2021

Third Grade Students' Occupational Aspirations and Perceptions of Parents' Career Satisfaction

Tiffany Corum
tiffanyacorum@gmail.com

LMU | Carter & Moyers School *of* Education
LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Final Dissertation Approval
Form 11

Third Grade Students' Occupational Aspirations and Perceptions of Parents' Career Satisfaction

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Julia Kirk	3/15/2021
Committee Chair	Date
	3/15/2021
Committee Member	Date
Shannon D. Collins	03/15/2021
Committee Member	Date
	3/15/2021
EdD Program Director	Date
Teresa A. Bicknell	3/15/2021
Dean, School of Education	Date

THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS' OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS' CAREER SATISFACTION

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Carter and Moyers School of Education
at Lincoln Memorial University

by

Tiffany A. Corum

March 15, 2021

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my three children, Elizabeth Ann, Adaline Belle, and Edison Steven. May each of you have ambitious aspirations and know you can do anything you set your mind to. I dedicate this to my husband, Garrett, who loved and supported me through this entire process and never once doubted I would finish, even when I sometimes doubted myself. I dedicate this to my parents for always encouraging me to further my education.

Acknowledgments

I owe a great deal of gratitude to the people who helped make this work a reality. To Dr. Pete Silberman who helped me begin the writing process, thank you for helping me narrow my focus on what I really desired to study. Next, thank you to Dr. Cherie Gaines for working as part of my committee and for meeting with me to go over my research data. I also want to thank Dr. Shannon Collins for being a part of my committee and helping me to improve my writing skills. Last, but most certainly not least, an enormous thank you to Dr. Julia Kirk for being my Chairperson. Your honest feedback, encouragement, and support pushed me to for helping me to plan, write, edit, replan when my family grew, replan again when the world turned upside-down, and giving up your own nights and weekends to help me finish strong. Without you this research would never have been completed.

Abstract

At the time of this writing, little research had been completed on the occupational aspirations of students and students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I completed a qualitative study in which I compared the occupational aspirations of 14 third-grade students, 7 girls and 7 boys, from a low socio-economic school and 14 third-grade students, 7 girls and 7 boys, from a high socio-economic school within the southeastern region of the United States. I also compared these students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I conducted one-on-one interviews with students in which they answered questions about their occupational aspirations and their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I found 12 students attending the high socio-economic school held higher occupational aspirations than the 14 students attending the low socio-economic school. Additionally, I found students from both schools aspired to occupations that maintained or improved from their parents' socio-economic status. All 14 students from the high socio-economic school, and 12 students from the low socio-economic school, believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. I found socio-economic status was a reliable indicator of students' occupational aspirations.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Moulton et al. (2018) defined aspirations as personal goals that a person would like to achieve. More specifically, Ashby and School (2010) defined an occupational aspiration as the future job or career that a person would most like to acquire, and educational aspirations were students' desires to obtain higher levels of education (Khattab, 2015). Aspirations have been found to be solid indicators of future achievement (Portes et al., 2010). According to Baker et al. (2014), educational aspirations were related to future educational attainment. Schoon and Polek (2011) stated occupational aspirations were reliable predictors of future career achievement. This meant aspirations were somehow related to future educational and occupational realization. Since aspirations could be used to predict future outcomes, then the study of aspirations and what factors shaped aspirations was necessary to help educators improve students' occupational aspiration achievement.

Having high aspirations during childhood often led to high achievement in adulthood (Khattab, 2015), while holding low aspirations during childhood often led to low achievement in adulthood (Baker et al., 2014). It was, therefore, especially important to study groups of children who were known for developing low educational and occupational aspirations. These groups included males (Berzin, 2010; Moulton et al., 2018; Watts et al., 2015), low socio-economic status (SES) children (Berzin, 2010; Bozick et al., 2010; Croll, 2008; Moulton et al., 2018), and children in single parent or non-parent households (Berzin, 2010; Byun et al., 2012a, 2012b; Portes et al., 2010). Blackhurst and Auger (2008) studied children in first grade through seventh grade in southern Minnesota and

found girls had higher aspirations and were more likely to attend college than their male counterparts. Gutman et al. (2012) explained the gender difference in aspirations was even greater for boys, ages 11 through 14, who were from low SES families. According to Robinson and Diale (2017), SES was positively correlated with aspiration fulfillment. Specifically, students from low SES families were less likely to obtain their aspirations than their higher SES peers who were more likely to obtain their aspirations. Portes et al. (2010) stated students in low SES households were also more likely to live in single parent homes, another common indicator of low aspirations (Byun et al., 2012b).

Low SES impacted students' educational and occupational aspirations in many ways (Holmes et al., 2017; Irvin et al., 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). While SES did indicate how much money students had and, therefore, what schools or colleges they could afford to attend (Gore et al., 2015; Mello, 2009), Schmitt-Wilson (2013) demonstrated SES to be a reliable predictor of parenting styles. Khattab (2015) explained parents from different social statuses possessed different attitudes and beliefs toward education, work ethic, and employment. Moulton et al. (2018) also claimed parents from varying social classes had different expectations of their children. According to Moulton et al. (2018), high SES families held higher occupational and educational expectations than low SES families. Meece et al. (2014) explained high parental expectations were important because parents' educational expectations were positively correlated with students' educational aspirations. Specifically, students from low SES homes were more likely to have parents who set lower educational expectations of them while students from high SES homes were more likely to have parents who had

high educational expectations of them. Students' aspirations would, in turn, mirror the expectations set for them by their parents, causing low SES children to have low aspirations and high SES children to have high aspirations. In the current study, I focused on students who were living in low a SES community and students who were living in a high SES community to better understand students who were likely to develop low and high aspirations.

Parents not only impacted students' aspirations through expectations but also through their own career choices. Schmitt-Wilson (2013) stated children's occupational aspirations were closely tied to their parents' careers. Schmitt-Wilson additionally claimed even if students did not choose their parents' career as a future occupational aspiration, students often chose an occupational aspiration that maintained the same SES of their parents. This was assumed to occur because children were likely to accept careers they had knowledge of as they grew up (van Tuijl & van der Molen, 2015). Students, however, did not choose their parents' careers if they perceived their parents were unhappy with their career choices (Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2008; Robinson & Diale, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

In 1991, Trice and Tillapaugh conducted a study on four samples of students (third-grade boys, third-grade girls, fifth-grade boys, and fifth-grade girls). The researchers asked students about their future occupational aspirations, their parents' current careers, and their perception of their parents' level of satisfaction with their current career. Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) were interested in finding if children were more likely to aspire to their parents' careers if the children felt their parents were happy with their current occupation. Children who

felt their parents were satisfied with their careers were two to three times more likely to choose their parents' careers as their own future occupational aspiration. Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) did not look at students' SES level when considering which students felt their parents were satisfied with their careers and which students felt their parents were dissatisfied with their careers. Since this research in 1991, no other researcher has studied the relationship between students' occupational aspirations and students' perceptions of their parents' satisfaction with their careers.

Other researchers have touched on the subject of occupational aspirations and parental career satisfaction, but none have focused on children's perceived level of parental career satisfaction since Trice and Tillapaugh's study in 1991. For example, Holmes et al. (2017) studied students' occupational aspirations and found children were more likely to be interested in career fields in which their parents worked. Holmes et al. only looked at the correlation between students' occupational aspirations and parents' current careers. They did not take into consideration students' perceptions of their parents' level of happiness in their current career (Holmes et al., 2017). Another instance of researchers having touched on the subject of occupational aspirations was when Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2008) studied students' occupational aspirations and parents' lifestyle. The researchers explained some low SES students reported a desire to escape their parents' lifestyle by obtaining jobs that would raise their social class. These researchers, however, did not focus on if the students' felt their parents were unhappy in their current job situation but only stated these students were

dissatisfied with the lifestyle associated with their level of income (Herenandez-Martinez et al., 2008; Holmes et al., 2017).

Since Trice and Tillapaugh completed their study in 1991, there has been no research on how parents impacted their children's occupational aspirations through the parents' level of career satisfaction. In the current study, I sought to update the research on children's occupational aspirations and parental career satisfaction. I also attempted to fill in the gap in the literature by comparing students from a low SES community and students from a high SES community. Many of the students who lived in the low SES community where I conducted this study suffered from generational poverty. This meant the majority of these children were not the first generation of their family to live in poverty. The students in the low SES community were able to give insight into how children from low SES homes thought about their future and their occupational aspirations. I also chose to study a nearby community that was predominately high SES. The students in the high SES community came from families that had been well established as middle to high SES families for several generations. The purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction.

Research Questions

I wanted to understand how students perceived their parents' level of happiness with their current careers. I wanted to know if students who believed their parents were satisfied with their careers were more likely to choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration when compared to students

who perceived their parents to be dissatisfied with their careers. I also wanted to know the difference between the occupational aspirations of students living in a low SES community and students living in a high SES community. To guide this study, I conducted interviews with students from one school in a low SES community and one school in a high SES-community and used the following research questions:

Research Question 1

Using one-on-one interviews, what were the occupational profiles of third-grade students' occupational aspirations and were there differences between students in a low socio-economic status school and a high socio-economic status school?

Research Question 2

Using one-on-one interviews, how did third-grade students from a low socio-economic status school and a high socio-economic status school describe their parent(s)' career satisfaction?

Research Question 3

Using one-on-one interviews, how did the occupational aspirations of third-grade students' from both a low socio-economic status school and a high socio-economic status school compare to their perception of their parent(s)' career satisfaction?

Research Question 4

Using one-on-one interviews, was there a difference in how third-grade boys and third-grade girls from both schools described their occupational aspirations and their parent(s)' career satisfaction?

Theoretical Framework

Gottfredson (1981) developed one of the most heavily researched theories on children's development of aspirations. Gottfredson titled her theory circumscription and compromise. In her theory, Gottfredson stated children began making decisions that would impact their future career choices as early as age three, and children continued to develop their aspirations through a series of stages that led to adulthood. According to Gottfredson, there were four stages through which children progressed. The first stage applied to children between the ages of three and five. During this stage, children identified career choices based on the adults around them. Children in this stage were highly likely to select their parents' careers as their own future occupational aspirations. The second stage applied to children ages six to eight. Children in the second stage of aspirational development were beginning to understand gender roles and their relationship to occupations. Gottfredson explained during the second stage, girls were more likely to choose female dominated fields while boys were more likely to choose male dominated careers. The third stage included children ages 9-13. Throughout this stage, children realized the social status typically associated with various careers. Gottfredson described children in this stage as likely to choose an occupational aspiration that would maintain their current economic status. The fourth and final stage applied to children 14 years old and older. During the last stage, children applied their own personal interests when considering possible career choices.

Researchers have tested Gottfredson's theory since its first release and found her philosophy has maintained relevance (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Gutman

et al., 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Moulton et al., 2018; Robinson & Diale, 2017; Watson et al., 2011). The current study is therefore based on Gottfredson's circumscription and compromise theory. I chose to interview third-grade students because according to Gottfredson (1981) third-grade students would have a solid understanding of the careers of those around them and were also becoming aware of the social classes typically associated with various careers.

Significance of the Study

This study will add to and update the current literature on student aspirations. At the time of this study, there were many studies on student aspirations but little research about the connection between students' perceptions of parents' career satisfaction and students' occupational aspirations. Updating this area of literature on student aspirations could help other researchers' understanding of how students used their perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward their careers in determining their own occupational aspirations.

It was my hope this study would also help the teachers understand the importance of understanding students' aspirations. According to Khattab (2015), having a better understanding of students' aspirations could lead to better predictions of students' future educational performance. According to researchers, children aspire to their parents' careers at a rate above chance (Holmes et al., 2017; Moulton et al., 2015; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). If teachers were aware of what occupations their students were most likely to aspire to, then teachers could help provide support about other career options so students' career choices would not become too narrowed early in life. It was beneficial for educators to know

how their students thought about their parents' careers and their own future occupational aspirations so teachers could provide support to help raise students' occupational aspirations and then provide the proper support so students could turn their occupational aspirations into realities.

Definition of the Terms

Aspiration

An aspiration is a personal goal that a person would like to achieve during his or her lifetime (Moulton et al., 2018).

Occupational Aspiration

An occupational aspiration is a future job or career goal that a person would like to achieve or obtain (Ashby & Schoon, 2010).

Children

For the purpose of this study, I narrow the meaning of *children* to include young people between the ages of 5 and 10 (Weisgram et al., 2010).

Expectation

An expectation is what a person expects to achieve when that person's current circumstances are taken into consideration (Beal & Crockett, 2010).

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

SES, as defined by American Psychological Association (0AD), is the social class or social standing of an individual or group. For the purpose of this study, high SES and low SES students were determined by their parents' average career incomes as determined by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) and United States Department of Health and Human Services' (2020)

poverty guidelines. Students were also considered low SES if they qualified for free and reduced lunch.

Organization of the Study

In Chapter I of this study, I introduced the connection between aspirations and future achievement and how students' occupational aspirations are connected to students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I stated the problem was since Trice and Tillapaugh's (1991) research there had been no other study that looked at students' occupational aspirations and students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I then listed the research questions for the study. The conceptual framework was based on Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise. I also provided definitions of terms that were important to the study.

