July 2015

# Getting Ahead: Socio-economic Mobility, Perceptions of Opportunity for Socio-economic Mobility, and Attitudes Towards Public Assistance in the United States

Alissa Klein
*University of South Florida*, aklein2@mail.usf.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the Public Policy Commons, Social Psychology Commons, and the Sociology Commons

Getting Ahead: Socio-economic Mobility, Perceptions of Opportunity for Socio-economic

Mobility, and Attitudes Towards Public Assistance in the United States


by


Alissa Klein


A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Sociology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida


Major Professor: John Skvoretz, Ph.D.
Donileen Loseke, Ph.D.
Maralee Mayberry, Ph.D.


Date of Approval:
July 20, 2015

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

# LIST OF FIGURES

# **ABSTRACT**

In this research I first examine how Americans' perceptions of what it takes to get ahead are influenced by their income and then compare those perceptions to measured levels of intergenerational socio-economic mobility. By better understanding these relationships I hope to gain insight into the paths people see to upward mobility, how this varies by income, and to what extent this belief is reflected in past mobility measurements. Additionally, I compare perceptions of what it takes to get ahead with responses regarding attitudes towards public assistance. The results of such a comparison could have important implications for public policy.

The results reveal that there is a significant correlation between income and views of what it takes to get ahead with those at higher income levels perceiving greater levels of opportunity for mobility. Perceptions of opportunity for mobility appear high across all incomes relative to previous measurements of mobility. However, the low income group perceived less opportunity than the middle income group which reflects the pattern of measured levels of mobility. Also, views on the importance of educated parents and working hard are significant predictors of attitudes on public assistance. Belief in the less meritocratic indicators was associated with support for public assistance while belief in the more meritocratic indicators was associated with opposition.

## CHAPTER ONE:

## INTRODUCTION

The promise of upward mobility, of getting ahead, has been an important part of the image of the United States since its inception, but is that promise being kept? Such opportunity is the central tenet of the American Dream, but has the dream faded? The idea that rags to riches is possible, that great success is attainable for those sufficiently determined, runs deep enough in the public consciousness that it is a common theme in popular fiction as well as political rhetoric (Page and Jacobs 2009; Kraus and Tan 2015). The questions are about who holds these beliefs, who experiences this type of mobility, and how those beliefs impact public policy views.

Using perception data collected as part of the 2010 General Social Survey (Smith et al. 2010) for the 2009 International Social Survey Program's Social Inequality Module (ISSP 2012), I examine how Americans' perceptions of what it takes to get ahead are influenced by their income. To put these perceptions into proper perspective, I then compare those perceptions to measured levels of intergenerational mobility for different income groups. Finally, I compare the responses on perceptions of what it takes to get ahead with responses regarding attitudes towards spending on public assistance. The intent of this final step is to examine the extent to which Americans who see the United States as more meritocratic with greater possibility for socio-economic mobility (SEM) through individual effort and accomplishment are less likely to

support public assistance. Previous research has found related links (Guetzkow 2010; Katz 2013), but the goal of this present research is to add to the existing body of literature though analysis of this highly appropriate and robust data set not previously used in this way. Also less common in the existing literature is investigation of how perceptions of economic mobility may be linked to the typical intergenerational mobility patterns of individuals at different levels of income.

The goal of this research is to answer the following questions.

RQ1A: Is there a relationship between income and perception of opportunity for socio-economic mobility?

RQ1B: How do perceptions of opportunity for socio-economic mobility compare to measured levels of mobility at each level of income?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between perceptions of socio-economic mobility and attitudes towards public assistance?

RQ1A will allow me to determine if Americans' relatively high average perceptions of mobility could be masking lower perceived levels in lower income groups as Jäntti et al. (2006) suggest and Griffith (2001) argues. RQ1B gives context to RQ1A. Only by comparing perceptions to the levels of mobility found in previous research does it become possible to understand if the perceptions are out of sync with levels of mobility in the way that Jäntti et al. (2006) and Griffith (2001) state. The features of these relationships have important implications for sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. One of the most immediate practical applications for this information, however, is related specifically to public policy. With RQ2 I will begin to explore this. Individuals' beliefs or perceptions drive their actions; perception is reality. Jäntti et al. (2006) suggest that an over perception of mobility could be responsible for a lack of political pressure for policies that would facilitate mobility. To determine if this is possible I will look for

a relationship between perceptions of what it takes to get ahead and attitudes towards spending on public assistance. If those who strongly believe mobility is possible through individual effort are more likely to oppose spending on public assistance, then what Jäntti et al. (2006) suggest is possible.

Limited socio-economic mobility is positively correlated with higher rates of inequality (Björklund and Jäntti 1997; Solon 2004; Corak 2006; d'Addio 2007; Andrews and Leigh 2009; Causa and Johnson 2010; Corak 2013; cf. Torche 2015), yet Americans are more willing to accept high levels of inequality because of the promise of mobility (Shepelak 1987; Fields and Ok 1999; Benabou and Ok 2001; Bartels 2005; Isaacs, Sawhill, and Haskins 2008; Page and Jacobs 2009; Arawatari and Ono 2013; Corak 2013; Obama 2013; Stiglitz 2015; Davidai and Gilovich 2015). Both represent significant social problems that have deleterious effects not just on those with lower socio-economic status (SES), but on society at large (Persson and Tabellini 1994: Alesina, Di Tella, and MacCulloch 2004; Collins and Yeskel 2005; Stiglitz 2012; Stiglitz 2015). With higher levels of inequality economic growth is hindered (Persson and Tabellini 1994). Highly unequal societies are inefficient as well as economically unstable and unsustainable (Stiglitz 2012). One of the reasons for this inefficiency and stifled growth according to Joseph Stiglitz (2012) is that "Whenever we diminish equality of opportunity, we are not using one of our most valuable assets—our people—in the most productive way possible" (P. 117). Another aspect of the human cost is that with higher levels of inequality, people are less likely to report that they are happy even when controlling for income (Alesina et al. 2004). While some aspects of the relationship between mobility and inequality are complex, their negative correlation to each other and consequences for a society are well established.

3

While socio-economic mobility, or the opportunity for it, has been researched extensively, there are questions raised by such research that remain unanswered about how people perceive mobility, what shapes those perceptions, and how those perceptions influence public policy opinions. There are a few strongly related, but still distinct areas of research importance here. First is differentiation between types of mobility, followed by issues in measurement of mobility, and then established levels of mobility in the United States. Next is inequality as it relates to mobility and then an international comparison of perceived and measured mobility before a more detailed discussion of American perceptions of mobility and opportunity for mobility. This is followed by concepts more directly related to public assistance including the American Dream and social construction of deservingness. These issues are important worldwide, but the American Dream, the idea that anyone has the opportunity for advancement through hard work, is engrained in the American psyche in a way that adds an important cultural dimension to such research on the United States.

## CHAPTER TWO:

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Socio-economic Mobility

#### Types of Socio-economic Mobility

Mobility as used here should be understood as upward or downward movement through socio-economic strata. Unless otherwise stated, the focus is on intergenerational mobility, the difference in SES attainment of parents compared to their children. This should not be confused with intragenerational mobility, the change in SES that people may experience within their adult lives. The mobility discussed in this research also refers to relative mobility, a change in SES such as moving from the working class to the middle class. This is different from absolute mobility which results from widespread economic upturns or downturns but not any change in relative position on the income ladder (Isaacs et al. 2008; Noah 2012). This issue is complicated by changes in income inequality that can allow widespread economic fluctuations to impact those at different income levels in unequal ways. As an example, however, if an economic boom allows the children of parents in the 60% income percentile to earn more than their parents, for example, they experience absolute upward mobility but not relative mobility if they remain near the 60th income percentile because average incomes have risen across the board. Another important distinction to make with regard to mobility depends on whether the strata are defined

with respect to wealth or income. Though wealth may be a better indicator of SES than income, out of necessity most mobility research is based on income or even occupation (usually as measured by a scale of occupational prestige) due to data limitations. Wealth data may be less available and harder to collect than income data, but it is a concern primarily when looking at the uppermost income quintiles where it is concentrated (Piketty 2014).

The difference between opportunity for mobility and actual or experienced mobility is also important, but somewhat more difficult to address. The two are often used interchangeably with the levels of mobility found assumed to be indicative of the level of opportunity for mobility. However, it should be noted that this relationship between mobility and opportunity for mobility is not accepted by all (see Jenks and Tach 2006). One possible source of controversy is differing definitions or understandings of equal opportunity (Roemer 2000). The relationship between experienced mobility and opportunity for mobility will be discussed further in the Results and Discussion section.

**Measuring Mobility**

Mobility, or the absence of mobility called elasticity, transmission, persistence (of status), or stickiness is difficult to measure. Though there are noteworthy currents within this area, different methods of research on mobility have yielded meaningfully different results regarding both levels and trends (Fields and Ok 1999; Jantti et al. 2006; Causa and Johnson 2010; Amiel et al 2015). Causa and Johnson (2010) note the complexity of the issue, the absence of an objective or easy to compare benchmark, and that "no single indicator provides a complete picture" (P. 3). The range and complexity of methodological choices in mobility research as well

as the sensitivity of the results to those choices (Isaacs et. al 2008) reduces the number of reliable results (Hauser 1998) and makes comparing the results of different studies precarious. For example, Beller and Hout (2006) as well as Lee and Solon (2009) express doubts about the findings in the earlier work of Becker and Tomes (1986). Becker and Tomes' (1986) found very high levels of mobility concluding "Almost all the earnings advantages or disadvantages of ancestors are wiped out in three generations" (P. 25). This finding remained largely unopposed until research published in 1992 by Solon suggested there was far less mobility than previously found. The studies that followed typically found results closer to those of Solon (1992), than those of Becker and Tomes (1986). It was suggested that this was not indicative of a change in levels of mobility, but rather that the earlier results were the product of flawed methods (Solon 1992, 2009; Beller and Howt 2006).

The elasticity of intergenerational income has already been thoroughly researched (Blanden 2013), but the immense difficulty and complexity of measuring such mobility has led to inconsistencies (Fields and Ok 1999; Lee and Solon 2009) that cloud the issue. Furthermore, there are aspects of mobility that are underrepresented in the literature. Average levels of income persistence or elasticity for a country as well as international comparisons are so numerous that I could not hope or dare to include all of them here. To a lesser extent studies of mobility trends over time are also well represented. For the United States there is less research, however, about variations in intergenerational mobility based on sex, race, income, region, and other characteristics.

**Levels of Mobility in the United States**

Though levels of mobility found vary for the reasons previously discussed, one of the lower reliable estimates is an average of 40% mobility (elasticity 0.6) across all income groups (Mazumder 2005) and on the high end 70% (Chetty et al 2014a, 2014b). Mazumder (2005) claims he found highest level of elasticity, or lowest level of mobility, because he is using more recent data than most from social security records. When he applied his methods to earlier data from another source he got results more similar to earlier studies implying that his methods where not the cause of the discrepancy, but rather that the more recent data revealed higher levels of elasticity than previously existed.

Since how to measure the level of mobility is a challenging and somewhat controversial arena, attempts to identify its trends overtime are even more so. There is a noteworthy amount of research suggesting that levels of mobility are essentially stable (Hertz 2007; Lee and Solon 2009; Chetty et al. 2014a, 2014b) as well decreasing (Auten and Gee 2009; Bradbury 2011; Noah 2012). Understandably, there are also some who say the muddled results suggest that there is no clear trend or that a definitive statement cannot be made due to contradictory results (Isaacs et. al 2008; Torche 2015). It is significant that there does not appear to be any research suggesting an overall increase.

Regarding current levels of SEM, the United States is typically found to have lower levels than comparable countries (Jäntti et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008; Bengali and Daly 2013), but what those levels are and the direction in which they are going is more controversial. There is a substantial body of work suggesting that mobility has declined (Bradbury and Katz 2002; Hungerford 2008; Bradbury 2011; Corak 2013), while others suggest an increase (U.S.

8

Department of Treasury 1992a, 1992b). There are also studies that have found levels of mobility in recent decades to be stagnant (McMurrer and Sawhill 1996; Acs and Zimmerman 2008; Auten 2009). Some of these discrepancies can be explained by differences in the period of time examined and other methodological differences (Solon 1992, Erikson and Goldthorpe 2002). An example of a sampling choice that could result in such difference is the limitation of the age group included. The lower the upper limit placed on age for the sample, the higher the level of mobility found (Carroll, Joulfaian, and Rider 2006; Auten 2009).

Though income is the demographic variable most central to this research, there are of course many other indicators that research has shown to impact mobility. There is a focus on fathers and sons because of the longitudinal nature of data required for mobility studies and issues with women's labor force participation (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). This is more defensible in earlier work, but is becoming less so (Blanden 2013). One way to avoid the issue altogether is to use family income (Torche 2015). As an added benefit family income where it refers to the immediate family is preferable over individual income because it better indicator of SES (Mazumder 2005). However, this does not eliminate the need for research comparing the intricacies of mobility trends of sons and daughters since differences have been found (Jäntti et al. 2006; Causa and Johnson 2010). There is also a clear race based mobility gap. In multiple studies Americans identified as black have shown less upward mobility than those identified as white (Hertz 2005; Isaacs et. al 2008; Currier 2012; Economic Mobility Project 2012; Mazumder 2014). There is less research on location or geography, but what has been done has found location to be a significant factor determining levels of mobility (Chetty et al 2014c).

Since levels of mobility vary between people of different SES, reporting the results broken down into income quintiles, for example, gives a far different impression than an average for all income levels (Jäntti et al. 2006). For this and other reasons to be addressed, this work includes a focus on differences in responses based on the income of the respondent. Of the large number of studies on mobility in the United States only a small subset of those using data from a period ending in the last 20 years produced income specific results.

A group of economists at the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Tax Analysis used tax returns from 1981 to 1995 to look at intragenerational mobility. They found that in the lowest quintile 54% were able to move up leaving 46% remaining there (Carroll et al. 2006). They also found that 53% of those in the highest quintile in 1981 were still there in 1995 meaning 47% fell below (Carroll et al. 2006). Regarding extreme mobility, 4% of people from the bottom income quintile moved to the top during this period, and 7.5% from the top fell to the bottom (Carroll et al. 2006).

Jäntti et al. (2006) used data from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth which included people born between 1957 and 1964 and compared family income from that time to children's earnings in adulthood for the years 1995 and 2001. Looking only at males only, they found that over 40% of those born into the bottom quintile stayed there (60% mobility), while over 36% stayed in the top quintile (64% mobility). They point out an incongruity between the levels of mobility they found and the perception of mobility in the United States in particular among the other countries in their study. They speculate that Americans' perceptions of SEM may be skewed upward because of higher levels of upward mobility experienced by the middle class. Specifically they suggest that knowledge of this mobility, either from experiencing or

witnessing it, might be overgeneralized to create the perception that it is more common than it actually is among all socio-economic strata (Jäntti et al. 2006).

