of college on average have similar levels of aspirations as students in their first two years. There was also no main effect of cohort in this model (b = -.228, p = .184, 95%CI[-.565,

.110]). There was a marginally significant interaction between cohort and year of study (*b* = .443, *p* = .046, 95%CI[.007, .878]). However, there was no significant interaction with year of study and time (*b* = .018, *p* = .773, 95%CI[-.106, .143]), indicating that students in the first two years of college compared to those in their last two years of college experience similar changes in aspirations over time.

Study 2 Discussion

"Self" versus "Other" Social Status Beliefs

The current study finds evidence that young college students' beliefs about social status attainment are more meritocratic when thinking about themselves versus when thinking about others in society, consistent with prior literature (Shane & Heckhausen, 2017). These merit-based beliefs are higher for individuals who start college with higher aspirations for their own social status, which reinforces the perspective that those with higher status-based goals place greater weight on personal merit.

Furthermore, when examining the endorsement of beliefs about privileges due to family backgrounds on social status attainment, first year students were found to be more likely to endorse this belief when thinking about others' privileges compared to when they think about their own privileges. This belief exhibited within-person variability in changes over time, where non-first generation students experienced a significant average rate of change. This indicates that the strength of endorsement in the belief in privilege seem to change across the first academic year for some students, particularly non-first generation students. Similarly, the belief that social status attainment is due to social connections is more strongly endorsed when thinking about others' connections compared to when thinking of their own social connections. This finding indicates that the endorsement of

social-tie-related opportunities being a significant factor in social status attainment is stronger when thinking about others in society. This idea suggests that people explain their own successes as a result of their hard work and abilities, but recognize that unfair systems can affect other people's opportunities. This dichotomy in "self vs. other" belief system about social status attainment can be attributed to the intrinsic tendency of individuals embedded in meritocratic societies to perceive themselves as autonomous and self-serving (Kraus, 2015).

Social Status Identities and Social Status Beliefs

Study 2 examines the distinct social status identities, including first generation college students, and subjective perceptions of past social statuses and current social statuses. First generation students hold greater beliefs in their efforts as being the dominant cause of attaining their aspired social statuses, reinforcing the idea that personal agency is a significant determinant of perceived social mobility (Shane & Heckhausen, 2013; Kraus, 2015; Kraus & Tran, 2015; Mijs et al., 2022; Piff et al., 2011; Davidai & Gilovich, 2018). This suggests that the experience of being a first-generation college student may engender a strong sense of personal efficacy, perhaps as a response to navigating their cultural mismatch between themselves and higher education (Stephens et al., 2012).

Moreover, when investigating non-merit-based beliefs, the current study finds that coming from a lower past social status was negatively associated with endorsing beliefs about privilege. This finding is consistent with research involving youth beliefs about social mobility. For example, Aries and Seidler (2007) found that liberal arts college students from lower socioeconomic are less likely to associate their social status attainment as being

a result of their family backgrounds compared to their higher status peers. Contrary to these findings, other studies find evidence that the context of growing up in a less educated household and having less economic advantages can socialize lower status individuals to believe that their personal efforts will not help them climb the social ladder, consequently leading to the belief that social status attainment is pre-determined by societal constraints (Heckhausen, 2021; Laurin & Engstrom, 2020; Laurin et al., 2019) and that one's current status is due to uncontrollable contextual factors (Mijs, 2009; McCoy et al., 2013; Laurin et al., 2019). However, the majority of these studies utilize samples of adults who have already climbed the social ladder. Exploring differences in these beliefs across the lifespan, as young adults transition into more salient and less malleable higher social status could shed light on when during status-based pursuits meritocratic beliefs are emboldened for higher status individuals, and disembodied for lower status individuals. For example, a recent study by Weiss and colleagues (2022) finds that greater endorsement of the justification for social inequality due to merit-based principles increases with age, where those of higher statuses are less likely to endorse this ideology in young adulthood compared to those of higher statuses in middle and late adulthood. Specifically, those of lower statuses who believe social status attainment is due to luck are likely to be sensitized to status-based identity affirming experiences. Thus, a current gap in the literature is whether lower social status students who do not waiver in their status-based beliefs are sensitized to negative academic and social experiences.

This study finds support that young adults' meritocratic social mobility beliefs are not entirely influenced by their past or current family social statuses. Contrary to the literature, the belief in meritocracy were similar across social status groups. These findings

may be unique to this particular sample due to their emboldened status-based ambitions among students at a 4-year research oriented university. The current sample of young adult college students held highly ambitious educational goals, with 81% expecting to go beyond their bachelor's degree to earn a master's degree. This sample had exceptionally high prior academic performances, such as high school GPAs of over 4.00 on average. These students, irrespective of their social status backgrounds (i.e., past social statuses) and their current perceived social status, hold uniformly high beliefs in meritocracy regarding attainment of their personal status-based goals. This suggests that college students who have been accepted into highly selective R1 institutions endorse meritocratic ideologies when it comes to carving a path toward their status-based goals independent of their perceptions of where they fall on the social ladder.

Associations in Beliefs and Aspirations Across the First Two Years of College

Stronger beliefs in personal abilities and efforts at the beginning of college were positively associated with stronger social status aspirations at the beginning of college, and at the end of the second year of college. This finding indicates that students who enter college with the mindset that their abilities and efforts determine their status-based achievements hold higher aspirations for their own social status attainment. Moreover, greater endorsements of effort as opposed to ability seems to play a more significant role in maintenance of strong aspirations for personal social status attainment, whereas subsequent analyses reveal higher aspirations also predict more endorsement in effort beliefs. For instance, this study finds that first generation students endorse stronger effort beliefs than non-first generation students, and they also experience less steep rates of decline in their aspirations.

Moreover, non-merit based beliefs including beliefs in personal privilege and social connections (i.e., opportunity beliefs) were not significantly associated with aspirations. These results suggest a connection between merit-based beliefs and aspirations for personal status-based goals, during both the first and second year, as opposed to attributing social status to personal opportunities associated with privilege and social connections. However, a stronger endorsement of personal luck at the beginning of college was negatively associated with aspirations at the end of the second year of college, suggesting that beliefs in uncontrollable factors are detrimental to aspirations for social status attainment.

Additionally, believing that the social status of others in society is attained more due to abilities was not associated with personal aspirations at any point across the first two years of college. However, believing that others' social status is attained more to effort was. This is likely because effort is perceived as more controllable and changeable compared to abilities, which are often seen as fixed (Weiner et al., 1972). Future work should investigate personal perceptions of controllability when assessing beliefs in social status attainment.

When assessing changes in "self" social status beliefs, merit-based beliefs including ability and effort remained relatively stable for both first and non-first generation students, while aspirations marginally declined over time. Thus, beliefs about achieving an aspired social status remain strong and meritocratic while aspirations seem to change, suggesting that aspirations change despite an unwavering belief system.

Although academic self-efficacy at the beginning of college was not a significant predictor of these beliefs, it would be critical for future research to investigate how academic motivation changes over time as students become more realistic in their future

social statuses as they progress through college. Moreover, it is possible beliefs do not impact aspirations until the latter end of their college careers, as they approach the job market. Future research should investigate these beliefs across the latter years, and their influence on aspirations over time. Subsequent findings in this study reveal that students in the latter years of their college education (i.e., juniors) also experience a downward change in their status aspirations, but only have marginally lower aspirations at the beginning of the academic term compared to freshmen students. Thus, students in their first two years of college experience similar aspirations as students in their final two years when not investigating the role that COVID-related disruptions had on students' aspirations. However, students whose first two years of college began after these disruptions (i.e., cohort 3, freshmen) had higher aspirations than students who spent their last two years after these disruptions (i.e, cohort 3, juniors) in the fall and spring terms of their freshmen and junior years respectively. These findings highlight the importance of investigating larger contextual events that can change the landscape for social mobility (e.g., changing economic markets).

The Context of COVID-Related Disruptions to Higher Education on Beliefs and Aspirations

Notably, those who started college during COVID-related disruptions tended to place less emphasis on effort beliefs for achieving social status when thinking about others in society. However, when students were instructed to think about their own pathways to personal social status, these students placed a greater emphasis on effort, suggesting that contextual constraints to status-based goals such as the COVID-related disruptions to education positioned young adults to belief that their own aspirations would require more

effort, while also placing less emphasis on others' efforts for attaining their aspired social statuses. This suggests a strong personal sense of agency when it comes to navigating contextual constraints like the pandemic, while also holding leniency when thinking about others. Moreover, subsequent analyses reveal that students whose first two years of college began during these disruptions (i.e., cohort 2, freshmen) had lower aspirations than students who spent their last two years during these disruptions (i.e., cohort 2, juniors) in the fall and spring terms of their freshmen and junior years respectively, in line with past work (Rogers et al., 2023).

Study 2 Conclusions

Young adult college students maintain strong merit-based beliefs when thinking about their pathways toward their future social statuses while first year freshmen students' aspirations for the attainment of their future social status tend to marginally decline over the course of their first year in college. Although students' social status backgrounds are associated with personal status attainment aspirations, that association becomes weaker over time as students move through college and develop their own social status less dependent of their social status of origin. Moreover, students of lower social standings at this highly selective university endorse similar and unwavering merit-based beliefs as their higher status peers. Other factors such as students' individual experiences with academic achievement, academic majors, and the approaching exposure to the labor market, as potential instigators of decreases in social status aspirations over time need to be investigated.

CHAPTER 4

Study 3.a.

Social Mobility Aspirations on Educational Goal Striving and Motivational Control Strategies

Introduction

Although setting high expectations for social mobility can be motivating, individuals in the United States often overestimate chances to achieve social mobility (Kraus, 2015; Mijs et al., 2022). On the one hand, high mobility goals may protect students' identity-related processes (e.g., self-worth), but they can also hinder constructed realities about how far education can help them climb the social ladder.

Drawing from the Motivation Theory of Lifespan Development, it is important for young adults to strive for attainable goals, appropriately adjusting and engaging with smaller status-related goals along the way. This adaptative agency promotes perceptions of control over goal pursuits. This adaptive agency is highest in young adulthood, where young adults have the greatest capacities to adjust their goals to opportunities and constraints (Heckhausen et al., 2010). How social mobility goals are associated with more short-term and specific educational goal pursuits as students strive to achieve an education as a means of social mobility is unknown. Although setting high status-based goals is associated with greater motivation to pursue them (Destin & Oyserman, 2010), it is important to investigate whether there are limits to ambitiousness in these aspirations, leading to maladaptive motivational control strivings.

Moreover, rooted in the Status-Based Identity Framework (Destin et al., 2017), a stronger sense of connection to current status social groups, like to friends in college in contrast to friends from back home, might help students from lower social statuses remain aligned with their educational goals and engage in appropriate control over specific academic performances.

The Current Study

The third and final study of this dissertation thus sought to understand (1) how intragenerational mobility aspirations differ among students from lower past social status backgrounds (i.e., less educated families; low income backgrounds), (2) whether more realistic intragenerational mobility aspirations protect students from a perceived loss of control over educational goals and promote more adaptive motivational control, and (3) whether social connections to members of higher status groups congruent with one's social status goals can help students stay engaged with their educational goals (Study 3.b.).

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Utilizing a convenience sample from the Measuring Undergraduate Student Trajectories (MUST) Project, a sample of 427 college students attending a highly selective university who participated in a series of beginning of academic term, and course evaluation surveys was utilized for the following study. The participants were ethnically diverse (17.1% Chicano/Mexican American; 4.5% Latino/Other Spanish American; 20.9% Chinese/Chinese American; 6.6% Filipino/Filipino American; 17.8% Vietnamese; 1.6% Japanese/Japanese American; 2.6% Thai or Other Asian; 3.1% Korean; 4.0% East Indian/Pakistani; 1.9% Black/African American; .20% American Indian; and 15.0% White; 4.7% unknown). A great proportion of the sample was female (72.40%), where a majority of the sample were US Citizens (17.8% non-U.S. citizens, 4.2% international students). Additionally, 42.10% were low-income, and 51.60% are first-generation college students. Notably, the sample had high prior academic achievements, with a mean high school of GPA of 4.10. In sum, the current sample of students is ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, primarily consisting of females, demonstrating high prior academic achievement.

Status attainment aspirations and educational goal striving were measured across the three main waves of data collection: the beginning of the fall 2021 term, the end of the spring 2022 term, and the beginning of the spring 2023 term. Course goal engagement and disengagement was measured in the fall term, whereas GPA and major course goal engagement and disengagement were measured in each of the spring terms. All status-group belonging indicators were measured in various weeks throughout the weekly surveys between the fall and spring term (see Figure 3.1 for details).

Student term data were used to integrate end of term GPA data and student major at each time point.[2] Student background data provided information on students' first generation status, gender, and ethnicity. For models assessing changes in aspirations, T1 aspirations and educational goal striving were measured in the core survey at the very beginning of the academic term, T2 in the course evaluation survey at the end of the first spring term, and T3 at the beginning of the second spring term. For models that evaluated the role of status-based group connections, a subset of participants (n = 226) who participated in the weekly surveys were used, as this data was collected in weeks two, six, and eight of each academic term (see Study 3.b.).

[2] When using term GPA as time-varying covariates, students' GPA in the prior term were used when predicting T1 aspirations to measure a causal relationship between GPA on aspirations.

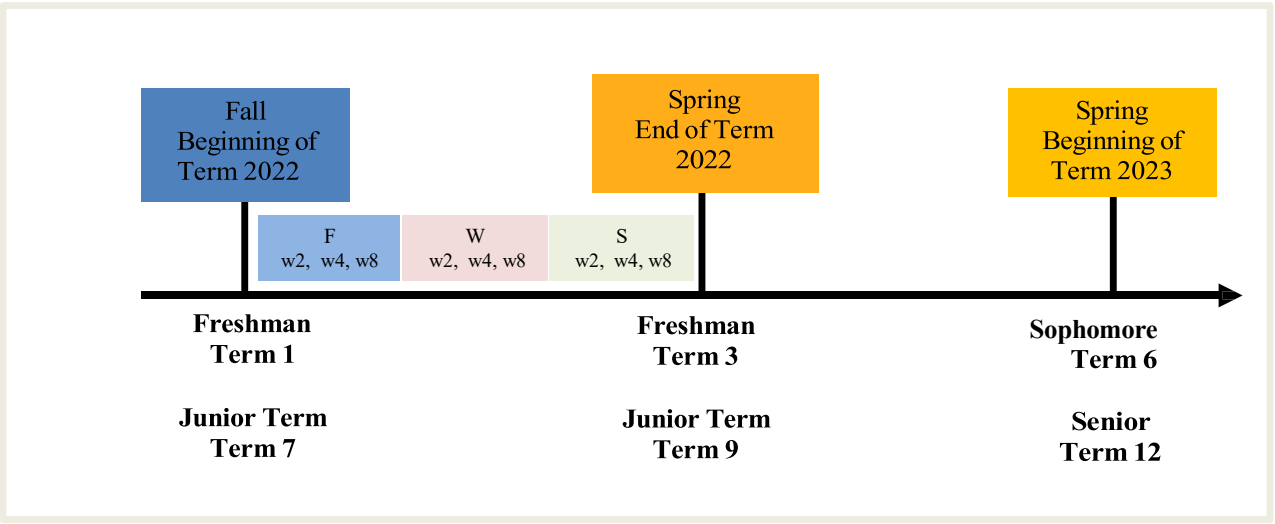

Figure 3.1. Study 3 Procedure and Timeline

Measures

Status Attainment Aspirations

Status attainment aspirations were measured similarly to that of Study 2 using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler, et al., 2000; Shane & Heckhausen, 2013). Specifically, in the fall 2021, spring 2022, and spring of 2023 terms, students were asked to report where on a 10-rung ladder they thought best represented where on the ladder would best represent them in fifteen to twenty years from now (i.e., *future*). The very top of the ladder represents people in the United States who are the best off: having the most money, highest amount of education, and well-respected jobs. The very bottom of the ladder represented people in the United States who were worse off: having the least amount of money, little or no education, and no jobs or a job that nobody wants or respects.

