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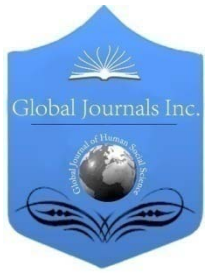

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A Higher Calling? Academic Aspirations in Guatemalan Religious Schools

Darin M. Mather

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I. Introduction

Higher levels of education are key contributors to well-being in the developing world. (See UNICEF, 2015 for a review.) This is particularly true for girls. A post-primary education for girls has been linked to various individual and societal benefits. Individually, girls with higher levels of education have a greater sense of personal empowerment (Moulton, 1997). They are more economically prosperous (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2002); their overall health is improved (UNICEF, 2004); their fertility rates decrease (Forste, 1994); and they experience the advantages of wider social, political and economic participation (Mensch et al., 1998). These benefits also extend beyond the individual to society as a whole in the form of enhanced economic development, improved educational outcomes for the next generation, and healthier families (DeJaeghere, 2004; Klasen, 2002).

Because higher levels of education have such a significant effect, it is important to examine the factors that contribute to academic attainment. One key component is students' academic aspirations. Since the seminal findings of the Wisconsin studies (Sewell et al., 1969; Sewell et al., 1970), a large longitudinal project that examined the underpinnings of success, researchers have established a clear link between students' educational aspirations and their eventual attainment. In their review of the literature, Bozick and his co-authors (2010)note that educational expectations emerged as one of the primary drivers of stratified educational achievement. This connection between aspirations and attainment conforms to common sense. We would naturally expect that those who hope to pursue higher levels of education are more likely to do so than those who have lower academic expectations for themselves.

With the clear link between academic aspirations and achievement in mind, the Wisconsin researchers and many who followed set out to determine which factors contribute most to students' desires to pursue higher levels of education. In addition to the key influence of students' family backgrounds and their peer relationships, numerous studies have shown that schools play a significant role in the development of academic expectations. (See Berzin, 2010, for a thorough review.)

This study, which is part of a larger investigation on girls' education in Guatemalan private schools, examines thekey role that religious schools play in forming academic aspirations, particularly for girls.In it, Ianalyse the association between different types of religious schools in Guatemala and different levels of expectations in their female students. I make direct comparisons between Catholic, evangelical and secular schools to examine the following: (a) differences in aspirations for all students in each school type; (b) differences in aspirations for girls in each school type; and (c) the differentials between girls and boys in each type of school. I also develop full regression models to determine if significant associations remain when controlling for key aspirational determinants.

Though limited to the specific context of Guatemalan private schools, results from this study make an important contribution by addressing significant gaps in the literature. First, much has been written about educational aspirations, but little has been done to examine gender differences in these expectations. (Marini and Greenberger, 1978, and Hanson, 1994, are two notable exceptions.) Only one study, conducted by McDaniel (2010), undertakes a cross-national comparison of gender differentials in educational aspirations. McDaniel's research, however, focuses exclusively on countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), leaving out countries in the developing world. Because 85% of school-age children worldwide live in developing countries (UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA, 2003), this gap is

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a significant oversight. The findings in this study, which do not conform to patterns in the West, highlight the importance of conducting more research on academic aspirations, especially for girls, in developing contexts.

Another gap exists in our understanding of the contributions of religious schools.Although religious schools are significant educational providers in the developing world at the primary and secondary levels—the Catholic Church alone has more than 250,000 schools worldwide, serving nearly 42 million students (Thavis, 2007)—these schools have been almost completely overlooked by educational development scholars (Mather, 2013) and virtually nothing has been done to understand the effects that religion and religious schools have on girls' educational aspirations.

This study seeks to address some of these gaps.It uses a common approach to measuring academic aspirations employing, as a dependent variable, a question that asks if students expect to obtain a tertiary degree. First, direct comparisons between school types are made using this measure. Later, full multilevel logistic regression models are developed to assess outcomes using relevant controls. With this design in mind, the literature review that follows will first summarize the existing literature on tertiary education in the developing world. I will then provide an overview of the importance of academic aspirations for achievement. Finally, I review the predictors that are commonly associated with increased aspirations.

