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Examining the Influence of Negative Labeling on Educational Aspirations

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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVE LABELING ON EDUCATIONAL
ASPIRATIONS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Jessie Schartung

August 2015

EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVE LABELING ON EDUCATIONAL
ASPIRATIONS

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I dedicate this thesis to my sister, Jennifer Gibbs -- who told me to carry on as she battled cancer and believed in me to her last breath. My best friend and biggest supporter.

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Teenagers are not yet fully developed, creating their self-identity, full of aspiration, and exploring their world through sometimes harmless acts. While it has long been acknowledged that delinquency can lead to a life of crime, criminologists vary on whether a criminal disposition is caused by internal and/or external forces. Labeling theory suggests it could be the negative labels placed upon youth that could inhibit future aspirations more so than the delinquent acts themselves. Using data from the National Youth Survey, this study examines the influence of negative labeling by significant others on educational aspirations among youth with varying levels of educational achievement. These analyses use the third wave of the National Youth Survey dataset when the respondents were teenagers, aged 13-19, as well as the fifth wave, two years later, to examine the internalization of negative labels and the transformative effects on self-identity and educational aspirations. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models show statistically significant relationships between negative labeling by significant others (teachers, parents, and friends) and lowered educational aspirations net of delinquency. Specifically, negative labeling by teachers has the most profound effect upon low achievers, while negative labeling by parents and friends has the greatest impact on middle achievers. Implications are discussed.

Introduction

For years, researchers have investigated the link between delinquency and negative labeling (Cechavicute & Kenny, 2007; Chambliss, 1973; Chassin & Young, 1981; Jenson, 1980; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Liu, 2000; Matsueda, 1992). More recently, researchers have begun to explore educational and occupational aspirations of youth, along with the factors that predict success or foreshadow a destructive path (Barry, Chaney, and Chaney, 2001; Hannon, 2003; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Polk & Schafer, 1972; Monk-Turner, 1989; Rist, 2011; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Wiatrowski, Hansell, Massey, & Wilson, 1982). What has yet to be explored is the potential behind peeling that label off. In small ways is society shaping who is to be successful?

An ongoing question for criminologists is if a criminal disposition is caused by internal and/or external forces. Labeling theory suggests that an individual becomes predisposed to delinquency through a process of stigmatizing an individual, placing a label on them, and producing a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). Should this be the case the label will have a greater effect on self-identity and aspirations than the delinquent acts themselves. Understanding labeling's effects could be meaningful for policies within schools and preventive action at both school and home. Teenagers are still developing, creating their self-identity, and occasionally engaging in risky, yet harmless acts while exploring their world.

Researchers typically look at the correlates of delinquency and the subsequent outcomes of delinquency for teens (Barry, Chaney, and Chaney, 2011; Briar & Piliavin, 1965; Hannon, 2003; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Menard & Morse, 1984; Short &

Strodtbeck, 1965). However, exploration is needed examining the affect of the negative label itself and how it may inhibit future aspirations for those labeled delinquent and not the delinquent acts themselves. Discovering and possibly curbing the influence of negative labeling on educational aspirations could be vital for youth and their future outcomes.

This study examines negative labeling by significant others, including teachers, parents, and friends, and the educational aspirations of youth ages 13-19 years old. This is done by analyzing data from the third and fifth waves of the National Youth Survey to examine if negative labels in wave 3 are internalized and influence future educational aspirations in wave 5. This study also examines the impact of negative labeling for youth with varying levels of academic achievement, measured by grade point average (GPA).

It can reveal, first, if there is a relationship between negative labeling and lowered educational aspirations. Through the further examination of the effect on various educational achievement levels we gain insight into who is most harmed by these negative labels. Perhaps those with lower academic abilities are more accepting of a negative label, thus negatively affecting educational aspirations, while others are empowered, raising aspirations to “prove people wrong.”