Intergenerational Mobility

Using the same ladder, students reported where on the ladder their family was growing up (i.e., *past*) and where on the ladder best represented them currently (i.e.,

current). The difference between these two items were calculated, where positive values represented students who felt they had climbed the ladder, and negative values represented students who felt they had descended the ladder.

Intragenerational Mobility Aspirations

A measure of aspirations for intragenerational mobility was created by subtracting current status from their aspired social status.

Educational Goal Striving

Control striving toward educational goals was measured using three items in each of the core surveys in the fall 2021, spring 2022, and spring 2023. Items assessed how much effort students would put into (1) "working hard to get a good education", (2) "even if it takes a long time and lots of effort, I will not give up on my educational goals," and (3) "if it gets more difficult to get the education I want, I will try harder" on a 0 (*none at all*) to 100 (*as much as I can*) scale. Cronbach alphas ranged from .87 at .88 across academic terms.

GPA Goal Engagement and Adjustment

GPA goal engagement and adjustment were measured in the spring core and course evaluation surveys. The OPS scale was adapted to reflect students' engagement with their GPA goals, asking students to think about their GPA goals for the next academic term. For *selective primary control*, students were asked to report how likely they were to increase their efforts and time invested in their course work, or try harder to do well on assignments and exams if their courses turned out to be more difficult than they had originally anticipated. For selective secondary control, students were asked to report how likely they would try to stay away from anything that could distract them from coursework. Items were measured on a 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*very likely*) scale. Goal adjustment was

measured by asking students how likely they would be to adjust their aspirations for course grades, and become more realistic in their grade aspirations. Goal engagement and adjustment items had a Cronbach alpha of .88 in spring of 2022; .85 for goal engagement and .82 for goal adjustment in spring of 2023.

Term GPA

End of term GPA was taken from the registrar at the end of each academic term. Both raw term GPAs and cumulative GPAs were collected.

Analytic Plan

Levene's tests were conducted to determine whether the distributions of status aspirations and selective primary control were similar for year of study in school, first generation status, STEM majors, and by ethnicity.

A series of longitudinal structural equation modeling techniques were employed to test the research questions. All analyses were conducted in R version 4.1.3, using the following packages: lavaan, sem, psych, tidyverse, haven, ggplot2, skim, dplyr, and apaTables. Growth models were estimated with maximum likelihood with robust standard errors. For analyses that included the larger sample of students who participated in the core and course evaluation surveys, 405 students (i.e., 20.9% retained out of the 1,937 students from T1) who participated at T1 had complete data at T3. 43.8% of students who participated at T1 participated at T2.

Missing data were handled with full information maximum likelihood (FIML) techniques, with estimates mimicking those of Mplus using the mimic = "Mplus" command in R under the lavaan package. For growth models, only those with complete data across the three waves of status aspirations and educational goal striving were included in the

final sample (n = 427).

Latent growth curve modeling was conducted to examine the trajectories of status aspirations and educational goal striving across two years (6 total terms): The beginning of the first academic term (T1), the end of the third academic term (T2), and at the beginning of the sixth academic term (T3). Time was coded to reflect a change in status aspirations and educational goal striving each academic term. Specifically, a multivariate growth model was chosen in order to determine the degree of which holding higher status aspirations is associated with maintaining perceived control over educational goal pursuits over time. The underlying optimal functional forms of status aspirations and educational goal striving were first assessed. Their optimal functional forms were chosen when modeling the final multivariate growth model. The covariances for within-time relationships between these variables were examined. Their inclusion led to a better model fit, and therefore were reported and retained in the final model. With both status aspirations and educational goal striving exhibiting an average downward rate of change across the six academic terms, but non-significant between-person variation in this rate of change, the final factor regression multivariate model allowed for the intercept of status aspirations to predict the rate of change in educational goal striving, and the intercept of educational goal striving to predict the rate of change in status aspirations.

Next, a series of multiple group path models were estimated using spring term data to assess how intragenerational mobility and GPA performances are associated with educational control strivings, GPA goal engagement, and GPA goal adjustment differently for students from low income backgrounds, and who are the first in their families to attend college. Differences across groups was tested by constraining the path coefficients to be

equal across groups and comparing model fit indices to the model without constrained path coefficients. Model fit was assessed using chi-square results and model fit indices.

Study 3.a. Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3.1 contains descriptive information about absolute placements on the social ladder for past, current, and aspired social statuses, as well as how much students perceive that they have climbed the social ladder compared to their parents (i.e., intergenerational mobility), and how much they aspire to climb from their current social status (i.e., intragenerational mobility aspirations). For all students, average absolute status aspirations decrease over time. Additionally, on average, first generation students perceived their current social status as higher than their past social status, while non-first generation students perceive their current social status as lower than their past social status. Moreover, on average, students aspired to climb the social ladder by 1.96 rungs over the next 15 to 20 years. This aspired climb was higher for first generation and low income students compared to non-first gen and higher income students.

Intergenerational Mobility by Generation and Income

Intergenerational mobility significantly differed by generation status in the fall term, $t(390) = -5.41$, CI[-1.29, -.601], $p < .001$, $d = .539$, the first spring term, $t(383) = -4.02$, CI[-1.19, -.409], $p < .001$, $d = .409$, and the second spring term, $t(402) = -4.65$, CI[-1.28, -.520], $p < .001$, $d = .461$, where first generation students consistently perceived having higher upward intergenerational mobility than non-first generation students. Low-income students had higher intergenerational mobility in the fall term, $t(341) = -3.15$, CI[-.943, -

.217], $p = .001$, $d = .331$, in the first spring term, $t(322) = -3.16$, CI[-1.08, -.250], $p = .002$, $d = .341$, and in the second spring term, $t(301) = -2.60$, CI[-.984, -.136], $p = .010$, $d = .282$.

Intragenerational Mobility by College Generation and Income

Intragenerational mobility aspirations significantly differed by generation status in the fall term , $t(378) = -3.75$, CI[-1.01, -.315], $p < .001$, $d = .375$, the first spring term, $t(380) = -4.01$, CI[-1.07, -.366], $p < .001$, $d = .408$, and the second spring term, $t(387) = -4.14$, CI[-1.03, -.368], $p < .001$, $d = .413$, where first generation students consistently had higher upward intragenerational mobility aspirations than non-first generation students. Low-income students had higher intragenerational mobility aspirations in the fall term, $t(329) = -3.93$, CI[-1.07, -.357], $p < .001$, $d = .418$, in the first spring term, $t(316) = -3.64$, CI[-1.06, -.317], $p < .001$, $d = .396$, and in the second spring term, $t(312) = -5.26$, CI[-1.25, -.571], $p < .001$, $d = .567$.

Educational Goal Striving and Engagement by College Generation and Income

First Generation Students. First generation students reported higher GPA goal engagement compared to non-first generation students in the first spring term, $t(384) = -2.59$, CI[-.541, -.074], $p = .009$, $d = .259$, but not in the second spring term, $t(178) = -1.90$, CI[-.685, -.013], $p = .059$, $d = .257$. Similarly, first generation students reported higher GPA goal adjustment compared to non-first generation students in the first spring term, $t(383) = -3.46$, CI[-.903, -.249], $p = .006$, $d = .346$, and in the second spring term, $t(188) = -2.76$, CI[-.980, -.163], $p = .006$, $d = .371$. However, educational goal strivings were similar in the fall term, $t(403) = .693$, CI[-1.72, 3.59], $p = .489$, $d = .069$, first spring term, $t(405) = -.198$, CI[-3.26, 2.67], $p = .844$, $d = .020$, and in the second spring term, $t(399) = -.034$, CI[-3.37, 3.49], $p = .973$, $d = .003$.

Low Income Students. GPA goal engagement was similar for low income and non-low income students in the first spring term, $t(320) = -1.64$, CI[-.453, .041], $p = .101$, $d = .176$, and in the second spring term, $t(202) = -.764$, CI[-.445, .196], $p = .446$, $d = .106$. GPA goal adjustment was similar for low income and non-low income students in the first spring term, $t(337) = -1.30$, CI[-.545, .112], $p = .196$, $d = .137$, and in the second spring term, $t(196) = -1.88$, CI[-.800, .019], $p = .061$, $d = .260$. Additionally, educational goal strivings were similar for low income and non-low income students in the fall term, $t(311) = .240$, CI[-2.57, 3.28], $p = .810$, $d = .026$, the first spring term, $t(311) = .042$, CI[-3.16, 3.30], $p = .967$, $d = .005$, and in the second spring term, $t(306) = .062$, CI[-3.51, 3.73], $p = .951$, $d = .006$.

As seen in Figure 3.2, distributions for absolute aspirations were similar among all groups ($ps > .05$). However, distributions of goal-oriented control varied by students' year in college, $F(3,422) = 5.24$, $p < .001$. Initial goal-oriented control was significantly lower for Seniors ($M = 81.80$, $SD = 17.30$) compared to Freshmen ($M_{diff} = -8.16$, CI[-13.35, -2.97], $p < .001$), Sophomores ($M_{diff} = -9.13$, CI[-15.38, -2.88], $p = .001$), and Juniors ($M_{diff} = -6.13$, CI[-11.62, -.647], $p = .02$).

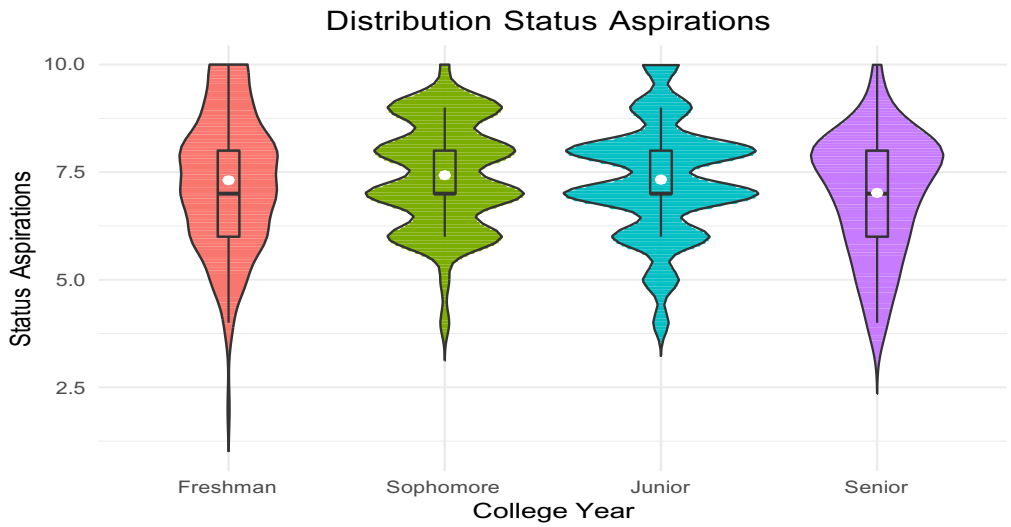

Figure 3.2. Ladder Aspirations Distributions by Grade

Note. Ladder aspirations by students' year in college. Average initial status aspirations do not vary by students' year in college, $F(3,422) = .869$, $p = .457$. Levene's test reveals variance in status aspirations amongst year of study are similar across all years, $F(3,422) = 2.26$, $p = .081$.

Table 3.1. Means and Standard Deviations Amongst Past, Current, Aspired Social Status, and Intergenerational and Intragenerational Mobility

	Fall T1	Spring T2	Spring T3	Fall T1	Spring T2	Spring T3
	All Students			**Freshmen**		
Past SS	5.09 (1.95)	-	-	4.83 (2.01)	-	-
Current SS	5.32 (1.76)	5.52 (1.79)	5.24 (1.76)	5.19 (1.74)	5.44 (1.90)	5.07 (1.72)
Future SS (asp)	7.28 (1.45)	7.23 (1.51)	7.11 (1.49)	7.27 (1.63)	7.22 (1.66)	7.04 (1.64)
Intergenerational Mobility	.26 (1.79)	.48 (1.99)	.20 (2.02)	.36 (1.75)	.59 (1.97)	.23 (2.05)
Intragenerational Mobility	1.96 (1.80)	1.69 (1.81)	1.88 (1.72)	2.08 (1.89)	1.78 (1.83)	1.98 (1.73)
Educational Control Striving	88.47 (13.44)	83.39 (14.96)	79.14 (17.39)	89.98 (11.84)	83.51 (15.72)	78.88 (18.44)
GPA Goal Engagement	-	5.33 (1.20)	5.07 (1.27)	-	5.45 (1.08)	5.13 (1.20)
GPA Goal Adjustment	-	4.71 (1.67)	4.67 (1.59)	-	4.96 (1.57)	4.85 (1.45)
Term GPA	3.58 (.510)	3.55 (.520)	3.58 (.510)	3.46 (.570)	3.45 (.600)	3.46 (.570)
	First Generation			**Non-First Generation**		
Past SS	4.18 (1.70)	-	-	5.88 (1.83)	-	-
Current SS	4.92 (1.66)	5.02 (1.66)	4.83 (1.66)	5.68 (1.83)	5.99 (1.81)	5.63 (1.80)
Future SS (asp)	7.26 (1.34)	7.11 (1.41)	7.06 (1.37)	7.36 (1.51)	7.32 (1.61)	7.17 (1.57)
Intergenerational Mobility	.74 (1.64)	.86 (1.93)	.65 (2.06)	-.20 (1.87)	.06 (1.99)	-.25 (1.83)
Intragenerational Mobility	2.34 (1.58)	2.07 (1.69)	2.23 (1.57)	1.68 (1.95)	1.35 (1.83)	1.53 (1.82)
Educational Control Striving	88.01 (13.43)	83.67 (15.80)	79.15 (17.00)	88.53 (13.67)	83.21 (14.50)	78.56 (18.15)
GPA Goal Engagement	-	5.49 (1.10)	5.18 (1.01)	-	5.15 (1.26)	4.87 (1.56)
GPA Goal Adjustment	-	5.04 (1.28)	5.00 (1.28)	-	4.42 (1.77)	4.41 (1.80)
Term GPA	3.47 (.570)	3.45 (.580)	3.47 (.570)	3.69 (.450)	3.67 (.410)	3.69 (.450)
	Low Income			**Non-Low Income**		
Past SS	3.90 (1.76)	-	-	5.68 (1.75)	-	-
Current SS	4.54 (1.73)	4.71 (1.63)	4.45 (1.57)	5.75 (1.64)	5.88 (1.73)	5.67 (1.71)
Future SS (asp)	6.92 (1.61)	6.83 (1.65)	6.83 (1.61)	7.40 (1.18)	7.29 (1.29)	7.14 (1.29)
Intergenerational Mobility	.64 (1.68)	.84 (1.87)	.55 (2.15)	.06 (1.80)	.18 (2.01)	-.01 (1.86)
Intragenerational Mobility	2.37 (1.73)	2.09 (1.71)	2.39 (1.70)	1.66 (1.70)	1.40 (1.77)	1.48 (1.54)
Educational Control Striving	87.87 (14.82)	83.05 (16.22)	78.92 (18.22)	88.07 (12.97)	82.90 (14.45)	78.50 (15.93)
GPA Goal Engagement	-	5.41 (1.22)	5.17 (1.10)	-	5.21 (1.14)	5.02 (1.25)
GPA Goal Adjustment	-	4.86 (1.56)	4.98 (1.30)	-	4.67 (1.61)	4.60 (1.66)
Term GPA	3.48 (.590)	3.47 (.550)	3.48 (3.67)	3.64 (.480)	3.63 (.450)	3.64 (.480)

Note. Intergenerational mobility was calculated by subtracting past social status from current social status, where higher values equals greater perceived mobility at that point in college. Intragenerational mobility was calculated by subtracting student's aspired social statuses from their current social status, where higher values equals greater perceived aspired intragenerational mobility.