In Chapter II, I included a thorough review of the literature including the origins of aspirations, gender differences in aspirations, socio-economic differences in aspirations, school impact on students' aspirations, and parental impact on students' aspirations. In Chapter III, I explained the qualitative research study that took place within two schools, one low SES and one high SES, within the southeastern region of the United States. I discussed within Chapter III my methods for collecting and analyzing data gathered during one-on-one interviews with third-grade students about their occupational aspirations and their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. In Chapter IV, I used constant comparative method of data analysis to categorize my data and answer the research the questions. Finally, in Chapter V, I summarized my findings, made

connections to other researchers' studies, provided implications for practice, and made recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction. Mello (2009) found children's educational and occupational aspirations were solid predictors of future educational and occupational attainment. This was partially because children's educational and occupational aspirations helped to guide their decision-making as they grew and began to realize their possible outcomes (Bowden & Doughney, 2010). According to Howard et al. (2011), even if children did not fully achieve their occupational aspirations as adults, youth who held high occupational aspirations were more likely to obtain high-status careers than students who maintained low occupational aspirations. Schuette et al. (2012) agreed with Howard et al. (2011), when they explained an occupational aspiration may not guarantee a career in the same field but a hope for the future encouraged people to meet their goals. Portes et al. (2010) stressed the importance of tracking occupational aspirations throughout childhood because early occupational aspirations have shown to be reliable indicators of future career achievement. According to researchers, the majority of research on aspirations was focused on high school students (Gore et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Holmes et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2015); therefore, it has become important to focus on the educational and occupational aspirations of children and seek out what factors impact those aspirations. In this chapter, I reviewed the existing academic literature regarding the origins of aspirations, gender differences in aspirations, socio-economic differences in aspirations,

school impact on students' aspirations, and parental impact on students' aspirations.

Origins of Aspirations

Gottfredson (1981) developed one of the earliest and most researched theories on aspirational development called the theory of circumscription and compromise. Additionally, at the time of this study's publication, recent authors had researched various aspects of Gottfredson's theory and have found her model to still be relevant to students (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Gutman et al., 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Moulton et al., 2018; Robinson & Diale, 2017; Watson et al., 2011). Gottfredson theorized children begin selecting plausible career choices early in life. Gottfredson identified four stages of occupational development. The first stage related to children ages three to five. Gottfredson explained in this stage children identified careers based on the adults around them. Children ages three to five were likely to desire occupations that matched the careers of their parents. Gottfredson said the second stage occurred in children ages six to eight. In the second stage, children began to realize the gender roles associated with careers. It was during the second stage that girls began choosing more female dominated careers and boys leaned toward male dominated careers. Gottfredson stated the third stage occurred from ages 9 to 13. During the third stage, children and adolescents identified the social status of various careers and were more likely to begin identifying with careers that fit within their current social status. Gottfredson explained the last stage related to all adolescents 14 years old through adulthood. In this final stage, students began to apply their personal interests to the occupations they selected as potential future careers.

Holland et al. (1981) concluded identifying the exact age in which aspirations began would be unsuccessful. Holland et al. (1981) based this claim on the idea that every person was constantly growing and developing; therefore, aspirations were fluid and ever changing. Although this may be true, it did not stop other researchers from looking for generalizations about children's aspirational development. Porfeli et al. (2008) stated when looking at life-span occupational development, children often established a rational view of the world of work during grade school, even as young as four years old. Porfeli et al. also concluded students' occupational aspirations became more stable throughout grade school. Moulton et al. (2018) studied 19,000, 7-year-old children from across the United Kingdom and found less than 2% of 7-year-old children had fantasy aspirations. Moulton et al. also found 55% of these same children aspired to commonplace occupations. Bozick et al. (2010) monitored 790 Baltimore students' educational and occupational aspirations from first grade through graduation. Bozick et al. concluded 40% of these youth had stable occupational expectations by fourth grade. Bozick et al. also claimed by fourth-grade children were aware of the importance of obtaining a college degree and had steady expectations about future college enrollment.

Although educational and occupational aspirations could develop early, it was not until later that children discovered the difference between aspirations and expectations. Aspirations were the goals that a student would like to achieve while expectations were the goals that students believed they would actually achieve (Ashby & Schoon, 2010). By fourth grade, students were able to understand the difference between aspirations and expectations (Gottfredson,

1981). Moulton et al. (2018) explained children in middle childhood had obtained the necessary skills to make rational predictions about their future careers. Jerrim (2014) examined the educational and occupational aspirations versus the educational and occupational expectations of nearly 200,000, 13-year-old through 18-year-old students in 25 developed countries. Jerrim (2014) claimed around age 14, students began to recognize educational and career hurdles. Beal and Crockett (2010) completed a longitudinal study in which they conducted surveys with three cohorts of students who were in seventh grade, eighth grade, and ninth grade. Beal and Crockett surveyed each cohort group annually through their final year of high school and then once again in early adulthood. Beal and Crockett (2010), in line with Gottfredson (1981), found 79% of seventh-grade, eighth-grade, and ninth-grade students had corresponding aspirations and expectations. Beal and Crocket showed as students aged, they began to align their aspirations with what they expected to achieve. Robinson and Diale (2017) stated during early high school, adolescents evaluated their own ability and achievement and used this self-assessment to determine what they believed they could achieve in society.

Porfeli et al. (2008) explained people generally believed childhood was a world of fantasy and children were inept when it came to understanding the realities of the world of work; however, Parsons (1909) established the importance of occupational development in early childhood. Blackhurst and Auger (2008) even claimed career-related decisions made during childhood had lasting impacts that affected adult outcomes. Blackhurst and Auger interviewed elementary and middle school students in two waves. During the first wave, the students were in first, third, and fifth grade. The same students were interviewed

in a second wave two years later. In the first wave, 88% of boys and girls were able to give an accurate description of college and their need to attend college. In the second wave, this number increased to 93% of boys and 100% of girls. These results showed children as young as first grade had a clear understanding of college and the need for college in their future endeavors. Blackhurst and Auger also interviewed the same students about their occupational aspirations. In the first wave, 65% of girls and 21% of boys aspired to occupations that required a college education. In the second wave, 62% of girls and 27% of boys aspired to occupations requiring a college degree. These numbers were nearly identical to the college enrollment rate during the time of the study, with women making up nearly 60% of college students. Blackhurst and Auger claimed it was feasible that childhood occupational aspirations led to the differences in college enrollment and therefore occupational outcomes. Children's occupational aspirations tended to be stable and became even more solid throughout elementary school (Porfeli et al., 2008).

According to Geldard and Geldard (2012), adolescence brought on biological, emotional, and cognitive changes for children. These natural changes could cause children to reevaluate their occupational aspirations to determine what possible futures fit with their new identity (Robinson & Diale, 2017). Moulton et al. (2018) concluded adolescence was a significant stage in occupational development as teens became more fixated on their future goals. Mello (2009) claimed occupational expectations generally increased through high school and educational expectations were typically high and stable from ages 14-26.

Robinson and Diale (2017) completed a qualitative study in which they conducted group interviews with low SES male students between the ages of 12 and 13. Robinson and Diale stated at the beginning of adolescence (around seventh grade), these children valued careers that would provide them with independence, a better lifestyle, and sustainability. Weisgram et al. (2010) explained children desired jobs that provided opportunities to help others, allow for plenty of family time, make a great salary, and have authority. Weisgram et al. interviewed 313 students, ranging from elementary school to college, where they looked at four core career values, money, power, family, and altruism, and the importance of each when selecting a career. Of the participants, 80 were children (ages 5 to 10), 97 were adolescents (ages 11 to 17) and 136 were adults (ages 18 to 23). Of these groups (children, adolescents, and adults), only the children highly endorsed all four of the core career values. Weisgram et al. found as students aged they realized one career could not realistically accommodate all their occupational values. The older participants, therefore, had more narrow lists of occupational values and were better able to match their values with possible career choices. Weisgram et al. concluded this process of narrowing career values as children, would in turn narrow students' lists of possible occupational aspirations. Lee and Rojewski (2009) explained this narrowing of aspirations occurred in a two-step process. In the first step, students eliminated occupations they considered to be unacceptable. For instance, a student may have determined being a nurse was unacceptable, even if it fit with their values, because he or she had a fear of needles. In the second step, students began dismissing their most favored options for less preferred but more available options. For example, a

student may have preferred to be an architect, but because being near family was high on his or her list of values, chose a different career due to the availability of jobs in their area.

According to Gottfredson (1981), in her theory on aspirations, students' aspirations decreased slightly after high school. Gottfredson explained this decrease in students' occupational aspirations was caused by students balancing their occupational preferences with what careers were available and finding a satisfactory compromise. Lee and Rojewski (2009) agreed with Gottfredson and further explained although aspirations tended to increase through high school, they began to decrease during young adulthood. Lee and Rojewski found young adults better recognized their own strengths and weaknesses, educational and occupational barriers, and professional competition than high school students. Lee and Rojewski collected surveys from 10,827 students across the United States, over the course of 12 years, about the careers they expected to have by age 30. Lee and Rojewski first surveyed the participants during eighth grade and then repeated the survey in 10th grade, 12th grade, two years post-high school, and lastly eight years post-high school. Lee and Rojewski found occupational aspirations tended to increase from eighth grade through 12th grade but after high school graduation the participants' occupational aspirations typically decreased. Portes et al. (2010) disagreed with the idea that aspirations often lower in adulthood. Portes et al. conducted a study on the aspirations of over 3,000 high school students in two metropolitan cities in Spain, Madrid and Barcelona. Portes et al. stated aspirations changed only slightly after high school. Other researchers have also found few differences between the occupational aspirations of teenagers

and the career outcomes of adults (Asby & Schoon, 2010; Schoon & Polek, 2011; Watts et al., 2015). These conflicting findings may be explained by the differences in the variations of the participants in each study. According to Holmes et al. (2017), a variety of variables impacted aspirations, including gender, SES, and prior achievement.

Gender Differences

According to Moulton et al. (2018), children understood gender stereotypes by age seven. Weisgram et al. (2010) claimed gender differences in occupational aspirations were evident in all ages of people from preschool to adulthood. Many studies prior to the 1970s showed girls had fewer occupational aspirations than boys (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008; King, 2000; Poe, 2004; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). In 1971, Looft explained the women's movement did not influence girls who were six or seven years old. These same girls were extremely likely to choose gender-typed jobs and were likely to be more limited in their choices than their male counterparts. Only seven years later, Kriedberg et al. (1978) found males and females alike believed girls were freer to choose female- or male-dominated career whiles males were more strictly confined to choosing only masculine professions. Adams and Hickens (1984) replicated Looft's 1971 study. In Looft's original study, the researcher interviewed 33 girls between the ages of 6 and 8 from middle-class homes about their occupational aspirations. Looft found all but one of the girls aspired to either be a mother or a female-dominated occupation. The one girl who did not aspire to a female dominated profession aspired to be a doctor but followed up with a statement that even though she wanted to be a doctor she would probably have to become a sales

clerk. Adams and Hickens (1984) interviewed 54 girls between the ages of 5 and 8 years old about their occupational aspirations. Adams and Hickens (1984) found 79% of girls stilled aspired to a female-dominated occupation but this was a significant difference from the 97% of girls who aspired to a female-dominated occupation in Looft's (1971) study. Adams and Hickens (1984) determined girls during the late 1970s and early 1980s girls were expanding their occupational aspirations. This coincided with Gottfredson (1981) who claimed more women began holding more prestigious jobs. By the mid-1990s, girls and boys had equal educational and occupational aspirations, with girls even beginning to surpass boys in their desire to attend college (Post et al., 1996; Trice, 1991; Trice & Hughes, 1995).

According to Blackhurst and Auger (2008), girls' aspirations drastically increased during the 1990s and early 2000s. Howard et al. (2011) agreed although throughout history girls consistently maintained lower aspirations than boys, this was no longer true. Researchers found girls typically aspired and expected to go to college more often than their male counterparts (Berzin, 2010; Gutman et al., 2012; Moulton et al., 2018; Portes et al., 2010; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013).

Blackhurst and Auger (2008) interviewed 115 students from a southern Minnesota school district about their occupational aspirations. Blackhurst and Auger first interviewed the students when they were in first grade, third grade, and fifth grade. The researchers then interviewed the same participants again two years later. Blackhurt and Auger found girls were more likely to aspire to occupations that required a college education than were boys. In the same study, Blackhurst and Auger stated in the United States, women earned 60% of all

associate's degrees, 57% of all bachelor's degrees, and had begun to outnumber men in graduate degrees as well. These results indicated girls not only aspired to college degrees more often than boys, but they also attained those aspirations. Portes et al. (2010) also found females had higher educational aspirations than males and females had shown to be better at converting their aspirations into educational fulfilment. Gutman et al. (2012) attributed this phenomenon to girls' greater academic preparation and the tendency of boys to have been less mature and have had more behavior problems than girls.

Lee and Rojewski (2009) conducted a longitudinal study to determine how occupational aspirations changed by gender over time. Lee and Rojewski collected surveys from 10,827 students from across the United States, over the course of 12 years, about the careers they expected to have by age 30. The participants completed the first survey during eighth grade and then repeated the survey in 10th grade, 12th grade, two years post-high school and lastly eight years post-high school. Lee and Rojewski's data indicated girls tended to have higher educational and occupational aspirations than boys throughout middle and high school. This pattern began to change as students started entering college. First-year college students showed no difference in their educational and occupational aspirations based on gender. As students progressed through their college career both men and women showed a tendency to lower their aspirations. By the final year of college, women had significantly lowered their educational and occupational aspirations as compared to their male counterparts. Lee and Rojewski concluded throughout most of adolescence, girls typically held higher

aspirations than boys. As students proceed through college, boys' aspirations became higher than girls' aspirations.

Watts et al. (2015) also agreed girls were more likely than boys to aspire to occupations of higher prestige before high school, but after high school, girls were more likely than boys to lower their occupational aspirations. Ayman and Korabik (2010) attributed this shift in occupational aspirations to the influence of social constraints perceived by women. Ayman and Korabik (2010) labeled these social constraints as the *glass ceiling* that women had to overcome in the work force. Women have identified sexism, inflexible work hours, conflict between family and career demands, work place policies that were not family friendly, and inadequate career preparation all as contributors to the *glass ceiling* (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Cardoso & Moreira, 2009; Watts et al., 2015).