II. Literature Review

a) *Tertiary attendance and aspiration rates*

Global tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER)[1]are climbing rapidly. Just in the last decade, worldwide rates have jumped from 18.1% in 1999 to 27.1% in 2009 (Klein, 2011). While these rates are increasing across the different regions of the world, there are wide discrepancies between countries. At the high end of the spectrum, the United States and countries in Scandinavia have rates at or above 70%, while at the low end, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have rates less than 2% (Klein, 2011; NationMaster, 2013). The Latin American average GER is 37%, a rate that is above the world average but well below OECD rates (Klein, 2011). In Guatemala, however, the GER is much lower than that—8.5% (NationMaster, 2013).

Those who study girls' education have given much attention to gender differentials in tertiary education. The Gender Parity Index (GPI), which is a ratio of the number of enrolled females to the number of enrolled males, is a common measure of gender equality in higher education (Koronkiewicz, 2013). Female participation in higher education has been steadily rising, and it recently passed an important global milestone. In 1999 the world GPI was 0.98. Ten years later it was 1.08, signifying that globally the female GER is now higher than the male GER (Klein, 2011). Currently, female enrolments at the tertiary level have exceeded parity in over 35% of countries (Ortega, 2008), but again these rates vary from region to region. With an average GPI of 1.25, Latin American and Caribbean countries fare quite well, scoring slightly ahead of Europe and Central Asia's 1.22 GPI. Again, Sub-Saharan countries constitute the low end of the spectrum with an average GPI of 0.64 (Klein, 2011).

In Guatemala, however, gender parity continues to be an important issue. A recent study by Stith, Gorman and Choudhury (2003) found that girls in rural regions were significantly less likely than boys to continue their education beyond the primary grades into secondary school. At the tertiary level, the GPI in Guatemala is only 0.72 (Nation Master, 2013).

While GER and GPI have been the focus of much scholarly work, very little has been done to explore the topic of academic aspirations in the world community. Anne McDaniel (2010) was one of the first to conduct a comparative study on this topic in the developed world. Her study of OECD countries showed that, on average, 47% of 15-year-olds in OECD countries expect to complete tertiary schooling—that number is closer to 60% in the United States (McDaniel, 2010). She also found that, except for Japan and Korea, girls' tertiary expectations exceed boys' expectations in all 29 OECD countries (McDaniel, 2010). But, as McDaniel herself indicates, no research has been done on academic aspirations in the developing world. Given the established link between aspirations and attainment, this is an important oversight. Are students in the developing world aspiring to attend higher educational institutions? How do their rates compare with those in the developed world? Are schools and parents encouraging children to pursue higher education? Are there differences between religious schools in student tertiary aspirations? Are there gender differentials in aspirations among the student population as a whole and among religious student populations in particular? These are unanswered questions in the literature that this article seeks to address by looking specifically at the Guatemalan context.

b) *Theories of academic aspirations*

In the study of academic aspirations, researchers focus on three broad theoretical frameworks: status attainment, blocked opportunities

[1] The Gross Enrolment Ratio is the "number of students enrolled at a certain level of education as a percentage of the population of the age group that officially corresponds to that level."
(Soubbotina 2004). The tertiary GER usually uses the number of people in the five-year age group following secondary school for its calculations.

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and social support. Often these are viewed as competing theories, but recent research (Kao and Tienda, 1998; Mau and Bikos, 2000; Berzin, 2010) has examined them concurrently in an attempt to assess their complementary contributions to our understanding of student aspirations.

Status attainment has been the primary theoretical framework for explaining differences in educational aspirations. Beginning with a study by Blau and Duncan (1967), a number of studies have linked academic achievement and aspirations with family socioeconomic status (Barr and Dreeben, 1983; Featherman and Hauser, 1978; Sewell et al., 1969). This theory maintains that family factors such as parental education, status, and educational expectations strongly affect children's aspirations (Berzin, 2010), and in this way social status is transmitted intergenerationally.