Table 3.2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Key Variables

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Past SS T1	5.09 (1.95)	-											
2. Aspiration T1	7.28 (1.45)	.230**	-										
3.Aspiration T2	7.23 (1.51)	.242**	.618**	-									
4. Aspiration T3	7.11 (1.49)	.135**	.644**	.630**	-								
5. Current SS T1	5.32 (1.76)	.539**	.381**	.304**	.260**	-							
6. Current SS T2	5.52 (1.79)	.439**	.227**	.411**	.249**	.537**	-						
7. Current SS T3	5.24 (1.76)	.411**	.233**	.252**	.447**	.486**	.524**	-					
8. SPC T1	88.47 (14.96)	.021	.298**	.194**	.292**	.129**	.052	.096*	-				
9. SPC T2	83.39 (14.96)	.005	.224**	.157**	.224**	.054	-.047	-.001	.544**	-			
10. SPC T3	79.14 (17.38)	.060	.263**	.201**	.316**	.091	-.020	.102*	.450**	.510**	-		
11. GPA T1	3.58 (.430)	.143**	-.019	-.078	-.027	.140**	.060	.111*	.054	.126**	.062	-	
12. GPA T2	3.57 (.400)	.103*	-.083	-.019	.000	.007	.082	.117*	.003	.068	.004	.486**	-
13. GPA T3	3.57 (.370)	.147**	-.027	.041	0.06	.075	.139**	.125*	.066	.064	.064	.237**	.414**

Note. Term GPA T1: End of fall Term; GPA T2: End of spring Term; T3: End of winter Term in Second Year. p<.01**, p <.05*.

Past social status was positively correlated with aspirations at each time point (*ps* <.01), but not with educational goal striving (*ps* >.05). Similarly, current social status was positively correlated with aspirations at each time point (*ps* <.01), with this association growing stronger across time (T1: r = .381, CI[.297, .460], p <.001; T2: r = .411, CI[.326, .489], p <.001; T3: r = .447, CI[.367, .520], p <.001). However, current social status was only positively correlated with educational goal striving at T1 (r = .129, CI[.034, .221], p = .008) and T3 (r = .102, CI[.007, .195], p = .036). Notably, past social status and current social status become less correlated strong over time (T1: r = .539, CI[.468, .603], p <.001; T2: r = .439, CI[.357, .515], p <.001; r = .411, CI[.329, .488], p <.001), suggesting as students progress through college, they increasingly distinguish their current status standing from their family's social status. Moreover, perceiving one's past and current social status as higher is positively associated with higher term GPAs.

Past and Current Social Status with Academic Achievement

Past social status was positively correlated with GPA such that those perceiving one's past social status as higher is positively associated with higher GPAs (*rs* = .103 to .147, *ps* <.05). However, past social status was not correlated with cumulative course units completed (*rs* = .042 to .090, *ps* >.05). Current social status was also positively associated with term GPA, including current social status and GPA at T1 (r = .140, CI[.046, .232], p =.004), GPA at T1 with current social status at T3 (r = .111, CI[.017, .204], p = .021), and GPA and current social status at T3 (r = .117, CI[.022, .210], p = .015). Current social status was also positively correlated with course units such that current social status at T1 was associated with a greater number of course units completed at T3 (r = .118, CI[.019, .213], p = .019), and current social status at T3 was associated with a greater number of course units completed at T3 (r = .147, CI[.050, .242], p = .003).

The Relationship Between Status Aspirations and Educational Goal Striving

Correlations amongst variables can be seen in Table 3.2. Absolute ladder aspirations and educational goal striving were positively associated across time points (*ps* <.01), with the association the strongest at T3 (r = .316, CI[.228, .399], p <.001).

Latent growth curve modeling was conducted to examine the trajectories of status aspirations and educational goal striving across two years (6 total terms): The beginning of the first academic term (T1), the end of the third academic term (T2), and at the beginning of the sixth academic term (T3). Time was coded to reflect a change in status aspirations and educational goal striving each academic term. Growth models included only participants who had complete data across all three waves (n = 427). The model fit indices

for status aspirations and selective primary control are shown in Tables B.1 and B.2 in Appendix B.

Ladder Status Aspirations

For status aspirations, the linear growth model with constrained residuals fit the data best. The covariance between the intercept of status aspirations and the rate of change was non-significant, b = .026, SE = .020, p = .195, indicating that changes in status aspirations over time were not associated with where students start. The intercept was significantly different than 0, b = 7.28, SE = .065, p <.001, and there was a significant rate of decline in status aspirations per academic term, b = -.033, SE = .012, p = .004. Although there were substantial individual differences in status aspirations at the beginning of the first academic term, variance = 1.29, SE = .0135, p <.001, the variance estimate for the rate of change was non-significant, variance = -.006, SE = .006, p = .328, indicating a non-significant amount of variation in the rate of change across individuals. Thus, status aspirations decline at a similar rate for all individuals. The latent factors explained approximately 60% to 62.6% of the variance in status aspirations at each time point.

Educational Goal Striving

For educational goal striving, the linear growth model with non-constrained residual variances fit the data best. When estimating the model that included all participants, the covariance between the intercept and the rate of change was non-significant, b = -.327, SE = 3.40, p = .923, r = .-.019, indicating students' educational goal striving at the beginning of the first academic term was not associated with the rate of change over time. The intercept was significantly different from 0, b = 87.86, SE = .616, p <.001, and the rate of change declined at a significant rate, b = -1.85, SE = .153, p <.001.

Although there were substantial individual differences in educational goal striving at the beginning of the first academic term, variance = 111.34, *SE* = 14.62, $p < .001$, there were no individual differences in the rate of decline over time, *variance* = 2.55, *SE* = 1.54, $p = .098$. Thus, educational goal striving declines at a similar rate for all individuals. The latent factors explained approximately 53.2% to 61.1% of the variance in educational goal striving at each time point.

Educational Control Striving by Groups. When testing group differences in the most optimal functional form, the linear, unconstrained residuals model fit the data best for first generation and non-first generation students, as well as for low-income and non-low-income students. For generation status, first generation students experienced a significant rate of decline in educational control striving ($b = -1.77$, $SE = .217$, $p < .001$) and so did non-first generation students ($b = -2.03$, $SE = .281$, $p < .001$). The underlying growth trajectory of educational goal striving explained a greater proportion of variation (55.3% to 74.1%) for first generation students compared to non-first generation students (44.8% to 55.2%). A conditional multiple groups model was estimated with interindividual mobility, intraindividual mobility, academic self-efficacy, and year of study as predictors of the intercepts and rate of change (see Table 3.3. for standardized regression coefficients), $\chi^2(10) = 9.25$, $p = .508$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA
= .000 CI[.000, .075], SRMR = .016. For first generation students, neither higher intergenerational mobility nor higher intraindividual mobility aspirations predicted initial educational goal striving, or the rate of change in educational goal striving. For non-first generation students, stronger intergenerational mobility was associated with higher initial educational goal striving and a less steep rate of decline in educational goal striving over time, despite initial levels and the rate of change not being significantly correlated

(r = -.220, p = .643). Additionally, higher intraindividual mobility aspirations were associated with higher initial educational goal striving, but did not attenuate the decline in educational goal striving over time for first generation students. 30.4% of the variation in the intercept of educational goal striving, and 6.4% of changes in educational goal striving was explained for first generation students, compared to 41.7% of the intercept and 22.7% of the slope for non-first generation students.

Regarding income status, low income students experienced a significant rate of decline in educational control strivings (b = -1.78, SE = .294, p <.001) and so did non-low income students (b = -1.91, SE = .230, p <.001). For non-low income students, there was significant variability in the rate of change in educational goal striving (variance = 4.84, SE = 2.16, p = .025). The underlying growth trajectory of educational goal striving explained a greater proportion of variation (55.3% to 74.1%) for low income students compared to non-low income students (44.8% to 55.2%). When entering the predictors, $\chi^2(10) = 9.50$, p = .485, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, CI[.000, .079], SRMR = .018, higher interindividual mobility did not predict initial educational goal striving nor the rate of change for low income or non-low income students. However, higher intraindividual mobility aspirations predicted higher initial educational goal striving for non-low income students, but not the rate of change.

Table 3.3. Predictors of Conditional Growth Model for Educational Goal Striving

	First Generation		Non-First Generation	
	Initial SPC	**Slope SPC**	**Initial SPC**	**Slope SPC**
Interindividual mobility	.013 (.603)	.101 (.148)	.276 (.594)**	-.459 (.193)*
Intraindividual mobility	.096 (.614)	.187 (.153)	.225 (.500)*	-.192 (.139)
Academic self-efficacy	.518 (.066)***	.054 (.015)	.545 (.052)***	.212 (.016)
Freshmen	.183 (1.77)*	-.174 (.448)	.079 (1.67)	-.222 (.555)
	Low Income		**Non-Low Income**	
	Initial SPC	**Slope SPC**	**Initial SPC**	**Slope SPC**
Interindividual mobility	-.164 (.731)	-.106 (.194)	.110 (.590)	-.027 (.182)
Intraindividual mobility	.047 (.563)	.000 (.143)	.210 (.594)*	.059 (.163)
Academic self-efficacy	.600 (.067)***	.133 (.019)	.540 (.053)***	-.005 (.015)
Freshmen	.250 (1.97)	-.106 (.535)	.100 (1.64)	-.220 (.037)*

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

Aspirations Predicting Changes in Educational Goal Striving

To understand how status aspirations and educational goal striving mutually change over time, parallel process growth models were conducted (see Table B.3 in Appendix B. for model fit indices). The model that allowed for within-time covariances fit the model best. As seen in Figure 3.3, there was a positive association among initial ladder status aspirations and the rate of change in educational goal striving (r = .38, p = .016). When estimating the factor regressions of the intercepts on the rate of change factors, higher initial aspirations predicted a steeper rate of decline in educational goal striving (B = .34, p = .035).

Educational Goal Striving Predicting Changes in Aspirations

There was a positive association amongst initial educational goal striving and the rate of change in status aspirations (r = .60, p <.001). When estimating the factor regressions of the intercepts and the rate of change factors, higher initial educational goal striving did not significantly predict the rate of decline in aspirations over time (B = .60, p = .070), suggesting that status aspirations decline at similar rates despite a student's initial investments of effort and time into their educational experiences.

The Role of Status Identities. When estimating the factor regressions for past and current social status as well as if students belonged to an underrepresented minority with regards to the student body of the university, we find that at the beginning of the academic term, higher current social status predicted higher initial aspirations (B = .412, SE = .042, p <.001) and a less steep decline in these aspirations over time (B = -1.53, SE = .009, p = .020). Additionally, higher current social status predicted higher educational goal striving (B = .195, SE = .431, p = .001) and a less steep rate of decline in educational goal striving over time (B = -.340, SE = .138, p = .016). Moreover, underrepresented minority student (i.e., non-Asian/Asian American; non-White) had higher initial status aspirations (B = .157, SE = .147, p = .005). See Table 3.4. for details. Together, 36.2% of the variation in the rate of change in status aspirations was explained by this model, whereas only 17.9% of goal striving was explained. However, only 4.4% of the variation was explained for initial educational goal striving.