This research builds on existing findings from the criminological literature and explores the extent negative labeling has on self-identity and aspirations. This factor is addressed separate from delinquency and hypothesized to lower educational aspirations. When present, negative labeling by significant others is hypothesized to lower educational aspirations. This study is the first to dissect those significant others as well

as the recipients of the negative label separated by varying achievement levels as to see the clearest possible picture of the damage being done.

Literature Review

Labeling

Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), uses the phrase “looking glass self” to refer to self-image being based on how one thinks others see oneself; it is not a direct label, but a reflexive appraisal. Others are a mirror (which used to be called looking glass) in which individuals see themselves and from which draw conclusions that affirm or challenge one’s sense of self. What individuals think of themselves, then, depends on how individuals think others view them. Another important contributor to this work in sociology, George Herbert Mead (1934) speaks of the self that arises in various situations. Current research stems from the work of these classical sociologists.

Ross Matsueda (1992) speaks of there being significant others in individual’s lives, which are also referred to as reference groups. At a young age one begins to strive to maintain a good self-image in the eyes of parents, friends, and teachers. Studies show that reflected appraisals, or one’s perception of how others see oneself, does influence an individual’s behavior and is an aspect of one’s self (Cechavicute & Kenny, 2007; Chassin & Young, 1981; Felson, 1985; Kinch, 1963; Matsueda, 1992; Rist, 2011; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Those who perceive that others view him/her as a delinquent, for example, and as one who would engage in delinquent behavior is more likely to commit delinquent acts (Chassin & Young, 1981; Matsueda, 1992). Once one begins internalizing a label he/she may take on that role and begin acting on the reflected

appraisal part of self. In this instance, Matsueda (1992, p. 1582) calls this “the self as a delinquent.” The delinquent self is a dimension of individuals that both endures and predicts such delinquent behaviors (Matsueda, 1992).

While internalizing the labels one begins a path known as a self-fulfilling prophecy, living up to the role one perceives is expected of him/her. W.I. Thomas states, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” which has become a fundamental principle in sociology. “Living up to” a negative label can have very damaging consequences. The feeling of being stigmatized through the labeling and judging of society shapes and fuels the continued path (Cechavicute & Kenny, 2007). Matsueda (1992) discusses how a child committing harmless acts, seeking fun and adventure, can be labeled “bad” or “evil” by a community, parents, friends, and teachers. That label stigmatizes the child and influences the self-image. This is when a self-fulfilling prophecy takes place and a child responds with a delinquent self-image. The chances for further labeling and delinquency increase in a spiraling process fulfilling the negative label (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). It can even be a rite of passage from one side of the group boundary to the other (Erikson, 1969).

Some individuals are more likely to be labeled than others (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Simmons, 1965; Farrell & Swigert, 1978, 1988). According to labeling theory, deviant labels are more likely to be placed on the powerless, especially teenagers given their age and lack of authority. It is also found more with the disadvantaged and poor (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). Delinquent labels are generally placed on existing criminal stereotypes such as those in the lower class, minorities, and again, teenagers (Simmons, 1965; Farrell & Swigert, 1978, 1988). Labels are not equally or fairly distributed.

Though more likely, a label is not always attached to delinquent acts or those who commit them. The powerless, such as teens and those with fewer resources, are more likely to accept labels, which, again, turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy (Matsueda, 1992).

Research finds mixed results when testing labeling theory. Jensen (1980) poses that labeling has a greater impact on those less delinquent. The labels for such individuals cause the delinquent self-image. The great impact can be even more harmful for those falsely accused or undeserving of labels.

A label is not placed on all youth who commit crimes. Teenagers are in their prime for seeking fun and excitement and engaging in risky behavior (Arluke, 2002). Cechaviciute & Kenny (2007) find the numbers to be lower than suspected when studying a sample of young offenders serving community orders. Their work notes out of 153 youth offenders, “more than half did not believe others labeled them delinquent” (Cechaviciute & Kenny, 2007, p. 1). Similar research finds that most juvenile delinquents do not accept the delinquent label (Chassin & Young, 1981). Those who did believe they were labeled self-reported more delinquency, yet criminal records were the same as the other youth offenders (Cechaviciute & Kenny, 2007). A strong association between feeling labeled and self-reporting is found across literature (Cechaviciute & Kenny, 2007; Jensen 1980; Matsueda 1992). This could lead to problematic results if studying delinquency, however when studying labeling, it sheds a bit of light on self-image.