Although little has been done to investigate educational aspirations in the developing world, studies on academic achievement tend to support status attainment theory in these contexts. Research studies conducted in Latin America by Post (1990), Forste, Heaton, and Haas (2004), and Psacharapolous and Velez (1993), together with a study conducted in Thailand and Malawi by Lockheed, Fuller, and Nyirongo (1989) affirm the relationship between household socioeconomic status and children's educational attainment although correlations are not as strong as in the West.

Blocked opportunities theories, which focus mainly on educational institutions, take a negative approach to academic aspirations, arguing that students can be prohibited from aspiring to higher education based on messages that they get from schools and sometimes their parents and peers. A number of studies have shown that student difficulties in elementary and secondary schools can lead to discouragement, which makes students less interested in pursuing higher education (Mau, 1995; Ogbu, 1991; Wilson and Wilson, 1992).

Blocking in schools can also be gendered. Schools can hinder girls' aspirations through the following: curricula that track girls away from higher education, pedagogies that limit girls' expectations, a lack of female teachers to serve as role models, and the absence of educational and career guidance systems that encourage girls to aspire to higher education. (See DeJaeghere, 2004, for a review.)

While not generally considered in blocking theories, gender ideology also plays a role in suppressing girls' educational expectations. A number of studies have shown that girls with less gender egalitarian viewpoints tend to have lower academic aspirations (Davis and Pearce, 2007; Eccles, 1994; McDaniel, 2010). This is often attributed to the perception that girls with more traditional gender attitudes have fewer opportunities and incentives to pursue higher education (McDaniel, 2010).

The third theoretical framework points to social support as a key contributor to increased academic aspirations. According to this theory, encouragement and support from family, friends, teachers and others can positively affect students' academic expectations (Berzin, 2010). While peers do have an influence on an adolescent's educational and life goals, the expectations and support of parents have the strongest influence on aspirations (Berzin, 2010; Hill et al., 2004; Kandel and Lesser, 1969). A supportive school environment is also correlated with higher levels of academic attainment (Marjoribanks, 2004).

Neo-institutionalists argue that global norms about schooling have contributed to the expansion of higher education, especially in the developing world where, in many instances, higher education rates are greater than they were in European countries just a few decades ago (Schofer and Meyer, 2005). According to neo-institutionalists, this rapid growth is driven by prevailing world models of education, which have dramatically expanded mass schooling at the primary and secondary levels. Schools that follow these models tend to extol the values of increased tertiary education as well (Chabott, 2002; Meyer et al., 1992; Schofer and Meyer, 2005). These prevailing world models have also had a significant effect on girls' education. The international 'Education for All' movement, which had a primary aim to expand girls' access to primary and secondary education, has had a corresponding unprecedented and unforeseen impact on women's higher education enrolment (Bradley and Ramirez, 1996; Ortega, 2008). Though neo-institutional perspectives are typically not included in social support theories of educational attainment, the global norms about seeking higher education that are regularly propagated at the primary and tertiary levels clearly apply within the social support framework.

In this study of private religious schools in Guatemala, the religious context is also an important consideration. While little, if any, research has been done on the connection between religion and academic aspirations, there is reason to believe that religious institutions could have a blocking or supporting effect. Schools that endorse more traditional gender ideologies may block girls from aspiring to attain tertiary level schooling. On the other hand, religion is often a key source of support (see Edgell et al., 2013, for a review). It is conceivable that religious groups could provide a supportive environment that encourages girls to aspire for higher levels of education. For this reason, religious school types are included in the models for this study to determine what, if any, effect they have on their students' academic aspirations.