Although girls aspired to higher education and completed college more often than boys (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008), as of 2015, there was still a distinguishable pay gap between men and women's salaries (Bar et al., 2015). Researchers contributed the pay gap to men and women's occupational values and how this changed their occupational aspirations (Bikos et al., 2013; Broadley, 2015; Watson et al., 2011; Watts et al., 2015; Weisgram et al., 2010). According to Weisgram et al. (2010), girls tended to have altruistic career values while boys tended to endorse careers that provided power and money. Weisgram et al. also noted women held the most positions in nursing, education, and childcare while men held the most positions in engineering, computer programming, and physical science. Weisgram et al. stated this finding was rather unsurprising since nursing, education, and childcare provided little money but an abundance of altruistic

value; on the other hand, engineering, computer programming, and physical science provided high salaries but did not offer as mush altruistic value.

Females also highly valued careers that supported family values, such as allowing enough time off to care for small children or an elderly family member (Weisgram et al., 2010). Males did not deem this quality as important as females when selecting a career. Watts et al. (2015) noted half of female executives, those earning $100,000 or more per year, were childless while only one fifth of men in the same positions had no children. Watts et al. claimed this finding suggested women were more likely than men to have to choose between fulfilling their occupational aspirations and having a family. Ayman and Korbik (2010) likewise reported women's occupational aspirations could become crushed by corporate practices that did not provide flexibility in regard to having children. Beede et al. (2011) also explained many male-dominated careers might not have been conducive to raising a family, which discouraged women from pursuing those professions.

While males who attended college and obtained a professional degree tended to obtain higher occupational status and earn more money than their female counterparts (Watts et al., 2015), there were an alarming number of boys who did not aspire to go to college. According to Berzin (2010), there were significantly more male youths who did not aspire to go to college when compared to females. Moulton et al. (2018) claimed this was partially due to the increasing number of boys who aspired to rare occupations such as a professional sports players or rock stars. Blackhurst and Auger (2008) attributed this increase of boys who aspired to rare occupations, to the U.S. cultures' emphasis on

celebrities and wealth. These researchers also attested a fixation on instant monetary gain caused boys to subconsciously reject higher education in trade for jobs straight out of high school, or worse, illegal activities that offered *fast cash*. Since boys placed money high on their list of occupational values (Weisgram et al., 2010), it was no wonder that more boys, especially those who did not see the value in education, would choose not to attend college and immediately enter the work force after high school than girls. An additional factor found by researchers that impacted aspirations was SES differences (Gutman et al., 2012; Moulton et al., 2015).

Socio-Economic Differences

Gender, race, and SES all played a part in the development of children's aspirations (Lee & Rojewski, 2009). Of these three factors, SES played the largest role in predicting children's future educational and occupational aspirations (Moulton et al., 2015; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). Gutman et al. (2012) completed a longitudinal study of 11,035 students from across England. Each student completed a face-to-face interview at ages 11, 14, and 15. According to Gutman et al. (2012), low SES adolescents had lower educational aspirations than their high SES peers. Gutman et al. (2012) also stated although SES was the most significant predictor of educational aspirations for all children, the effect was more prominent in males than females. This meant although females from low SES families had lower educational aspirations than females from higher SES families, males from low SES families typically had lower aspirations than low SES females.

Croll (2008) explained children from low SES homes had lower educational and occupational aspirations than children from high SES homes. Other researchers found differences in aspirations between social classes. Moulton et al. (2015) measured the aspirations of over 13,000, 7-year-old children. The children from higher SES families had higher educational and occupational aspirations than their low SES counterparts. Khattab (2015) interviewed 16-year-old students about their aspirations and expectations for college. Khattab found adolescents from low SES families had aspirations that fell on the lower end of the job spectrum. Bowden and Doughney (2010) found SES was positively correlated to high school students' college aspirations. Bowden and Doughney further explained high school students from low SES families were more likely to aspire to vocational schools while students from high SES families were more likely to aspire to college. Holmes et al. (2017) explained students from low SES homes were under-represented in higher education. Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2008) further explained when low SES students did attend college, they were more likely to attend lower status institutions.

Khattab (2015) explained the differences in aspirations between social classes could partially be due to the variation of lifestyles of each class. Khattab clarified each social class possessed different values, resources, and parenting styles. Schmitt-Wilson (2013) further explained parents in high SES homes tended to prime their children for the future by guiding their children through a process that the parents believed would prepare their children to be successful in the future. Parents in low SES homes, however, believed children developed naturally and took a more hands-off approach to parenting (Schmitt-Wilson,

2013). Moulton et al. (2015) also confirmed there was a positive correlation between SES status and parental involvement, meaning parents in low SES homes were less likely to be involved in the lives of their children than parents from high SES homes. Moulton et al. (2015) concluded this correlation between social class and parental values predicted aspirations for children.

Khattab (2015) claimed parental behavior was not necessarily intentional but rather proved many parents in low SES homes did not have the knowledge or resources to help their children achieve high goals and aspirations. The lack of parental involvement was often because parents in low SES households had not attended college themselves, and, therefore, those parents were unsure of how to help their children navigate unknown territory. Gutman et al. (2012) explained parents from low SES homes also tended to have lower educational and occupational expectations of their children. Gutman et al. further discussed lower parental expectations typically led to lower student aspirations. Berzin (2010) also explained children with both parents in the home were more likely to hold higher aspirations. Berzin (2010) additionally detailed the students who were most likely to live in a single parent household were students from low SES families. Each of these researchers discussed the actual income of the family was not always the cause of the low aspirations, but SES was a reliable predictor of aspirations because of the parenting styles typically associated with low SES families.

According to Khattab (2015), parents from high SES homes, with high expectations, created individuals with high aspirations although schools tended to take the credit for developing the high aspirations. Khattab further explained it was the home environment that mostly influenced children's socialization skills,

work ethic, and attitudes toward education and future careers. Mello (2009) confirmed SES was positively correlated to educational and occupational expectations even after controlling for academic attainment. Moutlon et al. (2018) also concluded high SES home environments showed to be successful in fostering children's aspirations, while low SES families were unable to provide the adequate resources needed to develop aspirations. Byun et al. (2017) argued students from low SES families were more likely to attend schools with deficient resources to help students prepare for college. Low SES students in poor quality schools also had lower graduation rates (Byun et al., 2017), academic achievement (Demi et al., 2010), college enrollment (Byun et al., 2012b) and aspirations (Irvin et al., 2011). Conversely, Bowden and Doughney (2010) claimed students from private schools were more likely to have higher aspirations. Bowden and Doughney noted students from high SES families were more likely to attend these private schools. It seemed parents from high SES homes tended to raise children with higher aspirations and send their children to better schools; while lower SES families raised children with lower aspirations and sent their children to lower achieving schools. Since many students were high SES and attended prestigious schools, or low SES and attended poorer quality schools, it would be difficult to determine if parents or schools were the main factor in increasing aspirations. Bozick et al. (2010) explained there was not a single factor, but rather the combination of social and school environments that either encouraged or discouraged students to set high expectations. Bozick et al. further explained students would typically follow the social tendencies of their class.

Unaligned Aspirations and Academic Ability

There was conflicting research regarding if low SES students had lower or similar aspirations when compared to their high SES peers. Researchers claimed SES was a solid predictor of career and educational aspirations (Berzin, 2010; Khattab, 2015; Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Mello, 2009; Moulton et al., 2018; Robinson & Diale, 2017). Other researchers found SES was not an accurate predictor of career or educational aspirations (Goodman et al., 2011; Jerrim, 2014; St. Clair et al., 2013). Jerrim (2014) examined the educational and occupational aspirations versus the educational and occupational expectations of nearly 200,000, 13-year-old through 18-year-old students in 25 developed countries. Jerrim claimed low SES students expected to attend and complete college as frequently as their high SES peers. St. Clair et al. (2013) collected 300 surveys on the occupational aspirations of 13-year-old students in London, Nottingham, and Glasgow, United Kingdom. St. Clair et al. surveyed the same students again two years later. St. Clair et al. described how students from low SES backgrounds were likely to develop high aspirations that were unrelated to their academic achievement or ability. Unaligned aspirations and ability occurred because low SES students were unaware of the barriers they would face while striving to achieve their high aspirations (Jerrim, 2014). Bozick et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study in which they surveyed 790 students in Baltimore, MD, beginning in fourth grade and ending in 11th grade. The researchers asked students in each survey to determine if they expected to not finish high school, finish high school, complete come college, finish college, or complete beyond and bachelor's degree. Bozick et al. concluded low SES students were unaware of the

barriers they may face. Bozick et al. explained the United States had created a culture that encouraged all students, no matter their circumstances, to aspire to college. Baker et al. (2014) claimed U.S. policy makers placed too much focus on raising students' educational and occupational aspirations, yet those policies did not create strategies to help students overcome barriers. Raising aspirations without preparing students for the barriers that may stand between them and achieving their aspirations would potentially led to future obstacles (Zipin et al., 2015).

The conflicting findings of these researchers regarding low SES students' aspirations may be due to the differences in aspirations and expectations. According to Beal and Crockett (2010), aspirations were the hopes and dreams that a person would like to achieve and were often disengaged from the real world, while expectations were what a person expected to achieve given his or her circumstances. Beal and Crocket also noted expectations were often a better indicator of achievement because they were directly tied to a student's SES status and school performance. Moulton et al. (2018) also agreed with this distinction between aspirations and expectations by stating aspirations were personal goals that one would like to be able to achieve but expectations were what people actually thought they would achieve. Gottfredson (1981) claimed by fourth-grade students were able to distinguish between aspirations and expectations. Jerrim (2014) claimed by age 14 adolescents began to compromise their aspirations to meet their expectations; as students aged they lowered their aspirations to meet their expectations.

Beal and Crockett (2010) agreed with this sentiment. Beal and Crockett conducted cross examinations of aspirations and expectations with seventh-grade, eighth-grade, and ninth-grade students and 79% of the students interviewed had aspirations and expectations that fell into the same category. Mello (2009) conducted interviews with 14-year-old students about their future educational and occupational aspirations and expectations. At age 26, the majority of students had met their educational and occupational expectations. Beal and Crocket (2010) and Mello (2009) have shown it is important to distinguish between aspirations and expectations when researching students' goals. Students' aspirations and expectations may often be aligned but if they are not aligned, then expectations may be a more significant predictor of future attainment.

Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Occupational Aspirations

Parental involvement with students' academics was another area that impacted students' aspirations. Berzin (2010) stated parents who provided a solid academic environment at home had children with high aspirations. Suizzo et al. (2012) explained parental school involvement, which included communicating expectations and discussing learning techniques, was positively correlated with student achievement. Khattab (2015) discussed the importance of social support, including support from parents, was associated with academic achievement. Students from low SES homes were less likely to have as strong of a social support system as students from high SES families. Portes et al. (2010) also stated there was a positive relationship between levels of parent-child interaction and children's educational and occupational expectations. This meant parents who spent more time interacting with their children were more likely to have children

with high aspirations than parents who spent less time interacting with their children. According to Moulton et al. (2015), children who had high levels of parental involvement at the age of three were likely to have higher levels of cognitive ability at age five than their peers with low levels of parental involvement. Moulton et al. also noted parents who involved themselves with their children's academic performance by reading books, helping with homework, and being involved in the school helped raise their children's aspirations.

Moulton et al. (2015) stated the parents who were unlikely to be involved with their children's education were parents from low SES households, which showed social class could be used as a predictor of parental involvement and therefore impacted students' aspirations. Beal and Crockett (2010) also discussed how SES was a reliable predictor of student achievement with high SES students typically outperforming low SES students. Griffin et al. (2011) explained how parents may have wanted to provide educational support to their children but lacked the knowledge in how to provide support. Witherspoon and Ennett (2010) explained how students in low SES communities with highly educated parents tended to have higher aspirations and higher achievement than their peers. This likely occurred because their parents had knowledge of how to help their children be successful in school. Khattab (2015) explained the parent-child relationship was a transmitter of cultural norms that would shape children's aspirations and future career options. This statement further confirmed the *passing-down* of social status from generation to generation through parenting. Parents were not the only influencers of aspirations; schools also impacted students' educational and occupational aspirations (Rosenbaum et al., 2015).

School Influence

Blackhurst and Auger (2008) claimed guidance counselors played an instrumental role in helping children assess their own abilities and assess their realistic career options. Ameen and Lee (2012) also stressed the importance of guidance counselors in career development. Ameen and Lee claimed career development programs not only prepared students for the world of work but also helped prevent future incarcerations. Porfeli et al. (2008) found many high school counselors claimed they spent *very little* time on career counseling but had a desire to spend more time working with students in this area. Pofeli et al. also stated the majority of high school seniors rated their school as *fair* or *poor* in preparing them for college and future careers. Schenck et al. (2012) predicted counselors would begin to spend more time focusing on career development as career guidance services became more valued. According to Bikos et al. (2013), counselors with six or less years of experience made career development a higher priority than counselors with seven plus years of experience. Bikos et al. also reported school counselors who closely adhered to state counseling guidelines placed more emphasis on career development than counselors who used other counseling models.

Gore et al. (2015) discovered the majority of schools did not begin focusing on or supporting students' career or educational aspirations until the last three years of high school. Gore et al. claimed this trend was caused by the general assumption that younger students did not form realistic aspirations. Cardak and Ryan (2009) also found schools did not typically offer career education until students' sophomore year of high school or later. Gore et al.