A report released by the Brookings Institute in 2008 used data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics collected beginning in 1968 with people ages 0-18 and followed until 2004. Brookings produced the stickiness numbers taking the mean of family income from 1967-1971 and comparing it to the mean of the family income of the children, now adults, in five selected years in the 1990s and 2000s (Isaacs et al. 2008). They found a stickiness rate of 42% for the lowest income quintile meaning 58% chance of upward mobility into a higher quintile (Isaacs et al. 2008). They characterized these as "twice as high as would be expected by chance" (Isaacs et al. 2008:4).  They described the middle income group including the second, third, and fourth quintiles as having "roughly an equal shot at moving up or moving down and of ending up in a different income quintile than their parents" (Isaac et al. 2008:4). For the top income quintile they found the level of stickiness to be 39% leaving a 61% chance of downward mobility into a lower quintile (Isaacs et al. 2008).


**Income Inequality as it Relates to Mobility**

The question of mobility levels and trends may remain less than settled, but there is a general consensus that inequality is on the rise in recent decades (Morris and Western 1999; Piketty and Saez 2003; Collins and Yeskel 2005; Gottschalk and Danziger 2005; McCall 2005; Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Bartels 2008; Goldin and Katz 2008; Isaacs et. al 2008; Kelly and Enns 2010; Page and Jacobs 2009; Xu and Garand 2010; Stiglitz 2012; Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2015). Though this has not happened without consternation, the promise of mobility looms large and

makes it more palatable (Shepelak 1987; Fields and Ok 1999; Benabou and Ok 2001; Bartels 2005; Isaacs et al. 2008; Page and Jacobs 2009; Arawatari and Ono 2013; Corak 2013; Obama 2013; Stiglitz 2015; Davidai and Gilovich 2015). This valuation is not some less-than-conscious ideological undercurrent either; it is a feature, not a bug. In a 2013 speech President Barack Obama put it plainly,

> We've often accepted more income inequality than many other nations for one big reason -- because we were convinced that America is a place where even if you're born with nothing, with a little hard work you can improve your own situation over time and build something better to leave your kids. As Lincoln once said, 'While we do not propose any war upon capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with everybody else' (2013).

This is not tacit approval, but rather open endorsement of this bargain. One problem with accepting inequality as long as mobility remains robust is the negative correlation between the two (Björklund and Jäntti 1997; Solon 2004; Corak 2006; d'Addio 2007; Andrews and Leigh 2009; Causa and Johnson 2010; Corak 2013; cf. Torche 2015). The president addressed this also in the same speech. "This is the defining challenge of our time ... The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American Dream, our way of life, and what we stand for around the globe" (Obama 2013).

Americans' acceptance of inequality cannot be traced to ideology alone but rather is rooted in complex political power relations that stretch back to the founding of the nation (Thompson 2007). Chetty et al. (2014b) suggest that trends in income and mobility have a complex interaction. They state, "Although rank-based measures of mobility remained stable,

income inequality increased over time in our sample, consistent with prior work.  Hence, the consequences of the 'birth lottery' – the parents to whom a child is born – are larger today than in the past" (Chetty et al. 2014b:141). Though the relationship between income and perceptions of mobility is limited, perceptions of inequality have been more thoroughly explored. From such research it is clear that factors like income do have an impact on perceptions of inequality (Alesina et al. 2004; Xu and Garand 2010). This suggests a relationship between income and perceptions of mobility or opportunity for mobility is also possible.

**International Comparison**

Adding another layer of complexity to the study of mobility and inequality in the United States is the growing wealth divide and stagnation of wages (Noah 2012). As a social problem this makes mobility research all the more important, but at the same time can make it more challenging for studies of the U.S. and international comparisons.  In international comparisons, the United States is often measured against nations such as Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. However, some researchers have added a caveat to the results of such work regarding income differences. If two countries have income distributions dissimilar enough, then even if their mobility levels are similar, outcomes for people in those countries can still be very different (Jäntti et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008; Blanden 2013; Corak, Lindquist, and Mazumder 2014). Corak et al. (2014) find that

> It may be the case that moving 10 percentiles from the bottom of the earnings distribution is significantly more meaningful in the U.S. in terms of living standards than a comparable move in Sweden. For example, we find that upward mobility plays a much

larger role in the U.S. in terms of keeping an individual out of poverty than in Canada and Sweden (P. 19).

While international comparisons of mobility are still meaningful and important, they must be interpreted in the context of the differing income distributions of the countries in question. Despite such findings Americans perceive high levels of mobility or opportunity for mobility compared to economically comparable countries (ISSP 2001; Isaacs et. al 2008; ISSP 2012). That higher perceived level of mobility does not appear to be paralleled by higher levels of actual mobility (Jäntti et al. 2006; d'Addio 2007; Isaacs et al. 2008; Causa and Johnson 2010; Noah 2012; Bengali and Daly 2013; Bjørnskov et al. 2013; Corak 2013; Mazumder 2014; Kraus and Tan 2015). It is possible that because the U.S. had higher levels of mobility than European nations from its founding through the 19th century (Ferrie 2005, Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2012) the idea still persists even though it is no longer the case.

**American Mobility Perceptions**

Comparing intergenerational mobility and attitudes towards it in the United States with that of other nations puts the peculiar trends of the U.S. into stark relief, but does not always make the reasons for those differences clear. One possible explanation is that Americans heavily prioritize equality of opportunity over equality of outcomes (Ladd and Bowman 1998; Benabou and Ok 2001; Page and Jacobs 2009; Obama 2013; Stiglitz 2015). A report from the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, addresses the importance of perceptions of opportunity.

Equality of opportunity is a demanding social standard. It requires that people perceive the rules of the game to be far. If they believe that this is the case, they put up with disparities in income and status. If people believe that the rules are being rigged to favor one group or another, inequality could become a more important political issue (Ladd and Bowman 1998:3).

This report recognizes the lack of political pressure to reduce income inequality and that it hinges on a perception of fairness through equal opportunity. To explain their finding that the poor in the U.S. do not seem overly concerned with inequality compared to those in European nations, Alesina et al. (2004) contend, "these findings are consistent with the perception (not necessarily the reality) that Americans have been living in a mobile society, where individual effort can move people up and down the income ladder while Europeans believe that they live in less mobile societies" (P. 2009). A focus on equality of opportunity and the suggestion that it makes lived inequality more acceptable raises important questions. What does this imply about the perceived connection between opportunity and outcomes or lived experiences? At what point does a belief in opportunity become strained? To what extent does economic inequality reflect levels of opportunity or lack thereof? Or, more relevant to this work, to what extent do people attribute socio-economic mobility or lack thereof to opportunity or lack thereof?

American's perceptions of mobility do not typically reflect average levels of mobility experienced (Jantii et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008; Noah 2012; Bengali and Daly 2013; Bjørnskov at al. 2013; Kraus and Tan 2015), but the relationship between perception and "reality" is not as simple as everyone seeing more than there is. When this work began there did not appear to be any published studies that investigated the influence of income on perceptions of mobility (or opportunity for mobility) or compared those perceptions to measurements of mobility as this

15

work does. Very recently, however, two have been published that begin to fill this void. However, they used methods substantially different from this research (Chambers, Swan, and Heesacker 2014; Davidai and Gilovich 2014). Both used survey questions where they asked participants to estimate the likelihood that a person born into a given income level or class would move up or down into a different one in their lifetimes. In contrast the research reported in this thesis uses questions about what it takes to get ahead in order to assess respondents' perceptions of opportunity for upward mobility and how meritocratic or non-meritocratic the system is. This does not produce numbers directly representative of perceived levels of mobility, but rather perceived opportunity for mobility under the interpretation that perceiving the system as meritocratic corresponds to a perception that opportunity for mobility exists whereas perceiving the system as non-meritocratic corresponds to a perception that the opportunity for mobility is limited or non-existent

In contrast to much previous research, Chambers et al. (2014) found that respondents underestimated the current level of mobility. Those sampled also seemed to believe that mobility has declined (Chambers et al. 2014) which previous studies are divided on. There was an ideological divide in these findings, however, with both of these results being more pronounced with politically liberal respondents (Chambers et al. 2014). Davidai and Gilovich (2014) also found an ideological divide with political conservatives perceiving more mobility, both up and down. However, their results showed that those with higher income also tended to perceive more mobility. Comparing to established levels of experienced mobility, as an average with all income groups and political persuasions they found that Americans see unrealistically high amounts of upward mobility and while underestimating downward mobility.

16

Horatio Alger's rags to riches stories made upward mobility seem common and attainable (Carey 1973; Mazumder 2005; Auten 2009; Page and Jacobs 2009: Davidai and Gilovich 2014; Stiglitz 2015). Americans revere those said to have pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps, a figurative feat born out a literal impossibility. With increasing levels of inequality eroding SEM, Corak (2013) suggests that the American Dream is increasingly becoming just that, a dream. He explains "Relatively less upward mobility of the least advantaged is one reason why intergenerational mobility is lower in the United States than in other countries to which Americans are often compared" (Corak 2013:97). It is for this reason that he and others argue the American Dream is becoming increasingly more difficult to attain (Griffith 2001, Jäntti et al. 2006; Noah 2012; Corak 2013; Stiglitz 2015).

**Hypotheses for Income and Mobility**

Jäntti et al. (2006) suggest that a stronger belief in mobility among the middle class, who are more likely to experience mobility, skews the mean belief about mobility upward. I would suggest that this perception mean is likely to differ more from the level of mobility experienced by the working class than the upper class. The opportunity for mobility, particularly upward mobility, is a belief that serves to validate the position of those with higher socio-economic statuses and so I expect them to have similar views on mobility as those in the middle even if the levels they experience are lower. An important consideration is that Jäntti et al. (2006) discuss both upward and downward mobility, while the ISSP (2012) phrasing is more focused on upward mobility. I hypothesize that there will be a significant difference in what those in the lowest income quintile perceive it takes to get ahead compared to the middle and high income groups.

Specifically, I expect their responses to emphasize the ascribed and less individualistic requirements for upward mobility indicating that the system is non-meritocratic so there is less opportunity for mobility. I expect a more modest but still significant difference between the middle and higher income groups, but not with lower levels in the high groups as is seen with experienced mobility. Instead I expect higher income to correlate with a more meritocratic view of what it takes to get ahead.

## Attitudes Towards Public Assistance

Americans' perceptions of mobility are culturally informed by deeply held beliefs such as the American Dream and those perceptions influence support or opposition to public assistance (Steensland 2006, Loseke and Beahm 2013). Since the American Dream is built upon ideas of individualism, meritocracy, and equal opportunity it follows that it is most associated with opposition to public assistance. Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony in society has special meaning in the context of the American Dream. In the United States not only do the poor adopt many of the dominant values of the rich, but this process is encouraged by the idea that the poor can and will become rich. This idea, this dream, has survived generations even in the face of relatively low levels socio-economic mobility.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) framework offers a way to understand why even people at lower income levels might adopt the values of those at higher income levels. Through symbolic violence and the formation of habitus, dominant ideas like 'the U.S is a meritocracy' are legitimized and internalized, becoming part of a person's ideology (Bourdieu 1991; Appelrouth and Edles 2012; Harrits 2013). Even someone who does not make a lot of money, but who has

18

integrated the concept of the nation as a meritocracy into their world view might oppose welfare on the basis of that meritocratic ideal (Bullock, Williams, and Limbert 2003). This meritocratic ideal involves the assumption that people who work hard not just deserve success, but will achieve success, and only those who do not can fall into poverty. The construction of deservingness factors in heavily in the discourse on public assistance, with some people seen as deserving or underserving based on a complicated set of culturally informed factors (Kingfisher 1999; Fullerton and Dixon 2009, Obrien and Major 2009; Guetzkow 2010; Hussey and Pearson-Merkowitz 2011; Katz 2013). As Katz (2013) puts it, "This problem has been partly about the allocation of finite resources and partly about the exercise of moral judgement" (P. xii).

The level of support or opposition to welfare varies based on income, race, and other demographics of respondents. In keeping with Marxist conflict theory, those with higher socio-economic status are more likely to oppose welfare (Bullock et al. 2003; Abner 2011; Epstein 2004), but the gap is not as large as might be expected based on a conflict framework (Epstein 2004; Treier and Hillygus 2009). Opposition to welfare can be part of a larger and more complete individualistic, personal responsibility based, and freedom centered ideology that is not perceived to be compatible with support for welfare. "Politics is not about individual choices made in isolation; it is collective decision-making in circumstances where individual objectives cannot be achieved simultaneously" (Druckman and Lupia 2000:19), meaning not only are there competing interests between groups or individuals, but even an individual can possess competing interests.

There is social psychological research that demonstrates in a related context the ease with which beliefs that disadvantage individuals may, nevertheless, be adopted and supported

by those very same individuals. In a series of experiments Ridgeway (2001) found potent effects of interpersonal interactions on the formation and acceptance of unequal status constructions. Of particular relevance here is the ease with which she found people will adopt such status beliefs even when they are personally disadvantageous. Her finding that "interaction can spread status beliefs from person to person throughout the population" (Ridgeway 2001:273) has implications for views about welfare that may not seem to be in the viewer's best interest. It implies that such ideas are not only surprisingly easy to instill, but also to proliferate even among those they work against.

Some of the opposition to welfare stems from American ideas of individualism, meritocracy (Piketty 2014), and the assumption that welfare violates the Protestant work ethic (Weber 1904; Hasenfeld 1989). The logic in such case is that anyone who worked hard enough would not need such assistance and so they must be undeserving (Guetzkow 2010, Loseke and Beahm 2013). This view does not acknowledge systemic causes of poverty. Americans tend to favor individualist explanations for both wealth and poverty (Bullock et al. 2003; Collins and Yeskel 2005; Piketty 2014), but this is true to a lesser extent for economically disadvantaged groups. People of color, women, and those with lower incomes are more likely to favor structural explanations (Bullock et al. 2003). Gans (1994) argues that "the notion of undeservingness survives in part because of the positive functions it has for the better-off population" (P. 281). If a millionaire argues that someone living in poverty is poor due to laziness, the corresponding message is that he is rich because of hard work. A difference in attributions for wealth and poverty also happens along ideological lines with liberals tending towards structural attributions

and conservative favoring more individual explanations (Furnham 1983; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Bullock et al. 2003; Chambers et al. 2015; Davidai and Gilovich 2015).