Table 3.4. Standardized Coefficients and Standard Error of Factor Regressions

	Initial Aspirations	Slope Aspirations	Initial Control	Slope Control
Control intercept	-	2.09 (.002)*	-	-
Aspiration intercept	-	-	-	.420 (.307)*
Past SS	.128 (.039)	-.607 (.008)	-.072 (.393)	.163 (.105)
Current SS	.412 (.042)***	-1.53 (.009)*	.195 (.431)**	-.340 (.138)*
URM	.157 (.147)**	-.094 (.030)	.102 (1.50)	.091 (.411)
STEM	.084 (.125)	-.090 (.025)	.072 (1.27)	-.026 (.337)

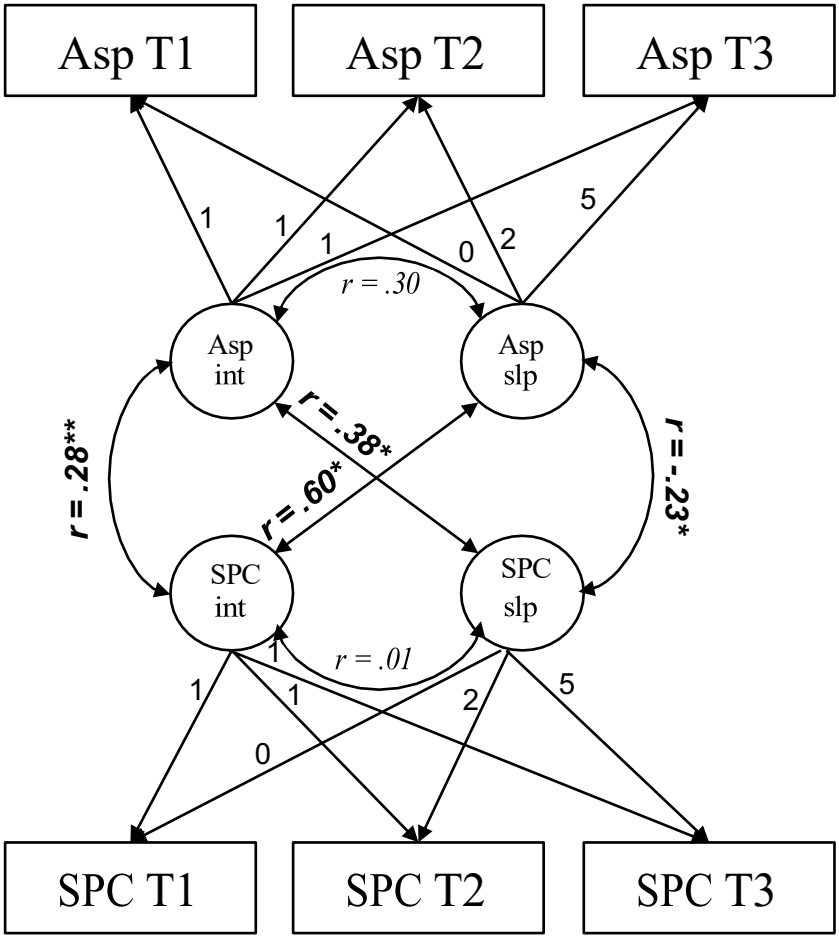

Figure 3.3. Associations Among Ladder Status Aspirations and Educational Goal Striving – Initial Levels and Rate of Change

Note: Residual variances were allowed to correlate at T1 (r = .33**), T2 (r = -.100) and T3 (r= .42**), where final estimations accounted for this within-residuals covariance. ***p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05.

Path Analysis of Intragenerational Mobility Aspirations on Educational Goal Engagement

Path models assessed the relationships between mobility aspirations and term GPA on a series of engagement and adjustment of GPA goals. The robust chi-square test of model fit was non-significant ($\chi^2(6) = 7.58$, $p = .271$), suggesting that the model adequately fits the data. Other fit indices further supported the adequacy of the model fit: robust CFI = .996. The robust Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .026, (90% CI [.000, .077]), indicating a good fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was .017, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of .08, suggesting a good model fit. Several key relationships were identified.

All Participants

Irrespective of social status, higher intragenerational mobility aspirations had a positive relationship with engagement with GPA goals, $B = .239$, $SE = .035$, $p < .001$, to adjustment of GPA goals, $B = .171$, $SE = .047$, $p = .001$, and to general educational goal striving, $B = .178$, $SE = .408$, $p = .001$. However, actual end of term GPA performance was not a result of higher mobility aspirations in the same term, and thus does not explain these significant associations. Higher end of term GPA does however show a significant negative relationship with GPA goal engagement, $B = -.131$, $SE = .105$, $p = .006$, and adjustment, $B = -.152$, $SE = .138$, $p < .001$, showing that higher GPA is associated with less need to increase engagement and goal adjustment for their future GPA goals. Notably, GPA was not associated with general educational control striving, indicating that independent of actual GPA performance, students intend to pursue their education with maximal efforts. Together, intragenerational mobility aspirations and term GPA explained 8.1% of the

variation in GPA goal engagement, 5.8% in goal adjustment, and 3.7% in educational control strivings.

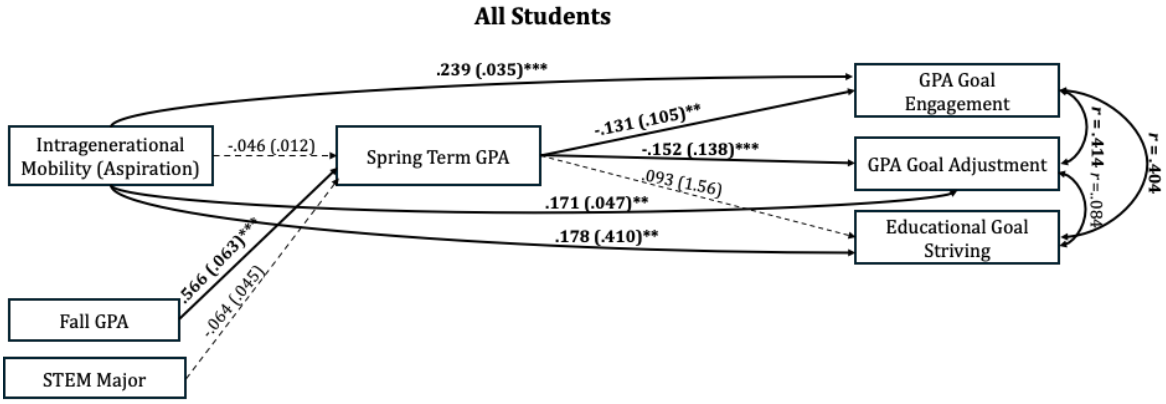

Figure 3.4. Intragenerational Mobility Aspirations Path Model On Educational Goal Engagement And Adjustment
Note. Coefficients are standardized. p<.001***; p<.01**; p<.05*.

First Generation Students

When comparing path coefficients between first and non-first generation students, intragenerational mobility aspirations had a positive relationship with GPA goal engagement for both first generation, B = .268, SE = .042, p <.001, and non-first generation students, B = .177, SE = .060, p = .046. Similarly, intragenerational mobility aspirations were positively associated with GPA goal adjustment for first generation, B = .159, SE = .059, p = .015, and non-first generation students, B = .160, SE = .080, p = .049. However, intragenerational aspirations were only positively associated with educational control striving for first generation students, B = .262, SE = .568, p <.001. For both groups, term GPA was not associated with GPA goal engagement, GPA goal adjustment, or educational control striving. Intragenerational mobility explained more variation in GPA goal engagement and educational control strivings for first generation students (GPA engagement: R^2 = .082; control strivings: R^2 = .075) compared to non-first generation

students (GPA engagement: R^2 = .048; control strivings: R^2 = .044). The amount of variation explained in goal adjustment were similar by generation status, (first generation: R^2 = .036; non-first generation: R^2 = .039).

A chi-square difference test was performed to compare the constrained model, which assumes equal path coefficients across groups, to the unconstrained model, which allows for group differences. The results did not show a significant worsening of fit when path coefficients were constrained to be equal across groups ($\Delta\chi^2(24) = 32.02$, $p = .127$), indicating that the path coefficients did not differ significantly by first-generation status.

Low-Income Students

When comparing path coefficients between low income and non-low income students, intragenerational mobility aspirations had a positive relationship with GPA goal engagement for both low income, B = .264, SE = .046, p = .007, and non-low income students, B = .161, SE = .049, p = .031. However, intragenerational mobility aspirations were only associated with GPA goal adjustment for non-low income students, B = .172, SE = .059, p =.007. Additionally, intragenerational aspirations were positively associated with educational control striving for both low-income, B = .242, SE = .737, p =.002, and non-low income students, B = .168, SE = .578, p = .016. Term GPA was not associated with GPA goal engagement, adjustment, or educational control strivings for low-income students. However, term GPA was negatively associated with GPA engagement, B = -.133, SE = .163, p = .044, GPA adjustment, B = -.206, SE = .215, p = .001, and educational control striving, B = .166, SE = 2.03, p = .010, for non-low income students. Overall, this model explained 6.9% of the variation in goal engagement for low-income students and 5.1% for non-low income students; 2.2% of the variation in goal adjustment for low income students and 8.5% for

non-low income students; and 7% of the variation in educational goal striving for low income students versus 4.6% for non-low income students.

A chi-square difference test was conducted to compare the fit of the constrained and unconstrained models to determine if the path coefficients varied significantly across groups defined by low income status. The results indicated a significant worsening of fit when constraints were imposed across groups, $\Delta\chi^2(24) = 40.079$, $p = .021$, suggesting significant differences in the path coefficients between the low income and non-low income groups.

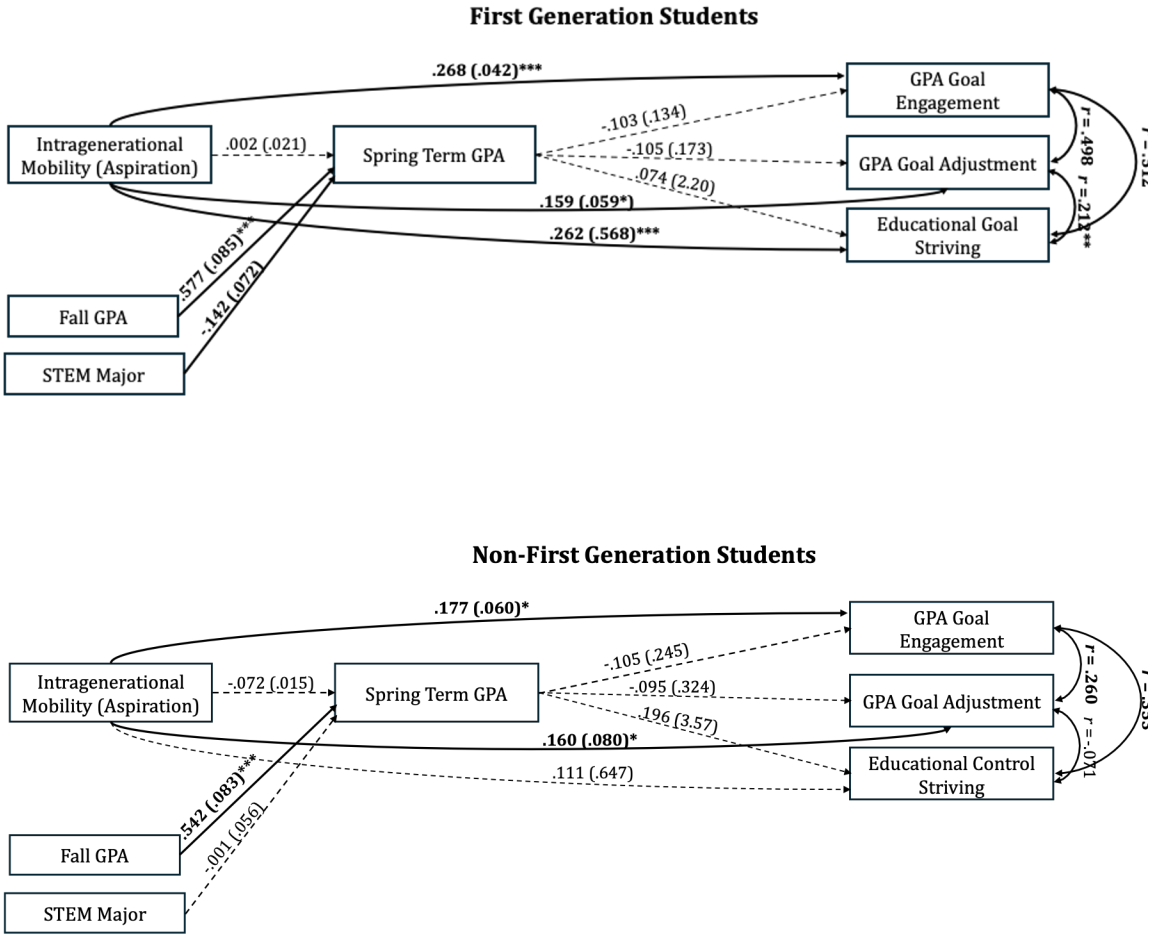

Figure 3.5. Multiple Groups Path Models for First Generation and Non-First Generation Students

Note: Standardized coefficients reported. $p<.001$***; $p<.01$**, $p<.05$*. Multiple groups model robust fit indices: $\chi^2(12) = 18.22$, p = .109; CFI = .981; RMSEA = .056, SRMR = .027. First generation: $\chi^2(6) = 12.57$; non-first generation: $\chi^2(6) = 5.66$. 38.9% of the variation in spring term GPA was explained for first generation students, whereas 31.2% was explained for non-first generation students.

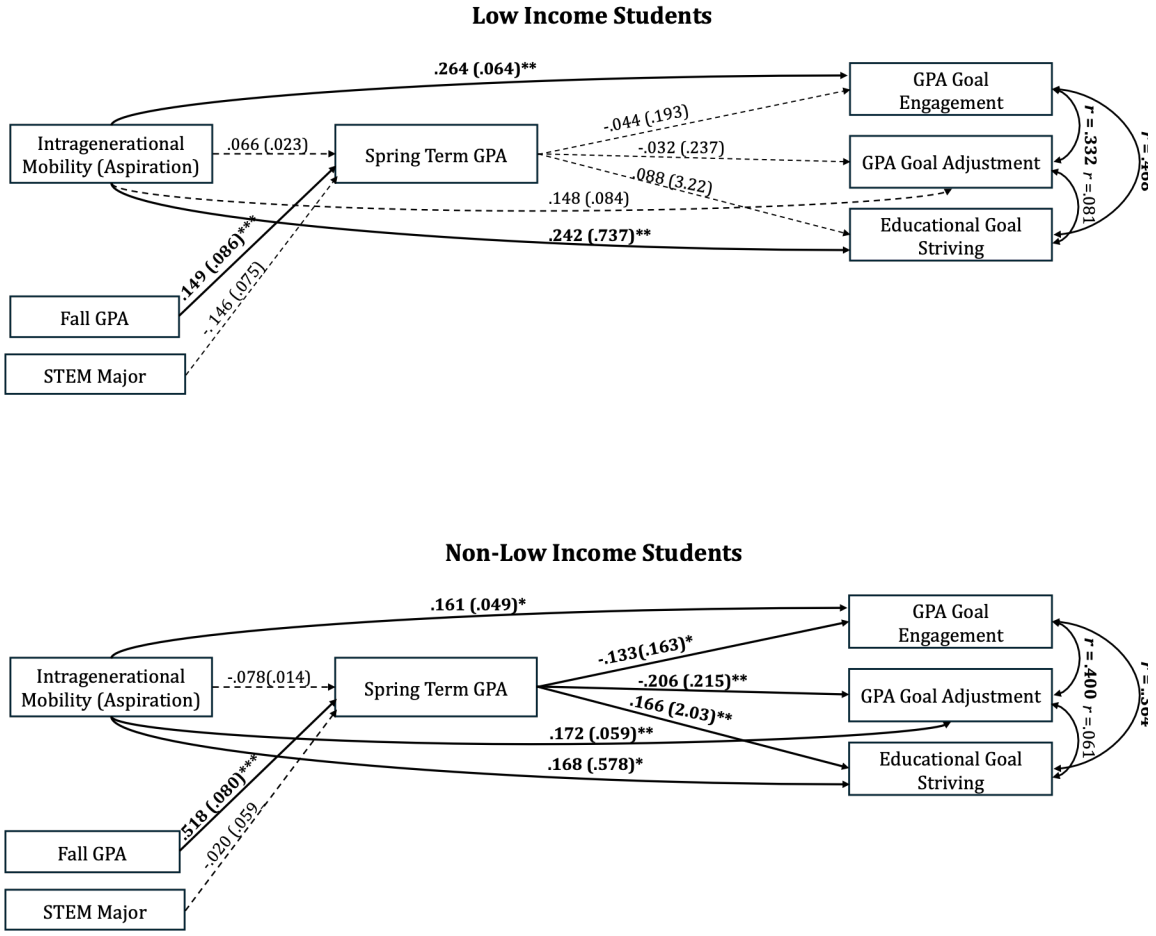

Figure 3.6. Multiple Groups Path Models for Low Income and Non-Low Income Students
Note: Standardized coefficients reported. $p<.001$***; $p<.01$**; $p<.05$*. $\chi^2(6) = 19.23$, $p = .083$; CFI = .977; RMSEA = .061, SRMR = .037. Low-income: $\chi^2(6) = 9.27$; non-low income: $\chi^2(6) = 9.95$. 27.7% of the variation in spring term GPA was explained for low-income students, versus 47.7% for non-low income students.