(2015) stated this practice was not beneficial to students since students formed occupational aspirations much earlier than the high school years. Robinson and Diale (2017) suggested there was a lack of research on the aspirations of elementary and middle school students. Other researchers have expressed this same sentiment (Arulmani, 2011; Bowden & Doughney, 2010; Gore et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Schuette et al., 2012). Bikos et al. (2013) even stated school counselors desired more training that addressed how to properly prepare students to reach their educational and occupational goals. This lack of research and training could have prevented elementary and middle school counselors from providing career guidance.

Zipin et al. (2015) explained governments have often focused on raising children's aspirations to improve educational and occupational attainment. Zipin et al. explained the problem with raising aspirations was many students were not trained on how to achieve their new-found aspirations. Rosenbaum et al. (2015) argued raising educational aspirations without proper training on how to achieve these goals resulted in negative consequences. Blackhurt and Auger (2008) found although the majority of students aspired to go to college, only a small percentage of students enrolled in college preparatory classes. Byun et al. (2017) noted college preparatory classes and activities were better indicators of future college enrollment than students' educational aspirations. Both Black and Auger (2008) and Byun et al. (2017) concluded career and educational counseling was key in helping students know how to properly prepare themselves to meet their future goals.

Parental Impact

Parents have long had a robust influence over their children's aspirations (Ramos & Sanchez, 1995). This included parents' educational and occupational expectations of their children. According to Wahl and Blackhurst (2000), parents were a significant factor in influencing children's college aspirations. Bandura et al. (2001) concluded, one year later, the expectations parents had for their children heavily influenced their children's occupational aspirations and their educational attainment. Mau (1995) found middle school students' aspirations mirrored their parents' expectations of them. Likewise, Berzin (2010) claimed parents' expectations often had more of an impact on children's aspirations than parental education, occupation, or involvement with school. Gemici et al. (2014) also claimed parents' educational expectations were one of the strongest factors in predicting students' aspirations. Khattab (2015) showed high parental expectations had a strong positive correlation on students' educational achievement and future aspirations. Byun et al. (2017) stated parental educational expectations were significant predictors of students' future educational attainment.

High parental expectations were not solely responsible for raising children's aspirations; parents also had to clearly communicate their expectations to their children. According to Hill and Tyson (2009), communicating expectations was the type of parental involvement that would most likely lead to achievement. Students who perceived their parents had high educational expectations for them also had high educational goals they set for themselves (Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). According to Nagenegast and Marsh (2012), parental

expectations were often based on social norms. Nagenegast and Marsh's finding showed social classes impacted what parents expected from their children and, therefore, influenced what students expected from themselves.

Parents' Careers

Beginning in 1962, Holland established children aspire to the careers of their parents at a rate significantly above chance and other researchers have confirmed that finding (Holland, 1962; Holmes et al., 2017; Moulton et al., 2015; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013; Trice & Hughes, 1995; Werts & Watley, 1972). Moulton et al. (2015) explained children aspired to their parents' careers more often, especially during elementary years. Schmitt-Wilson (2013) affirmed students' occupational aspirations were closely tied to their parents' careers even during late adolescence. Schmitt-Wilson interviewed 200 students in 10th grade-12th grade. When asked if they knew someone who held their occupational aspiration, 74% of the students replied someone in their home was currently working in the career toward which they aspired. Trice (1991) explained occupational aspirations were related to experience and early exposure to careers often came from parental influence. Holmes et al. (2017) confirmed Trice's statement. Holmes et al. explained having a parent in a particular field would increase a student's chance of aspiring to that same career. Holmes et al. studied the rate at which students aspired to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers. The researchers found having a parent or family member in the STEM field significantly increased the likelihood of a child aspiring to a STEM career. Homes et al. explained students could not aspire to careers if they lacked knowledge of those careers. This statement applied to not only STEM careers, but to all possible

career choices. If students were unaware of available career options, then they would not aspire to those careers. Schmitt-Wilson (2013) further explained even when students did not aspire to the careers of their parents, they would often aspire to a career that would maintain the same social status of their parents. Watson et al. (2011) agreed there was a general consensus among researchers that children aspired to occupations that maintained the same social standing of their parents.

Although children were more likely to choose the same career as their parents or a career that maintained the same SES status as their parents' career, some children strived to change their social standing. Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2008) found children from low SES households with high aspirations were likely trying to *escape* their current situation. Hernandez-Martinez et al. interviewed low SES youth about their aspirations and why they held the aspirations they identified. The majority of low SES youth who held high aspirations expressed their desire to not be like their parents. These young people held high aspirations because they were aware of the lifestyle afforded by their parents' careers and did not want to end up in the same situation as their parents. Hernandez-Martinez et al. described these students' high aspirations as a hope of escaping the SES situation in which they lived. Robinson and Diale (2017) conducted a study on low SES youth and found similar results as Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2008). Robinson and Diale interviewed low SES youth who did not aspire to their parents' careers. These students explained their parents' careers did play a role in their decisions to choose other occupational aspirations. Each of the participants also stated their parents encouraged them to make better decisions than they had

made. Robinson and Diale showed although students aspired to careers that were more prestigious than their parents, the parents had encouraged their children to do so.

Children not only considered their parents' SES when thinking about future careers, but they also considered if their parents were happy with their career choices. According to Watson et al. (2011), children evaluated their parents' level of career satisfaction before choosing whether to follow in their parents' footsteps. Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) conducted a study on students' occupational aspirations and students' perceptions of parental career satisfaction. The researchers found students who perceived their parents were highly satisfied with their careers were more likely to choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration than students who perceived their parents were dissatisfied with their career. Trice and Tillapaugh showed children did not mindlessly follow their parents' footsteps in choosing a future career path for themselves. Rather, children took into consideration their own future happiness while considering future career options by considering their parents' current careers and if they perceived their parents to be happy with their career choices. I looked to Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) to develop a similar study in which children considered their parents' level of career satisfaction while also discussing their own occupational aspirations.

Conclusion of Review of Literature

I reviewed the literature based on students' occupational aspirations. Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise showed how students progressed through four stages of aspirational development beginning at

age three and ending in adulthood. Researchers have tested Gottfredson's theory and found her research maintained relevant over time (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Gutman et al., 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Moulton et al., 2018; Robinson & Diale, 2017; Watson et al., 2011). Researchers also established children aspired to the careers of their parents at a rate significantly above chance (Holland, 1962; Holmes et al., 2017; Moulton et al., 2015; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013; Trice & Hughes, 1995; Werts & Watley, 1972). Trice and Tillapaugh (1991), however, discussed children did not simply choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration without thought. Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) explained students would only be more likely to choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration if they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. During the review of literature, I discovered there had been no other study to look at students' occupational aspirations and student's perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction since the completion of Trice and Tillapaugh's study in 1991. To update the body of literature on students' aspirations and their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction I conducted a qualitative research design using one-on-one interviews with third-grade students. I further explained my methods for conducting the research in Chapter III.

Chapter III: Methodology

Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) determined the happier a child perceived their parents to be within their career, the more likely a child was to aspire to that same career. Trice and Tillapaugh's study was quantitative in nature, and the researchers established there was a positive correlation between students' perceived level of parental career satisfaction and students' own occupational aspirations. The researchers also showed third-grade students were accurate at determining their parents' level of career satisfaction at a rate considered significant (R^2 = .22). Since the completion of Trice and Tillapaugh's study in 1991, other researchers compared students' aspirations to their parents' careers but did not consider students' perceptions of parental career satisfaction (Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2008; Holmes et al., 2017).

To update the existing literature and fill the gap in research on students' occupational aspirations, the purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction. I aimed to update the body of research by studying third-grade students and their aspirations, similar to Trice and Tillapaugh (1991), and to fill in the gap in research on students' occupational aspirations by conducting a qualitative study, through interviews, on third-grade students' occupational aspirations. I conducted interviews with third-grade students from two schools, one in a high SES community and one in a low SES community, from the same school district in the southeastern region of the United States. During the interviews, I discussed with students their parents' careers, the

students' perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward their careers, and the students' own occupational aspirations. I used data from the interviews to compare the perceptions and aspirations of students from the low SES school and the students from the high SES school.

Research Design

I sought to understand how third-grade students described their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction and how third-grade students described their own occupational aspirations. I was interested in discovering how students used their perceptions of the realities of the workforce to determine what occupations they wished to acquire as adults. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained qualitative research was beneficial to educational research because it allowed researchers to determine how individuals constructed their reality. According to Creswell (2013), people sought to understand the world around them, and how they constructed the world varied among individuals. The nature of a qualitative researcher was to uncover how people constructed meaning from their experiences and interpret those meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I strived to encourage students to discuss their perceived reality by asking them to explain if they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers and describe their own occupational aspirations.

I used a qualitative research design known as a basic interpretive study. Meriam and Tisdell (2016) described a basic interpretive study as a qualitative design where the researcher sought to understand how people used their experiences to create meaning in their lives. I chose this design to understand how students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction were related to

students' personal occupational aspirations. Students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction represented the experience while students' personal occupational aspirations represented the meaning. I used one-on-one interviews with students to collect data. I chose to conduct interviews rather than give a survey because the interviews allowed students to explain their thoughts and feelings more than a written survey since writing or typing responses could have hindered students who were not proficient writers. I also believed one-on-one interviews were more appropriate than group interviews because one-on-one interviews allowed the participants to maintain a higher level of privacy and prevented a small number of participants from dominating the interview (Greenfield & Greener, 2016). During the interviews, I conducted purposeful conversations with the participants with questions designed to answer the research questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

My closeness to the study was an area of potential bias. At the time of the study, I was an elementary school teacher and taught elementary students in this school district, but in a different school than the schools in which the research took place. It was possible that my pre-conceived notions about third-grade students may have impacted the study. To mitigate this potential bias, I remained true to the pre-determined interview questions and only added questions necessary for clarification. I was also diligent in logging all the participants' responses to the interview questions into an excel spreadsheet.

Context of the Study

I obtained a sample of students from the population of students attending Lower Springs Elementary School (LSES) (pseudonym) and Higher Springs Elementary School (HSES) (pseudonym), two public schools within the Henry School District (HSD) (pseudonym). HSD was located in the southeastern region of the United States. HSD served approximately 60,000 students in 90 different schools. Approximately 46% of the students within HSD were from low SES families as determined by the number of students who received free or reduced lunch. LSES served approximately 570 of HSD's students and employed 3 administrators, 57 teachers, and 20 support staff members. LSES was a Title I school where 92% of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch. HSES served approximately 771 of HSD's students and employed 2 administrators, 53 teachers, and 14 support staff. HSES did not qualify as a Title I school because only 20% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. At the time of the study, Title I schools were based on the number of students who received free or reduced lunch. Students were only eligible for free or reduced lunch if they were considered low SES by the state's current poverty guidelines. This meant 92% of the students at LSES were living in low SES households while only 20% of students at HSES were living in low SES households. Researchers have found students in low SES homes typically have lower aspirations than students who live in middle to high SES homes (Gutman et al., 2012; Moulton et al., 2015; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013); therefore, I chose these schools because of stark differences in their percentages of students who lived in low SES homes. These two schools were similar in the number of students and staff members but were

opposites in the number of students who were from low SES homes. This made these two schools excellent for comparing students' aspirations while considering SES.

Participants of the Study

I chose to interview third-grade students from LSES and HSES based on Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise. The majority of third-grade students begin third grade at age eight and end third grade at age nine. This put third-grade students at the end of stage two and beginning of stage three of Gottfredson's (1981) circumscription and compromise theory. According to Gottfredson (1981), students in third grade should have a solid understanding of common careers that people around them have obtained and the gender roles typically associated with those careers. Third-grade students should also be starting to become aware of the social statuses associated with various careers. This meant third-grade students were starting to understand someone who was a doctor would likely enjoy a more luxurious lifestyle than perhaps someone who worked retail. According to Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2008), the reason many children and adolescents aspired to an occupation that would provide a higher SES than that of their parents was because they were dissatisfied with the lifestyle that was provided by their parents' careers. Robinson and Diale (2017) also explained when students aspired to occupations that provided a higher SES than their parents' careers it was often because their parents encouraged them to aspire to occupations higher than their own. It would be reasonable to assume parents who were satisfied with their careers were also satisfied with the lifestyle their careers afforded. Whereas parents who were dissatisfied with the lifestyle provide

by their careers would likely be dissatisfied with their careers. Third-grade students were in the perfect age group to ask what their aspirations were while also thinking about their parents' career satisfaction. Students in third grade were less likely than younger students to mimic their parents' careers as their own aspirations simply because they wanted to be like their parents. Third-grade students may have been likely to take into consideration their parents' level of happiness with the SES that their current career provided.

According to Patton (2015), a sample size should provide reasonable coverage of the population depending on the intentions of the study. I considered the population of this study to be all third-grade students enrolled in HSES and LSES. During the time of study, the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. Due to the pandemic, HSD allowed each student's family at all schools within the district to choose to attend school virtually or in person at their designated school. I chose to interview only the students who were learning in person. Saunders et al. (2018) also explained a sample size should ensure what was known as saturation, a term that Saunders explained meant enough data were collected that adding further data would become redundant and unnecessary. I interviewed the first 5 qualifying girls and 5 qualifying boys from LSES and the first 5 qualifying girls and 5 qualifying boys from HSES who submitted their permission forms and students who wanted to participate. Students did not qualify if their parent did not complete every portion of the online permission form. After the first 10 interviews at each school, I continued to conduct interviews until the data reached saturation. I interviewed a total of 37 third-grade students, 20 boys and 17 girls, from HSES and 14 students, 7 boys and 7 girls, from LSES. To make the data

comparable, I used all 14 interviews from LSES and used a random number generator to randomly select 7 boys and 7 girls from HSES for data analysis. Choosing only 7 boys and 7 girls from HSES made the data more comparable to the data collected from LSES since LSES also had 7 boys and 7 girls participate in the study. Thus, my sample was a total of 28 students.