Labeling by Parents

As noted, parents have an enormous influence on their children, more so than their peers, teachers, and other significant others (Garg et al., 2002; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986). Often parental aspirations for their children become the aspirations of the children themselves (Garg et al.; Wentzell, 1998). Parental labeling, which can bear the heaviest influence, can be negative as well. It is noted to have the strongest impact when a child is seeking approval and support and expects a loving, positive reaction or praise. If they expect one thing and receive a different reaction from a parent, their disapproval or disinterest can seem twice as bad. This can happen when presenting a report card or speaking of achievements. Where praise is expected they may feel shunned and suddenly “not good enough” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Negative labeling by parents at times can be found where no deviance is even occurring (Matsueda, 1992). Labels can be transferred to a child simply from a parent who feels stigmatized. Matsueda (1992) notes that a self-fulfilling prophecy can occur even when labels hold no ground. You can have the brightest student, with the same abilities and behaviors as their peers, who is negatively labeled because of the parent’s own self view. Not only does the parent see themselves through what they believe the eyes of others hold, they transfer the label onto their children as well.

Simultaneously a parent may be wrapping a successful label around their son or daughter, which has the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy as well (Agnew & Jones, 1988). Similar to teachers encouraging bright students, leading them on a path to success (Agnew & Jones, 1988; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Polk & Schafer; Wiatrowski et al., 1982), so do parents. Some can thrive with a positive label and incredible

influence. However, a positive label is not always enough if the abilities or motivation are lacking within the individual (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). Again, a label can be positive or negative (Elliot, 1978).

Matseuda (1992) work measures both positive and negative labels in his study drawn from the first three waves of the National Youth Survey. He explores the labels of sociable, success, distressed, and rule violator, placed on youth 11-17 years old by their reference groups: parents, friends, and teachers. The study finds that blacks are more likely to be negatively labeled net of delinquency. It also revealed a high correlation between parental appraisal of youth and the youth's reflected appraisal. The strong influence was hypothesized beforehand because of the intimate knowledge a parent has of child (Matseuda, 1992). The significant role is there as well, as children often seek approval in their parents' eyes. Parents may also be quicker to label their child as deviant or delinquent because of their concerns for their children's behavior (Matseuda, 1992). It is also found that the child does not even have to be aware of the label to suffer damaging effects. Labels placed on youth by parents can affect the child's actions by how they treat their child regardless if the child is aware of the label or not (Liu, 2000; Matsueda, 1992). For example, if a parent believes a child to be delinquent, he or she may distance him/herself, further alienating the youth or showing less affection such that delinquency results from the treatment (Liu, 2000; Matsueda, 1992). This could also be the case of labels being passed down in disadvantaged families.

Labeling by Friends

True internalization of a negative label creates "delinquent as self" as Matsueda (1992 p. 1582) notes, with a delinquent identity formed. Again, we see Sutherland's

differential association theory at play as the next step being a sister to the labeling theory (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). When a youth starts internalizing labels perceived by others and embracing delinquent as self, they are also more likely to associate with delinquent peers. These associations create a new reference group of those similar and supportive (Shibutani, 1955; Glaser, 1956). The youth will find themselves molding to the attitudes of the group, strengthening this self, and possibly setting a new path with a new set of norms and expectations. Within this group, he/she will learn motives, justifications, receive positive reactions, and be presented with many more situations to partake in delinquency (Briar & Piliavin, 1965; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965). The strong influence of delinquent peers and lifestyle may reinforce or supersede the adverse effects of negative labeling by significant others (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Liu, 2000). Delinquency may even be a coping mechanism to deal with the frustration of the negative labels or turn to rebellion when coming from parents (Liu, 2000). If youth already belong in a group with delinquent peers, a negative or “bad” label can be seen as a good title, where delinquent acts are rewarded (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). Heimer and Matsueda (1994) note that most youth who are a part of conventional peer groups will likely feel the label of “good kid,” seeing themselves as such, therefore expressing different attitudes, expectations, and behavior. Labels have incredible influence in shaping how one sees themselves, steps they take, and even embracing what they *believe* to be life outcomes.