Study 3.a. Discussion

The current study reflects the importance of investigating the role of past, current, and future status-based identities in shaping continual investments into status-based goals. As students move through college, their past social status is less correlated with their current social status, indicating that their current social statuses become more salient over time. At the same time, their current social status becomes more correlated with their future status aspirations. While these ladder aspirations start high at the beginning of a term, they marginally decline over the course of two years for all students, where the perception of having a higher current social status attenuates this decline. These changes in status aspirations had consequences for educational goal striving, where striving toward educational goals decreased at steeper rates for students with higher aspirations. Moreover, the number of rungs students aspired to climb on the social ladder affected the use of their motivational strategies that are important for remaining invested in appropriate goal pursuits.

Pursuing college to climb the social ladder provides students with agency to shape their social status identities by engaging with their educational goals and investing their time and energy into these goals. This is reflected in the finding that a student's current social status is associated with their status aspirations more strongly over time. At the same time, students' past social status is less intertwined with their current status over time, highlighting the importance of educational experiences in molding a students' current status. However, setting too high and unattainable aspirations has implications on their academic experiences, where we find higher ladder aspirations are associated with steeper declines in effort and time allotted to their educational goals. In this way, high status

aspirations may be a double-edged sword; while students who strive to achieve a high place on the social ladder are motivated to achieve academically, the unattainable nature may lead to a steeper loss in their capacities to appropriately invest their time and efforts into these goals compared to students who set more attainable status goals. These changes in goal striving as a result of high status aspirations seem to indicate a re-calibration of students' capacities for continual investments of motivational resources.

Mobility Aspirations Among First-Generation and Low-Income Students

First generation and low income students report significantly higher subjective intergenerational mobility (i.e., change from their past social status to their current social status) while their peers perceive their current social statuses as being closer to their families of origins' social status. This reflects that pursuing educational goals is particularly important for students from lower status backgrounds to cultivate a current social status independent from their backgrounds. However, these students reported lower absolute ladder aspirations for where they wanted to be on the social status ladder 15-20 years in the future, aligning with prior research that suggests individuals from lower social statuses tend to set less ambitious long-term status-related goals (Browman et al., 2022). Despite lower absolute aspirations compared to their peers, first generation and low income students set highly ambitious intragenerational mobility goals (i.e., change from their current social status to their aspired future social status). First generation students aimed to climb roughly two-thirds of a ladder rung higher than non-first generation students respective of where they perceive themselves currently, and low income students aim to climb two-thirds to almost one ladder rung higher than non-low income students. These high upward mobility aspirations might reflect the faith these students have in attaining a

higher education as a means for achieving their upward mobility goals despite their backgrounds. However, excessively high and thus potentially unrealistic mobility aspirations may have detrimental consequences for continual engagement with educational goals.

In line with our hypothesis, initial status aspirations did not significantly differ by past students' social status, but those with higher current social statuses had higher aspirations, and less steep rates of decline over time. Additionally, it was originally hypothesized that aspirations would remain high and stable regardless of social status. However, we find a significant rate of decline of almost a quarter of a ladder rung over two years in status aspirations, regardless of past or current social statuses. These findings point to the differentiating role of past and current social statuses on where students start the academic term wanting to end up on the social ladder. Moreover, perceiving a current social status to be higher was also associated with higher educational control strivings at the beginning of the first academic term, and less steep rates of decline over time.

This suggests that students with well-calibrated future selves when it comes to their future social statuses are more attuned to proper engagement and adjustment with their educational goals. For example, it was found that students who had higher intragenerational mobility aspirations in the first spring term were more likely to intend to appropriately adjust their GPA goals when performing worse than expected, as well as increase personal efforts to still maintain GPA goals. However, low income students seem to be more rigid when it comes to their intentions to appropriately adjust and engage in their GPA goals regardless of their actual GPA performances. Taking into account that the low income or first generation students in this sample achieved a very difficult to attain

acceptance into a highly selective university that made them more resilient in defending their educational and career goals. These findings reflect prior findings that students from marginalized backgrounds face trouble in identity management and sustaining appropriate motivation that contribute to the overall achievement gap (Jury et al., 2017).

Overall, students with higher mobility aspirations in this study are more inclined to adjust their GPA goals appropriately, yet they also strive to attain their GPA goals through continual effort. This adaptability is contrasted with the more rigid approach observed in low-income students, who persistently adhere to their high intragenerational mobility aspirations and use of control strategies, regardless of actual academic performance that term. This persistence underscores the insistent nature of low income students, but at the same time, also underscores the potential for maladaptive motivational control.

These findings raise important questions pertaining to how to encourage college students to set more realistic goals, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Prior literature suggests that high status aspirations are often established early in life, driven by parental expectations and societal messages (Kay et al., 2016). This cultural and familial backdrop may contribute to starting college with high aspirations, and an appropriate re-calibration effect might be underlying the slow declines over time.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the results of this study seem to point at the importance of educational experiences in helping students remain aligned with their longer term status goals, higher mobility aspirations did not predict educational control striving through term GPA performances within an academic term. Additionally, whether students were STEM majors or not did not impact changes in status aspirations or educational control strivings.

Enrolling in STEM majors is associated with greater social mobility (Shaw et al., 2016), yet the current study supports that aspirations and investment of effort and time are similar despite students' major. It would be critical for future work to investigate the influence of changing academic experiences on changes in these outcomes while using college as an avenue for social mobility, particularly for those from lower status backgrounds (Browman et al., 2017).

For example, feeling a sense of in-group belongingness is often important for keeping individuals engaged with their goal-directed behaviors (Fritsche, 2022). Thus, it would be important to investigate relations to status-based peer groups and their role on students' goal-oriented motivation strategies. For example, Chetty and colleagues (2022) find that weaker friending biases–the degree to which low-SES students befriend high-SES students– can dampen pursuits for social mobility. Thus, students from lower status backgrounds who feel more connected to their higher status peers may have an easier time transitioning into their new status-based identities, and these identity changes may be reflected in their strategy usage (Jury et al., 2017). Moreover, students' expectations and the value they place on their educational goals matter for whether they use appropriate control strategies when striving for their goals (Wigfield and Eccles, 2022). For example, students who hold strong expectancy beliefs and value educational tasks are more likely to adjust their educational goals when needed (von Keyserlingk et al., 2022). However, this does not seem to be the case for all students. This study reveals that for low-income students, higher mobility aspirations did not predict intentions to adjust their GPA goals if they fell short of reaching them, whereas for non-low-income students, they did. Additionally, these differences in findings could also be derived from differences in

expectations versus aspirations (Perry & Raeburn, 2017) , where expectations are more motivating for goal-oriented behavior and are more associated with possible selves as they are more concrete.

Thus, a nuanced understanding of how specific academic and social experiences modulate motivational control strategies, and how these control strategies matter for status aspirations warrant a deeper investigation, particularly within the context of specific academic pursuits.

Study 3.a. Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore the importance of setting realistic ladder aspirations. Thus, students who hold more attainable future status-associated identities manage a re-calibration of appropriate educational goal strivings. Because high mobility aspirations are not associated with actual GPA performance, setting too high of mobility aspirations may spill over into unrealistic educational goals, overriding goal adjustments skills in the educational domain. In this way, perhaps unrealistic mobility aspirations can be maladaptive for remaining appropriately calibrated academic goals, where students from lower income backgrounds remain resistant to effective goal adjustment strategies.

Study 3.b.

Ladder Aspirations and Educational Goal Engagement: The Role of Peer Connections

Introduction

The lack of a sense of belonging to an institution and to peers at college can significantly harm striving toward social mobility goals, such as educational goals (Piff et al., 2018). This effect is anticipated to be more pronounced for students from lower status backgrounds. Consequently, diminished feelings of belonging to current status-based social groups (i.e., peers and faculty at college) are likely to weaken the effect of high mobility goals on continual goal engagement, and overall strivings toward educational goals. It is important to investigate the role of status-based social group membership on these changes to determine whether worse membership to new status-based groups undermines control striving. These dynamics represent critical status-based social identity processes that can impact student engagement with educational goals, because connections to certain in-groups helps individuals remain in control (Fritsche, 2022). The Status-Based Identity framework suggests that a greater disconnection from one's social status and from social groups within college settings can negative implications on student motivation (Destin et al., 2017). For students from lower statuses, such detachment may undermine their educational control strivings to a worse degree. Therefore, lower status students' academic motivational control strivings may be undermined when they feel at odds with their membership to their new status-based groups in college.

Identification with groups of individuals who are seen as conducive with an aspired identity is necessary for maintenance of control striving, particularly for individuals who have lower perceptions of personal control due to inequalities (Fritsche, 2022; Turner & Tajfel, 1979). Students who feel a stronger sense of belonging to their peers and faculty, and the institution at large are cultivating a salient self that belongs to that institution

(Destin et al., 2017). This sense of belonging leads students to persist longer because the environment is more likely to feel congruent with their aspired self (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Oyserman, 2007; 2013). However, feeling disconnected from past social status groups may also undermine status-based goal pursuits due to a promotion of status-based uncertainty (Destin et al., 2017; Destin et al., 2019). On the other hand, moving away from past social status groups may help lower status students remain committed to their current status aspirations (see Browman et al., 2019).

The Current Study

The current study sought to extend upon Study 3 by testing the following research questions: (1) Do stronger status-group social connections change the association amongst status aspirations and engagement with, and control striving for educational goals? (2) Do stronger status-group social connections help students from lower statuses stay aligned with their educational goals?

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Out of 462 students from cohort 3 data from the MUST study who participated in the weekly surveys over one year of college, a subsample of 226 (M_{age} = 22.27, SD_{age} = 4.07) participated in the fall T1 weekly surveys. The participants were ethnically diverse (36.3% Chicano/Mexican American; 5.3% Latino/Other Spanish American; 13.7% Chinese/Chinese American; 4.9% Filipino/Filipino American; 15.5% Vietnamese; 1.3% Japanese/Japanese American; 1.8% Thai or Other Asian; 3.1% Korean; 3.1% East Indian/Pakistani; 3.5% Black/African American; and 9.3% White; 2.2% unknown). A greater proportion of the sample were female (70.4%), where a majority of the sample were US Citizens (13.3% non-

U.S. citizens, 5.3% international students). Additionally, 77.9% were low-income, and 65.0% were first-generation college students. 49.8% were freshmen at the beginning of the first term, and the remaining were juniors–both transfer and continuing.

Measures

Past Social Status

See Study 3.a.

Intraindividual Mobility Aspirations

See Study 3.a.

Educational Control Strivings

See Study 3.a.

General Course Goal Engagement

A domain-general version of the OPS scale (Heckhausen et al., 1998) was adapted to reflect students' engagement with their courses. Both selective primary control and selective secondary control items were used to create a composite measure of course goal engagement. For *selective primary control*, students were asked to report how likely they were to increase their efforts and time invested in course work, or try harder to do well on assignments and exams if their courses turned out to be more difficult than they had originally anticipated. For selective secondary control, students were asked to report how likely they would try to stay away from anything that could distract them from coursework. Items were measured on a 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*very likely*) scale. Course goal engagement was measured in the fall core survey with a Cronbach alpha of .78.

School Belonging

In weeks two and six of each academic quarter, general belonging was assessed by measuring the extent participants felt confident they could engage in a series of behaviors with their peers at their college (e.g., develop personal relationships with other students; discuss events which happen outside of class with other students) on a scale from 0 (*not at all confident*) to 100 (*completely confident*). Lower scores indicated lower status-based group membership. Similarly, a series of items measured the degree of confidence students had with faculty (e.g., talk about a personal problem with faculty; confident that a faculty member would be sensitive to your difficulties if you shared them) on the same scale. These items were used to create a composite average of school belonging. Lower scores indicate lower belonging to current status-relevant groups.

College Friends Connections

Students were asked to assess how strong their connections to their friends at their institution on a 0 (*not at all strong*) to 100 (*completely strong*) scale. Lower scores indicate lower status-based group membership.

Friends From Back Home Connections

Students were asked to assess how strong their connections to their friends from back home were on a 0 (*not at all strong*) to 100 (*completely strong*) scale. This variable is mainly exploratory. Because the status-based identity framework suggests moving away from prior status-based groups is a source of distress for lower SES students, less connections to friends from back home may undermine control strivings, and therefore status attainment aspirations. However, moving away from friends from back home may also allow students to cultivate new friendships with others at their institution which may help promote positive engagement with academic goals.

Covariates

Student gender, ethnicity, prior academic achievement, and academic self-efficacy were used as covariates. Model fit and coefficients with and without the inclusion of these covariates were tested.

Study 3.b. Results

Table 3.1.b. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 3.b.

Variable	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Past SS	4.35 (2.12)	-									
2. Current SS	4.68 (1.71)	.588**	-								
3. Aspired SS	7.20 (1.67)	.246**	.412**	-							
4. Intragen. Mob.	2.51 (1.82)	-.312**	-.566**	.517**	-						
5. Peer Bel.	50.64 (23.33)	.081	.180*	.178*	-.005	-					
6. Fac. Bel.	49.63 (23.41)	.073	.163*	.170*	.002	.990**	-				
7. Con. Past SS	76.19 (21.92)	-.014	.080	.230**	.128	.153	.142	-			
8. Con. Current SS	59.63 (29.07)	.118	.184*	.266**	.053	.530**	.538**	.141	-		
9. Ed. Goal Striv.	87.06 (14.26)	-.014	-.066	.264**	.301**	.149*	.146*	.111	.368**	-	
10. Course Goal Eng.	5.69 (.923)	-.109	-.120	.176**	.291**	.224**	.225**	.091	.093	.572**	-
11. Course Goal Adj.	5.32 (1.25)	.011	.025	.055	.054	.034	.046	.122	.032	.187**	.308**

Note. **p<.01; *p<.05. Social Status (SS); Con. Past SS (connections to past social status groups); Con. Current SS (connections to current social status groups); Ed. Goal Striv. (Educational Goal Strivings).