Data Collection

Prior to conducting the study, I created a list of 10 interview questions, or the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I created these questions to help guide the interview into a structured discussion that would fulfill the purpose of answering the research questions (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The first three questions in the interview were trivial questions that were unneeded to answer the research questions but were instead demographic questions that included *what has been your favorite part of the day today*, *what did you have for lunch/breakfast today*, and *tell me about your school*. I chose to ask these questions because, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), asking easy to answer questions at the beginning of the interview can put participants at ease. To develop questions that were pertinent to answering the research questions, I used Patton's (2015) guide to creating research questions. Patton (2015) created a list of six types of interview questions that are beneficial in conducting interviews: experience questions, opinion questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background/demographic questions. Although Patton (2015) explained not all six types of questions were required to conduct a proper interview, it was important to use a mixture to answer the questions in the current study. I used knowledge questions to establish if students were aware of their

parent's current career. I used experience questions to determine how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction or dissatisfaction. I also used opinion questions to determine what occupations students aspired to and if students believed their parents' careers were fulfilling. I asked students *how do you think your parents feel about their job* and *what job do you want to have when you grow up*. I drew these interview question from Trice and Tillapaugh's (1991) research when they compared students' occupational aspirations to their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction.

To determine if the interview questions were appropriately worded for third-grade students, I assembled a team of five third-grade teachers from schools within HSD, but at schools other than LSES and HSES and distributed the interview questions to each of them. Each of the five third-grade teachers read over the questions and verified the average third-grade student would be able to answer the interview questions without difficulty. The team also assured me I worded the questions in such a way that they were appropriate for third-grade students. I made no changes to the interview questions after receiving feedback from this team of third-grade teachers because their approval served as validation the protocol was appropriate for my population.

After writing the questionnaire, I submitted a research proposal to HSD's research review committee. After receiving approval from the HSD, I contacted the principal of LSES and the principal of HSES via phone call. The principals of each school verbally agreed to my request. I then emailed each of them a permission form stating I had permission to conduct the research at their schools and both principals signed the form and returned it via email. After receiving

permission from the school district and the school principals, I submitted the necessary forms to Lincoln Memorial University's Internal Review Board.

After receiving approval from the school district, the principals, and LMU's IRB, I sent online permission forms to the parents of each third-grade student at LSES and HSES (see Appendix B). I created the permission form using Survey Monkey. Included in the online permission form was information regarding the terms and conditions of the study, my contact information, questions regarding consent for students to participate in the study, and also a question to the parents that was used to verify students' responses during the interviews. This question was *please list the occupations of the adults living in your child's household*. I used this question to verify students correctly identified their parents' careers during the one-on-one interviews. Survey Monkey assured all information collected on their website was secure and was only accessible by me. I sent parents a digital message (see Appendix C) about the online permission form through School Messenger, a parent communication tool that the schools were already using prior to the study. This message, sent through School Messenger, arrived to parents in the form of an email and the link to the online permission form was embedded in the email. I gave the parents one week to go online and fill out the online permission form. I sent the digital message about the online permission form again two days later through School Messenger. I received 39 online permission forms back from the HSES students' parents and 14 forms back from the LSES students' parents. I printed all the permission forms and kept these forms in a locked filing cabinet in my home residence.

I began interviewing students after students' parents submitted the first online permission forms. I selected students by the order in which their parents submitted their permission forms online. I worked closely with the principal of each school while scheduling the interviews for each student to ensure no instructional time was lost for the participants. I conducted interviews with students through Microsoft Teams, a virtual meeting platform that was already in use by the schools during the time of the study. Each school's principal determined the best course of action for pulling students for the interviews and the best locations for students to sit at the school while participating in the interviews. The principals of each school ensured students were in an area where they could be monitored by school staff but would also maintain the required privacy for the interview. Once a student was online with me in the designated interview area, I introduced myself and explained to the student that he or she had been selected to participate in the study and the interviews would be recorded. At the beginning of the interview, I explained the terms of the interview and explained the students could choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. I then asked students to verbally confirm they understood the terms of the study and to verbally confirm they wished to participate in the study.

During the interviews, I used a digital audio recorder to record the interviews. I chose not to use the recording feature on Microsoft Teams during the interviews because I did not feel the recordings would be secure and only accessible by myself since the Microsoft Teams accounts that were being used were owned by the school district. I also recorded my own memos onto the recording immediately following the interview. These memos consisted of

similarities I noticed between the current interview and any preceding interviews. I used my recorded memos to help me make connections during the categorizing process. I also logged information from the audio recordings into an Excel spreadsheet. I saved the audio recordings and Excel spreadsheet on a password protected flash drive that was locked in a filing cabinet in my personal residence that was accessible only by myself. After three years I will shred and recycle the printed copies of the excel spreadsheet. I will delete the audio recordings and digital versions of the spreadsheet from the flash drive, and the flash drive will be completely reformatted three years after the completion of the research to ensure there will be no content remaining. There were 28 total interviews recorded, 7 girls and 7 boys from LSES, and 7 girls and 7 boys from HSES. I categorized the information from these interviews to answer the four research questions.

Methods of Analysis

Flick (2014) explained data analysis was the process of taking material and structuring it in such a way to derive meaning. I used a process known as constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to dissect the data collected in the interviews to answer the research questions. I began by listing all the interview questions in a spreadsheet. After I completed a round of interviews, I listened to the interviews and my notes from the audio recordings. I then listed each student's answers to the interview questions in the spreadsheet under the corresponding interview question. I then determined the average income of each parent's career and each student's occupational aspiration by using the current occupational profiles provided by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). I also estimated the SES of each parent by cross referencing the

average income of each career that students' parents stated they had on the online permission form with the poverty guidelines determined by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2020). I also estimated the SES that would be provided by each student's occupational aspiration by cross referencing the students' occupational aspirations with the United States Federal Poverty Guidelines (2020). I also used the Internal Revenue Service (2020) tax brackets for the year in which the data were collected to determine SES.

I then began to organize the collected data in such a way that would help answer the research questions. To answer the first research question, I assembled all the responses about students' occupational aspirations from students who attended LSES together in one group and compiled all the responses about students' occupational aspirations from the students who attended HSES in another group. I then went through each groups' responses and first determined which group had higher estimated incomes for their occupational aspirations according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). Lastly, to better group the incomes of the students' occupational aspirations, I used salary grouping based on the income tax brackets from the IRS (2020) for the year that the study was conducted.

To answer the second research question, I assembled all the responses about students' parents' career satisfaction from students who attended LSES together in one group and compiled all the responses about students' parents' career satisfaction from the students who attended HSES in another group. I then coded each groups' responses to how they believed their parents' felt about their jobs. I coded the responses by first summarizing each participants' answer into

short answers that gave the most important details of how participants believed their parents felt about their careers. I then used these short answers to create categories. This led to the creation of seven categories. I then looked for similar categories throughout each school.

To answer the third research question, I assembled all the responses from the students who attended LSES in one group and compiled all the responses from the students who attended HSES in another group. I then compared the estimated income and tax bracket of each student's occupational aspiration to the estimated income and tax bracket of their parent's current career. I then ranked each student's occupational aspiration as higher SES, similar SES, or lower SES than their parent's current career based on their tax brackets. I also compared this ranking with how each student believed their parent felt about their current career. I tried to determine if there were similarities between students who believed their parents were satisfied with their careers and similarities between students who believed their parents were dissatisfied with their careers. I then compared the results of the students attending LSES to the results of the students attending HSES to determine if there were differences or similarities between the two groups.

To answer the fourth research question, I assembled all the responses from the girls from both schools into one group and all the responses from the boys from both schools into a second group. I then categorized all the girls' responses to the questions about their occupational aspirations. I categorized the responses by first summarizing each participants' answer into short answers that gave the most important details of why students chose their occupational aspiration. I then

used these short answers to create categories. This led to the creation of four categories. I then used the same process to categorize all the girls' responses to their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. This led to the creation of seven categories related to why students believed their parents were happy with their current careers. I also used the labor force statistics from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) to determine if each occupation chosen by each girl was a female or a male dominated occupation. I then repeated these same steps for the boys' responses. I then compared the similarities and differences between the two groups.

Trustworthiness

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the biggest threat to the validity of qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the researcher. I took several precautionary measures to ensure I conducted the study with validity and reliability and my methods would be considered trustworthy. First, I used triangulation (Denzin, 1978) by collecting data from various sources including the parents of the participants, students from a low SES school, and students from a high SES school. I collected information from the parents about what adults were living in the households of the participants and the jobs held by those adults. I collected this information to check third-grade participants were accurate when I questioned them about the careers of the adults in their households. It was important to check students knew what their parents' careers were because if students were unaware of what their parents' careers were, then it would be safe to assume those students may struggle in knowing if their parents were satisfied or dissatisfied with their current career. I also interviewed students from different

schools and from different SES levels to collect interview data from third-grade students with varying perspectives.

Second, I strived to make my research replicable. To do this I estimated the salaries of parents' current careers and estimated the salaries of students' occupational aspirations using national averages from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). I used data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) instead of parents' actual salaries so that I could accurately compare parents' salaries and students' occupational aspiration salaries. Comparing parents' actual salaries to national averages of salaries for students' occupational aspirations would have been unreliable because I would have been comparing salaries typical of the region in which the study was conducted to national averages. This strategy also allowed my research to be replicated anywhere within the United States since it was based on national averages and not regional salaries.

Second, I also strived to conduct reliable interviews. To do this I used a list of pre-determined interview questions during the interviews. I remained true to the pre-determined interview questions. The only questions I added during the interviews were questions that were necessary for clarification from the participant. For example, when asked if he believed his parent was happy with her career, one young man replied "uh huh". Since this response was unclear, I asked the participant to explain what "uh huh" meant. Throughout each the interview, I also used respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013). When a participant gave a response that could be interpreted in more than one way, I asked the participant to

explain their response. This method allowed me to validate all data collected during each interview.

Lastly, I wanted to ensure the results presented in the findings were consistent with the data that I collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I strived to conduct a fair and just categorizing process. I listened to each interview three times and then recorded each participant's responses in a spreadsheet under the corresponding interview questions. Knowing the data in great detail helped me to ensure I used only data related to research questions during the categorizing process. To mitigate potential misidentifying during the categorizing process, I created an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure the research process would be dependable. I used memos to describe what categories I created and why I created each category. This ensured I directly aligned the categories to the research questions.

Limitations and Delimitations

Creswell (2012) explained limitations were possible flaws or areas of weakness within a study that the researcher was unable to control. I was unable to control the number of students whose parents completed the online permission form. I tried to mitigate this problem by informing parents multiple times about the study and the online permission form. I sent a digital message about the online permission form to the students' parents through School Messenger, an online messaging system that the school was already using prior to the study. I sent the digital message about the online permission form again two days later through School Messenger. The teachers also sent parents reminders to check school messenger for the message I sent.

Another limitation to this study was the use of Microsoft Teams. I originally intended to conduct in person interviews, which I assumed would make students more comfortable and allow for more clear and concise communication. I had to use Microsoft Teams to conduct the interviews because, at the time of the research, the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. School district administrators had determined for the safety of students, staff, and the community, they would not allow anyone who did not work inside the school to be allowed inside the building; therefore, I was prevented from doing in person interviews because of this safety policy. To continue with the research and maintain public health safety, I conducted the interviews virtually. Though students in this district regularly used Microsoft Teams and had been thoroughly trained in how to do so, this virtual setting may have caused students to behave differently than they would have in person.

A third limitation to this study was, during the time of the research, students' families from both HSES and LSES were allowed to opt out of in person learning in favor of learning virtually from home to provide extra precaution to their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. I determined only students who were learning in person should participate in the study as I decided students who were learning virtually may disrupt the study because the students would possibly have had to answer questions about how they believed their parents felt about their careers in front of their parents. This may have caused discomfort to the students. I also determined it was best to exclude students learning in the virtual option because parents may have interfered during the interview by correcting student answers or adding in their own perspectives. I was also aware excluding

students learning in the virtual option may cause a misrepresentation of the student population but still determined it was in the best interest of the students to only interview students who were attending school in person.

A final limitation to this study was my inability to control students' school attendance and students' schedules. Students whose parents completed the online permission form but who had multiple absences may not have been able to participate in the study because they were not at school on a day that I conducted interviews. I tried to overcome this obstacle by interviewing on multiple days, various days of the week, and at various times throughout the day. This provided many opportunities for students to participate in the study without interfering with students' academic work.

The delimitations of this study set by myself determined the boundaries for the study (Simon, 2011). The first delimitation included the decision to draw a sample of students from the population of students at HSES and LSES. I chose these two schools because the student populations at both schools were fitting for the research questions. I wanted to compare students from a low SES community and students from a high SES community. I chose HSES and LSES in the HSD because of their percentages of students living in low SES homes. While LSES had over 90% of students living in low SES home, HSES had less than 10% of students living in low SES homes. This made these two schools ideal for comparing low and high SES students.

A second delimitation to the study was I also chose to conduct the study with third-grade students beginning at the midpoint of the school year. This was because many third-grade students were in Gottfredson's (1981) third stage of

circumscription and compromise. At this stage of Gottfredson's theory, children understood the social status typically associated with various careers. Third-grade students were on the brink of this stage at the beginning of third grade and I conducted the interviews during the second half of the school year, which allowed students to become more comfortably situated in the suggested age range for Gottfredson's third stage of circumscription and compromise.

Assumptions of the Study

I assumed the participants of the study understood the interview questions. I made this assumption because a cohort of third-grade teachers from a school outside of LSES and HSES read the interview questions and assured me the interview questions were appropriate for third-grade students' comprehension level. Additionally, I assumed the parents' careers would provide a social status close to the social status determined by the United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2019) and the United States Department of Health and Human Services' (2020) poverty guidelines. I used the average income as stated by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) in conjunction with the poverty guidelines determined by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2020) to determine parents' SES.