“Why Try” Effect

Recent studies among other fields, such as psychology and psychiatry, explore a “Why Try” model, referring to it as “modified labeling theory” (Corrigan, Larson, &

Rusch, 2009). This model examines a “why try effect” that occurs after accepting and internalizing attitudes that accompany stereotypes among adults. The focus on this model has been on stigma stemming from mental illness, lowered self-esteem and self-worth, and a lack of confidence needed to achieve one’s goals (Corrigan et al., 2009).

This “Why Try Effect” concept can be applied back to sociology and criminology where it began as traditional labeling theory to explore the vulnerable population of youth struggling with the internalization of negative labels at a time when aspirations should be peaking. Youth engage at times in risky lifestyles and activities. They are prone to stereotypes and stigmatization. Though not necessarily mentally ill, being negatively labeled may leave them feeling unsuccessful. Teachers, parents, and friends play such a significant role, and a youth feeling looked down upon may also ask the question, “Why try?”

One contribution other fields make is finding an opposite positive reaction in some stigmatized individuals (Corrigan et al., 2009). Psychologists find empowerment within some who have been stigmatized, who respond by trying to “prove others wrong.” Such individuals “energize” from being stereotyped and react pro-socially to it (Corrigan et al., 2009). Should this be a reality, further research might examine how academic ability, mixed with negative labeling over time, can influence pro-social outcomes over time. Youth, who have never been studied in this regard, may be more resilient and react with an even more pro-social self-fulfilling prophecy. Drawing from the literature, it is hypothesized that such positive reaction may occur with those who are more stable and more susceptible to positive labeling from others pushing them toward success. This is suspected among high achievers, who likely have higher self-esteem due to grades, and

may find alternative avenues for support, whether it be from teachers or within the home. Looking at different achievement levels in the current study will also show the others being most harmed by the negative label. Though youth can be resilient, they are still in a vulnerable developmental stage in their lives and developing their self-identity. They are prone to being highly influenced and aware of the views around them. Drawing from prior literature again, one can sense that those with lower ability levels reflected in GPA may too say, “why try?” regarding college attainment. This will allow us to see the extent of that damage of internalization and acceptance of negative labels and who exactly is falling through the cracks.

Educational Aspirations

The pursuit of knowledge should be a path that is available to everyone. Somewhere inside, people are born to not only strive in society, but to tap into their potential and thrive. Compared with thirty years ago, completing college has become a social norm in the United States (Goyette, 2008). Youth are now expected to complete college despite parents’ education, social background, or academic aptitude. The occupational bar is often higher, with youth now aspiring for jobs that require a Bachelor’s degree, though it is noteworthy that requirements for jobs have not changed significantly (Goyette, 2008). The expectation of a BA has risen from 43.4% of high schoolers expecting to receive degree in 1980, to 62% in 1990, to an astounding 84.5% in 2002. College attainment is not just a societal expectation but ingrained in the students themselves, with four out of five reporting hopes for attaining a degree (Goyette, 2008).

Profile of a College Student

Not everyone, of course, fulfills those aspirations. There is a typical “profile of a college student” that many youth are aware of (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). A study using the National Youth Survey Waves I-III finds the role expectations of youth to be significant when looking at college expectations. Youth are aware of their role expectations as shaped by society with the younger and higher class more likely to expect to go to college (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). Those in the lower class are more likely to go to two year schools and are less likely to finish degrees (Goyette, 2008). Women are now more likely than men to go to college (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006). There are conflicting findings regarding race, with studies finding both higher and lower expectations of black youth attending college (Hauser & Anderson, 1991; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Delinquency and college expectations are noted to be on opposite sides of the spectrum (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Polk & Schafer; Rist, 2011; Wiatrowski et al., 1982). A delinquent is not the profile of an aspiring college student, nor is it a student that most schools are interested in recruiting.