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III. Data and Methods

a) Data

This paper draws on data collected for a larger study on girls' education in private religious schools. Guatemala was selected for this project because a high percentage of its schools are private and many of these schools have religious affiliations (MINEDUC, 2008).In this context, 21 different private schools (seven Catholic, nine evangelical and five secular) were studied to assess the tertiary aspiration levelswithin their schools.(Secular institutions were included as a comparison group.)The school sample was chosen from a list, provided by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, of all schools in the Department of Sacatepequez, which lies just to the west of the capital city.Schools were selected for consideration if they were privateand if they had students at the primary and junior levels (first through tenth grades).Efforts were made to choose one Catholic, one evangelical and one secular school from each region of the Department in an attempt to include similar sample demographics for each type of school.

Public schools were not included in the sample for two reasons. First, a main thrust of this study is to understand the effect that religion and religious schools have on educational outcomes. Since the key comparison is religious versus secular and not private versus public, the school types included are sufficient.Second, adding public schools to the sample would introduce unnecessary complexity because there tend to be substantial differences between Guatemalan private and public schools in class size, teacherdedication, and resources. Since private schools are generally more similar to each other in these and other areas, restricting the sample to private institutions makes it easier to focus comparisons on religious factors.

It is important to note that, although there are a number of elite private schools in Guatemala, these are the exception to the rule and thus, they were not included in this study.Many Guatemalan private schools cater to lower middle class and even poor students. In fact, some of the private schools in this study enrolled students who could not afford to go to the public schools, which often have fees for uniforms, books and other expenses. Thirteen of the 21 schools in the sample reported that 50% or more of their students were poor or very poor. Only threesampled schools reported that less than 20% of their students were poor or very poor.

The data for this study were derived directly from student surveys, which were administered to students in grades five to nine of each school. In addition to gathering demographic information about the students' gender, ethnic, family and religious background, the surveys also asked about students' educational aspirations and religious beliefs and values.

b) Methods

Using this survey data I compare the educational aspirations of students in Catholic, evangelical and secular private schools. The analysis has two parts. I begin with a direct comparison of the three different school types using crosstabs to contrast the proportions of students in each who intend to finish university. In these crosstabs, I include comparisons of all students: girl students separately, boy students separately, and a differential between boys and girls for academic aspirations in each type of school.

Next, I develop multivariate models to assess correlations between religious schools and academic aspirations when control variables are added. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks reviewed above, controls from this study have been specifically chosen to measure the effect of status attainment, blocked opportunities and social support on students' academic attainment. Additional controls have been introduced to test the influence of religion.

Because the students in these surveys are clustered in schools, multilevel models are employed instead of traditional ordinary least squared methods. Multilevel methods minimize distortion in estimates that could be caused from intraschool correlations by partitioning error variances into between-school and within-school components (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). In this way between-school effects, such as school type, and within-school effects, such as students' gender, grade, family background and religious beliefs, can be assessed simultaneously. Hausman tests determined that random-effects models are most appropriate for analysing differences between these school clusters. Tests have also been conducted to ensure that independent variables are not highly correlated. Finally, results for each model have been checked to ensure that outliers do not have an undue impact on coefficients.

Given this study's comparative analysis of different school types, one area of special concern is the possibility that outcomes may be influenced by school selection biases. While it is very difficult to control for such biases without interviewing parents and students about their school selection processes, steps have been taken to address this concern. Most importantly, controls for parental educational levels are included along with measures of parental academic expectations[2] and involvement in their children's schoolwork. Though these controls in no way eliminate the potential effect of selection bias, they do provide some indication of whether such bias is an important factor for the assessed outcomes.

[2] This measure was not included in final models because it had no significant effect on the outcomes addressed in this study.