Social Mobility Goals and Social Status Identities

The final sample was comprised of 114 (50.4%) students who perceived that they came from families who were on rungs 1 through 4 on the social status ladder, whereas 65 (28.8%) thought they came from rungs 5 or 6, and 33 (14.6%) thought they came from rungs 7 through 10.

Although there were no significant differences in absolute status aspirations based on students' past social status, $F(2, 221) = 2.09$, $p = .126$, there were significant differences in intragenerational mobility (i.e., how much students wanted to climb the social ladder from where they were currently to 15-20 years) by past social status, $F(2, 218) = 7.12$, $p < .001$, *eta-squared* = .061, 95%CI[.011, .126]. Tukey's post-hoc comparisons reveal that

mobility aspirations were higher for students who grew up on rungs 1-4 ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.71$) compared to those who grew up on rungs 5-6 ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 2.10$), and to those who grew up on rungs 7-10 ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 2.73$). Past social status was positively correlated with absolute status aspirations ($r = .246$, 95%CI[.164, .371], $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with intragenerational mobility ($r = -.312$, 95%CI[-.437, -.240], $p < .001$). Additionally, intergenerational mobility (i.e., how far students think they have climbed from their past social status to their current status) was not associated with their absolute status aspirations ($r = .054$, 95%CI[-.030, .191], $p = .153$).

Moreover, higher intragenerational mobility aspirations were positively associated with educational goal strivings ($r = .301$, 95%CI[.110, .321], $p < .001$) and course goal engagement ($r = .291$, 95%CI[.125, .336], $p < .001$), but not course goal adjustment ($r = .054$, 95%CI[-.049, .174], $p = .267$).

Connections to Status-Based Groups

As seen in Table 3.1.b., higher intragenerational mobility aspirations were not associated with connections to past or current social status groups. However, absolute status aspirations were positively associated with connections to past status groups ($r = .230$, 95%CI[.069, .379], $p = .006$), current status groups ($r = .266$, 95%CI[.106, 412], $p = .001$), peer belonging ($r = .178$, 95%CI[.033, .316], $p = .017$), and faculty belonging ($r = .170$, 95%CI[.024, .309], $p = .023$).

Intragenerational Mobility and Status Connections on Educational Control Striving and Goal Engagement by Past Social Status

As seen in Table 3.2.b, higher prior academic performances, higher academic self-efficacy, and being female were significant predictors of both educational goal strivings and

engagement with course goals. Higher intragenerational mobility goals were predictive of higher educational control strivings, but not engagement with course goals. When assessing status social group connection variables, a stronger sense of school belonging was positively associated with engagement with course goals, but not overall control strivings.

Although the main effects of status-based connections were not significant, the main effect of connections to current status social groups (i.e., friends at college) and students' past social status were qualified by a significant interaction. As seen in Figure 3.1.b., higher status students had higher educational control striving compared to lower status students when connections to college peers were stronger. However, tests of the simple slopes revealed that the strength of these associations were non-significant. Additionally, as seen in Figure 3.2.b., the association among connections to college peers on course engagement was only significant for those of high past social statuses (*effect* = .011, *SE* = .004, *p* = .006).

Table 3.2.b. Hierarchical Regression Results for Predictors on Educational Goal Striving and Course Goal Engagement: Past SS

	Educational Control Strivings			**Course Goal Engagement**		
Predictors	*B*	*SE*	*p-value*	*B*	*SE*	*p-value*
Step 1: Demographics						
Asian/Asian American	-0.08	3.98	.561	-0.04	0.27	.805
Hispanic	0.12	4.07	.391	0.06	0.28	.687
Female	**0.16**	2.49	.047	**0.18**	0.17	.028
High school GPA	**0.18**	5.28	.022	**0.11**	0.36	.197
Academic self-efficacy	**0.54**	0.08	<.001	**0.51**	0.01	<.001
R^2	.340			.267		
F	12.74			9.16		
Step 2: Mobility Aspirations						
Intragenerational mob. asp.	**0.25**	0.67	.003	0.14	0.05	.109
Past SS	0.07	0.65	.428	-0.06	0.05	.582
Past SS x mob.	0.02	0.27	.819	0.05	0.02	.617
R^2	.383			.280		
ΔR^2	.054			.032		
ΔF	3.28			1.66		
Step 3: Status Connections						
Connections to past SS	0.12	0.06	.150	0.05	0.00	.579
Connections to current SS	-0.01	0.05	.912	0.05	0.00	.652
School belong	0.08	0.07	.444	**0.22**	0.01	.045
Mob. x Connections past SS	0.00	0.03	.970	0.02	0.00	.874
Mob. x Connections current SS	0.04	0.04	.753	0.05	0.00	.695
Mob. x School belong	0.00	0.05	.983	-0.01	0.00	.939
Past SS x Connections past SS	0.03	0.06	.567	0.02	0.00	.828
Past SS x Connections current SS	**0.20**	0.02	.047	**0.23**	0.00	.035
Past SS x School belong	-0.06	0.03	.525	-0.09	0.00	.376
R^2	.391			.309		
ΔR^2	.008			.083		
ΔF	.848			1.49		

Note. Standardized coefficients are reported. Interactions between ethnicity and mobility aspirations did not yield significant results and thus were excluded from the reported analyses.

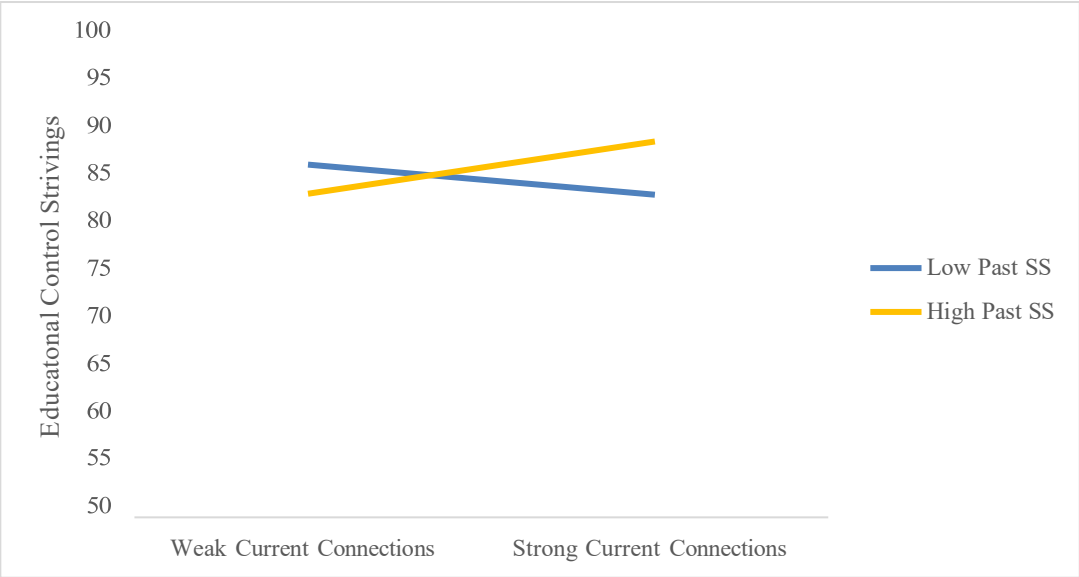

Figure 3.1.b. Current Social Groups Connections on Educational Goal Striving by Past SS
Note. Significant interaction effect, but non-significant simple slopes.

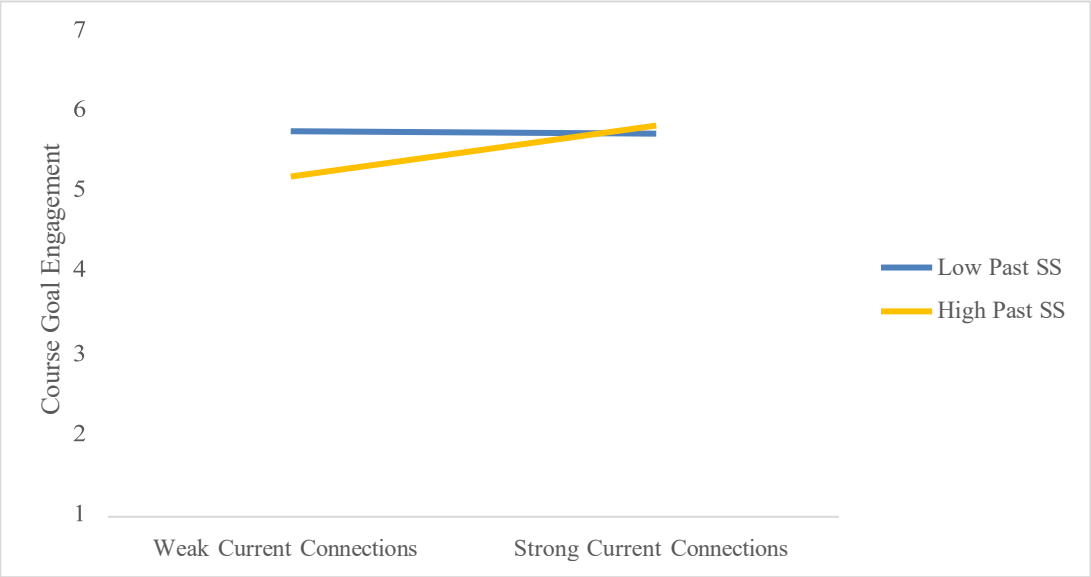

Figure 3.2.b. Current Social Group Connections on Course Goal Engagement by Past SS

Intragenerational Mobility and Status Connections on Goal Engagement by Current Social Status

Next, whether these associations were similar when looking at the main effects of current social status and its interaction with status-based social groups was tested. As seen

in Figure 3.3.b., tests of the simple slopes reveal that there was a marginally significant relationship between connection to college peers on educational goal striving for students with high levels of current social status (effect: .117, *SE* = .063, *p* = .05). However, this association was non-significant for lower current status students (effect: -.019, *SE* = .055, *p* = .732).

Table 3.3.b. Hierarchical Regression Results for Predictors on Educational Goal Striving and Course Goal Engagement: Current SS

	Educational Control Strivings			**Course Goal Engagement**		
Predictors	*B*	*SE*	*p-value*	*B*	*SE*	*p-value*
Step 1: Demographics						
Asian/Asian American	-0.08	3.96	.582	-0.03	0.27	.826
Hispanic	0.12	4.06	.393	0.06	0.28	.690
Female	**0.16**	2.47	.042	**0.19**	0.17	.025
High school GPA	**0.18**	5.26	.022	0.11	0.36	.198
Academic self-efficacy	**0.54**	0.08	<.001	**0.51**	0.01	<.001
R^2	.344			.269		
F	12.86			9.30		
Step 2: Mobility Aspirations						
Intragenerational mob. asp.	**0.21**	0.78	.025	0.13	0.05	.208
Current SS	-0.05	0.83	.654	-0.04	0.06	.705
Current SS x Mob	-0.02	0.27	.814	0.09	0.02	.315
R^2	.384			.288		
ΔR^2	.054			.037		
ΔF	3.30			1.97		
Step 3: Status Connections						
Connections to past SS						
Connections to current SS						
School belong	0.10	0.07	.315	**0.24**	0.00	.027
Mob x Connections past SS	0.00	0.03	.983	0.09	0.00	.376
Mob x Connections current SS	-0.03	0.05	.726	0.07	0.00	.505
Mob x School belong	-0.02	0.04	.901	0.05	0.00	.711
Current SS x Connections current SS	**0.30**	0.03	.004	0.07	0.00	.522
Current SS x Connections past SS	0.05	0.04	.604	0.15	0.00	.136
Current SS x School belong	-0.07	0.04	.493	0.17	0.00	.118
R^2	.403			.329		
ΔR^2	.066			.092		
ΔF	1.38			1.72		

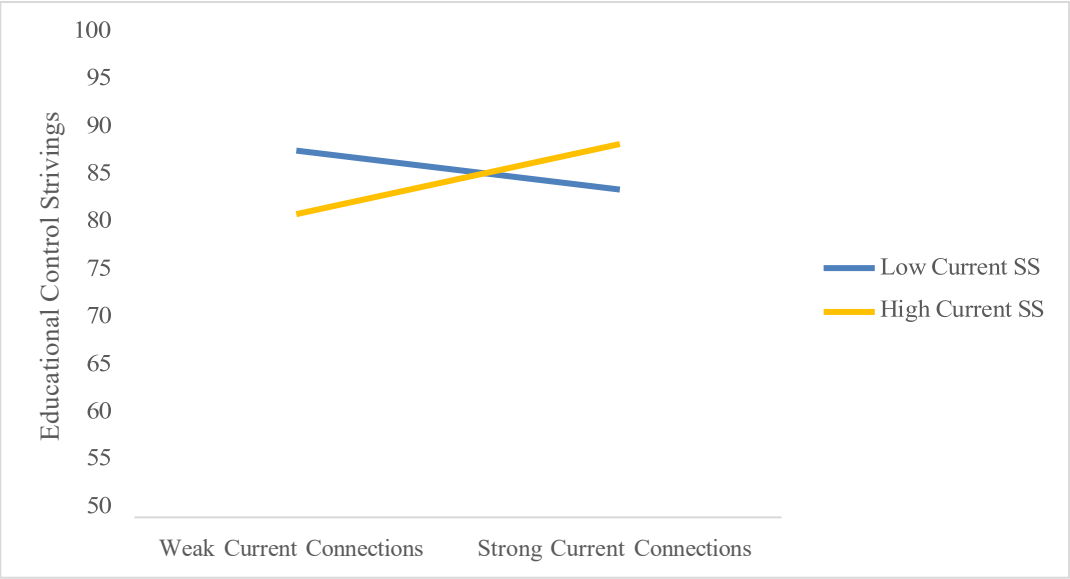

Figure 3.3.b. Connections to Current Social Groups on Educational Control Striving by Current SS

Ladder Aspirations on Educational Goal Commitment by Status Social Groups

Finally, a similar hierarchical regression was conducted, but instead of intragenerational mobility, the absolute ladder aspiration was used. Higher ladder rung aspirations were not significantly associated with educational goal strivings, B = .133, SE = .771, p = .116. However, this non-significant main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between ladder aspirations and stronger connections to current social group peers, B = .242, SE = .030, p = .007. As seen in Figure 3.4.b., the effect of ladder aspirations on goal striving was only significant when connections to peers at college were strong (effect: 3.05, SE = .116, p = .010).