The demographic makeup of public assistance recipients varies by program, location, and over time. The levels of black identified and white identified recipients of benefits under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, commonly referred to as welfare, has remained very similar in recent years with black families making up 31.9% and white families 31.8% in 2010 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2012). Racial minorities may be overrepresented among TANF recipients in comparison to the general population, but these nearly equal rates show racialized stereotypes of welfare recipients are unfounded. The "queen" aspect of the welfare queen stereotype is equally as hard to defend especially given the cuts to TANF and other public assistance programs, but the sex skewed aspect is accurate. As of 2010 only 14.8% of adult TANF recipients were male (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2012). Women and children are disproportionately represented as recipients of welfare for two clear reasons. Since women average lower levels of pay compared to men in equivalent positions and overall (Chauvin and Ash 1994; National Equal Pay Task Force 2013) they are more likely to qualify for welfare. Women are also more likely to be the single heads of household with dependent children.

Dorsch (2010) argues that "economies with higher degrees of social mobility will choose lower levels of public consumption expenditures in equilibrium" (P. 37). This sentiment is echoed by Bartels (2005) and Franko et al. (2013). Dorsch (2010) describes this as an intuitive relationship. What is missing from much of this analysis is the consideration of the potential for

a gap between perception and experienced SEM.  What matters more for attitudes towards public assistance is how people perceive the chance for upward mobility. The basis by which they choose to explain economic success or failure determines the level of support (Nelson 1999; Fong 2001; Bullock, et al. 2003; Robinson 2009; Guertzkow 2010). This is a potential explanation for why those at the lower end of the SES spectrum do not necessarily support public assistance at the levels one might expect based on their higher potential need for it (Bartels 2005; Gilens 2009; Dorsch 2010). Clearer understanding of these concepts has been shown to influence individual's policy opinions and allow them to better act in their own self-interest (Franko, Tolbert, and Witko 2013). Despite this issue of perception that can cause people to adopt policies that may not appear in their own self-interest, there is still a relationship found between SES and attitudes towards public assistance with those with lower levels of SES more likely to support (Fong 2001; Epstein 2004). By comparing perception of SEM to measured SEM at different levels of SES, I hope to improve the understanding of this relationship.

The attribution of socio-economic status can be divided into three basic categories: individual, structural, and fatalistic or having to do with luck (Bullock et al. 2003). In 2014 comments by Congressman Paul Ryan one of the reasons he cited for his belief in a self-reproducing culture of poverty was the work of Charles Murray (Bennett 2014; Kertscher 2014; Weigel 2014). Though Ryan did not specify which work by Murray, in his most famous work, *The Bell Curve* (1994), he and his co-writer Richard Herrnstein made an argument that fueled a still raging debate about biological causes of stratification. The two argued that there are racial differences in intelligence (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). Their controls for social and environmental factors were inadequate enough to make their findings suspect, but despite this,

it has been fodder for those seeking to legitimize racial and other forms of inequality. Paul

appears to have been appealing to what Alesina, Glaeser, and Sacerdote (2001) say is "racial

animosity" in the U.S. which "makes redistribution to the poor, who are disproportionately

black, unappealing to many voters" (P. 2). Gorski (2008) vehemently opposes these types of

arguments made by Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and echoed by Ryan (Bennett 2014). He

collectively calls it part of deficit theory, the idea that poverty is caused by some deficit within

individuals in poverty and that it is part of a culture of poverty (Bullock et al. 2003; Gorski 2008).

This is a plainly individualistic attribution for poverty and one that is not limited to one

congressman, but rather has been expressed by many during legislative sessions where welfare

was discussed (Loseke and Beahm 2013).

By demeaning and 'othering' people in poverty, often using racist stereotypes, those

who oppose welfare programs are able to make the target audience of such messages feel less

connected to and responsible for those in poverty (Hussey, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2011;

Fullerton and Dixon 2009). Beyond fighting efforts to maintain or increase spending on public

assistance programs, the rich by distancing themselves from the poor in this way reinforce the

idea that they have achieved their wealth and success through their own merits. People at any

point on the SES spectrum can make such judgments about those at lower levels. It is for this

reason, in part, that looking for variation in perception of SEM to measured SEM at different

levels of SES is important.

With racial or other kinds of negative stereotypes, members of the stereotyped group

may internalize those negative views about other members of the group while thinking of

themselves as an exception (Ellemers 2001). In this way, even targeted group of a negative

stereotype may believe it and perpetuate it to their own detriment. Someone who needs public assistance can also see themselves as in need due to circumstances beyond their control while still simultaneously thinking others in need are responsible for their situations and not deserving of help.

Adorno et al. (1950) state that a person's political ideology "reflects his personality and is not merely an aggregate of opinions picked up helter-skelter from the ideological environment" (P. 176). As such, a person's personality is certainly reflected in his or her ideology (Jost Federico, and Napier 2009) and it is also an aggregate of carefully selected and internalized opinions (Bourdieu 1991). Such opinions can be selected on the basis consistency, even consistency of opposition. An inter-disciplinary investigation of political attitudinal development reveals strong support for the idea that "at the common environmental level, the structure of attitudes is consistent with the sociological model of attitude formation that suggests partisan rhetoric exaggerates the consistency between the social and economic ideological preferences" (Verhulst, Hatemi, and Eaves 2012:390). This suggests that some who may oppose welfare, do not do so because of any innate qualities of welfare as an issue, but because they oppose those who support it.

Political polarization in the United States is at or near all-time highs depending on which measures are used (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Jost et al. 2009; Treier and Hillygus 2009).  Though liberals tend to be more likely to support welfare and conservatives more likely to oppose, the high levels of polarization do not translate directly to a greater separation on the issue of welfare. Trends in levels of support or opposition to welfare are complex, but overall support appears to be diminishing over time and opposition rising (Epstein 2004). This is not a

simple, progressive, downward slide, however. There is research suggesting that support rises in difficult economic times (Kam and Nam 2008). Such exceptions to the downward trend hint at the nature and cause of opposition to welfare. Research into this phenomenon suggests that people's perceptions of their own security, including economic security, is positively correlated with support for welfare and other aspects of political orientation and ideology (Carney et al. 2008; Jost et al. 2009). This contradicts the idea that economic hardship might lead to pressure for more austere public spending, showing that people's increased sensitivity to the need for welfare is stronger than budgetary concerns. It is for this reason among others that is it important to note that the ISSP (2012) data were collected in the US during the recovery from The Great Recession.  The earlier version of the same survey conducted in 1999 (ISSP 2002) did not include the question that serves as an indicator of support for or opposition to public assistance in this research so no direct comparison is possible.

### Hypotheses for Get Ahead and Public Assistance

Based on this previous research I expect that those who believe more strongly in individualistic or meritocratic ways to get ahead will be less likely to support public assistance. I also expect that respondents in demographics more likely to need or receive public assistance will show stronger support for it.

**CHAPTER THREE:**

**DATA AND METHODS**

The core of this research is quantitative analysis of data gathered as part of the Social Inequality portion of the International Social Survey Programme (2012) beginning its fourth round in 2009 worldwide[1]. In the United States, the data were collected as part of the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. A multi-stage, stratified, random sample of people 18 or older and not institutionalized were interviewed face to face between March 18 and August 14, 2010 nationwide. The survey items of special interest in the project are income, sex, race, views of what it takes to get ahead, and attitudes towards public assistance. Sex and race are control variables. Though the survey included over 1,500 American participants, 1,357 answered all of these survey items, therefore that is the sample size for this analysis.

Since income levels are central to this analysis I continue this section with a detailed discussion of the coding and other methodological considerations for this variable and how they relate to subjective class identification. While subjective class identification is not a focus of this

---

[1] The complete list of countries is Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, USA, and Venezuela.

research, how people identify their own place in the hierarchy of socio-economic status is relevant to their mobility related perceptions. The discussion of income is followed by an explanation of the coding of the get ahead survey items and then the analysis for each of the research questions. For RQ1A the independent variable is income and the dependents are views of what it takes to get ahead. RQ1B involves comparison of those views broken down by income to existing mobility data for those income groups. For RQ2 the independent variables are views of what it takes to get ahead and the dependent variable is attitude towards spending on public assistance.

## Construction of Income Categories and Comparison to Class

For income, interviewers asked respondents "In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes, that is" (Smith 2013:186). Respondents had 25 income groups to choose from (See Appendix A). The income groups are numerous and narrow enough to capture and represent the respondent's income status, but having the data grouped in this way rather than in exact dollar amounts necessitated recoding. As they were, the bottom 20% of incomes made up the bottom 48% of the categories, 1-12 of 25. Using these skewed categories would produce skewed results. To correct for this I have constructed two more representative coding schemes. The first uses the midpoint of the dollar range for that group as the income for all respondents in that group. For example, for the $20,000 to $22,499 group the mean rounded to the nearest dollar is $21,250, therefore $21,250 is used as the income for all respondents who reported their total family income fell in that

group. The first group, $1,000 and less, is represented by $500. The last group, 25 of 25, $150,000 and over, is coded as $150,000 (See Appendix B).

The second coding scheme is based on the income quintiles similar to much previous mobility research. To define the quintiles I chose the cut points that fell closest to 20%, 40%, 60%, and 80% of respondents in order to produce five groups with approximately equal numbers of respondents, as close to equal as the predefined categories allowed. The first quintile includes those who reported $19,999 or less of total family income, second quintile $20,000-34,999, third $35,000-59,999, fourth $60,000-89,999, and the fifth quintile includes those who reported $90,000 and over. For some methods of analysis I have combined the second, third, and fourth quintiles to facilitate comparison to previous research where this is typical. This leaves a low income category which includes only the first income quintile, a middle income category for the second through fourth quintiles, and a high income category which includes only the top income quintile.

Respondents were asked to report their own class in addition to family income. Though issues of class are relevant here, income rather than class is the more useful measure for this analysis for two reasons. First, since income, and especially income quintiles, is more typically used for mobility research using the same approach here facilitates more meaningful comparison to previous work. The second reason is the subjectivity and complexity of class labels, which is likely why they are not favored in more research. Since class labels cannot be depended upon and used in the same way income data can, income is the more meaningful and useful measure. However, since how respondents identify their place in the class hierarchy is relevant to work such as this regarding perceptions, it is worth further investigation.

28

For class, respondents were given the choices lower, working, lower middle, middle, upper middle, and upper class. Table 1 shows the cross tabulation of these classes collapsed into three groups with the collapsed income quintiles previously described as well as and resulting chi-square value.

**Table 1.** Cross Tabulation of Total Family Income and Self-Reported Class

| | | | Income | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Low | Middle | High | |
| $\chi^2 = 213.67$, p < .001 | | | Q1 | Q2, Q3, Q4 | Q5 | |
| | | | $0 - 19,999 | $20,000 - 89,999 | $90,000 - 150,000+ | Total |
| Class | Lower and Working | Count | 146 | 351 | 45 | 542 |
| | | % within Low, Mid, or High Income | 57% | 43% | 16% | 40% |
| | | % of Total | 11% | 26% | 3% | 40% |
| | Lower Middle and Middle | Count | 101 | 437 | 166 | 704 |
| | | % within Low, Mid, or High Income | 39% | 54% | 59% | 52% |
| | | % of Total | 7% | 32% | 12% | 52% |
| | Upper Middle and Upper | Count | 9 | 25 | 72 | 106 |
| | | % within Low, Mid, or High Income | 4% | 3% | 25% | 8% |
| | | % of Total | 1% | 2% | 5% | 8% |
| Total | | Count | 256 | 813 | 283 | 1352 |
| | | % within Low, Mid, or High Income | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | | % of Total | 19% | 60% | 21% | 100% |

*n* = 1352

The chi-square value shows that there is a significant and strong relationship between income and class. However, a closer look at the cross tabulation shows that income group does not predict self-identified class in the pattern that might be assumed. The cross tabulation of income and class reveals a notable number of respondents with low income identifying as middle and upper class and high income respondents identifying as working or middle class.

Only somewhat slim majorities of those in the low and middle income groups identify with the superficially corresponding classes.

Most notably 39% of respondents in the lowest income quartile identified as lower middle or middle class rather than lower or working class and 4% reported they were either upper middle or upper class. Among those in the highest income quintile, only 25% identified as upper or upper middle class. A majority of the highest income quintile, 59%, reported that they were part of the lower middle or middle class. Another 16% of people in the highest income quintile called themselves lower or working class. There are several potential reasons for this seeming incongruity, but what is most important to this analysis is that there *is* a notable incongruity. Respondents may have found it more comfortable to identify as middle class to the interviewer. They may lack understanding of the class labels or have inaccurate ideas about their meanings. This may also result from geographic differences in the cost of living. Though the potential reasons are interesting, what is important for the purpose for this research is that family income is the more "objective" indicator.

## Coding of Getting Ahead Variables

For research question 1a, in order to assess differences in perception of mobility among those at different income levels for RQ1a and compare those perceptions to measurements of mobility for research question 1b, I used the following questions from the ISSP (2012) (See Appendix A for survey materials showing these and other questions used in this research). These will be referred to as the "get ahead" variables.

1. Please show for each of these how important you think it is for getting ahead in life. How important is...
    a.) ...coming from a wealthy family?
    b.) ...having well educated parents?
    c.) ...knowing the right people
    d.) ...hard work?
    e.) ...having ambition? (Smith et al. 2013: 2198-2201)

For each question, the interviewer presented respondents with an ordinal scale and asked them to rate that survey item as "Essential (1), Very Important (2), Fairly Important(3), Not Very Important (4), or Not important at all (5)" (Smith et al. 2013: 2198-2201). They were also given a "Can't choose" option which is not part of this analysis.

For some types of analyses all five of these variables are combined into a composite measure representing each respondent's overall attribution for what the survey calls "getting ahead." In the getting ahead composite the responses to 1a, 1b, and 1c have the original coding. Note that the agreement with the first three statements indicates a non-meritocratic view of what it takes to get ahead while agreement with the last two statements indicates a more meritocratic perception. Therefore, in building the composite measure, the last two responses must be reverse coded before they are added to the response scores from the first three questions. In the getting ahead composite the responses to 1a, 1b, and 1c are coded as Essential = 1, Very Important = 2, Fairly Important = 3, Not Very Important = 4, Not Important at All = 5. For the questions 1d and 1e the coding is reversed for the composite only, so that Essential = 5, Very Important = 4, Fairly Important = 3, Not Very Important = 2, and Not Important at All = 1. The sum of the values from answers to all five of the getting ahead variables with this recoding comprise the getting ahead composite. Since there are five component variables with scales of

31

1 through 5, the scale or possible range of the composite is 5 through 25. Here is an example of the composite calculation.