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IV. Results

a) School type comparisons of academic aspirations

The first analytical step in this paper is a direct comparison of academic aspirations between different school types. This analysis is conducted using a survey variable which asks fifth through ninth graders, 'When do you think that you will stop going to school?' Students who answered 'after university' are coded 1 and all others are coded 0. Crosstab comparisons of the academic aspirations dummy variable are used to determine if there are significant differences between Catholic, evangelical and secular schools in the aspirations for all of their students, and for girl and boy students specifically. I also compare the girl-boy differential for each school type. Results for this analysis are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 : Crosstab Comparisons of Academic Aspirations between Religious Schools

	N	All Students	Girls	Boys	Girls - Boys
All Schools	1682	75.56%	78.08%	73.54%	4.54%*
Catholic Schools	725	75.03%	75.71%	74.70%	01.01%
Evangelical Schools	661	75.79%	81.79%*	71.31%	10.48%***
Secular Schools	296	76.35%	76.71%	76.39%	0.32%

*Significantly different from all other school types at *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (two-tail test).*

The first thing to note is the incredible result that 75.56% of all students across all different types of private schools sampled in the Department of Sacatepequezaspire to finish university. This number exceeds aspiration levels in the United States and across Europe. The only OECD countries that surpass these Guatemalan students in academic expectations are Turkey and Korea (McDaniel, 2010), and these expectations are present despite the fact that actual Guatemalan enrolment rates are only 8.5% (NationMaster, 2013). The similarity of the proportions for each type of school suggests that despite the fact that opportunities are limited, all of these schools are fostering high expectations among their students for academic attainment.

Gender comparisons reveal that, across the board, girls aspire to finish tertiary education at significantly higher rates than boys. While this trend mirrors that of most OECD nations (McDaniel, 2010), it is somewhat surprising in a context like Guatemala where machismo has been an established feature of society and where opportunities for women have traditionally been limited (Stromquist et al., 2000).

Given the limited data available on academic aspirations in Guatemala, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint the causes for these high levels of aspirations for students, and especially for girls. However, these findings do lend further support to neo-institutional claims that schools around the world are picking up on prevailing world models of education which place a high value on tertiary education in general and which encourage girls to achieve at higher educational levels (Bradley and Ramirez, 1996; Ortega, 2008).

Finally, it is surprising to note that girls at evangelical schools expect to finish a university level education at higher rates than Catholic and secular school girls. The girl to boy differential is significantly higher at evangelical schools as well. This finding is unexpected given Guatemalan evangelicals' greater propensity to be non-egalitarian (Mather, 2013). Catholic schools, which are most likely to be completely egalitarian, have the lowest rates of tertiary aspirations among girls. This, at least initially, suggests that gender attitudes have little affect on academic expectations in this context, a proposition that will be more fully explored in the next section.

b) Multivariate comparisons of academic aspirations

Next, the bivariate findings above are further tested to see if they stand when appropriate control variables are introduced. Table 2 below provides the descriptive statistics for each of the independent variables that are included in these models. The first three independent variables (female, evangelical school and female at evangelical school) represent the key findings in the bivariate tables above—namely that girls have higher academic aspirations than boys and that evangelical girls in particular have the highest aspirations.A grade variable has also been included to determine if aspirations are higher or lower in the upper grade levels. Each of the remaining independent variables has been chosen to test the influence of key theoretical factors.

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Table 2 : Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables in Academic Aspiration Models

Independent Variable	Description of Variable	Sample Mean or %	Evan. Schl. Mean or %
Female student	Student is female.	50.33%	46.18%
Evangelical school	Student goes to evangelical school.	39.30%	100.00%
Female at evangelical school	Student is female at evangelical school	18.20%	46.18%
Student grade level	Student's grade in school (Range 5-9)	7.09 (1.41)	7.19 (1.43)
Father's education	Father's education 0=did not complete primary school; 1=completed primary school; 2=completed middle school; 3= completed secondary school; 4=attended university	2.24 (1.43)	2.17 (1.48)
Mother's education	Mother's education 0=did not complete primary school; 1=completed primary school; 2=completed middle school; 3= completed secondary school; 4=attended university	2.03 (1.42)	1.96 (1.48)
Non_egalitarian	Student's strongly agree that men should be the head of the family; men are better leaders than women; women can't do the same jobs as men; and they would not like to see a woman president.	26.58%	28.29%
Parents help	Parents help student with homework	62.31%	58.40%
Teacher experience	Years of teaching experience for student's teacher.	2.38 (2.89)	3.26 (3.89)
Female teacher	The student's teacher is a female	59.69%	42.81%
Learning helps	Response to: "The things I am learning in school will help me in life." 4=strongly agree; 1= strongly disagree	3.84 (0.42)	3.83 (0.40)
Evangelical student	Student identifies self as evangelical.	31.36%	55.56%
Female evangelical student	Female student identifying as evangelical.	15.87%	26.15%

Standard deviation in parenthesis.