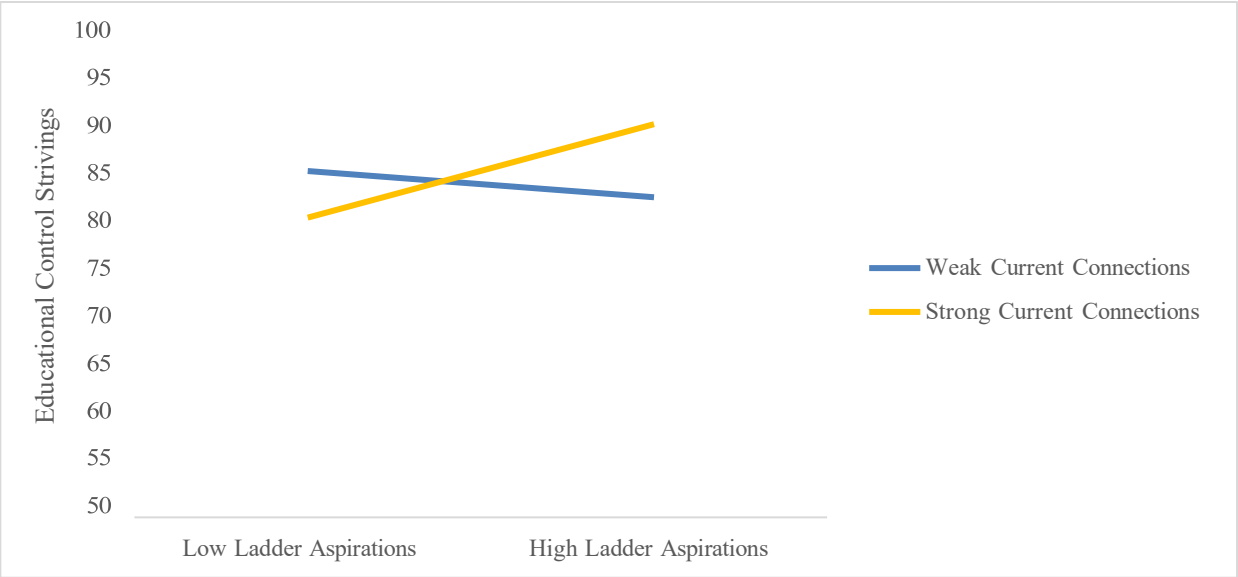

Figure 3.4.b. Ladder Aspirations by Connections to Current Social Groups on Educational Control Strivings

Study 3.b. Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore the role that status-based social group memberships play in shaping students' engagement with their educational goals. Holding higher intragenerational mobility aspirations (i.e., aspirations for how many ladder rungs students wish to climb from where they currently are to where they expect to be in 15-20 years) is associated with higher educational goal strivings. However, raw ladder aspirations were not associated with these strivings unless students felt a strong sense of membership to their peers at college. Students with weak connections to their peers strived toward their educational goals similarly regardless of where they wanted to be on the social ladder in their futures. Moreover, contrary to what was expected, students from lower status backgrounds remain engaged with their educational goals at high levels despite their connections to their peers. It is instead students from higher status backgrounds who rely on the connections to their peers to maintain engaged. These findings reflect persistence among students from lower statuses to continue to engage in

their educational goals despite challenges with feelings of connectedness to their current status-related social groups.

CHAPTER 5

General Discussion

Understanding how social status identities inform cognitions and behaviors associated with personal status goal pursuits has been a recent avenue of interest among social psychologists. This dissertation delves into the complex interplay of past, current, and future aspired status-based identities and how they shape individual beliefs and behaviors regarding social status attainment. With an emphasis on lower status students' aspirations to climb the social ladder, the three studies of this dissertation find that these students, (1) are more motivated than their higher status peers to pursue college as an avenue for status enhancement, (2) have strong and stable meritocratic beliefs about climbing the ladder despite lower initial status aspirations compared to their peers, and marginal declines in these aspirations over time, and (3) plan to climb more rungs on the social ladder, but these high aspirations put them in a position to not effectively adjust educational goals when necessary. Moreover, it is not students from lower social statuses that benefit from feeling a sense of belonging to current status-based social groups. Instead, it is their higher status peers who benefit from stronger connections to these groups for maintaining high educational engagement. Together, the findings of this dissertation suggest that aspirations to climb the social ladder harden students from lower statuses to persistently pursue their high status-related goals, even during times when re-calibration of these pursuits would be adaptive to protect their motivational resources against repeated setbacks.

Association of Status-Related Goals with Educational Pursuits

The first study of this dissertation finds that students from lower social status backgrounds, and who perceive themselves as lower class while attending college, report a greater motivation to attend college to achieve status enhancement (e.g., to earn more money, to obtain the finer things in life). Although, this study does not find that attending college for these purposes results in stronger commitments toward their educational goals. Moreover, the second and third study find that status-related aspirations (i.e., a future status-related identity) undergo changes as students move through college.

These changes could reflect an underlying developmental process of approaching graduation and facing an unexpected job market. For example, both first year students and students in their later years of college experienced marginal downward shifts in their ladder aspirations over the course of two years, where juniors seem to experience more rapid downward changes. On average, both first year and junior students began the academic term planning to be between the seventh and eighth ladder rung on the social ladder 15 to 20 years in the future. According to the California labor market, the median salary of UC students five years post-graduation was $65,000, almost doubling to $124,000 fifteen years post-graduation. Although this income was much higher for students graduating with STEM degrees (five years post-graduation: $99,000; fifteen years post-graduation: $152,000), it is important to point out that majoring in STEM did not offset the rate of downward change in ladder aspirations over time. Thus, perhaps these high aspirations translate into actual status attainment in students' futures. This is reflected by their strong commitments to strive toward their educational goals, particularly for those who aspire to climb higher on the ladder.

However, study three reveals that starting the term with high ladder aspirations predicts a steeper rate of decline in educational control strivings over time. This finding may reflect an appropriate re-calibration of how much effort and time students can realistically invest into reaching their educational goals. As important as it is for students to strive to achieve good grades and high GPAs to open doors for further status-related pursuits (e.g., graduate school; prestigious internships), it is critical that students engage in attainable, and disengage from unattainable academic goals (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). Specifically, when goals are overly ambitious, adjusting goals can help students invest in more appropriate goals. For example, von Keyserlingk and colleagues (2022) find that students who had higher educational expectations for academic exams were more likely to use goal adjustment strategies for future exams. Adjusting overambitious goals can free up resources for students to invest time and effort into more realistic goals, allowing them to appropriately engage with future academic goals (Heckhausen et al., 2010). The findings of study three seem to reflect this process, where expecting to achieve an ambitious status-based goal leads to decreases in time and effort invested into educational goals at large. However, it is important to note that although educational control strivings decrease over time, strivings are still extremely high over the course of college.

Notably, first generation students are more likely to plan to use specific goal-oriented strategies when it comes to pursuing their educational goals compared to their peers, consistent with prior findings (Rogers, 2021). Low-income students utilize these strategies similarly. For these students, aspiring to climb more rungs on the social ladder is not associated with goal adjustment strategies, but is positively associated with goal engagement strategies for their GPA goals. However, actual GPA performance was not associated with either of these strategies.

These results reflect the relentless pursuit of ambitious educational goals regardless of actual academic performances for those who have more to lose by not making this climb. Additionally, these results affirm prior findings that students from lower status backgrounds have less strategies for attaining their education-focused identities despite the fact that they are more salient (Oyserman et al., 2011). The sample of primarily low-income students in the second part of study three have lower GPAs on average despite expecting similar GPAs at the beginning of the academic term. These mismatches between expectations and appropriate strategies for adaptive educational goal management can have long-term implications for students' psychological health and maintenance of their future status aspirations.

Moreover, perceiving one's current social status as higher, but not one's past social status, attenuates this decline in goal strivings as well, reflecting the importance of current status-based identities on keeping students aligned with their educational goal pursuits. Additionally, students who perceive growing up on lower rungs of the ladder have lower absolute status aspirations, but aspire to climb further up the social ladder (relative status aspirations) compared to their higher status peers.

Associations Between Status-Related Goals and Cognitions about Climbing the Social Ladder

The results of the second study of this dissertation reveal that believing that one's chances to climb the social ladder are due to personal efforts and abilities remain strong and stable over the course of students' first year of college, regardless of a student's social status background. However, when students were asked to think about others in society, students are more likely to recognize systemic barriers, endorsing less merit-based beliefs

and attributing social mobility to specific privileges. First generation students in particular are more likely to endorse the belief that mobility is achieved through personal efforts and less to privileges compared to their non-first generation peers when thinking about themselves. On the other hand, when thinking about others in society, first generation students are more likely to endorse others' abilities as the result of their ascent up the social ladder.

It is possible that the nature of the university itself could be why these students endorse such strong beliefs in their efforts. These students have already climbed the hoops of being selected to attend a highly prestigious university. Reflected in their prior academic achievements, this acceptance likely affirms their confidences in their individual hard work as the cause of their successes in their status-based endeavors. For example, in a qualitative analysis of first generation college students' beliefs about their career pursuits, first generation students think of themselves as "persistent and motivated", "self-reliant and responsible", and "adaptable" when it comes to achieving their career goals (Tate et al., 2015). However, as seen in the third study, first generation students' term GPAs were not associated with strategies to engage with or adjust academic goals, while higher mobility aspirations were. It would be important for future studies to unravel whether these beliefs in personal efforts waiver over time as these students face academic challenges, and consequently, challenges to their persistent and adaptable self-concepts.

Reflected in the finding that higher aspirations for a future social status predicts stronger effort beliefs, it would be expected that as aspirations decline over time, students may begin to place more weight into their individual abilities and competencies and less to their efforts. For first generation and low-income students, it is also possible that facing

academic challenges may implicate a shift from beliefs in efforts to beliefs in luck as a protective measure of students' identities. It would be important to understand the nuances in where students shift their beliefs as they experience changes in their academic experiences. Prior work affirms that stronger beliefs in effort is beneficial for continual engagement in academic goals whereas beliefs in uncontrollable factors such as luck promotes more disengagement from educational goals (Shane & Heckhausen, 2013). However, whether this is adaptive for students who have a harder time disengaging from unrealistic goals would be a possible avenue for empirical work. Moreover, this dissertation only examined causal mobility beliefs across the first year of college. It would be important to assess how beliefs shift as students get closer to facing the job market, thus facing novel status-related transitions.

The Role of Peers in College with Keeping Students Aligned with Educational Goals

Apart from cognitions about social status attainment, this dissertation finds that stronger connections to peers at college help higher status students remain committed to their educational goal pursuits. Feeling less belonging to peers at college can produce a distancing effect that harms mobility related goal strivings (Piff et al., 2018). This finding is consistent with Destin and colleagues (2022), who find that social support from peers and faculty at their institution reduces the negative effect of status uncertainty on diminished mobility beliefs. This was the case when assessing two different populations of students; a group of primarily white students who attended private liberal arts colleges, and a sample of ethnically diverse students who attended a highly selective R1 institution. However, this association was contingent on students' status-based goals. For example, in the first study, stronger connections to peers at college versus peers from back home helped students

remain committed to their education, but only for those students who came to college to enhance their social standings in society. Similarly, in the third study, only for those with higher ladder aspirations did stronger connections to peers at college help them strive for their educational goals. Those with low levels of ladder aspirations maintained lower educational strivings even when feeling strongly connected to peers at college. However, connections to past social groups did not seem to change the influence of ladder aspirations on actual goal pursuit.

Contrary to the sample in the first study, the sample in the second part of study three were primarily lower income students. These findings point to how lower status students seem to be more sensitized to their social status identities when they are more connected to their peers at college compared to their peers from back home. Lower status students who come to college for status enhancement are more sensitized to intergroup relations with their higher status peers than those who come to college for other reasons. Thus, these findings extend upon prior work highlighting how mismatched social identities elicit consequences for students' sense of belonging and academic outcomes (Strayhorn et al., 2022; Jury et al., 2019; Destin et al., 2019).

However, in both samples, students feel more strongly connected to their friends and families from back home compared to their friends at college. It would be important to investigate how social groups change over time, and how as lower status students move away from their past status groups their engagement with their social mobility goals changes.

It is critical to assess the socioeconomic standing of other peers in college when considering the impact peers have on keeping lower status students engaged with their

academic goals. While this dissertation could not directly measure students' friends' socioeconomic statuses, the institutions students attended had high economic connectedness (Chetty, et al., 2022), meaning that lower income students were likely to be friends with higher income students. For example, at the institution used in Study 1, 88.2% of friends of low-income students were of higher incomes. This was similar for Study 3, with 89.2% of the friends of low-income students having higher incomes. Furthermore, while the institutions used in Study 1 had low friending biases, indicating a greater likelihood that lower income people form friendships with higher income people, those used in Study 3 had high friending bias, indicating that friendships formed at this institution may be more strongly class-based.

Economic connectedness is positively associated with economic mobility, where living in a more connected community is more critical for upward mobility pursuits than living in a wealthy place (Chetty et al., 2022). The findings of this dissertation reveal that stronger connections to college peers is important for keeping students aligned with their educational goals, particularly those motivated to achieve a higher status in life. Examining whether these effects hold up at institutions with less economic connectedness would be an important avenue for future research, having implications for decisions about which institutions could provide lower income students with the best path toward upward mobility.

Future Directions

The findings of this dissertation warrant further investigation into the context of a university's stature when exploring the associations among past and aspired future social statuses on status attainment. Students' social status backgrounds coupled with the

selectivity of their college can have important implications on how realistic their long-term status aspirations are. For example, students in studies two and three had exceedingly high prior academic achievements, highly ambitious educational goals, and high long-term aspirations for their statuses in their futures. Additionally, students who are the first in their families to attend college anticipate utilizing more self-regulatory control strategies when pursuing their educational goals. Students who attend highly selective institutions are more likely to come from more affluent backgrounds, and therefore enter college with more resources for successfully navigating it (Giancola & Kahlenberg, 2016). Reflecting these findings, students from lower social statuses who attend highly selective universities have similar academic performances as their peers who are from higher status backgrounds.

However, despite that students who attend these universities are more likely to reap greater economic advantage compared to students who attend less selective institutions, family background still limits long-term earnings when accounting for college selectivity (Witteveen & Attewell, 2017). Because students from lower status backgrounds are positioned to make great leaps in their education as a means of enhanced social standing in society, the leaps to higher overall economic prosperity may be more challenging. Thus, future work should investigate how status identities shape aspirations during times of other status-related changes, including pursuing graduate school, applying for first jobs, and making a leap into a prestigious career.

Moreover, apart from maladaptive motivation, status-uncertainty also can elicit poorer psychological well-being (Destin et al., 2022). In a different study, we find that students who would be the first in their families to earn a college degree who attended the

same highly selective university as study three had lower psychological distress compared to their peers, even after experiencing an academic challenge (Rogers, 2021). Psychological well-being management as a result of status uncertainty may differ among students from lower statuses who are well prepared versus those who are ill equipped to navigate academic challenges.