Not all youth fall into the trap of the college student stereotype. Non-traditional students are noted to make up 38% of the student body and expected to rise (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Role expectations are being challenged and it is no longer clear cut. For example, though those in the upper class fit the “profile of a college student,” youth from that class are reportedly only 1.8 times more likely to expect a BA in comparison to lower class peers (Goyette, 2008). This signifies aspirations should not be much different across the board. The influence of social class has declined. Education is becoming

universal with more seeing college as a realistic and attainable goal (Goyette, 2008). Though there is a profile for youth, society is not shaking the aspirations.

What then, is the influence of the significant others around us? Parents' aspirations for their own children, for example, have a strong influence on children's aspirations for themselves (Garg, Kauppi, Lewko, and Urajnik, 2002; Wentzell, 1998). Conversely, if parents are negatively labeling their children, it could have damaging effects lowering aspirations. Teenagers are also surrounded by peers every day as well as teachers within school systems that can all affect their aspirations and self-identity.

In a complex society many factors influence who goes to college (Agnew & Jones, 1988; Barry, Chaney, and Chaney, 2011; Garg et al., 2002; Hannon, 2003; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986; Polk & Schafer, 1972; Wiatrowski et al., 1982) as well as many factors surrounding the influence from various reference groups. Those influences can be positive or negative. Some influences include residential location, strength of attachments to parents and peers, supervision, and school organization (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Parents are noted across studies to have an enormous influence on their children, more so than their peers, teachers, and other models in their life (Garg et al., 2002; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986). Moreover these factors are interconnected. As Heimer and Matsueda (1994: 369) note, "within schools, peer influences are in part conditioned by the conventional social organization and interactional patterns of the school." The quality of school a youth attends can make a major difference in their future paths (Kozol, 1991). School organization that does not tolerate delinquent behavior, for example, and is instead committed to scholastic achievement and promoting a brighter path can have high

influence on educational aspirations and attainment (Polk & Schafer; Wiatrowski et al., 1982). This raises flags for alternative schools that only pursue graduation as well as other more disadvantaged and disorganized school settings. That with a finding that negative labels are more often applied to disadvantaged groups and stereotypical deviants could be a concern for a self-fulfilling prophecy within the structure (Heimer & Matsueda; Farrell & Swigert, 1978, 1988; Rist, 2011; Simmons, 1965). Negative labels are important and can easily lower educational aspirations and diminish drives, quite possibly in the best and brightest students.

Positive Effects of Labeling on Schooling

Within schools committed to high scholastic achievement, students are also socialized to “high aspirations, rewarding high-achievers, motivating students to learn and dissuading students from negative subcultures---all of which increase the likelihood that students’ generalized others will include law-abiding classmates, teachers, and conventional rules and role expectations” (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994, p.370). These seeds are planted within the students in various ways. Researchers study the process in which these seeds grow (Good & Brody, 1973; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Rist, 2011; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), known for their work, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, take a closer look at the inside workings of labeling and success within the classroom, exploring the self-fulfilling prophecy. Like labeling theory they explain how something may not be a reality, but once someone believes something and acts upon it, it then becomes true to them (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). They have found that simply knowing the expectations of others can increase one’s motivation and reduce anxiety. Alternatively, if one knows that other’s expectations are unfavorable it

can reduce one's motivation and increase anxiety. Different sciences explore this phenomenon, calling it the "placebo effect," and within education, the "expectancy effect." It is noted we need more observational experiments to see how teachers' attitudes affect student behavior, but there is always an ethical concern when labeling students negatively (Rist, 2011; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). They have been successful, however, in testing positive behavior that leads to positive results.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) find, through an Oak School Experiment, that students expected to gain intellectually do more so than those not expected. Their experiment is conducted at a public elementary school and tested the proposition that within a given classroom those children from whom the teacher expected greater intellectual growth would show such greater growth. They find that when the students were labeled favorably, the teachers were noted to observe with a "halo in the eye." Even the grading behavior differed whether the "halo in the eye" was present or not. When teachers' expectations lower, they were noted to grade more harshly, and also had lower standards for lower class students as well. The interaction quality was also observed, with teachers treating their students in a more pleasant, friendly, and enthusiastic fashion when they had more favorable expectations for their intellectual development. It notes that this more pleasant behavior led to better behavior as well as more opportunities for the star students overall.