The first set of controls includes measures for father's and mother's education. These variables will be used to assess the status attainment theory that family status, which is often measured through parents' education levels, has a significant effect on students' aspirations.

The blocked opportunities theories focus on the ways in which academic aspirations can be discouraged. This discouragement can often come from schools and teachers, but it can also be imparted through the prevailing non-egalitarian gender ideology of the students' social context. These factors are represented in the multivariate model with variables including school type and non-egalitarian gender ideology.

Next, social support theories argue that support from family, teachers and others can positively influence students' academic aspirations. To assess this theory, four variables have been added. First, on the family side, a variable is included that assesses whether the students' parents help them with their homework. On the school side, variables measuring teachers' experience and gender are used. (The teacher gender variable is important because female teachers are often seen as instrumental in providing role modelling and support for girls' aspirations.) Finally, a 'learning helps' variable, which assesses the degree to which a student views the things that they are learning as beneficial for their lives, has been added to the model. Although no link has previously been made in the literature, this attitude among students could influence aspirations because those students who have learned the value of education from their parents and teachers may be more likely to seek to attain more of it.

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Finally, an evangelical and a female evangelical variable have been placed into the models. In the bivariate analysis above, evangelical schools were shown to have significantly higher rates of girls' aspirations; therefore, these two measures have been added to determine if these differences can be attributed to the religious tradition of the students.[3]

Table 3 : Multivariate Models of Academic Aspirations.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
Female student	0.99	(0.15)	0.99	(0.17)	0.94	(0.14)	0.88	(0.16)	0.98	(0.16)	0.74	(0.16)
Evangelical school	0.76	(0.25)	0.80	(0.23)	0.77	(0.25)	0.60	(0.21)	0.76	(0.26)	0.62	(0.21)
Female at evangelical schl.	1.80 **	(0.46)	2.04 **	(0.58)	1.81 **	(0.46)	2.14 **	(0.61)	1.82 **	(0.51)	2.45 **	(0.86)
Student grade level	1.32 *	(0.06)	1.37 *	(0.07)	1.31 *	(0.06)	1.29 *	(0.07)	1.32 *	(0.06)	1.32 *	(0.08)
Father's education			1.16 *	(0.07)							1.16 *	(0.08)
Mother's education			1.18 **	(0.08)							1.19 *	(0.09)
Non-egalitarian					0.65 **	(0.09)					0.58 **	(0.14)
Parents help							1.10	(0.16)			0.93	(0.16)
Teacher experience							1.06	(0.04)			1.03	(0.04)
Female teacher							1.16	(0.19)			1.21	(0.21)
Learning helps							1.45 *	(0.23)			1.43 *	(0.27)
Evangelical student									0.98	(0.20)	1.01	(0.27)
Female evangelical student									1.02	(0.29)	1.27	(0.47)
N	1659		1316		1659		1241		1651		999	
	46.8		60.8		56.5		36.7		45.9			
Wald chi-square	3		2		0		0		0		54.42	

*$p>.05$; **$p>.01$; ***$p>.001$.

and practice were also

[3] Various variables for religious beliefs, values tried, but these had no significant effect so they were not included in the final models.

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Table 3 shows results from analyses using all of the above listed independent variables. These multivariate models were constructed using Hierarchical Linier Modelling. Because the dependent variable is a dummy assessing whether students aspire to complete a university education, logit models are used. The coefficients are displayed as odds ratios to ease interpretation. Any result that is greater than one indicates increased odds, whereas results less than one represent decreased odds.