**Table 2**. Calculation Example for Getting Ahead Composite

| Coding | | Variable | Response | Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Original | Essential = 1<br>Very Important = 2<br>Fairly Important = 3<br>Not Very Important = 4<br>Not Important at All = 5 | Wealthy Family | Not Very Important | 4 |
| | | Educated Parents | Essential | 1 |
| | | Know Right People | Not Very Important | 4 |
| Reversed | Essential = 5<br>Very Important = 4<br>Fairly Important = 3<br>Not Very Important = 2<br>Not Important at All = 1 | Hard Work | Essential | 5 |
| | | Ambition | Fairly Important | 3 |
| | | | Getting Ahead Composite Score: | 17 |

With this coding higher numbers in the sum will represent a more meritocratic perception indicative of a belief in greater opportunity for upward mobility. Questions 1a, 1b, and 1c represent an inherited route to high SES implying a rigid social structure with limited SEM, so disagreement with this is scored highly. Questions 1d and 1e represent a route with individual agency allowing for the greater possibility of SEM with fewer ascribed impediments, so agreement is scored highly. Furthermore, because of this difference it is expected that 1a, 1b, and 1c will be negatively correlated with 1d and 1e.

## RQ1A and RQ1B – Income, Perceptions of Opportunity for Mobility, and Mobility

The first set of results is from an analysis of the responses to each getting ahead item by income quintile. The expectation is that the lowest income quintile will differ significantly from the middle and upper ones and display mobility perceptions that skew towards the less meritocratic and more inherited modes of getting ahead. Though the upper quintile has been

found to have lower levels of mobility than the middle quintiles (Jäntti et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008), I do not expect that to equate to more limited perceptions of opportunity for mobility because a meritocratic view of opportunity for mobility serves to validate the SES of those in this group.

This analysis is elaborated by a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the income categories (low, middle, and high) as the independent variable and the getting ahead composite as the dependent variable. This facilitates a comparison among income groups with respect to their average level of perceived opportunity for mobility. Further, it allows for additional confirmation or refutation of the suggestion that greater opportunity for mobility is perceived by those in the middle income quintiles pushing up the average and obscuring the lower opportunity for mobility perceived by those with lower income. The next step involves a comparison of the perceptions of each income group to the levels of mobility typically found in other research for respondents in these quintiles. This makes it possible to determine if the perceptions are related to differences in experienced mobility.

The next step involves a comparison of the perceptions of each income group to the levels of mobility found in other research. This makes it possible to determine if the perceptions are notably different from experienced mobility levels. Without such a difference an unrealistic perception could not be responsible a lack of political pressure for changes to public policy that would promote mobility as Jäntti et al. (2006) suggest.

**RQ2 – Perceptions of Opportunity for Mobility and Attitudes Towards Public Assistance**

For the final research question (RQ2) about the relationship between Americans' perceptions of socio-economic mobility and attitudes towards public assistance, the following question will represent the level of support or opposition to public assistance.

2. Do you agree or disagree?
   a.) The government should spend less on benefits for the poor (Smith et al. 2013: 2198-2201)

In the survey the answers available and their coding are strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, neither = 3, disagree = 4, and strongly disagree = 5. With this coding scheme lower scores indicate opposition to public assistance, while higher scores indicate support for public assistance. For simplicity, this variable is referred to as attitudes towards public assistance. I performed a multiple linear regression with the individual get ahead variables as the predictors or independent variables and attitudes towards public assistance as the dependent. Controls for income, sex, and race were also added in a second regression model for the purpose of comparison. Rather than the low, middle, and high income categories used in the ANOVA, the regression was completed using income in the previously described five quintiles. A simplified race variable was required because of sample size limitations. It included one category for respondents who identified as "white" coded as 0 and another category for respondents who identified as "black" or "other" coded as 1. For sex the categories were male (0) and female (1).

Rather than the low, middle, and high income categories used in the ANOVA, analysis for RQ2 involves regressions including income in two other forms. The first uses income quintiles like the ANOVA, but unlike the ANOVA uses all five instead of grouping them into low, middle,

and high. The second uses dollar amounts representative of each of the income categories that

respondents were able to choose from as previously discussed in this section (see Appendix B).

# CHAPTER FOUR:

## RESULTS

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. The standard deviations are high for the public assistance, getting ahead, and income variables relative to their ranges showing that there is a great deal of dispersion. Looking at the individual get ahead variables, the ones indicative of ascribed modes of getting ahead (wealthy family, educated parents, and knowing the right people) are all significantly and moderately correlated. Similarly, the variables more associated with meritocratic views of what it takes to get ahead (hard work and ambition) are also significantly correlated, but more strongly. Despite this, only three of the six possible correlations between the systemic and meritocratic variables are significant and only one of those is negative. This does not support the hypothesis that these two contrasting types of variables would all be negatively correlated. The two that were significantly and negatively correlated can be considered the most representative of each of their types. The wealthy parents variable epitomizes the systemic and unmeritocratic contingent and hard work is most representative of the individualistic and meritocratic variables. The two codings of income, predictably, have a significant and extremely strong correlation, .935. The difference in their correlations with other variables are also no more than .016 showing

**Table 3**. Descriptives and Correlations for Get Ahead Variables and Attitudes Towards Public Assistance

| | Public Assistance | Wealthy Family | Educated Parents | Know Right People | Hard Work | Ambition | Getting Ahead Composite | Income Quintile | Income $ Midpoint | Sex | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | 3.570 | 3.133 | 2.590 | 2.560 | 1.590 | 1.680 | 17.016 | 3.028 | 57977.89 | 0.539 | 0.221 |
| Standard Deviation | 1.024 | 1.074 | 0.875 | 0.860 | 0.592 | 0.661 | 2.333 | 1.401 | 41960.51 | 0.499 | 0.415 |
| Public Assistance | -- | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wealthy Family | -.067** | -- | | | | | | | | | |
| Educated Parents | -.126** | .399** | -- | | | | | | | | |
| Know Right People | -.093** | .366** | .312** | -- | | | | | | | |
| Hard Work | .085** | -.054* | .044 | .067** | -- | | | | | | |
| Ambition | .056* | .013 | .026 | .156** | .476** | -- | | | | | |
| Getting Ahead Composite | -.149** | .755** | .655** | .593** | -.372** | -.331** | -- | | | | |
| Income Quintile | -.198** | .100** | .116** | .110** | -.074** | -.099** | .178** | -- | | | |
| Income Dollars | -.191** | .099** | .105** | .111** | -.076** | -.102** | .174** | .935** | -- | | |
| Sex | .026 | .053* | -.003 | .036 | -.053* | -.006 | .052* | -.120** | -.104** | -- | |
| Race | .132** | -.146** | -.202** | -.191** | .026 | .066** | -.238** | -.163** | -.151** | .022 | -- |

*$p < .05$    **$p < .01$    (one-tailed test)                                                                 $n = 1357$

that they represent respondents' incomes similarly. They are significantly correlated with every other variable as well making it likely that income will have predictive power in this analysis. Notably, income has a weak to moderate, but solidly significant, correlation with the getting ahead composite and public assistance.

Race is significantly though weakly correlated with public assistance. With the 0 = white, 1 = all racial identifications other than white coding, this means white respondents were less likely to support public assistance. It is impossible to determine the cause for this, however, based on these data. Therefore, no conclusions can be made regarding findings like those of Alesina (et al. 2001) that racial animosity is the source of opposition to public assistance by white respondents. The high correlation of income and relationship between race and income also begs the question of whether the effect of income is being captured in the race-public assistance correlation.

Of all variables, sex has the lowest number of significant correlations and all of them are weak. Of the getting ahead variables, sex only correlated significantly with wealthy family and hard work. Since male = 0 and female = 1 the positive weak correlation with wealthy family and equally negative correlation with hard work implies a slight tendency toward systemic or inherited attributions for upward mobility. The negative correlation between sex and income seen here is as expected based on the well-established trend of females earning less than males (National Equal Pay Task Force 2013). Notably, sex is not significantly correlated with attitudes towards public assistance which is interesting considering females are disproportionally represented among TANF recipients.

Most of the correlations are weak or moderate excluding the designedly strong correlations of the composite with its constituent variables and the two different methods of coding income. Some of the significant correlations suggest that other analysis will reveal significant results.

<u>Income and Perception of Opportunity for Upward Mobility</u>

The tables below show the cross tabulations of the get ahead variables and income and the chi-square value for each. The cells with greater than expected values are shaded for the tables with significant chi-square values.

**Table 4.** Importance of Wealthy Family to Getting Ahead by Income

| | | | How important is coming from a wealthy family? | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2 = 33.80$, $p < .001$ | | | Essential | Very | Fairly | Not Very | Not At All | Total |
| Income | Low, Q1 | Count | 22 | 79 | 70 | 54 | 33 | 258 |
| | | Expected Count | 13.3 | 64.3 | 84.8 | 66.0 | 29.7 | 258.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 8.5% | 30.6% | 27.1% | 20.9% | 12.8% | 100.0% |
| | Mid, Q2-Q4 | Count | 41 | 205 | 254 | 219 | 97 | 816 |
| | | Expected Count | 42.1 | 203.2 | 268.2 | 208.7 | 93.8 | 816.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 5.0% | 25.1% | 31.1% | 26.8% | 11.9% | 100.0% |
| | High, Q5 | Count | 7 | 54 | 122 | 74 | 26 | 283 |
| | | Expected Count | 14.6 | 70.5 | 93.0 | 72.4 | 32.5 | 283.0 |
| | | % within High Income | 2.5% | 19.1% | 43.1% | 26.1% | 9.2% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 70 | 338 | 446 | 347 | 156 | 1357 |
| | | Expected Count | 70.0 | 338.0 | 446.0 | 347.0 | 156.0 | 1357.0 |
| | | % within Income | 5.2% | 24.9% | 32.9% | 25.6% | 11.5% | 100.0% |

$n = 1357$

**Table 5.** Importance of Educated Parents to Getting Ahead by Income

| | | | How important is having well educated parents? | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2$ = 30.78, *p* < .001 | | | Essential | Very | Fairly | Not Very | Not At All | Total |
| Income | Low, Q1 | Count | 29 | 132 | 72 | 20 | 5 | 258 |
| | | Expected Count | 19.0 | 108.8 | 96.2 | 26.8 | 7.2 | 258.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 11.2% | 51.2% | 27.9% | 7.8% | 1.9% | 100.0% |
| | Mid, Q2-Q4 | Count | 54 | 340 | 303 | 93 | 26 | 816 |
| | | Expected Count | 60.1 | 344.0 | 304.3 | 84.8 | 22.9 | 816.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 6.6% | 41.7% | 37.1% | 11.4% | 3.2% | 100.0% |
| | High, Q5 | Count | 17 | 100 | 131 | 28 | 7 | 283 |
| | | Expected Count | 20.9 | 119.3 | 105.5 | 29.4 | 7.9 | 283.0 |
| | | % within High Income | 6.0% | 35.3% | 46.3% | 9.9% | 2.5% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 100 | 572 | 506 | 141 | 38 | 1357 |
| | | Expected Count | 100.0 | 572.0 | 506.0 | 141.0 | 38.0 | 1357.0 |
| | | % within Income | 7.4% | 42.2% | 37.3% | 10.4% | 2.8% | 100.0% |

*n* = 1357


**Table 6.** Importance of Knowing the Right People to Getting Ahead by Income

| | | | How important is knowing the right people? | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2$ = 51.55, *p* < .001 | | | Essential | Very | Fairly | Not Very | Not At All | Total |
| Income | Low, Q1 | Count | 39 | 115 | 75 | 20 | 9 | 258 |
| | | Expected Count | 26.8 | 92.0 | 109.5 | 26.0 | 3.6 | 258.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 15.1% | 44.6% | 29.1% | 7.8% | 3.5% | 100.0% |
| | Mid, Q2-Q4 | Count | 74 | 293 | 349 | 91 | 9 | 816 |
| | | Expected Count | 84.8 | 291.0 | 346.4 | 82.4 | 11.4 | 816.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 9.1% | 35.9% | 42.8% | 11.2% | 1.1% | 100.0% |
| | High, Q5 | Count | 28 | 76 | 152 | 26 | 1 | 283 |
| | | Expected Count | 29.4 | 100.9 | 120.1 | 28.6 | 4.0 | 283.0 |
| | | % within High Income | 9.9% | 26.9% | 53.7% | 9.2% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 141 | 484 | 576 | 137 | 19 | 1357 |
| | | Expected Count | 141.0 | 484.0 | 576.0 | 137.0 | 19.0 | 1357.0 |
| | | % within Income | 10.4% | 35.7% | 42.4% | 10.1% | 1.4% | 100.0% |

*n* = 1357

**Table 7.** Importance of Hard Work to Getting Ahead by Income

| | | | How important is hard work? | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2 = 11.57$, $p = .171$ | | | Essential | Very | Fairly | Not Very | Not At All | Total |
| Income | Low, Q1 | Count | 96 | 150 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 258 |
| | | Expected Count | 116.7 | 130.6 | 9.5 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 258.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 37.2% | 58.1% | 3.9% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| | Mid, Q2-Q4 | Count | 380 | 400 | 32 | 3 | 1 | 816 |
| | | Expected Count | 369.2 | 413.1 | 30.1 | 2.4 | 1.2 | 816.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 46.6% | 49.0% | 3.9% | 0.4% | 0.1% | 100.0% |
| | High, Q5 | Count | 138 | 137 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 283 |
| | | Expected Count | 128.0 | 143.3 | 10.4 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 283.0 |
| | | % within High Income | 48.8% | 48.4% | 2.8% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 614 | 687 | 50 | 4 | 2 | 1357 |
| | | Expected Count | 614.0 | 687.0 | 50.0 | 4.0 | 2.0 | 1357.0 |
| | | % within Income | 45.2% | 50.6% | 3.7% | 0.3% | 0.1% | 100.0% |

*n* = 1357

**Table 8.** Importance of Having Ambition Getting Ahead by Income

| | | | How important is having ambition? | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2 = 24.38$, $p = .002$ | | | Essential | Very | Fairly | Not Very | Not At All | Total |
| Income | Low, Q1 | Count | 90 | 137 | 22 | 8 | 1 | 258 |
| | | Expected Count | 107.2 | 129.9 | 17.9 | 2.7 | 0.4 | 258.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 34.9% | 53.1% | 8.5% | 3.1% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| | Mid, Q2-Q4 | Count | 338 | 417 | 54 | 6 | 1 | 816 |
| | | Expected Count | 339.1 | 410.7 | 56.5 | 8.4 | 1.2 | 816.0 |
| | | % within Low Income | 41.4% | 51.1% | 6.6% | 0.7% | 0.1% | 100.0% |
| | High, Q5 | Count | 136 | 129 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 283 |
| | | Expected Count | 117.6 | 142.4 | 19.6 | 2.9 | 0.4 | 283.0 |
| | | % within High Income | 48.1% | 45.6% | 6.4% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 564 | 683 | 94 | 14 | 2 | 1357 |
| | | Expected Count | 564.0 | 683.0 | 94.0 | 14.0 | 2.0 | 1357.0 |
| | | % within Income | 41.6% | 50.3% | 6.9% | 1.0% | 0.1% | 100.0% |

*n* = 1357

The chi-square values for the get ahead variables were all significant except for the hard work variable. There was a clear trend in the answers to the question of how important hard work is to getting ahead, but it was mostly uniform across all income groups. Over 95% of respondents regardless of income answered that hard work was either essential or very important. Even though the overall relationship to income was not significant, within those two answers the distribution did vary by income in a clear way. Those in the lowest income trended more towards very important rather than essential with 37.2% calling it essential and 58.1% calling very important. This is in contrast to the middle and high income groups who answered 46.6% essential and 49% very important, and 48.1% essential and 45.6% very important respectively.