Moreover, the majority of the literature that investigates status identity processes emphasizes the negative implications that pursuing higher social statuses can have on motivation and well-being for individuals from lower status backgrounds. Feeling a sense of belongingness to important status-related groups has been found to help keep these students aligned with their status-related goals. However, the findings of this dissertation find that a stronger sense of connection to peers at college has no effect on goal engagement for students from lower social statuses. These students remain engaged with their goals regardless of their strength of these connections, underscoring the resilience of lower status students who forged their way into a selective institution. Instead, weaker connections to college peers seems to have negative implications on goal engagement for students from higher social statuses. These findings highlight the need to further investigate differences in the qualities of college friendships between those from lower status backgrounds and higher status backgrounds instead of the strength of these connections.

Implications

The heightened motivation and persistence of students from lower social statuses to climb the social ladder highlight important areas for improvements in academic counseling and support. For instance, educational institutions should provide robust counseling

services that help students set realistic goals and develop adaptative strategies for achieving them. However, because this climb can elicit uncertainties about belonging, careful consideration for how to approach supporting these students in this way should be taken. For example, when helping students set realistic goals, phrasing matters. Telling these students to lower their expectations may affirm their lack of belonging and increase imposter syndrome, ultimately undermining their beliefs in their own abilities (Ramsey & Brown, 2018). Instead, explaining the long-term implications of managing course loads, picking a well-fit major, and holding oneself to realistic performance standards could help them remain aligned with their educational goals, and therefore their aspired future status-based identities.

Conclusions

This dissertation aimed to examine the dynamic interplay between social status identities, social mobility aspirations, social connections, and educational goal pursuits among college students. Across the three studies, status pursuits motivate students to engage with their educational goals, despite marginal declines in status aspirations and goal strivings over time. Students from lower social statuses hold strong beliefs that they will climb the social ladder because of their individual efforts. This is the case despite students' awareness of the role of privileges in social mobility when thinking about others in society. However, this persistence in engaging with their ambitious status goals has consequences for important adaptative self-regulatory processes pertinent for maintenance of motivation. For instance, students from lower social status backgrounds who strive to climb higher up the ladder are at risk of not appropriately adjusting academic goals when necessary. These findings underscore the significant role that social status as an

identity plays in shaping aspirations for climbing the social ladder, and engagement with educational goals important for helping students to achieve their long-term aspirations. Future work should continue to investigate how these beliefs and aspirations change with situational influences in the college setting, particularly during times of academic challenges and in the junior and senior year when students come closer to transitioning into the job market.

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APPENDIX A

Table A.1. Sample descriptive across three studies

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	
	-	-	*3.a.*	*3.b.*
Sample	n = 303	n = 360	n = 427	n = 226
Age – M(SD)	20.32 (1.35)	-	22.21 (2.35)	22.27 (4.07)
Female %	64.1%	70.6%	72.4%	70.4%
Low-Income %	-	40.6%	42.1%	77.9%
First Generation %	25.7%	55.0%	51.6%	65.0%
Non-US Citizen %	10.2%	17.8%		18.7%
International Student %	4.6%	12.5%	4.4%	5.3%
Ethnicity %				
White	71.3%	11.1%	15.8%	9.3%
Asian	10.9%	47.5%	59.6%	43.4%
Hispanic	4.0%	31.0%	22.3%	41.6%
Black	4.6%	4.2%	0.20%	3.5%
Multiracial	8.6%	-	-	-
Other	0.70%	6.2%	2.1%	2.2%
Current Social Status – M(SD)		5.34 (1.85)	5.32 (1.76)	4.68 (1.70)
Lower Class %	4.1%	-	-	-
Working Class %	11.2%	-	-	-
Lower Middle Class %	17.3%	-	-	-
Middle Class %	34.6%	-	-	-
Upper Middle Class %	15.3%	-	-	-
Upper Class %	4.1%	-	-	-
Past Social Status – M(SD)	5.97 (2.38)	5.25 (2.10)	5.09 (1.95)	4.35 (2.12)
Academic				
STEM	30.4%	-	52.1%	27.2%
Prior HS GPA – M(SD)	3.80 (.285)	4.03 (.230)	4.10 (.190)	4.01 (.240)
College GPA – M(SD)	3.44 (.373)	-	3.58 (.430)	3.27 (.735)

Note. Study 2 and 3 cross-collapses ethnicity to match study 1. More detail is provided in text. College GPA for study 1 participants does not include first year students. For participants in study 2 and 3 indicates students' end of term GPA for their first term they participated in the study. Past social status for study 1 participants is family income on a continuous scale. Past and current social status is taken from the first wave of data collection for studies 2 and 3. STEM major was taken from T2.

APPENDIX B

Table B.1. Study 3: Model Fit Indices of Status Aspirations

Model Description	χ^2 (df)	p-value	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR
No Growth	$\chi^2(4) = 9.37$	.053	.990	.993	.054 (.000,.101)	.057
Linear Growth (non-constrained)	$\chi^2(1) = .100$	.752	1.00	1.00	.000 (.000,.098)	.003
Linear Growth (constrained)	$\chi^2(3) = .778$	.855	1.00	1.00	.000 (.000,.043)	.014

Note. Likelihood ratios test were conducted where there was a difference between the no growth aspirations model and the linear, constrained model ($\Delta\chi^2$ (3) =9.27, p = .026), but no difference between the linear non-constrained and constrained model ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) =.678, p = .712). Thus, the linear constrained model was retained.

Table B.2. Study 3: Model Fit Indices of Educational Goal Striving

Model Description	χ^2 (df)	p-value	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR
No Growth	$\chi^2(4) = 151.58$	.000	.556	.667	.285 (.247,.325)	.301
Linear Growth (non-constrained)	$\chi^2(1) = 5.20$	.023	.987	.962	.096 (.029,.185)	.022
Linear Growth (constrained)	$\chi^2(3) = .16.40$	.001	.960	.960	.099 (.056,.149)	.110

Note. Likelihood ratios test were conducted where there was a difference between the no growth aspirations model and the linear, constrained model ($\Delta\chi^2$ (3) =146.38, p <.001), but the linear, constrained model fit significantly worse than the linear, non-constrained residuals model, ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 11.20, p = .004). Thus, the linear non-constrained model was retained.

Table B.3. Study 3: Parallel Process Model Fit Indices

Model Description	χ^2 (df)	p-value	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR
Parallel Process Model – Baseline	$\chi^2(9) = 16.53$	.057	.992	.987	.043 (.000, .075)	.029
Parallel Process Model – Within Time	$\chi^2(6) = 6.38$	.382	1.00	.999	.012 (.000, .063)	.025
Parallel Process Model – Within Time (constrained)	$\chi^2(8) = 15.21$	.055	.992	.985	.045 (.000, .078)	.029

Note. Likelihood ratios test were conducted where there was a difference between the baseline parallel process baseline model and the parallel process model when accounting for within-time residual covariances ($\Delta\chi^2$ (3) =10.15, p = .017). When constraining within-time residual covariances, model fit worsens ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 8.83, p = .012). Thus, the parallel process model with non-constrained within time covariances was retained and interpreted.

Table B.5. Study 3: Parameter estimates for selective primary control over time with term GPA as a time-varying covariate

	estimate (SE)	*sig.*
T1 SPC ~ GPA	.967 (3.94)	$p = .806$
T2 SPC ~ GPA	.062 (2.75)	$p = .982$
T3 SPC ~ GPA	1.20 (3.99)	$p = .764$
Factor Means		
GPA T1	3.20 (.038)	$p<.001$
GPA T2	3.21 (.058)	$p<.001$
GPA T3	3.14 (.056)	$p<.001$
SPC Intercept	85.04 (12.63)	$p<.001$
SPC Slope	-2.02 (3.66)	$p = .581$
Factor Variances		
SPC Intercept	78.34 (25.25)**	$p = .002$
SPC Slope	2.81 (3.54)	$p = .427$
Factor Covariances		
Intercept ~~ Slope	7.81 (6.54) ($r = .526$)	$p = .526$

Table B.6. Study 3: Parameter estimates for selective primary control over time with number of course units completed as a time-varying covariate

	estimate (SE)	*sig.*
T1 SPC ~ CU	-.199 (.302)	$p = .510$
T2 SPC ~ CU	-.175 (.337)	$p = .603$
T3 SPC ~ CU	-.110 (.409)	$p = .788$
Factor Means		
CU T1	73.55 (2.22)	$p<.001$
CU T2	101.43 (2.26)	$p<.001$
CU T3	134.59 (2.39)	$p<.001$
SPC Intercept	102.77 (22.23)	$p<.001$
SPC Slope	-1.88 (7.47)	p = .801
Factor Variances		
SPC Intercept	131.25 (213.13)	$p = .538$
SPC Slope	4.05 (4.70)	$p = .860$
Factor Covariances		
Intercept ~~ Slope	1.13 (18.53) ($r = .049$)	$p = .952$

Appendix C

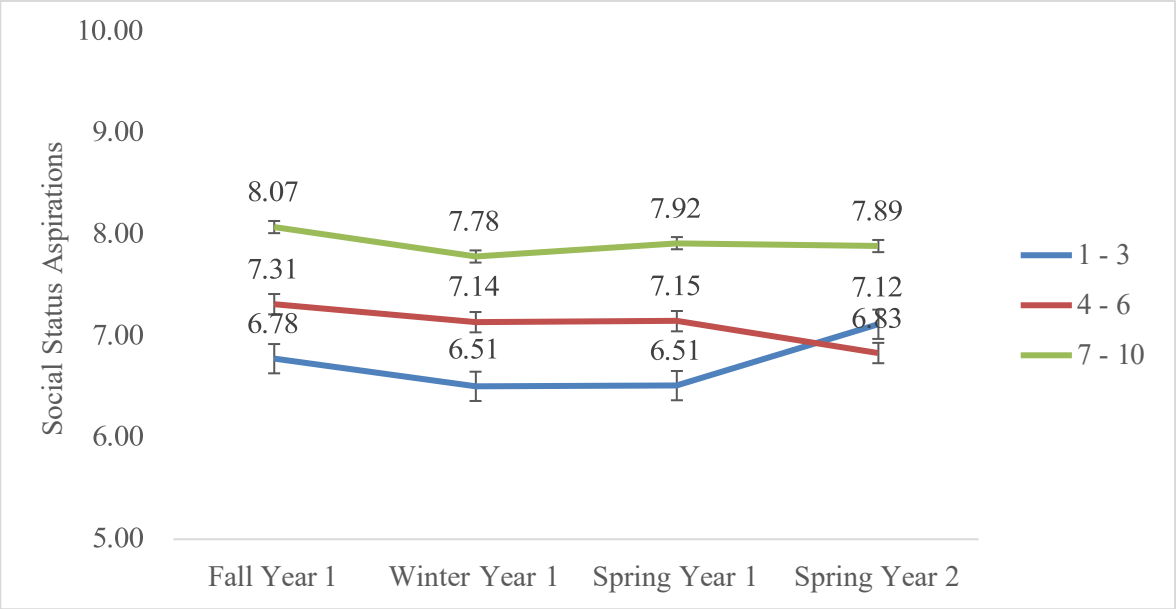

Figure C.1. Absolute Status Attainment Aspirations Grouped by Past Social Status Categories. 1-3 represent low social status background, 4-6 represent average status background, and 7-10 represent coming from a high status background.

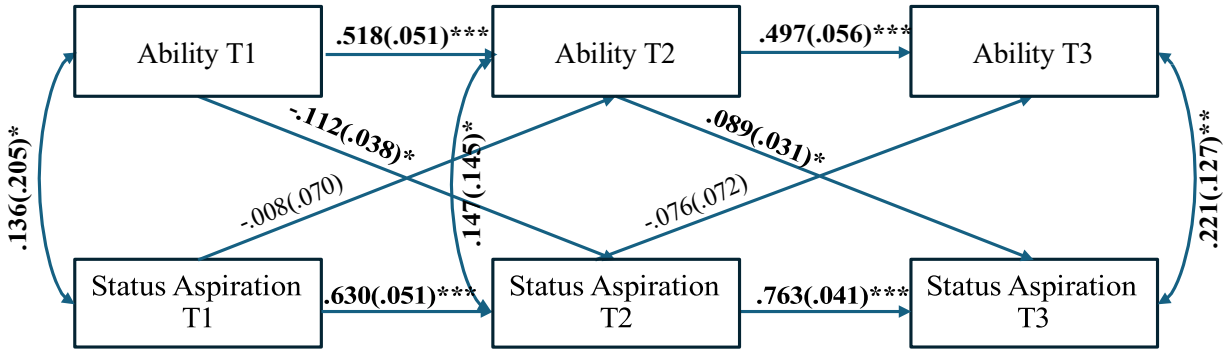

Figure C.2. Cross-lagged path model between fall ability beliefs and status aspirations (T1), winter ability beliefs and aspirations (T2), and spring ability beliefs and aspirations (T3). Model fit: ($X^2(4) = 55.83$, $p = <.001$, CFI = .877, RMSEA = .216, SRMR = .059).

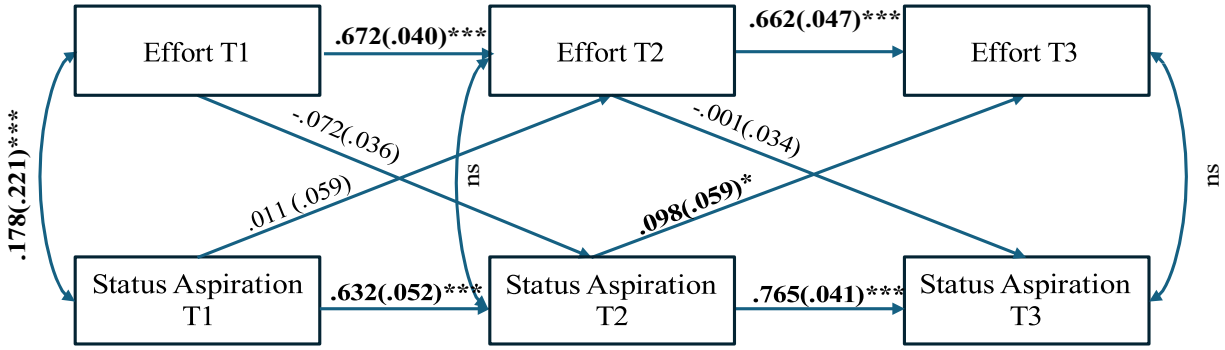

Figure C.3. Cross-lagged path model between fall effort beliefs and status aspirations (T1), winter effort beliefs and aspirations (T2), and spring effort beliefs and aspirations (T3). Model fit: ($X^2(4) = 50.68$, $p = <.001$, CFI = .932, RMSEA = .205, SRMR = .044).