Summary of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction. This study was based on the research that conducted by Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) and Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and

compromise. To accomplish this study, I interviewed 14 students, 7 girls and 7 boys, from LSES and 14 students, 7 girls and 7 boys, from HSES. During the interviews, I asked students to describe their occupational aspiration, why they chose their occupational aspiration, and their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I transcribed all the student interviews and placed the students' responses to the interview questions in a spreadsheet beneath each corresponding research question. I then categorized student responses to the interview questions and used these categories to answer the research questions. I further explained the analysis of the collected data in the following chapter.

Chapter IV: Analyses and Results

Children's occupational aspirations have been reliable predictors of future occupational achievement (Mello, 2009). Even if adults did not acquire the occupational positions they once dreamed about as children, it was likely that people who held high occupational aspirations as children would hold a higher-status career than people who held low occupational aspirations as children (Schuette et al., 2012). Third-grade students were especially important to study because during their third-grade year, students were aware of the gender roles associated with most careers and were becoming aware of the social status associated with various careers (Gottfredson, 1981). Beal and Crockett (2010) claimed SES was also a predictor of future occupational outcomes. Children from low SES homes were more likely to obtain occupations with a lower social status than children from high SES homes (Khattab, 2015). Children used their understanding of gender, social status, and personal interest to determine their own occupational aspiration. Researchers also stated children are more likely to aspire to their parents' careers (Holmes et al., 2017; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) claimed children were only more likely to choose their parents' careers as their own occupational aspirations if the children perceived their parents to be happy in their current career. Considering the implications holding high or low occupational aspirations during childhood could have on a child's future, it was beneficial to study the occupational aspirations of students from a low SES school and students from a high SES school.

The purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described

their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction. I conducted a qualitative study to investigate if third-grade students attending a low SES school and third-grade students attending a high SES school, while considering their perception of their parents' career satisfaction, had differences in their occupational aspirations. I also investigated if there were differences in how students from a low SES school and students from a high SES school described their parents career satisfaction. Finally, I also looked at gender differences in the occupational aspirations of third-grade students.

Data Analysis

The purpose of an educational qualitative study was to understand how students constructed meaning from their experiences and interpreted those meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the current study, I used structured interviews with third-grade students from LSES and HSES. I chose third-grade students because, according to Gottfredson's (1981) theory of Circumscription and Compromise, students in the third grade would have a solid grasp of the careers of people around them, understand the gender roles typically associated with various careers, and have an emerging awareness of the social status usually associated with various careers. I chose to base the current study on Gottfredson's (1981) theory because researchers have tested this theory and have found it remained relevant over time (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Gutman et al., 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Moulton et al., 2018; Robinson & Diale, 2017; Watson et al., 2011).

I focused my study on two schools within the south-eastern region of the United States. The first school, LSES, had 92% of students from low SES homes.

The second school, HSES, had 20% of students from low SES homes. I used the data collected in 14 interviews, 7 boys and 7 girls in third grade, from each school for a total of 28 interviews. I gave each student a pseudonym based on their school; the students from LSES were given pseudonyms beginning with the letter L and the students from HSES were given pseudonyms beginning with the letter H. I recorded the interviews and then transcribed each student's response to each interview question in a spreadsheet. I then placed the responses into separate spreadsheets based on which research question the responses answered.

After compiling all the data, I began the categorizing process. To categorize responses to open-ended questions, I summarized each student's response into short answers, which included the most important information from the student's answer. I then used the short answers to create categories. For example, one participant, Hannah, when answering why she chose her occupational aspiration, said, "Because an equestrian races horses and I love horses. Horses are my favorite animal, and it would [be] fun to race horses all the time when I grow up." I shortened this response to *Love* and *Fun* because these were the two most important reasons she aspired to be an equestrian when she grew up. This response ended up in the *fun/interest* category at the end of the categorizing process. This process led to the creation of seven categories used in research question number two and research question number four. To categorize the responses about what students wanted to be when they grew up and what careers their parents currently had, I used the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2018) data on estimated incomes, the U.S. Poverty Guidelines (2020), and the IRS (2020) tax brackets for the year in which the data were collected. This

categorization process provided manageable information that could be used to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

I organized my collected data according to research questions. I created a spreadsheet with each of the research questions. I listed all the student responses underneath the specific research questions. I then categorized the data for each research question to determine the answers to each question.

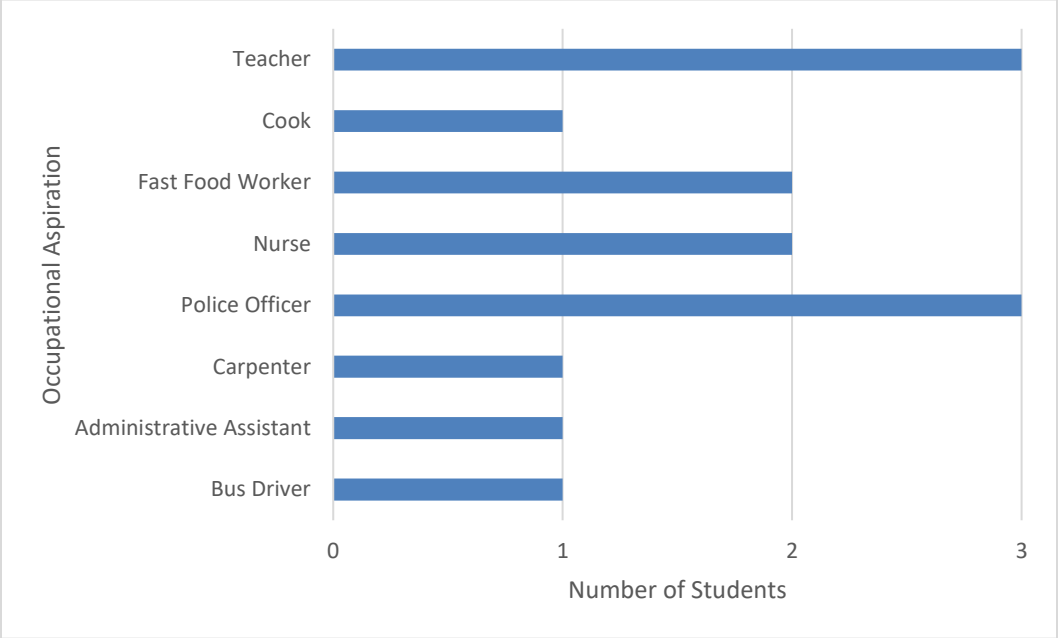
Research Question 1

Using one-on-one interviews, what were the occupational profiles of third-grade students' occupational aspirations and were there differences between students in a low SES school and a high SES school?

I interviewed 14 students from LSES and 14 students from HSES. When asked what their occupational aspirations were, the 14 students from LSES gave 8 different occupational aspirations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

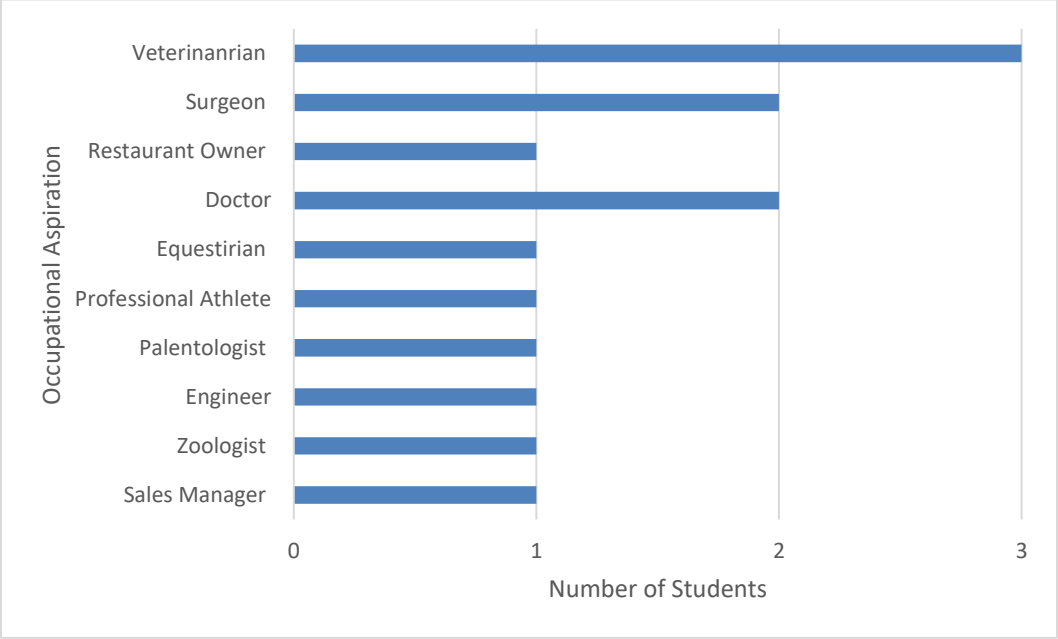
LSES Students' Occupational Aspirations



The 14 students from HSES named 10 different occupational aspirations (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

HSES Students' Occupational Aspirations



There were no matching occupational aspirations between the two schools.

I used the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics's (2018) average career incomes for the state in which the students resided during the study to determine the estimated salary of each child's occupational aspiration. The students from HSES were more likely to have occupational aspirations with higher incomes than students from LSES (see Table 1).

Table 1

Average, Lowest, and Highest Incomes for LSES and HSES

Incomes	LSES Students	HSES Students
Average Income	$45,530	$123,853
Lowest Income	$20,490	$29,220
Highest Income	$62,570	$271,680

The highest paid occupational aspiration for students from LSES was a nurse. The highest paid occupational aspiration for students from HSES was a surgeon. The lowest paid occupational aspiration for the students from LSES was a fast-food worker. The lowest paid occupational aspiration for students from HSES was an equestrian. The second lowest paid occupational aspiration from HSES was a restaurant owner with an average income of $56,310. Equestrian and restaurant owner were the only two occupational aspirations from HSES that would earn less than the highest occupational aspiration, nurse, from LSES. The other 12 students from HSES aspired to occupations that would earn more than $62,570, the highest occupational aspiration salary chosen by a student from LSES.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services's (2020) poverty guidelines, the poverty level for a single person, within the state in which the participants were living during the time of the study, was an income of $12,760 annually. No student at either school held an occupational aspiration that would earn less than the poverty threshold for a single person. According to the United States Federal Poverty Guidelines (2020), the poverty threshold for a household of three or more people was $21,720. Only two students from LSES aspired to occupations with an estimated income that would be below the poverty threshold for a household of three or more people if this were the only income for their household.

To better understand the differences in estimated salaries, I chose to group the salaries because some salaries were close in proximity. I used the income tax brackets determined by the IRS (2020) to group the estimated salaries. These tax

bracket groups allowed me to compare the estimated incomes of each participants' occupational aspiration. The tax bracket grouping also provided pre-determined minimum and maximum salaries for each group. According to the IRS (2020), there were seven tax brackets for the year in which the data were collected. Not all tax brackets were used because students did not aspire to occupations with estimated incomes that would fall into those brackets (see Table 2).

Table 2

Estimated Salaries for Students' Occupational Aspirations

Tax Bracket Number	Amounts of Money Made Per Year	Number of LSES Students	Number of HSES Students
1	Up to $9,875	0	0
2	$9,876 - $40,125	3	1
3	$40,126 - $85,525	11	3
4	$85,526 - $163,300	0	6
5	$163,301 - $207,350	0	2
6	$207,351 - $518,400	0	2
7	$518,400 and higher	0	0

There was a wide range of occupational profiles for third-grade students. In total, the 28 students at both schools listed 18 different occupational aspirations. Students from HSES held higher occupational aspirations than students from LSES. Twelve out of 14 students from HSES aspired to occupations that generally earned more than any of the occupations chosen by the

students from LSES. HSES also had 10 students with estimated incomes that would fall into higher tax brackets than the students from LSES.

Research Question 2

Using one-on-one interviews, how did third-grade students from a low SES school and a high SES school describe their parent(s)' career satisfaction?

I interviewed 14 students from LSES and 14 students from HSES about their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. When asked if they believed their parents liked their current career, 11 students from LSES stated they believed their parents liked their career and three students believed their parents did not enjoy their current careers. All 14 students from HSES stated they believed their parents liked their career. Of the 14 students from HSES, 12 were able to explain what they believed their parent enjoyed about their career. The other two students from HSES believed their parents liked their careers but were unsure why they thought their parents enjoyed their careers. Of the 11 students from LSES who believed their parents liked their career, seven of them were able to explain what they believed their parent enjoyed about their job. The other four students from LSES who did not know why their parents liked their career all said they assumed their parents liked their careers because their parents were always happy.

To categorize student responses for this research question, I summarized responses into short answers that gave the most important details of how participants believed their parents felt about their careers. One example of how I summed up students' responses was a student, Henderson, stated, "I think that my mom loves her job because she gets to help people feel better when they are sick

and doing that makes her feel good." I summarized this response into *helps people* because this was the most important detail of why this student believed his mother enjoyed her job. Another example of how I summarized a student response was a student, Leslie, who stated, "I think that she likes her job because she gets paid." I summarized this into *money* because this was the most important detail of why this student believed her parent enjoyed her job. These short summaries led to the creation of seven categories (see Table 3). There was some overlap in students' responses between the two schools.

Table 3

Students' Perceptions of Parents' Career Satisfaction

Parent's Reason for Liking Job	Number of LSES Students	Number of HSES Students
Do not like their job	3	0
Helps people	1	6
Fun/Interesting	0	5
Time off work	1	1
Make money	5	0
Assumed they liked their job because they are always happy	4	0
Other	0	1 – They just like it. 1 – I don't know why but I think she likes it.