The survey also included a question about the importance of getting an education yourself. In fact, a great deal of mobility research focuses on educational attainment. Like the hard work question it was also not significant in certain types of preliminary testing. However, I choose not to include it while including hard work because the self-education results do not have as many implications beyond the perceived importance of education to getting ahead. The get ahead survey items included here have more clear implications about the respondents' attributions for mobility beyond those individual questions. They are all easily categorized as representative of a more meritocratic perception or a more systemic view. Getting a college degree is easier and more likely for those in higher income groups, but it ostensibly requires talent, skills, and hard work making the implications of the survey question mixed in a way that made it less useful to this research.

The survey question about knowing the right people could hypothetically work in a similar way with overlap between being to some degree inherited and some degree self-made. However, it since the right people in this context are presumably people with higher socio-economic status it seems more likely that someone would know "the right people" if he or she was also part of that social stratum even if it is not absolutely required. It is impossible to know how respondents conceptualized "knowing the right people," however, the moderate positive correlation of this variable with variables such as wealthy parents suggests a similar line of thought or association.

In the tables for the ascribed traits, Table 4, wealthy family, Table 5, educated parents, and Table 6, knowing the right people, there is trend opposite of what Table 8, ambition, an achieved characteristic, displays. In Tables 4, Table 5, and Table 6 the low income group tends to have greater than expected counts in the essential and very important categories. This shows that those in the lowest income group are more likely to perceive inherited traits as important to getting ahead and therefore see opportunity for mobility through individual effort as more limited. The middle income group tends to exceed expected counts closer to the other end of the answer spectrum particularly calling them not very important. This points to more meritocratic perceptions of what it takes to get ahead since they find these inherited traits as less important. The implications of the answers of the high income group are less clear since their counts tend to exceed expected around the middle for wealthy family, educated parents, and knowing the right people. These trends is most clear with wealthy family and educated parents, but it is also present with know the right people. Looking at all of the shaded areas this trend is present, but less focused. It is even more visible when focusing on the cells where the

difference between the expected and actual counts is larger when adjusted for the size of the expected count.

With ambition the trends for the low and middle income groups are reversed which is unsurprising given that placing importance on ambition, an achieved characteristic, runs counter to placing importance on inherited characteristics such as having wealthy parents. Though significant, the relationship between income and believing ambition is an important part of getting ahead is not as strong as wealthy family, educated parents, or knowing the right people. Like hard work, all income groups seemed to believe strongly in the importance of ambition to getting ahead. Also like hard work this is more true the higher the income of the respondent. Even though all income groups tend to report ambition is important, the lower the income, the less strongly a respondent is likely to feel about it.

To elaborate upon the relation between income and the get ahead variables, I next use the same collapsed income quintiles but with the get ahead composite rather than the individual variables for a different type of analysis. A one-way (ANOVA) with collapsed income quintiles (low, middle, and high) as the independent variable and the getting ahead composite as the dependent also indicated that mobility perceptions do vary with income. The ANOVA yielded significant results, $F(2, 1354) = 18.022$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.03$. Though significant even at the $p < .001$ level, the effect size of 0.03 is small. This suggests that Jäntti et al. (2006) were correct in their assertion that perception of mobility is different based on class, but the effect may not be large enough to explain much of the phenomena they hypothesize result from this difference. Post hoc testing using Tukey's HSD reveals that the significant result in the ANOVA is driven entirely by a significant difference between the low income group and the other groups. The descriptive

44

statistics below show a small difference between the middle and high income groups, but Tukey's HSD indicates it is not significant.
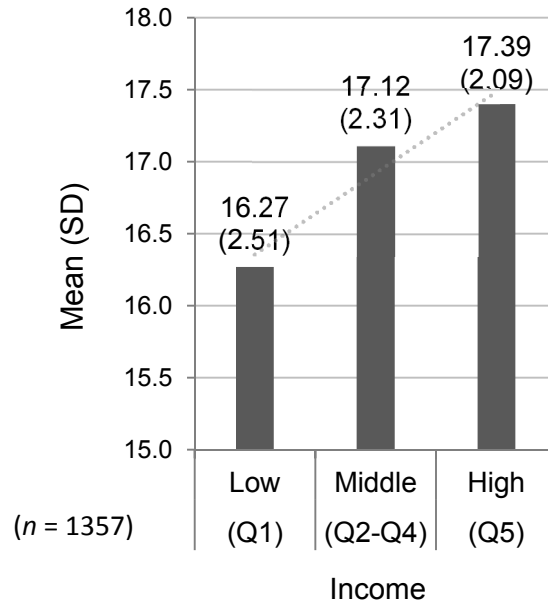


**Figure 1.** Getting Ahead Composite Means

Figure 1 shows the mean getting ahead composite scores. Since the composite is the sum of the five getting ahead measures coded with the more individualistic or meritocratic answers as higher values, higher composite values represent more meritocratic views and a perception of opportunity for mobility. The range of possible values for the getting ahead composite is 5 to 25, therefore the means in Figure 1 show an overall trend towards the higher end of this measure. This suggests that respondents perceive high levels of opportunity for mobility in all income categories, though to varying degrees. Across all incomes the actual range (rather than possible range) was 11-25 with a mean of 17.02, median of 17, and mode of 17 resulting from a nearly perfectly symmetrical distribution.

As hypothesized the lower income group perceives less opportunity for mobility through individual effort than other groups, though still more than most previous research would suggest. The gap between the means of the low income and middle income group is larger than the difference between the middle and high groups, but is not as large as expected based on differences in levels of mobility found in previous research (Jäntti et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008). These differences are not great enough to offer strong support for arguments made by Griffith (2001) and echoed by Jäntti et al. (2006) that those in lower income brackets are fully aware of their relatively limited chances for upward mobility, while those in the middle class are relatively confident in their chances for advancement. Though the levels of opportunity for mobility perceived are quite tightly grouped, the pattern does not diverge entirely from previous theories and findings. The low income group does have the most limited view of mobility and there is a larger rise in the mean between the low and middle than between the middle and upper. Though this pattern does not match measurements of mobility, the differentiation between those with the lowest incomes and everyone else is in line with past research on perceptions of inequality (Xu and Garand 2010).

## Comparison to Measured Mobility

Since the range for the getting ahead composite is 20, multiplying the means by five puts them on the same scale as the measured percentage chances of mobility. These adjusted perception means are low 81.35, middle 85.60, and high 86.95. This pattern of perception of mobility has ways in which it is both similar to and different from the levels of experienced or measured mobility found in previous research. Despite the challenges in measuring mobility and

the resulting inconsistencies, there is a trend among research on different levels of mobility for different income groups. Jäntti et al. (2006) found 57.8% mobility for the lowest quintile, 75% in the middle (Q2-Q4), and 66% at the top using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth. Similarly, Isaacs et al. (2008) found 58% at the bottom, 74% in the middle and 61% at the top using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics from a similar period. Studies reliably find lower levels of mobility or more stickiness in the bottom and top income quintiles compared to the middle (Carroll et al. 2006; Jäntti et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008).

The pattern and levels do not match the perception results here. However, as previously discussed, the perception of the chance at upward mobility of those in the top income quintile may be expected to be high relative to levels of mobility experienced because of the self-justifying nature of such a belief. Setting the high income perceptions aside for this reason and focusing on the perceptions of those in the low and middle groups, it is clear that the relative positions of the income groups do essentially match. Compared to the middle income group, there is both less mobility experienced and perceived, though both perception means are quite high and the difference between the low and middle perceptions is not as large as the difference in experienced mobility. The most obvious reason for this discrepancy is the idea of the American Dream and the tendency of Americans to overestimate the possibility for upward mobility (Jäntti et al. 2006; Isaacs et al. 2008; Bengali and Daly 2013; Bjørnskov et al. 2013; Corak 2013; Kraus and Tan 2015).

**Perceptions of Mobility and Support for Public Assistance**

Looking at the correlations in Table 3, all of the get ahead variables are significantly correlated with support for public assistance and in the directions hypothesized. A stronger belief that the ascribed characteristics, wealthy family, educated parents, and knowing the right people are required to get ahead is positively correlated with support for public assistance. This implies that a structural view of mobility and opportunities for mobility makes a person more likely to support spending on public assistance. Also in keeping with the hypothesis, a stronger belief in the importance of the attained characteristics, hard work and ambition, is negatively correlated with support for public assistance. This implies that those who have more individualistic views and see more opportunity for mobility are less likely to support spending on public assistance.

Looking at the control variables, again income was more strongly correlated with support for public assistance than any of the get ahead variables. The individual get ahead variables were more suitable for this regression rather than the composite for the purpose of examining their individual relationships with the public assistance variable. However, since the correlation of income with public assistance was higher than with any of the get ahead variables, a comparison to the getting ahead composite is called for to look for their combined effect. For the get ahead composite and support for public assistance $r = -.149$, $p < .001$, which is still a weaker correlation than that of income. As the ANOVA also showed, however, income is a significant predictor of a respondent's perceptions of what it takes to get ahead, so the get ahead variables already incorporate some of the effects of income in the above correlation where income is not controlled for.

Sex was the only variable tested that was not significantly correlated with support for public assistance. Race, however, was second only to income in the strength of its correlation. These two results are not as hypothesized based on who is more likely to receive public assistance such as TANF. This suggests that something other than who actually receives such benefits is significantly affecting support or lack thereof for spending on such programs. The fact that the two strongest correlations with public assistance were income and race and that their addition to the model more than doubled the effect size suggests that they are more important determinants of support for public assistance than any of the get ahead variables. Setting aside the differences in the strengths of these correlations, even all of the significant correlations with support for public assistance must be considered weak since none even reach .20.

To more stringently test for a relationship between views of what it takes to get and attitudes towards public assistance I performed the following regression analysis. A multiple linear regression produced significant but weakly effective predictive models for support for public assistance. The coefficients are in Table 9 below. Model 1 includes all of the get ahead variables as predictors. Model 2 includes all of the get ahead variables plus income as quintiles, sex, and race. Model 3 includes all of the get ahead variables plus income as the category midpoint in dollars, sex, and race. For model 1 $F(5,1351) = 7.948$, $p < .001$ with an $R^2 = .029$ (adjusted $R^2 = .025$) showing it accounted for only 2.9% of the variance in support for public assistance. For Model 2 $F(8,1348) = 11.321$, $p < .001$ with an $R^2 = .064$ (adjusted $R^2 = .058$) showing that is accounted for only 6.4% of the variance in support for public assistance. For Model 3 $F(8,1348) = 11.091$, $p < .001$ with an $R^2 = .062$ (adjusted $R^2 = .057$) showing that is accounted for only 6.2% of the variance in support for public assistance.

**Table 9**. Models of Predictors of Attitudes Towards Public Assistance

| | Model 1, $R^2$ = .029 | | | Model 2, $R^2$ = .064 | | | Model 3, $R^2$ = .062 | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | | (Income Quintiles) | | | (Income $ Midpoint) | | |
| | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | β |
| Intercept | 3.795** | 0.135 | | 4.003** | 0.153 | | 3.863** | 0.146 | |
| Wealthy Family | 0.007 | 0.029 | 0.008 | 0.015 | 0.029 | 0.016 | 0.015 | 0.029 | 0.016 |
| Educated Parents | -0.129** | 0.035 | -0.111 | -0.101** | 0.035 | -0.086 | -0.103** | 0.035 | -0.088 |
| Know Right People | -0.085* | 0.035 | -0.072 | -0.054 | 0.035 | -0.045 | -0.053 | 0.035 | -0.045 |
| Hard Work | 0.138** | 0.053 | 0.080 | 0.130* | 0.052 | 0.075 | 0.131* | 0.052 | 0.075 |
| Ambition | 0.049 | 0.048 | 0.032 | 0.012 | 0.047 | -0.008 | 0.012 | 0.047 | 0.008 |
| Income | | | | -0.120** | 0.020 | -0.164 | -3.871** | 0.000 | -0.159 |
| Sex | | | | 0.019 | 0.055 | 0.009 | 0.019 | 0.055 | 0.013 |
| Race | | | | 0.194** | 0.068 | 0.079 | 0.194** | 0.068 | 0.081 |

*$p$ < .05     **$p$ < .01     (one-tailed test)                                                                 $n$ = 1357

The addition of income, sex, and race more than doubled the still weak predictive power of the model making the get ahead variables look like weaker predictors by comparison. Before introducing the controls three of the five get ahead variables appear to be significant predictors, educated parents, know the right people, and hard work. After controlling for income, sex, and race, only educated parents, and hard work are still significant. Though not all of the get ahead variables are significant predictors of attitudes towards public assistance as hypothesized, the ones that are significant do have the relationships of the hypothesized types. Since the get ahead questions are coded as Essential = 1, Very Important = 2, Fairly Important = 3, Not Very Important = 4, Not Important at All = 5, the negative coefficient for educated parents show that those who say it less important are less likely to support public assistance. This fits with the hypothesis and earlier findings that those who feel ascribed characteristics are less important to getting ahead and therefore see more opportunity for mobility through individual effort, will be more likely to oppose spending on public assistance. Similarly, those who have less meritocratic

views on what it takes to get ahead and answered that hard work was less important to getting

ahead, were more likely to support spending public assistance.

Just as it was individually in the correlations, sex was also not significant as part of Model

2 or Model 3. Looking at the standardized betas income is the strongest predictor with race and

the two significant get ahead variables all around the same lower levels. Income has a negative

relationship with support for public assistance; higher income respondents were more likely to

oppose spending on public assistance. Since race was coded as white = 0 and all races other than

white = 1, the positive coefficient indicates that white respondents were significantly less likely

to support public assistance as predicted and suggested by previous research.

# CHAPTER FIVE:

## DISCUSSION

There is a relationship between income and views of what it takes to get ahead. Though the views of mobility found in this research seem relatively high at each income level compared to measured mobility, the lower income group has more limited views of mobility than the middle income group which mirrors the lower levels of experienced mobility of the lowest income quintile compared to the middle three. Furthermore, views on the importance of educated parents and working hard are significant predictors of attitudes on public assistance. As predicted, belief in the less meritocratic indicator, educated parents was associated with support for public assistance while those who thought hard work was more important were less likely to support it. Income proved to be a stronger predictor, however.

Americans' overestimation of the level of mobility in the U.S. may or may not be impacting public policy preferences as Jäntti et al. (2006) suggested, but since the effects of perception of what it takes to get ahead here were weak and limited, any lack of pressure for policies to reduce inequalities is difficult to attribute to it as they suggest. However, looking back to the getting ahead composite means for the three income groups, perhaps even among the group who saw the least opportunity for mobility, the perception was still too strong to facilitate a desire for different policies.