Six different models are displayed in Table 3. The first is a base model that replicates the key findings in the bivariate analysis above. Here we see that girls at evangelical schools have significantly higher academic aspirations than others. This significance holds when controls are added. In fact, the odds ratios increase in the presence of other controls in successive models.

Model 1 also contains a grade variable, which is significant even when relevant controls are added. Though it is not possible to make a clear determination without longitudinal models, this finding could indicate that the longer students stay in school, the more influence the schools have on their higher educational aspirations. Of course the findings could also result from dropouts that might occur among those with lower aspirations. More needs to be done to examine this significant correlation.

Models 2, 3, and 4 individually assess the influence of independent variables that serve as indicators for the status attainment, blocked opportunity and social support theoretical frameworks. In Model 2 both father's and mother's education have a significantly positive effect on students' academic aspirations. This significance holds even in Model 6, which includes all independent variables, giving strong support to status attainment theorists' contention that students from higher SES families aspire for higher levels of education as a means to maintain the status position of their parents.

In Model 3, the non-egalitarian variable is significant, suggesting that students' aspirations might be inhibited by gender ideologies that do not affirm the importance of women's roles in either the private or the public realm.This variable remains significant in Model 6, demonstrating that the non-egalitarian attitudes are correlated with decreased aspirations even when relevant controls are added to the analysis.

Model 4, which tests the social support theories, provides little evidence to uphold it. While it is conceivable that other variables measuring parental and school support could be correlated with increased aspirations, the three variables employed in this study—teacher experience, teacher gender and parental homework help—are not significant. It is important to note that the 'learning helps' variable is significant, suggesting that students who believe in the value of education are more likely to pursue it at higher levels.

Finally, Model 5 adds an evangelical student and a female evangelical student variable to the analysis. These were included to see if there was something in particular about evangelicalism that might explain the increased aspirations in evangelical schools. Results for these variables were insignificant, suggesting that there is something specific about evangelical schools and not evangelicalism in general that contributes to the heightened academic expectations of their female students.[4]

Overall these findings support the status attainment model, which holds true even in a developing context like Guatemala. Students at higher grade levels have higher aspirations, as do those who believe that education provides some benefit for their lives. Two other significant findings include the result showing that female students in evangelical schools are much more likely than other students to aspire to a university education and the indication that non-egalitarian gender attitudes are negatively associated with academic aspirations.

V. Discussion

The results of this study point to a number of important issues that warrant further attention in the educational development community. First, as noted above, students in the Guatemalan private schools surveyed for this study aspire to finish university studies at astonishingly high rates—higher than those in most OECD countries. This result begs the question as to whether this is a phenomenon that is exclusively limited to private schools in Guatemala or if it is more widespread. Would these rates be as high in Guatemalan public schools? Would they be as high in other Latin American countries, or in developing nations throughout the world? As Anne McDaniel (2010) notes, very little research on educational aspirations has been conducted outside the United States and almost nothing has been done in the developing world. The surprisingly high levels of aspirations in this study suggest that much more needs to be done to understand trends in tertiary aspirations in developing countries and to consider their implications.

Furthermore, it is important to better understand why these students have such high aspiration rates. Answers put forth by previous studies in the West are at least partially supported by this research in a Latin American context. Scholarship dating back to the 1960s has established the importance of status attainment as a driver for academic aspirations and achievement in more developed countries. This study demonstrates that parents' educational status is also highly correlated with students' academic expectations, indicating that status transmission is also a concern in Guatemala and that education could be viewed as an important vehicle for status maintenance there as well.

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While this study supports status maintenance theory, it cannot fully explain the extraordinarily high aspiration rates among children in these schools. Although the schools in this sample are private schools, they are by no means elite. On average, mothers of students in this sample have a middle school education and only 21% have any tertiary schooling. Father's average education is slightly above the middle school level, with 27% attaining some level of tertiary education. These education levels for parents do not explain the 75% tertiary aspiration rates among students. The two other aspirational theories (blocking and social support theories) were also partially supported by the results above, but again, they cannot fully explain the size of the rates.