There were two categories that included responses from students from both schools. They were *time off work* and *helps people*. While the category *time off work* had one response from both schools the category *helps people* had six responses from students attending HSES and one response from students attending LSES.

The majority of students from both schools believed their parents enjoyed their current careers. Of the 14 students attending LSES, 11 of them believed their parents liked their careers, and all 14 students from HSES believed their parents liked their careers. Five students from LSES believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers because they made money. This was the most frequent response of students from LSES. The second most frequent response of students attending LSES, with a total of four students, was they assumed their parents were happy with their careers because their parents were always happy at home. The majority, 11 out of 14, of the students attending HSES described their parents as enjoying their careers because they help people or because their career is fun and interesting.

Research Question 3

Using one-on-one interviews, how did the occupational aspirations of third-grade students' from both a low SES school and a high SES school compare to their perception of their parent(s)' career satisfaction?

To answer this research question, I compiled all the interview responses of students from LSES into one group and all the responses of students from HSES into another group. I used the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics' (2018) average career incomes for the state in which the students resided during the study to determine the estimated salary of each student's occupational aspiration. I repeated the same process to determine the estimated salary of each parent's current career. I then compared the estimated incomes of each students' occupational aspiration to the estimated income of their parents' current career. I charted the estimated incomes of students to parents by determining what

percentage students would make in comparison to their parents. There were four students, three from LSES and one from HSES, who had the same estimated income as their parents because they aspired to the same career as their parents (see Table 4).

Table 4

Students' Occupational Aspiration Income Compared to Parents' Income

Students' Income Percentage Compared to Parents' Income	Number of LSES Students	Number of HSES Students
200 to 250% more	0	3
150 to 199% more	1	1
100 to 149% more	3	3
50 to 99% more	0	3
1 to 49% more	5	0
Same	3	1
1 to 50% less	2	3

To determine if students would likely maintain their parents' current SES, I ranked the students' and parents' estimated incomes using the IRS (2020) tax brackets for the year in which the data were collected. I sorted the students from both schools into five groups. The first three groups were students whose occupational aspiration salaries would likely place them in a higher SES than their parents, the fourth group was students whose career aspiration would have them maintain a similar SES to their parents, and the fifth group was students who would likely have a lower SES than their parents. I determined the five groups by comparing if a student's estimated income for their chosen occupational aspiration put them in a higher, in the same, or in a lower tax bracket than their parent's estimated income for their current career. Most students, 21 out of 28,

aspired to an occupation that would maintain the same tax bracket or be in one tax bracket higher or lower than their parents. Some students aspired to occupations that would put them in a tax bracket that was two or three brackets higher than their parents; therefore, I made three groups for students who aspired to occupations with higher tax brackets than their parents (see Table 5).

Table 5

Students' Occupational Aspiration Tax Brackets Compared to Parents' Tax Brackets

Number of Tax Brackets Higher than Parents' Salaries	Number of Students from LSES	Number of Students from HSES
3 tax brackets higher	0	2
2 tax brackets higher	0	4
1 tax bracket higher	6	4
Same tax bracket as parents	8	2
1 tax bracket lower	0	2

There were three students who believed their parents were unhappy with their current occupation. All three of the students who stated their parents were unhappy with their current careers were from LSES, and they all aspired to occupations that would have higher salaries than their parents' current careers. Only one of these three students aspired to an occupation that put them in a higher tax bracket that their parent's current estimated salary. None of these three students chose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration.

To compare students' occupational aspirations to their parents' career satisfaction, I summarized students' responses about why their parents did or did not enjoy their careers into short answers that gave the most important details of

how participants believed their parents felt about their careers. These short summaries led to the creation of seven categories for parents' career satisfaction: *doesn't like job, makes money, time off work, helps people, happy at home, fun/interesting,* and *other*. I repeated the same categorizing process for students' responses to why they chose their occupational aspiration. This led to the creation of four categories for reasons for students' occupational aspirations: *helps people, fun/interesting, make money,* and *easy job*. Of these four categories, three of them overlapped with the seven categories for parents' career satisfaction: *helps people, fun/interesting,* and *makes money.* I then placed all this information into a table for comparison.

There were only seven students, one from LSES and six from HSES, whose reason for choosing an occupational aspiration matched the reasons why they believed their parents were satisfied with their careers. Nearly half, 6 out of 14, students from HSES chose an occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. Only one student from LSES chose their occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parent was satisfied with their current career. This reason was because they wanted to help people.

Students from both schools aspired to occupations with higher incomes than their parents' current careers at a similar rate, nine from LSES and 10 from HSES. No students from LSES aspired to occupations with lower salaries than their parents' current careers, but three students from HSES aspired to occupations with salaries less than their parents' current career. Of the nine students from LSES who aspired to occupations with higher salaries than their

parents' current careers, five of them aspired to occupations that would make between 1% and 50% more than their parents' current careers. Of the 10 students HSES who aspired to occupations with higher salaries than their parents' current careers, seven of them aspired to occupations that would make at least 50% more than their parents' current careers. Only one student from LSES choose their occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. Almost half, 6 out of 14, students from HSES chose their occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers.

Research Question 4

Using one-on-one interviews, was there a difference in how third-grade boys and third-grade girls from both schools described their occupational aspirations and their parent(s)' career satisfaction?

To answer this research question, I compiled all the responses from the girls from both schools into one group and all the responses from the boys from both schools into another group. I used the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistic's (2018) average career incomes for the state in which the students resided during the study to determine the estimated salary of each student's occupational aspiration. Overall, the girls were more likely to have occupational aspirations with higher incomes than the boys. The average estimated income for girls was $91,516. The average estimated income for boys was $77,866. The highest and lowest paid occupational aspirations for girls were a surgeon with an average income of $271,680 and an equestrian with an average income of $29,220. The highest and lowest paid occupational aspirations for boys were an orthopedic

doctor with an average income of $270,180 and a fast-food worker with an average income of $20,490.

To better understand the differences in estimated salaries, I chose to group the salaries because some salaries were close in proximity. I used the income tax brackets determined by the IRS (2020) to group the estimated salaries. These tax bracket groups allowed me to easily compare the estimated incomes of each student's occupational aspiration. The tax bracket grouping also provided pre-determined minimum and maximum salaries for each group. According to the IRS (2020), there were seven tax brackets for the year in which the data were collected. Not all tax brackets were used because students did not aspire to occupations with estimated incomes that would fall into those brackets (see Table 6).

Table 6

Students' Occupational Aspiration Income Tax Bracket

Tax Bracket Number	Amounts of Money Made Per Year	Number of Girls	Number of Boys
1	Up to $9,875	0	0
2	$9,876-$40,125	2	2
3	$40,126-$85,525	7	7
4	$85,526-$163,300	2	4
5	$163,301-$207,350	2	0
6	$207,351-$518,400	1	1
7	$518,400 and higher	0	0

The tax bracket grouping showed the estimated incomes for the occupational aspirations for girls and boys was nearly even with girls being slightly higher than boys. There did not seem to be any major differences in the estimated incomes of the occupational aspirations for boys or girls.

According to Gottfredson (1981), student in the third grade may still be likely to choose an occupational aspiration that is specific to their gender. To see if this held true in the current study, I used the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics' (2018) survey of the labor force statistics to establish if each student chose an occupational aspiration dominated by males or females. I categorized occupations following Smith and Koehoorn's (2016) classification system to determine if an occupation was highly female dominated (75% or more female), moderately female dominated (51%-74% female), moderately male dominated (51%-74% male), or highly male dominated (75% or more male). I then placed all the collected data into a spreadsheet (see Table 7).

Table 7

Gender Dominated Occupational Aspirations

Dominating Gender	Girls' Responses	Boys Responses
Highly Female Dominated	6	0
Moderately Female Dominated	3	3
Moderately Male Dominated	3	6
Highly Male Dominated	2	5

I also compared girls' and boys' reasons for choosing a specific occupational aspiration. To compare girls' and boys' reasons about why their chose their occupational aspiration, I placed all the girls' responses into a column on a spreadsheet and all the boys' responses into a column on the same spreadsheet. I then summarized each student's response into short answers. These short summaries led to the creation of four categories for why students chose an

occupational aspiration, *help others, fun/interesting, makes money,* and *it's an easy job.*

Out of the 28 students interviewed, 26 of them fell into one of two categories for why they chose their specific occupational aspiration. The two most stated reasons for choosing an occupational aspiration were *helping others* and because the occupation seemed *fun and interesting*. Of the 14 girls who were interviewed, 9 of them chose their occupational aspiration because they wanted to *help others*, while only 4 of the 14 boys who participated in the study chose their occupational aspiration because they wanted to help others. The majority of boys interviewed, 8 out of 14, chose their occupational aspiration because they claimed their chosen occupation was *fun and interesting* to them. Seven out of those eight boys also claimed they thought they would be good at the occupation they chose. Of the five girls who chose their occupational aspiration because they thought the career would be *fun and interesting*, three stated they believed they would be good at their chosen occupation. The only other reasons for choosing an occupational aspiration were wanting to *make money* and because the student felt *it's an easy job*. Both of these reasons were only stated by one student each and both of those students were boys.

To determine if there was a difference in how boys and girls described their parents' career satisfaction, I listed all the girls' responses in one column of a spreadsheet and all the boys' responses in a separate column on the same spreadsheet. I also gave each student a pseudonym that matched the school in which they attended. All the students who attended LSES were given a pseudonym that began with the letter L and all the students who attended HSES

were given a pseudonym that began with the letter H. I then categorized each group's responses to how they believed their parents' felt about their careers. I categorized the responses by first summarizing each student's response into short answers that gave the most important details of how students believed their parents felt about their careers. I then used these short answers to create categories. This led to the creation of seven categories. I then looked for similar categories throughout each group (see Table 8).

Table 8

Girls' and Boys' Perceptions of Their Parents Career Satisfaction

Parent's Reason for Liking Career	Girls with this Response	Boys with this Response
Do not like their job	Lindsey	Landon Lyle
Helps People	Harper Heidi Haley Lexi	Henderson Harrison Hendrix
Fun/Interesting	Helen Holly Heather Hannah	Hudson
Time Off Work	Laura	Hayden
Make Money	Leslie Lorelei Leah Lilly	Liam
Assumed They Liked Their Job Because They are Always Happy	None	Luke Logan Lincoln Lee
Other	None	Hunter

There was little difference in the estimated salaries of girls' and boys' occupational aspirations, although the girls did aspire to occupations that would make higher than boys with girls aspiring to occupations with an average income of $91,516 and boys aspiring to occupations with an average income of $77,866. Most girls, 9 out of 14, and most boys, 11 out of 14, chose an occupational aspiration that was dominated by their own gender. The majority of girls, 9 out of 14, aspired to their chosen occupation because they wanted to *help others*, while the majority of boys, 8 out of 14, aspired to their chosen occupation because they thought the occupation would be *fun/interesting*. All 13 girls who believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers were able to explain why they believed their parents were satisfied with their careers. Of the 12 boys who believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers, 8 were able to explain why they believed their parents were satisfied with their careers. The other four boys stated they assumed their parents were satisfied with their careers because their parents were happy when they at home but they did not know what their parents enjoyed about their careers.

Summary of Results

The occupational aspirations of students from HSES were generally higher than the occupational aspirations of students from LSES. Twelve out of 14 students from HSES chose occupational aspirations with higher salaries than the highest paid occupational aspiration of students from LSES. Girls had an average occupational aspiration salary of $91,516 and boys had an average occupational

aspiration salary of $77,866. Most girls, 9 out of 14, and most boys, 11 out of 14, chose an occupational aspiration that was dominated by their own gender. Twenty-five out of the 28 students interviewed, 11 from LSES and 14 from HSES, believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. The majority of students, nine from LSES and ten from HSES, aspired to occupations that would likely earn a higher income than their parents' current careers. Only four students, three from LSES and one from HSES, aspired to the same occupation as their parents. I have discussed the explanation of these results and connections to previous research in the following chapter.

Chapter V: Discussion of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction. This study helped to build on the foundation of knowledge concerning students' occupational aspirations and how students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction may be related to students' own occupational aspirations. I used a basic interpretive study, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), to understand third-grade students' descriptions of their own occupational aspirations and their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. Gutman et al. (2012) explained socio-economic status (SES) was the most reliable predictor in determining a student's occupational aspiration. Gottfredson (1981) claimed students were likely to choose an occupational aspiration that would maintain their current SES, and students' occupational aspirations were impacted by the careers of those around them. Researchers have stated students choose their parents career as their own occupational aspiration at a rate significantly above chance (Holmes et al., 2017; Moulton et al., 2015; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) also claimed students were more likely to choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration if they believed their parents were happy with their career. Schmitt-Wilson (2013) additionally claimed even if students did not choose their parents' career as a future occupational aspiration, students often chose an occupational aspiration that maintained the same SES of their parents.

In the current study, I compared the occupational aspirations of third-grade students from LSES and the occupational aspirations of students from HSES. I then compared students' descriptions of their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I also compared the occupational aspirations and perceptions of parents' career satisfaction of girls and boys from both schools. The findings of this research were similar to the findings of previous researchers.

According to Gottfredson (1981), in the theory of circumscription and compromise, students in the third grade were likely to aspire to occupations that would maintain their current SES. Gutman et al. (2012) further stated SES was the most significant predictor of students' occupational aspirations. Moulton et al. (2015) also found students from high SES homes had higher occupational aspirations than students from low SES homes. I concluded, from the current study, students who attended a HSES had higher occupational aspirations than students who attended LSES. This finding coincided with Byun et al.'s (2017) finding that families in low SES homes were more likely to send their children to schools whose students had lower aspirations. Bozick et al. (2010) claimed this phenomenon was not caused by a single factor but by the combination of social and school environments.