The findings in this research that low income and non-white respondents were less likely to believe in meritocratic ways of getting ahead contrasts with the findings of Davidai and Gilovich (2015). They found that lower income and non-white respondents perceived upward mobility was more likely than did higher income and white respondents (Davidai and Gilovich 2015). Rather than views that justified their relative positions they found that "Those who have more to lose from the current financial system, it seems, are more likely to see it as more dynamic" (Davidai and Gilovich 2015:64). While apparent disagreement of the results of this research and theirs cannot be fully explained there are important methodological differences.

The first difference is that their data are more recent, collected in 2014, so a change in the general economic outlook over time is possible, but unlikely to be this extreme. Second, the data were collected completely online so respondents were less likely to temper their answers because of concerns of judgement by an interviewer, but perhaps more likely to give the questions less thought. It is unclear whether they took steps to ensure that the requirement of internet access did not result in a skewed sample. Most importantly, however, they directly asked people hypothetical questions about the chances of a person in a given income quintile making it to a different specific quintile. For the lowest they asked for the chances of that hypothetical person moving up two quintiles or more. This is quite different from asking questions about what it takes to get ahead which has more to do with opportunity for mobility rather than experienced mobility.

As stated previously the distinction between opportunity for mobility and experienced mobility is often not made. There is also not sufficient research on how people tend to conceptualize each. Can it be assumed that if someone is not upwardly mobile it is because he

or she did not have opportunity, or can we allow for the possibility that a person has opportunities they do not exploit? In considering opportunities not taken, how could that be measured? What obstacles would be considered? None of this is well defined. In Davidai and Gilovich's (2015) were the participants intended to assume that the hypothetical situations they were asked about were governed by the presence or lack of opportunity for mobility or were they intended to make judgements about that individual's ability to control his or her own fate?

Opportunity for mobility could hypothetically come in many forms. As an example, acquaintance A could tell acquaintance B that acquaintance A's employer is trying to recruit someone with acquaintance B's skills for a prestigious job that pays more than he is currently making. Acquaintance A could offer to recommend acquaintance B to his employer making him far more likely to get the job. Acquaintance B could chose to follow up on the opportunity or not. If he does not end up pursuing and getting the position, this would not be captured on any measure of experienced mobility, but he still had the opportunity. However, it conceivably could be encompassed by the knowing the right people survey question used in this research.

Research that includes measures that assess a respondent's views on opportunity for mobility as well as asking questions similar to those used by Davidai and Gilovich (2015) would allow important and never before possible comparison of such views. Since perception of mobility is an under researched area, more research is needed of this kind and others.

## CHAPTER SIX:

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH


Though there are a number of factors that could impact the results related to the support for public assistance variable, but it is not clear that even if those were somehow controlled for that the get ahead variables would become stronger predictors. First, the phrasing of the question in the survey might have been suggestive. Though a Likert scale was used for the answers, the question's phrasing as "The government should spend less on benefits to the poor" (ISSP 2012) might have been suggestive and resulted in the low to moderate mean of 2.433 when recoded as support for public assistance where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Further, "benefits to the poor" may not have been interpreted by respondents as public assistance but rather any number of other government spending programs that the respondent may have had other feelings about.

Also, as previously noted, these data were collected in mid-2010, only a year into the recovery following the official end of The Great Recession (Nation Bureau of Economic Research 2010). Previous research has established that such conditions can increase support for public assistance (Carney et al. 2008; Jost et al 2009; Kam and Nam 2008). However, the issue here is more complex than simple support or opposition, but more its correlation with perceptions of what it takes to get ahead, so it is not safe to make any kind of adjustments or assumptions

based on the timing of the data collection. Regarding the coding of income, using the dollar value of the midpoint for each category intuitively seems like it would be a more representative coding scheme where possible. It is important to remember, however, that the greater than $150,000 category, which 93 respondents of 1357 said they were a part of, was represented by $150,000. Exact figures would have made the most difference for this category and likely would have produced stronger results.

One additional consideration in interpreting the results of this research is that this perception data focuses on upward mobility rather than both upward and downward. However, adding the possibility for downward mobility could only add to the already high mobility perceptions found here, therefore this does not explain the differences in the perception results in this work and the results from previous work on experienced mobility. As previously addressed, another potential limitation is that the get ahead questions are representative of how important the respondents believe specific characteristics are to upward mobility, so the results do not translate as directly to levels of mobility as the results produced by Davidai and Gilovich (2015) and Chambers et al. (2015). More work of both types is needed, however. Research that incorporates wealth rather than just income is also too scarce. Wealth appears to be a less common measure because the data is even more difficult to obtain, but since wealth is a better indicator of SES than income, it could produce results more representative of real world experience.

Previous research on beliefs about mobility and the causes of poverty has been used to contextualize the results of research on perceptions of mobility and inequality in this and other research, but it essentially amounts to well informed speculation if it is not part of the data.

Taking the best aspects of this research and studies where the questions more directly addressed levels of mobility is the next logical step. Research where respondents are asked not just for their assessments of mobility, but also for the reasons for those views would provide the most valuable insight. Similarly, the relationship between opportunity for mobility and achieved mobility may be in need of further clarification. Furthermore, though income was the most important demographic issue in this work and sex and race were also incorporated, future research of a similar kind examining differences in perceptions based on age and other demographics would be a useful addition to the literature. Because of sample size and other limitations, this data did not lend itself to a detailed examination of possible effects of intersectionality of such variables, though such work could provide valuable insight.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

## CONCLUSIONS

As hypothesized Jäntti et al. (2006) were correct that there are different perceptions of mobility at different income levels and that difference could partially explain why the average perception is higher than measurements of mobility. The effect shown in the data was in line with their suggestion, but it was too small to account for the incongruously high American perceptions of mobility that Jäntti et al. (2006) suggested are the result of the income based differences. As they also maintained, such perceptions do have an impact on ideas about public policy such as spending on public assistance. Here also though, such perceptions and even income only explain a small part of the variance. There are clearly other forces at work not captured in these data.

Given the higher perception of those in the middle experiencing more mobility and those at the top who have other reasons to perceive more opportunity for mobility, it is not surprising that average perceptions are not matching the experiences of those at the bottom. Again, however, this is only a partial explanation since even when compared to countries with similar levels of mobility at the middle, the US perceives more. While comparing perceived mobility to experienced mobility is difficult to do with precision, international comparisons help to highlight discrepancies. It seems that after accounting for income based differences, there is still simply

an American difference that is not accounted for by this data. The American Dream lives on in

the mind even if not in the bank account.

# REFERENCES

Abner, Kristin. 2011. "Determinants of Welfare Policy Attitudes: A Contextual Level of Analysis." *Sociological Spectrum* 31:466-497.

Acs, Gregory and Seth Zimmerman. 2008. "Like Watching Grass Grow? Assessing Changes in U.S. Intragenerational Economic Mobility Over the Past Two Decades." Washington, D.C.: Pew Charitable Trusts, Pew Foundation Economic Mobility Project.

Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford. 1950. The Authoritarian Personality. New York: Harper.

Alesina, Alberto, Edward Glaeser, and Bruce Sacerdote. 2001. "Why Doesn't the US Have a European-Style Welfare System?" (National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 8524) Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved December 16, 2014 (http://www.nber.org/papers/w8524).

Alesina, Alberto, Rafael Di Tella, and Robert MacCulloch. 2004. "Inequality and Happiness: Are Europeans and Americans Different?" *Journal of Public Economics* 88:2009-2042.

Amiel, Yoram, Michele Bernasconi, Frank Cowell, and Valentino Dardanoni. 2015. "Do We Value Mobility?" *Social Choice and Welfare* 44:231-255.

Andrews, Dan and Andrew Leigh. 2009. "More Inequality, Less Social Mobility." *Applied Economics Letters* 16:1489-1492.

Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2012. *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 2nd edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.Auten, Gerald and Geoffrey Gee. 2009. "Income Mobility in the United States: New Evidence from Income Tax Data." *National Tax Journal* 62(2):301-328.

Arawatari, Ryo and Tetsuo Ono. 2013. "Inequality, Mobility and Redistributive Politics." *Journal of Economic Theory* 148:353-375.

Auten, Gerald and Geoffrey Gee. 2009. "Income Mobility in the United States: New Evidence from Income Tax Data." *National Tax Journal* 62(2):301-328.

Bartels, Larry. 2005. "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3(1):15-31.

Bartels, Larry. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Becker, Gary S. and Nigel Tomes. 1986. "Human Capital and the Rise and Fall of Families." *Journal of Labor Economics* 4(3-2):S1-S39.

Beller, Emily and Michael Hout. 2006. "Intergenerational Social Mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective." *The Future of Children Journal Issue: Opportunity in America* 16(2):19-36.

Benabou, Roland and Efe A. Ok. 2001. "Social Mobility and the Demand for Redistribution: The POUM Hypothesis." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* May Issue: 447-487.

Bengali, Leila and Mary Daly. 2013. "U.S. Economic Mobility: The Dream and the Data." *FRBSF Economic Letter*, 2013(6):1-4.

Bennett, William (Host). 2014, March 12. *Morning in America* radio show episode. Executive Producer: Chris Beach. Irving, TX: Salem Radio Network.

Björklund, Anders and Markus Jäntti, M. 1997. "Intergenerational income mobility in Sweden compared to the United States." *American Economic Review* 87(4):1009-1018.

Bjørnskov, Christian, Axel Dreher, Justina A.V. Fischer, Jan Schnellenbach, Kai Gehring. 2013. "Inequality and Happiness. When Perceived Social Mobility and Economic Reality Do Not Match." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 91:75-92.

Blanden, Jo. 2013. "Cross-Country Rankings in Intergenerational Mobility- A Comparison of Approaches from Economics and Sociology." *Journal of Economic Surveys* 27(1):38-73.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited by John B. Thompson, Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bradbury, Katherine. 2011. "Trends in U.S. Family Income Mobility, 1969–2006." *Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Working Paper Series.* Retrieved February 24, 2014 (http://www.bostonfed.org/economic/wp/wp2011/wp1110.htm).

Bradbury, Katherine and Jane Katz. 2002. "Are Lifetime Incomes Growing More Unequal? Looking at New Evidence on Family Income Mobility." *Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Regional Review* 12(4):3-5.

Bullock, Heather E., Wendy R. Williams, and Wendy M. Limbert. 2003. "Predicting Support for Welfare Policies: The Impact of Attributions and Beliefs About Inequality." *Journal of Poverty* 7(3):35-56.

Carey, Ralph A. 1973. "The Horatio Alger Myth." *Fides Et Historia* 5(1-2):1-9.

Carroll, Robert, David Joulfaian, and Mark Rider. 2006. "Income Mobility: The Recent American Experience." *Andrew Young School of Policy Studies Working Paper Series* No. 06-20. Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University.

Causa, Orsetta and Åsa Johansson. 2010. "Intergenerational Social Mobility in OECD Countries," *OECD Journal: Economic Studies* 2010(1):1-44.

Chambers, John R., Lawton Swan, and Martin Heesacker. 2014. "Perceptions of U.S. Social Mobility Are Divided (and Distorted) Along Ideological Lines." *Psychological Science* 26(4):413-423.

Chauvin, Keith W., and Ronald A. Ash. 1994. "Gender Earnings Differentials in Total Pay, Base Pay, and Contingent Pay." *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 47(4):634-649.

Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, Emmanuel Saez, and Nicholas Turner. 2014a. *The Equality of Opportunity Project*. Data retrieved from (http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/index.php/data).

Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, Emmanuel Saez, and Nicholas Turner. 2014b. "Is the United States Still a Land of Opportunity? Recent Trends in Intergenerational Mobility." *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* 104(5): 141-147.

Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014c. "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129(4): 1553-1623.

Collins, Chuck and Felice Yeskel. 2005. *Economic Apartheid in America*. New York: The New Press.

Corak, Miles. 2006. "Do Poor Children Become Poor Adults? Lessons from a Cross Country Comparison of Generational Earnings Mobility." *Research on Economic Inequality* 13(1):143-188.

Corak, Miles. 2013. "Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27(3):79-102.

Corak, Miles, Matthew J. Lindquist, and Bhashkar Mazumder. 2014. *A Comparison of Upward and Downward Intergenerational Mobility in Canada, Sweden and the United States.* Working Paper. Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University.

Currier, Erin and Diana Elliott. 2012. "Economic Mobility in the United States: Current Research and Policy Strategies." *Conference Report, Disrupting the Poverty Cycle: Emerging Practices to Achieve Economic Mobility*. Boston, MA: Crittenton Women's Union.

d'Addio, Anna Cristina. 2007. "Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage: Mobility or Immobility Across Generations? A Review of the Evidence for OECD Countries." *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Davidai, Shai and Thomas Gilovich. 2015. "Building a More Mobile America—One Income Quintile at a Time." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10(1):60-71.

Dorsch, Michael. 2010. "Social Mobility and the Demand for Public Consumption Expenditures." *Public Choice* 142:25-39.

Druckman, James N., and Lupia, Arthur. 2000. "Preference Formation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 3:1–24. "Opinion Poll on Economic Mobility and the American Dream." Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts. (http://www.pewstates.org/research/analysis/opinion-poll-on-economic-mobility-and-the-american-dream-85899378651).

Economic Mobility Project. 2012. "Pursuing the American Dream: Economic Mobility Across Generations." Washington, DC: Pew Center on the States. (http://www.pewstates.org/research/reports/pursuing-the-american-dream-85899403228).

Ellemers, Naomi. 2001. "Individual Upward Mobility and the Perceived Legitimacy of Intergroup Relations." Pp. 205-222 in *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations,* edited by John T. Jost and Brenda Major.  New York: Cambridge University Press.

Epstein, William M. 2004. "Cleavage in American Attitudes Toward Social Welfare." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 31(4):177-201.

Erikson, Robert and Goldthorpe, John. H. 2002. "Intergenerational inequality: A Sociological Perspective." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 16(3):31-44.

Ferrie, Joseph. 2005. "The End of American Exceptionalism? Mobility in the U.S. Since 1850." (National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 11324) Cambridge, MA:

National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved December 16, 2014 (http://www.nber.org/papers/w11324).

Fields, Gary and Efe A. Ok. 1999. "The Measurement of Income Mobility: An Introduction to the Literature." Pp. 557-596 in *Handbook on Income Inequality Measurement*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Fong, Christina. 2001. "Social Preferences, Self-Interest, and the Demand for Redistribution." *Journal of Public Economics* 82:225-246.

Franko, William, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Christopher Witko. 2013. "Inequality, Self-Interest, and Public Support for "Robin Hood" Tax Policies." *Political Research Quarterly* 66(4):923-937.