Unfortunately, the last remaining major theoretical framework for explaining academic aspirations—neo-institutionalism—could not be tested in this study. However, the fact that attainment, blocking and social support theories provide inadequate explanations for the high educational aspirations of these Guatemalan students indicates that it would be worthwhile to test neo-institutional theory in this context. Much of neo-institutional theory is formulated at the macro level, relying on quantitative studies. More micro- and meso-level neo-institutional studies would be beneficial to see if global educational scripts that include an emphasis on tertiary education have indeed entered the classrooms of schools such as those in this study's sample and if so, to determine what impact these scripts are having on the students.

Next, in addition to these theoretical issues, this study also has a number of practical implications. More than 75% of students in this study indicate that they expect to complete a university degree. At the same time, only 8.5% currently enrol in universities. This wide gap between expectations and reality raises a number of important issues. First it suggests that, at least in Guatemala, more needs to be done to provide students with opportunities to achieve their academic goals. The Guatemalan higher educational structure is not adequate to meet student demand for good quality, low cost opportunities to get an education. The gap between aspirations and reality also highlights the potential for student frustration. How will students respond if they are encouraged to aspire to something that is virtually unattainable due to limited supply and high costs? What effects could arise from this dissatisfaction? Finally, the gap raises larger questions as to the advisability of fostering high expectations in countries such as Guatemala. Does it make sense to encourage students to pursue something that is likely out of reach? While higher education may be important in Western economies, is it essential in developing economies that may not even be able to support large numbers of jobs for university graduates? These are key development questions that need to be addressed in contexts where academic aspirations are so high.

Another practical outcome is the finding that students who believe that their education is beneficial to their lives are more likely to want to stay in school longer. This may seem obvious, but it is not widely addressed in the literature on academic aspirations. It also suggests that schools that want to foster high aspirations should give more attention to providing their students with a sense of the practical relevance of schooling for their lives.

Finally, this study set out to specifically compare different types of private schools to determine if there is a significant difference between them in academic aspirations, particularly for girls. The results indicate that when boys and girls are considered together, these private schools seem to do equally well; however, females in evangelical schools tend to have the highest aspirations of all the students. This finding that evangelical schools score highest in girls' aspirations is curious given the fact that evangelical schools have significantly lower levels of father and mother education, parental homework help, and female teachers than other types of schools. Evangelical schools also have significantly higher numbers of students who are non-egalitarian in their gender attitudes. All of these outcomes would generally suggest lower student aspirations, especially for girls. Evangelical schools do tend to have more experienced teachers than other schools, but this is not a significant variable in any of the models. Other measures, such class size and teacher education, were tested but not included because they produced insignificant results. While data acquired for this current research provide no clear explanation for this phenomenon, it may be best explained by the Protestant Ethic (Weber,(1930) 2002).This Protestant ideal, which emphasizes individualism, self-discipline and initiative, is alive and well in Guatemala (Sherman, 1997). Because achievement and a calling in the world can best be achieved, for girls especially, through education, this may explain why evangelical schools do so much to encourage their girls to aspire to higher levels of education.

VI. Conclusion

This study breaks new ground by examining the role of religion and religious schools in particular in educational aspirations.It is one of a few studies that explore gender differences in aspirations and the only study to examine aspirations in a non-Western

[4] Specific religious beliefs such as biblical literalism and the belief that Christ is returning soon were tested, but none of these were significant so they were excluded from the final models.

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context.Though much more needs to be done to fully explore the implications of these new lines of research, the results do point to a number of significant findings that have implications for education and societal change around the world. The high rates of academic aspirations for boys, and especially for girls, point to the potential for growing demand for education in developing countries like Guatemala. They also suggest that private evangelical schools in some way contribute to this demand. The implications of these high aspiration rates are, as yet, unforeseeable, but given the gap between expectations and reality, they clearly merit further attention.

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