Students in elementary school often aspire to their parents' careers (Moulton et al., 2015). Other researchers have stated that students aspire to their parents' careers at a rate significantly above chance (Holland, 1962; Holmes et al., 2017; Schmitt-Wilson, 2013; Werts & Watley, 1972). I did not find students aspired to their parents' careers as frequently as other researchers have stated; however, this could be because of differences in population or sample sizes.

Through my findings, I confirmed students often aspire to careers that would maintain the current SES of their parents.

According to Watson et al. (2011), students did not choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration without first considering if they believe their parents are happy with their career choices. Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) explained students who believed their parents to be highly satisfied with their careers were more likely to choose their parents' career as their own occupational aspiration than students who did not perceive their parents to be happy with their careers. I also found the four students, three from LSES and one from HSES, who chose their parents' careers as their own occupational aspirations believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers.

Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) also stated children in low SES homes may be more likely to believe their parents are dissatisfied with their careers than students from high SES homes, but this issue needed to be researched further. I found 11 students from LSES and 14 students from HSES believed their parents were satisfied with their careers. My finding showed the majority of students from LSES believed their parents were satisfied with their careers. This did not coincide with Trice and Tillapaugh's (1991) finding. One thing to consider, however, was my research was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many people lost their jobs and unemployment rates were high. It was possible parents who, under other circumstances, may have been dissatisfied with their careers were, during the time of the research, satisfied with their careers because they considered themselves lucky to still be employed.

I found students from HSES were more likely to choose an occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers, than students from LSES. Of the 14 students from HSES, 6 of them chose an occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. Students from LSES were unlikely to choose an occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. Only one student from LSES chose an occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parent was happy with their current career. This could be because students from LSES believed their parents to be happy with their careers but also were less likely than their high SES peers to know why their parents were satisfied with their careers. Even students who believed their parents were dissatisfied with their current careers were still likely to choose an occupational aspiration that would maintain a similar SES as their parents. Even when students did not aspire to their parents' careers, they often aspired to a career that maintained the same SES of their parents (Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). I found this statement to be true. Although third-grade students from both LSES and HSES aspired to occupational aspirations that earned higher salaries than their parents' current careers, the increases in salary often kept students within the same SES as their parents. Of the 28 students interviewed, 22 of them chose and occupational aspiration that placed them in the same tax bracket or one tax bracket higher or lower than their parents' current careers.

According to Holmes et al. (2017), SES was not the only reliable predictor of occupational aspirations, but gender also played an important role in choosing

an occupational aspiration. Moulton et al. (2018) claimed children understood gender stereotypes by the age of seven. Gottfredson (1981) stated children would start choosing gender specific occupational aspirations as early as age six. I found third-grade children, who were approximately nine years old, were more likely to choose gender specific occupational aspirations. Third-grade students who did choose occupations dominated by the opposite gender chose occupations that were only moderately dominated (51% - 71%) by the opposite gender.

Watts et al. (2015) studied male and female adolescents and claimed girls had higher occupational aspirations than boys. Lee and Rojewski (2009) studied students over a 12-year period beginning in eighth grade and stated girls held higher aspirations than boys but only prior to high school graduation. I found third-grade girls and boys were similar in their occupational aspirations but girls had slightly higher occupational aspirations. The difference in my findings and Lee and Rojewski's findings could be the difference in the age of participants. Lee and Rojewski (2009) claimed girls' aspirations tended to increase through middle and high school. I only focused on third-grade students, so these girls could potentially raise their occupational aspirations as they grew older.

Weisgram et al. (2010) stated girls chose an occupational aspiration while boys tended to seek careers that provided power and wealth. I found this held true for third-grade girls. Third-grade girls most often chose an occupational aspiration that allowed them to help others. I did not find, however, third-grade boys sought power and wealth when choosing and occupational aspiration. I found third-grade boys chose occupational aspirations based on interest. The difference in findings here could have been due to the difference in participants. The findings in this

research could be used by educators to help increase students' occupational aspirations and by researchers to conduct further studies.

Implications for Practice

The findings from my study could be used in practice to help educators better understand the foundations for their students' occupational aspirations. Khattab (2015) claimed being knowledgeable of students' occupational aspirations could lead to better predictions of students' future performance. I found third-grade students from LSES were likely to aspire to occupations that maintained the same or close to the same SES as their parents' current SES. Trice (1991) claimed this likely occurred because occupational aspirations were related to career exposure. This meant students from low SES homes were only exposed to low SES career options, while students from high SES homes were exposed to high SES career options. Holmes et al. (2017) explained students were unable to aspire to occupations of which they had no knowledge. Educators and counselors working in low SES schools could use this knowledge to implement career education into their curriculum. Providing low SES students with knowledge about occupations outside of their own SES could potentially encourage them to set higher occupational aspirations.

I found third-grade girls had slightly higher occupational aspirations than boys. Other researchers have shown as girls age, they continue to have higher occupational aspirations that their male peers and this trend continues until college (Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Watts et al., 2015). Ayman and Korbik (2010) believed this lowering of aspirations in young women could be caused by corporate practices that do not provide flexibility in having a family. Since girls

highly valued careers that supported family values (Weisgram et al. 2010), young women would lower their aspirations during college and early adulthood (Ayman and Korbik, 2010). My research showed third-grade girls clearly had similar, and somewhat higher, aspirations than boys. If girls' aspirations were being downsized as they age because girls are becoming aware of the difficulties of raising a family and maintaining their occupational aspirations, then business owners and managers should provide more flexible working conditions to their employees. Providing women with more flexibility in the work place could open more prestigious career opportunities for women, who otherwise may have chosen a different career path that favored family values. Corporations should also consider providing flexibility to women in the work force, as making policies that are beneficial to men and not women could potentially deprive those organizations of highly skilled women.

I found both third-grade boys and third-grade girls were more likely to choose a profession that was dominated by their own gender. To help students realize they are free to choose an occupational aspiration no matter their gender, teachers and school counselors should implement career education programs that bring community leaders and workers into the classrooms to teach students about various careers. Community leaders should focus on sending people into the schools who work in careers that are dominated by the opposite gender. Allowing girls to meet with women working in the field of computer science and allowing boys to see men working in a nursing career may help to show students they do not need to be held to gender stereo-types when choosing an occupational aspiration.

Recommendations for Future Research

Lee and Rojewski (2009) claimed girls, in middle and high school, had higher occupational aspirations than their male peers, but then girls' aspirations dropped after entering college. I only focused on third-grade students and found girls and boys occupational aspirations were similar in prestige. Future studies should be conducted with children in other grade levels. It would be beneficial to conduct a larger study including students from elementary school all the way through high school to determine if and when a deficit appeared between boys' and girls' aspirations and if this potential deficit continued to increase or decrease with the age of the students.

I found it interesting that only one student in the current study aspired to a rare occupational aspiration. This student was a boy from HSES who aspired to be a professional athlete. According to Moulton et al. (2018), there was a rising number of male youths who aspire to rare occupations such as professional athletes, movie stars, or pop singers. Blackhurst and Auger (2008) attributed this to the U.S. culture's emphasis on wealth and fame. I found the majority of third-grade boys aspired to realistic occupations, and third-grade boys aspired to occupations they believed would be fun or interesting. I did not find third-grade boys placed emphasis on making money as a reason for enjoying a career. Future researchers should conduct studies with larger populations and in different regions to determine if boys' occupational aspirations are realistic and what motivates boys to choose their occupational aspirations.

The current study only looked at students' perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. I did not take into consideration how parents actually felt

about their current careers. It would be beneficial for other researchers to conduct a study in which parents were also interviewed about their career satisfaction. A study which compared parents' actual career satisfaction and students' perception of their parents' career satisfaction could provide more insight on how parents' careers impact students' occupational aspirations.

Trice and Tillapaugh (1991) also studied third-grade students' perceptions of their parents' current career satisfaction. Since the completion of Trice and Tillapaugh's study in 1991, other researchers compared students' aspirations to their parents' careers but did not take into account students' perceptions of parental career satisfaction (Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2008; Holmes et al., 2017). I found the majority of third-grade students, 25 out of 28, believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study with students from other grade levels to determine if my findings remained true with students of various ages.

According to Watson et al. (2011), researchers had confounded race and SES. Mello (2009) also claimed far too many researchers claimed minority students had lower occupational aspirations than their white peers but this information was inaccurate because the researchers confounded race and SES. This meant when researchers studied the occupational aspirations of students with varying racial backgrounds, the minority students in the study were all from low SES homes, while all the white students in the study were from high SES homes. This caused confusion if the low aspirations of minority students were influenced by their race or by their SES. I was unable to research race because the population of third-grade students within HSD would also have confounded race and SES. In

HSD, the majority of minority students attended low SES schools while the high SES schools were composed of predominately white students. It would be beneficial to researchers to study a low SES school and a high SES school in which minority students were properly represented. This would allow researchers to properly compared the occupational aspirations of students of different races.

Conclusions of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide insight on how students living in low SES communities and students living in high SES communities described their occupational aspirations and how students perceived their parents' career satisfaction. I used a qualitative research design to interview 14 students from LSES and 14 students from HSES about their occupational aspirations and their perceptions of their parents' career satisfaction. Using their responses to the interview questions I created categories that I used to answer each of the four research questions. I developed the following conclusions from my analysis on the results.

I concluded, from the current study, students who attended a HSES had higher occupational aspirations than students who attended LSES. I found students from HSES were more likely than students from LSES to choose an occupational aspiration for the same reason they believed their parents were satisfied with their current careers. I also found third-grade girls and third-grade boys had similar occupational aspirations, with girls holding only slightly higher occupational aspirations than boys. I additionally found that third-grade students did not aspire to occupations based on a desire for wealth; instead third-grade students aspired to occupations that allowed them to help others or occupations

that they perceived as interesting. I also concluded both third-grade girls and third-grade boys, most often, chose occupations that were dominated by their own gender. This study showed third-grade students had solid occupational aspirations. May we as a society set the bar high for students' aspirations and provide the encouragement and support they need to achieve their dreams.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Hello,

My name is Mrs. Corum. I am here to find out about what kinds of jobs kids want to have when they grow up. Your parents have already said you can answer some questions for me if you want to. If you want to stop at any time just tell me and we will stop. You don't have to answer any questions that you don't feel like answering. If you don't understand a question, let me know and I will explain it. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. I will be recording our conversation but no one but me will hear what you say. Do you have any questions? Would you like to continue?

Interview Questions

1) What has been your favorite part of your day today?
2) What did you have for lunch today?
3) Tell me about your school.
4) What adults do you live with in your home?
5) What is your parent's job?
6) What does your parent say about their job?
7) How do you think your parents feel about their job?
8) What job do you want to have when you grow up?
9) Why would the job you choose be a good career to have as an adult

Appendix B

Parent's Permission Form

Dear Parents,

Your child's school has been selected to participate in a research study about students' career aspirations. The Henry County School District and your child's principal have already approved this research study. This research study is about what jobs students want to have when they grow up and also about what students think about their parents' current careers. If you choose for your child to participate in the research study then he/she will participate in a short interview session that will last approximately 5-10 minutes. The interview will not interfere with your child's learning time and will not impact your child's grade or classroom standing. During the interview your child will be asked about what job he/she would like to have as an adult and also what he/she knows about their parent's current career. Your child is not required to participate in the interview but may choose to do so with your permission. All information gathered during the interviews will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone at your child's school. If you would like a copy of the interview questions being used during the interview please contact Mrs. Corum at Tiffany.Corum@lmunet.edu. Mrs. Corum is a doctoral student at Lincoln Memorial University who is conducting this research as part of her dissertation for LMU. If you would like for your child to participate in the research study click below to begin filling out the permission form.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Corum (Researcher) – Contact E-mail: Tiffany.Corum@lmunet.edu

Dr. Julia Kirk (Supervising Professor) – Contact E-mail: Julia.Kirk@lmunet.edu

Dr. Kay Parris (IRB Chair) – Contact E-mail: Kay.Paris@lmunet.edu

Question 1) What is your child's first and last name?

Question 2) Who is your child's homeroom teacher?

Question 3) Please list the occupations of the parents living in your child's household.

Question 4) If you or your child wish to withdrawal from the study at any point during the research study you have the right to do so. If you give permission for your child to participate in the research, study please type your full name below and press "Done."

Appendix C

Digital Message to Parents

Dear Parents,

Your child's school has been selected to participate in a research study about students' career aspirations. The Henry County School District and your child's principal have already approved this research study. This research study is about what jobs students want to have when they grow up and also about what students think about their parents' current careers. If you choose for your child to participate in the research study then he/she will participate in a short interview session that will last approximately 5-10 minutes. The interview will not interfere with your child's learning time and will not impact your child's grade or classroom standing. During the interview your child will be asked about what job he/she would like to have as an adult and also what he/she knows about their parent's current career. Your child is not required to participate in the interview but may choose to do so with your permission. All information gathered during the interviews will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone at your child's school. If you would like a copy of the interview questions being used during the interview please contact Mrs. Corum at Tiffany.Corum@lmunet.edu. Mrs. Corum is a doctoral student at Lincoln Memorial University who is conducting this research as part of her dissertation for LMU. If you would like for your child to participate in the research study, please go to the link below and fill out the permission form.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LQNLYFF

Students whose parents do not fill out the online permission form will not be interviewed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Corum (Doctoral Student Researcher) – Contact E-mail:

Tiffany.Corum@lmunet.edu

Dr. Julia Kirk (Supervising Professor) – Contact E-mail: Julia.Kirk@lmunet.edu

Dr. Kay Parris (IRB Chair) – Contact E-mail: Kay.Paris@lmunet.edu