Fullerton, Andrew S. and Jeffery C. Dixon. 2009. "Racialization, Asymmetry, and the Context of Welfare Attitudes in the American States." *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 37(1):95-120.

Furnham, Adrian. 1983. "Attributions for Affluence." *Personality and Individual Difference* 4:31-40.

Gans, Herbert J. 1994. "Positive Functions of the Undeserving Poor: Uses of the Underclass in America." *Politics & Society* 22(3):269-283.

Gilens, Martin. 2009. "Preference Gaps and Inequality in Representation." *Political Science and Politics* 42(2):335-41.

Goldin, Claudia and Lawrence F. Katz. 2008. *The Race Between Education and Technology*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Gottschalk, Peter, and Sheldon Danziger. 2005. "Inequality of Wage Rates, Earnings, and Family Income in the United States, 1975-2002." *Review of Income and Wealth* 51(2): 231-254.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Auintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.

Griffith, Victoria. 2001, January 21. "The Myth of Upward Mobility." *Financial Times.*

Guetzkow, Joshua. 2010. "Beyond Deservingness: Congressional Discourse on Poverty, 1964-1996." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629:173-197.

Harrits, Gitte Sommer. 2013. "Class, Culture and Politics: On the Relevance of a Bourdieusian Concept of Class in Political Sociology." *The Sociological Review* 61:172-202.

Hauser, Robert M. 2010. "Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the United States Measures, Differentials and Trends." CDE Working Paper 98-12. Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Madison-Wisconsin. http://ssc.wisc.edu/cde/cdewp/98-12.pdf.

Herrnstein, Richard J., and Charles A. Murray. 1994. *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: Free Press.

Hertz, Tom. 2005. "Rags, Riches, and Race: The Intergenerational Economic Mobility of Black and White Families in the United States." Pp. 165-191 in *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success*, edited by Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne Groves. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hungerford, Thomas. 2008. *Income Inequality, Income Mobility, and Economic Policy: U.S. Trends in the 1980s and1990s CRS Report for Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

Hussey, Laura S. and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz. 2011. "The Changing Role of Race in Social Welfare Attitude Formation: Partisan Divides over Undocumented Immigrants and Social Welfare Policy." *Political Research Quarterly* 66(4):572-584.

Isaacs, Julia, Isabel Sawhill and Ron Haskins. 2008. "Getting Ahead or Losing Ground: Economic Mobility in America." *Economic Mobility Project*, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Brookings Institution. (http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2008/02/economic-mobility-sawhill).

ISSP Research Group. 2002. International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality III - ISSP 1999. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5400 Data file Version 1.0.0 and Questionnaire.

ISSP Research Group. 2012. International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality IV - ISSP 2009. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5400 Data file Version 3.0.0 and Questionnaire.

Jacobs, Lawrence and Theda Skocpol. 2005. "American Democracy in an Era of Rising Inequality." Pp. 1-18 in *Inequality and American Democracy: What We Know and What We Need to Learn*, edited by Lawrence Jacobs and Theda Skocpol. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Jäntti, Markus, Bernt Bratsberg, Knut Røed, Oddbjørn Raaum, Robin Naylor, Eva Österbacka, Anders Björklund, and Tor Eriksson. 2006. *American Exceptionalism in a New Light: A Comparison of Intergenerational Earnings Mobility in the Nordic Countries, the United Kingdom and the United States.* Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor.

Jost, John T., Federico, Christopher, and Napier, Jaime L. 2009. "Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities." *Annual Review of Psychology* 60:307-337.

Kam, Cindy, & Nam, Yunju. 2008. Reaching Out or Pulling Back: Macroeconomic Conditions and Public Support for Social Welfare Spending. *Political Behavior* 30(2):223-258.

Katz, Michael B. 2013. *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kelly, Nathan J. and Peter K. Enns. 2010. "Inequality and the Dynamics of Public Opinion: The Self-Reinforcing Link Between Economic Inequality and Mass Preferences." American Journal of Political Science 54(4):855-870.

Kertscher, Tom. 2014. "In context: Were Paul Ryan's poverty comments a 'thinly veiled racial attack'?"  Retrieved December 16, 2014 (http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/article/2014/mar/14/context-paul-ryans-poverty-comments-racial-attack/).

Kingfisher, Catherine P. 1999. "Rhetoric of (Female) Savagery: Welfare Reform in the United States and Aotearoa/New Zealand." *The National Women's Studies Association Journal* 11(1):1-20.

Kluegel, James and Eliot Smith. 1986. *Beliefs about Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Kraus, Michael W. and Jacinth J.X.Tan. 2015. "Americans Overestimate Social Class Mobility." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 58:101-111.

Ladd, Everett Carll, and Karlyn H. Bowman. 1998. *Attitudes Toward Economic Inequality*. Washington, D.C.: AEI Press publisher for the American Enterprise Institute.

Lee, Chul-In and Gary Solon. 2009. "Trends in Intergenerational Income Mobility." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 91(4):766-772.

Loseke, Donileen and Janine Beahm. 2013. "Culture in Social Policy:  The 'American Dream' and Social Welfare Reform." Manuscript submitted for publication. Department of Sociology, University of South Florida, Tampa.

Mazumder, Bhashkar. 2005. "Fortunate Sons: New Estimates of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States Using Social Security Earnings Data."  *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 87(2):235-255.

McCall, Leslie. 2005. "Do They Know and Do They Care? Americans' Awareness of Rising Inequality." Paper presentation at the Russell Sage Foundation Social Inequality Conference, University of California, Berkeley. Berkeley, CA.

McCarty, Nolan M., Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

McMurrer, Daniel and Isabel Sawhill. 1996. "How Much Do Americans Move Up and Down the Economic Ladder?" *Opportunity in America Series* No. 3. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

Morris, Martina and Bruce Western. 1999. "Inequality in Earnings at the Close of the Twentieth Century." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25:623-657.

National Equal Pay Task Force. 2013. *Fifty Years After the Equal Pay Act: Assessing the Past, Taking Stock of the Future.* Washinton, DC: The White House. (https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/equalpay/equal_pay_task_force_progress_report_june_2013_new.pdf).

Nelson, Thomas E. 1999. "Group Affect and Attribution in Social Policy Opinion." *The Journal of Politics* 61(2):331-362.

Noah, Timothy. 2012. *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It.* New York: Bloomsbury Press.

Obama, Barack. 2013. "Remarks by the President on Economic Mobility." Washington: DC. (https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/04/remarks-president-economic-mobility).

O'Brien, Laurie T. and Brenda Major. 2009. "Group Status and Feelings of Personal Entitlement: The Roles of Social Comparison and System-Justifying Beliefs" ch. 17 in *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification,* edited by John T. Jost, Aaron C. Kay, and Hulda Thorisdottir. Oxford University Press: New York.

Page, Benjamin I. and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2009. *Class War? What Americans Really Think About Inequality*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Persson, Torsten and Guido Tabellini. 1994. "Is Inequality Harmful for Growth?" *The American Economic Review* 84(3):600-621.

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Piketty, Thomas and Emmanuel Saez. 2003. "Income inequality in the United States: 1913–1998." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118:1-39.

Ridgeway, Cecilia. 2001. "The Emergence of Status Beliefs: From Structural Inequality to Legitimizing Ideology" Pp. 257-277 in *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations,* edited by John T. Jost and Brenda Major.  New York: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, James W. 2009. "American Poverty Cause Beliefs and Structured Inequality Legitimation." *Sociological Spectrum: Mid-South Sociological Association* 29(4):489-518.

Shepelak, Norma J. 1987. "The Role of Self-Explanations and Self-Evaluations in Legitimating Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 52(4):495-503.

Smith, Tom W., Peter V. Marsden, Michael Hout, Jibum Kim.2013. *General Social Surveys, 1972-2012.* [machine-readable data file]. Principal Investigator, Tom W. Smith; Co-Principal Investigators, Peter V. Marsden and Michael Hout, NORC ed. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, producer, 2005; Storrs, CT: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, distributor. 1 data file (57,061 logical records) and 1 codebook (3,422 pp).

Solon, Gary. 1992. "Intergenerational Income Mobility in the United States." *The American Economic Review* 82(3):393-408.

Solon, Gary. 2004. "A Model of Intergenerational Mobility Variation over Time and Place." Pp. 38-47 in *Generational Income Mobility in North America and Europe*, edited by Miles Corak. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England.

Steensland, Brian.  2006.  "Cultural Categories and the American Welfare State: The Case of Guaranteed Income Policy." *American Journal of Sociology* 111:1273-1326.

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2012. *The Price of Inequality*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2015. *The Great Divide*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Torche, Florencia. 2015. "Analyses of Intergenerational Mobility: An Interdisciplinary Review." *Annals of the American Academy* 657:37-62.

Treier, Shawn and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2009. "The Nature of Political Ideology in the Contemporary Electorate." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73(4):679-703.

United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. 2012, August 8. *Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of TANF Recipients*.

Retrieved December 2, 2013
(http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/character/fy2010/fy2010-chap10-ys-
final).

United States Department of the Treasury, Office of Tax Analysis. 1992a. "Household Income
Changes over Time: Some Basic Questions and Facts." *Tax Notes* 56:1065–74.

United States Department of the Treasury, Office of Tax Analysis. 1992b. "Household Income
Mobility During the 1980s: A Statistical Assessment Based on Tax Return Data." *Tax
Notes* 55: Special Supplement.

Verhulst, Brad, Peter K. Hatemi, and Lindon J. Eaves. 2012. "Disentangling the Importance of
Psychological Predispositions and Social Constructions in the Organization of
American." *Political Psychology* 33(3):375-393.

Weber, Max. 1904. "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism." excerpted in Pp. 140-
150 of *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 2nd edition by Scott Appelrouth
and Laura Desfor Edles. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Weigel, David. 2014. Paul Ryan and Charles Murray. Slate.com March 13, 2004.
(http://www.slate.com/blogs/weigel/2014/03/13/paul_ryan_and_charles_murray.html).

Xu, Ping and James C. Garand. 2010. "Economic Context and Americans' Perceptions of
Income Inequality." Social Science Quarterly 91(5):1220-1241.

**APPENDICES**

# Appendix A - Survey Materials

## GSS Codebook P. 160 – Respondent's Sex

28.    CODE RESPONDENT'S SEX

[VAR: SEX]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | | | | | YEAR | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
| Male | 1 | 6154 | 140 | 3238 | 137 | 2538 | 3260 | 1232 | 1229 | 1228 | 1280 | 2003 | 929 | 891 | 886 | 25145 |
| Female | 2 | 7472 | 214 | 4304 | 216 | 3369 | 4242 | 1600 | 1588 | 1537 | 1532 | 2507 | 1094 | 1153 | 1088 | 31916 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

REMARKS:    Interviewer coded.  See Appendix T, GSS Methodological Report No. 9. If planning to perform trend analysis
with this variable, please consult GSS Methodological Report No. 56.

## GSS Codebook P. 161 – Respondent's Race

29.    CODE WITHOUT ASKING ONLY IF THERE IS NO DOUBT IN YOUR MIND.
What race do you consider yourself? RECORD VERBATIM AND CODE.

[VAR: RACE]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | | | | | YEAR | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
| White | 1 | 11982 | 0 | 6476 | 0 | 4967 | 6179 | 2241 | 2213 | 2188 | 2234 | 3284 | 1559 | 1551 | 1477 | 46351 |
| Black | 2 | 1539 | 354 | 862 | 353 | 706 | 969 | 400 | 429 | 410 | 377 | 634 | 281 | 309 | 301 | 7924 |
| Other (SPECIFY) [See REMARKS] | 3 | 105 | 0 | 204 | 0 | 234 | 354 | 191 | 175 | 167 | 201 | 592 | 183 | 184 | 196 | 2786 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

REMARKS:    Interviewer coded except in cases where question suggested was asked.  Punch 3 in RACE  (Other
SPECIFY) included 1 Aleut, 154 American Indian, 1 Arab, 139 Asian, 1 Chamorro, 24 Chinese, 1
Chinese/Japanese, 1 Creole, 2 Cuban, 1 Dominican, 1 Egyptian 38 Filipino, 1 Guyanese, 6 Hawaiian, 6
Hindu, 267 Hispanic, 1 Hmong, 4 Human, 31 Indian (Asian), 1 Indonesian, 1 Israelite, 3 Iranian, 1
Jamaican, 29 Japanese, 11 Korean, 3 Laos, 4 Latin, 3 Latino, 2 Lebanese, 1 Malaysian, 2 Mestizo, 59
Mexican, 3 Mulatto, 18 Native American, 49 Oriental, 5 Pacific Islander, 3 Polynesian, 22 Puerto Rican, 30
Spanish, 2 Thai, 3 Vietnamese, 1 West Indies, 8 "Mixed", 1 "mixed bag", 1 "person of color", "1/2
American Indian, 1/2 Hispanic", 1 "halfbreed", 5 "Brown," and 3 "Yellow," 2 "Amerasian," 2 "Biracial,"
1 "Black and Asian," and 1 "Black and White," 1 "Black, American Indian, and Spanish," 1 "Asian Pacific
Islander," 1 "White Indian American," and 1 "American Indian/White," 1 "Euro-Asian," 1 "don't have one,
just me," 1 "White+Mexican," 2 "1/2 Caucasian, 1/2 Philippines," 1 "African Cherokee," 1 "Mexican and
Indian," 1 "American/Bangdi" and 1 "wheat color." If planning to perform trend analysis with this variable,
please consult GSS Methodological Report No. 56.  In 2000 RACE was based on RACESEE, RACEDBTF
and RACESELF. RACE was asked as indicated above from 1972 to 2000.
Starting in 2002 RACE was replaced by RACECEN1,2,3 and RACE was imputed based on these and
other variables. See Appendix D: Recodes.
See RACECEN1,2,3 for the new race variables first used in 2000.
See GSS Methodological Reports 85 and 89.

Intent of Recode: In 2002 the GSS switched from asking race in this three category format and
adopted an item based on the new Census race questions (RACECEN1,2,3).
For 2002 onwards RACE is imputed based on RACECEN1,2,3; ETHNIC, ETH1,2,3; and HISPANIC
so researchers have one race variable covering all years.

Method of Recode:  In 2000 both RACE and RACECEN1,2,3 were asked on the GSS.
Along with other racial and ethnicity variables (ETHNIC, ETH1,2,3, HISPANIC), RACECEN1,2,3 were used
to reproduce the racial classification produced by RACE.
This same procedure has since been used to create RACE in 2002 onwards.

# GSS Codebook P. 186 – Total Family Income

55.   In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes, that is.
Just tell me the letter.

HAND CARD
A20

[VAR: INCOME06]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. UNDER $1,000 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 43 | 19 | 43 | 24 | 129 |
| B. $1,000 to $2,999 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 38 | 25 | 24 | 25 | 112 |
| C. $3,000 to $3,999 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 23 | 17 | 18 | 87 |
| D. $4,000 to $4,999 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 27 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 54 |
| E. $5,000 to $5,999 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 16 | 19 | 8 | 83 |
| F. $6,000 to $6,999 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 45 | 19 | 19 | 8 | 105 |
| G. $7,000 to $7,999 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 48 | 29 | 27 | 24 | 128 |
| H. $8,000 to $9,999 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 83 | 34 | 37 | 38 | 192 |
| I. $10,000 to $12,499 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 142 | 61 | 82 | 77 | 362 |
| J. $12,500 to $14,999 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 145 | 44 | 65 | 63 | 317 |
| K. $15,000 to $17,499 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 126 | 52 | 72 | 58 | 308 |
| L. $17,500 to $19,999 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 102 | 47 | 34 | 48 | 231 |
| M. $20,000 to $22,499 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 157 | 59 | 66 | 66 | 348 |
| N. $22,500 to $24,999 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 125 | 70 | 78 | 60 | 333 |
| O. $25,000 to $29,999 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 212 | 95 | 81 | 93 | 481 |
| P. $30,000 to $34,999 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 231 | 99 | 99 | 89 | 518 |
| Q. $35,000 to $39,999 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 217 | 86 | 87 | 101 | 491 |
| R. $40,000 to $49,999 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 394 | 144 | 147 | 151 | 836 |
| S. $50,000 to $59,999 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 332 | 141 | 143 | 118 | 734 |
| T. $60,000 to $74,999 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 360 | 204 | 173 | 153 | 890 |
| U. $75,000 to $89,999 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 284 | 129 | 129 | 151 | 693 |
| V. $90,000 to $109,999 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 229 | 120 | 111 | 104 | 564 |
| W. $110,000 to $129,999 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 162 | 80 | 67 | 68 | 377 |
| X. $130,000 to $149,999 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 89 | 46 | 56 | 45 | 236 |
| Y. $150,000 or over | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 213 | 123 | 111 | 144 | 591 |
| Refused | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 195 | 171 | 146 | 111 | 623 |
| Don't know | 98 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 442 | 78 | 103 | 105 | 728 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 13626 | 354 | 7542 | 353 | 5907 | 7502 | 2832 | 2817 | 2765 | 2812 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 46510 |

REMARKS:   Hand Card A20 reads: Total income includes interest or dividends, rent, Social Security, other pension, alimony or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces or veteran's allotment.

# GSS Codebook P. 2198-2201 – Get Ahead Variables

To begin, we have some questions about opportunities for getting ahead . . .

1436.     Please show for each of these how important you think it is for getting ahead in life . . .

A.     First, how important is coming from a wealthy family?

[VAR: OPWLTH]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 1 | 0 | 0 | 49 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 35 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 97 |
| Very important | 2 | 0 | 0 | 203 | 87 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 206 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 496 |
| Fairly important | 3 | 0 | 0 | 360 | 72 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 338 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 770 |
| Not very important | 4 | 0 | 0 | 411 | 55 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 418 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 884 |
| Not important at all | 5 | 0 | 0 | 226 | 38 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 179 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 443 |
| Can't choose | 8 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 42 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 77 |
| No answer | 9 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 54 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 69 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 13626 | 354 | 6257 | 74 | 5907 | 7502 | 2832 | 1545 | 2765 | 2812 | 4510 | 2023 | 2044 | 1974 | 54225 |

B.     Having well educated parents?

[VAR: OPPARED]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 1 | 0 | 0 | 74 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 103 |
| Very important | 2 | 0 | 0 | 417 | 124 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 541 |
| Fairly important | 3 | 0 | 0 | 523 | 69 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 592 |
| Not very important | 4 | 0 | 0 | 184 | 35 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 219 |
| Not important at all | 5 | 0 | 0 | 63 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 78 |
| Can't choose | 8 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 |
| No answer | 9 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 13626 | 354 | 6257 | 74 | 5907 | 7502 | 2832 | 2817 | 2765 | 2812 | 4510 | 2023 | 2044 | 1974 | 55497 |

G.     Knowing the right people?

[VAR: OPKNOW]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 1 | 0 | 0 | 98 | 39 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 155 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 292 |
| Very important | 2 | 0 | 0 | 410 | 138 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 410 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 958 |
| Fairly important | 3 | 0 | 0 | 575 | 79 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 459 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1113 |
| Not very important | 4 | 0 | 0 | 160 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 129 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 302 |
| Not important at all | 5 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 71 |
| Can't choose | 8 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 29 |
| No answer | 9 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 71 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 13626 | 354 | 6257 | 74 | 5907 | 7502 | 2832 | 1545 | 2765 | 2812 | 4510 | 2023 | 2044 | 1974 | 54225 |

F.     Hard work -- how important is that for getting ahead in life?

[VAR: OPHRDWRK]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 1 | 0 | 0 | 475 | 95 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 570 |
| Very important | 2 | 0 | 0 | 661 | 153 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 814 |
| Fairly important | 3 | 0 | 0 | 113 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 137 |
| Not very important | 4 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| Not important at all | 5 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Can't choose | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| No answer | 9 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 13626 | 354 | 6257 | 74 | 5907 | 7502 | 2832 | 2817 | 2765 | 2812 | 4510 | 2023 | 2044 | 1974 | 55497 |

D.    Ambition? -- how important is that?

[VAR: OPAMBIT]

| RESPONSE | PUNCH | YEAR | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1972-82 | 1982B | 1983-87 | 1987B | 1988-91 | 1993-96 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | ALL |
| Essential | 1 | 0 | 0 | 535 | 92 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 627 |
| Very important | 2 | 0 | 0 | 577 | 151 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 728 |
| Fairly important | 3 | 0 | 0 | 133 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 154 |
| Not very important | 4 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| Not important at all | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Can't choose | 8 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| No answer | 9 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 |
| Not applicable | IAP | 13626 | 354 | 6257 | 74 | 5907 | 7502 | 2832 | 2817 | 2765 | 2812 | 4510 | 2023 | 2044 | 1974 | 55497 |

Note: The GSS codebook does not contain the exact phrasing for the 2010 versions of the class and public assistance variables. See frequency tables in Appendix B.

## Appendix B - Frequency Tables

The frequency tables below include only the cases used in this research.

### Respondent's Sex (SEX)

|        | Frequency | %      | Cumulative % |
|--------|-----------|--------|--------------|
| Male   | 625       | 46.1%  | 46.1%        |
| Female | 732       | 53.9%  | 100.0%       |
| Total  | 1357      | 100.0% |              |

### Respondent's Race (RACE)

|        | Frequency | %      | Cumulative % |
|--------|-----------|--------|--------------|
| White  | 1057      | 77.9%  | 77.9%        |
| Black  | 191       | 14.1%  | 92.0%        |
| Other  | 109       | 8.0%   | 100.0%       |
| Total  | 1357      | 100.0% |              |

### Respondent's Race Recoded

|                           | Frequency | %      | Cumulative % |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------|--------------|
| White                     | 1057      | 77.9%  | 77.9%        |
| All Races Excluding White | 300       | 22.1%  | 100.0%       |
| Total                     | 1357      | 100.0% |              |

## Total Family Income (INCOMEo6)

| | Midpoint | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| < $1,000 | $500 | 13 | 1.0% | 1.0% |
| $1,000 - 2,999 | $2,000 | 11 | 0.8% | 1.8% |
| $3,000 - 3,999 | $3,500 | 12 | 0.9% | 2.7% |
| $4,000 - 4,999 | $4,500 | 7 | 0.5% | 3.2% |
| $5,000 - 5,999 | $5,500 | 11 | 0.8% | 4.0% |
| $6,000 - 6,999 | $6,500 | 6 | 0.4% | 4.4% |
| $7,000 - 7,999 | $7,500 | 14 | 1.0% | 5.5% |
| $8,000 - 9,999 | $9,000 | 23 | 1.7% | 7.1% |
| $10,000 - 12,499 | $11,250 | 42 | 3.1% | 10.2% |
| $12,500 - 14,999 | $13,750 | 45 | 3.3% | 13.6% |
| $15,000 - 17,499 | $16,250 | 39 | 2.9% | 16.4% |
| $17,500 - 19,999 | $18,750 | 35 | 2.6% | 19.0% |
| $20,000 - 22,499 | $21,250 | 53 | 3.9% | 22.9% |
| $22,500 - 24,999 | $23,750 | 40 | 2.9% | 25.9% |
| $25,000 - 29,999 | $27,500 | 76 | 5.6% | 31.5% |
| $30,000 - 34,999 | $32,500 | 86 | 6.3% | 37.8% |
| $35,000 - 39,999 | $37,500 | 65 | 4.8% | 42.6% |
| $40,000 - 49,999 | $45,000 | 133 | 9.8% | 52.4% |
| $50,000 - 59,999 | $55,000 | 120 | 8.8% | 61.2% |
| $60,000 - 74,999 | $67,500 | 128 | 9.4% | 70.7% |
| $75,000 - 89,999 | $82,500 | 115 | 8.5% | 79.1% |
| $90,000 - $109,999 | $100,000 | 96 | 7.1% | 86.2% |
| $110,000 - $129,999 | $120,000 | 52 | 3.8% | 90.1% |
| $130,000 - $149,999 | $140,000 | 42 | 3.1% | 93.1% |
| ≥$150,000 | $150,000 | 93 | 6.9% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 1357 | 100.0% | |

## Total Family Income in Quintiles

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Q1 | 258 | 19.0% | 19.0% |
| Q2 | 255 | 18.8% | 37.8% |
| Q3 | 318 | 23.4% | 61.2% |
| Q4 | 243 | 17.9% | 79.1% |
| Q5 | 283 | 20.9% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

## Total Family Income In Collapsed Quintiles

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Low, Q1 | 258 | 19.0% | 19.0% |
| Mid, Q2-Q3 | 816 | 60.1% | 79.1% |
| High, Q5 | 283 | 20.9% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

## Social Class (CLASS/CLASS1)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lower | 51 | 3.8% | 3.8% |
| Working | 491 | 36.2% | 40.1% |
| Lower Middle | 186 | 13.7% | 53.8% |
| Middle | 518 | 38.2% | 92.2% |
| Upper Middle | 95 | 7.0% | 99.2% |
| Upper | 11 | 0.8% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1352 | 100.0% | |

## Social Class Collapsed

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Working (Lower and Working) | 542 | 39.9% | 40.1% |
| Middle (Lower Middle and Middle) | 704 | 51.9% | 92.2% |
| Upper (Upper Middle and Middle) | 106 | 7.8% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1352 | 100.0% | |

### Importance of Wealthy Family to Getting Ahead (OPWLTH)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 70 | 5.2% | 5.2% |
| Very Important | 338 | 24.9% | 30.1% |
| Fairly Important | 446 | 32.9% | 62.9% |
| Not Very Important | 347 | 25.6% | 88.5% |
| Not Important At All | 156 | 11.5% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

### Importance of Educated Parents to Getting Ahead (OPPARED)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 100 | 7.4 | 7.4% |
| Very Important | 572 | 42.2% | 49.5% |
| Fairly Important | 506 | 37.3% | 86.8% |
| Not Very Important | 141 | 10.4% | 97.2% |
| Not Important At All | 38 | 2.8% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

### Importance of Knowing the Right People to Getting Ahead (OPKNOW)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 141 | 10.4% | 10.4% |
| Very Important | 484 | 35.7% | 46.1% |
| Fairly Important | 576 | 42.4% | 88.5% |
| Not Very Important | 137 | 10.1% | 98.6% |
| Not Important At All | 19 | 1.4% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

## Importance of Hard Word to Getting Ahead (OPHRDWRK)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 614 | 45.2% | 45.2% |
| Very Important | 687 | 50.6% | 95.9% |
| Fairly Important | 50 | 3.7% | 99.6% |
| Not Very Important | 4 | 0.3% | 99.9% |
| Not Important At All | 2 | 0.1% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% |  |

## Importance of Ambition to Getting Ahead (OPAMBIT)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Essential | 564 | 41.6 | 41.6 |
| Very Important | 683 | 50.3% | 91.9% |
| Fairly Important | 94 | 6.9% | 98.8% |
| Not Very Important | 14 | 1.0% | 99.9% |
| Not Important At All | 2 | 0.1% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% |  |

## Get Ahead Composite Values

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 6 | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 7 | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 8 | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 9 | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 10 | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 11 | 7 | 0.5% | 0.5% |
| 12 | 16 | 1.2% | 1.7% |
| 13 | 61 | 4.5% | 6.2% |
| 14 | 131 | 9.7% | 15.8% |
| 15 | 148 | 10.9% | 26.8% |
| 16 | 192 | 14.1% | 40.9% |
| 17 | 232 | 17.1% | 58.0% |
| 18 | 213 | 15.7% | 73.7% |
| 19 | 158 | 11.6% | 85.3% |
| 20 | 112 | 8.3% | 93.6% |
| 21 | 52 | 3.8% | 97.4% |
| 22 | 20 | 1.5% | 98.9% |
| 23 | 11 | 0.8% | 99.7% |
| 24 | 3 | 0.2% | 99.9% |
| 25 | 1 | 0.1% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

## Government Should Spend Less On the Poor
## (Attitudes Towards Public Assistance)

|  | Frequency | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 54 | 4.0% | 4.0% |
| Agree | 194 | 14.3% | 18.3% |
| Neither | 226 | 16.7% | 34.9% |
| Disagree | 695 | 51.2% | 86.1% |
| Strongly Disagree | 188 | 13.9% | 100.0% |
| Total | 1357 | 100.0% | |

## Appendix C - Internal Review Board Certification Letter

**USF**
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA**

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

2/11/2015

Alissa Klein
Sociology
4202 E Fowler CPR 107
Tampa, FL   33620

RE:   **NOT Human Research Activities Determination**

IRB#: Pro00020114

Title:  Getting Ahead: Socio-economic Mobility, Perceptions of Socio-economic Mobility, and Support for Public Assistance in the United States

Dear Ms.  Klein:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed the information you provided regarding the above referenced project and has determined the activities do not meet the definition of human subjects research. Therefore, IRB approval is not required.  If, in the future, you change this activity such that it becomes human subjects research, IRB approval will be required.  If you wish to obtain a determination about whether the activity, with the proposed changes, will be human subjects research, please contact the IRB for further guidance.

All research activities, regardless of the level of IRB oversight, must be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of your profession and the ethical guidelines for the protection of human subjects.  As principal investigator, it is your responsibility to ensure subjects' rights and welfare are protected during the execution of this project

Also, please note that there may be requirements under the HIPAA Privacy Rule that apply to the information/data you will use in your activities.  For further information about any existing HIPAA requirements for this project, please contact a HIPAA Program administrator at 813-974-5638.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections.  If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

*John A. Schinka, Ph.D.*

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board