Good and Brophy (1973) also investigate processes within the classroom. Five steps arise beginning with teachers expecting specific behavior and achievement from particular students. Because of the different expectations, the teacher behaves differently toward different students. The teacher's treatment tells the student what behavior and

achievement the teacher expects from him and affects his self-concept, achievement motivation, and level of aspiration. The next step in the process is when the teacher treatment is consistent over time, and if the student does not actively resist or change it in some way it will often shape his achievement and behavior. High expectation students are led to achieve at high levels. While the achievement of low-expectation students decline. Lastly, with time, the student's achievement and behavior conform ever more closely to that originally expected of him.

Ray Rist (2011) explores similar interactions between teachers and students in his work. He finds multiple labels exist within classrooms ranging from bright, slow, trouble maker, to teacher's little helper. He explores the belief that teachers at all levels are prejudiced by information they receive about students ability and character, some of which is not even true. He states, "A godly amount of information about the student which informs the teacher's evaluation is second hand information," (p.74). This is unfair to the students and yields a profound impact to their treatment. Rist (2011) notes that studies have found that high achievers and low achievers are treated differently. High achievers have been given longer to answer questions and sometimes a second chance when low achievers are not. Rist (2011) also notes high achievers being praised more frequently and criticized less for failure.

While this work explores achievement influencing labeling, examining the influence of negative labeling on future achievement is important. If negative labeling inhibits future aspirations some may never even be given the chance to rise in achievement level. This could especially be true if the varying achievement levels are influenced differently. Some students' potential may never be tapped into but instead

blocked. While students can resist labels and expectations, making teachers change them, it is very difficult because of their power position.

Max Weber himself stated, to have power is to be able to achieve one's ends, even the face of resistance from others. When that resistance is manifested in school by children and is defined by teachers and administrators as truancy, recalcitrance, unruliness, and hostility, or conversely defined as a lack of motivation, intellectual apathy, sullenness, passivity, or withdrawal, the process is ready to be repeated and the options to escape further teacher definitions are increasingly removed (Rist, 2011, p. 80).

In contrast to the high achievers, poor performing students are less motivated, more likely to become alienated, less likely to be influenced by the school organization, and more likely to differentially associate with others labeled the same way (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Menard & Morse, 1984). Noblit and Polk (1975) highlight the point they do not have many reasons not to be a delinquent. At least being a delinquent is a status. The values of reference groups of these students are often different from their college-bound peer groups (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). They are more likely to identify with delinquents or those with "weak identities" and sway toward a subculture less committed to success. Students being rewarded and shining with positive labels clearly are being pushed to a more prosperous path. There is an obvious divide in the literature separating the youth.

In small ways these expectations and labels in society are shaping the path to success. Prior research notes that those who are positively labeled by significant others and encouraged to go to college with support often inflate their own abilities and maintain college expectations even if their grades are not up to par (Agnew & Jones, 1988). Sometimes, however, they find the academic challenge to be too great and they drop out. Educational aspirations for some of these students decrease after entering

college. Those ambitions are snuffed out after reality of college work sets in. The work may be harder than expected, individuals may be juggling family responsibilities causing additional stress, or simply the ability to afford school begins to crumble dreams (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). Their self-fulfilling prophecy diminishes. They thought they were a success and simply could not make it.

Negative Effects of Labeling on Schooling

There are those whose self-fulfilling prophecy was to not be successful. Failure is much easier to achieve. This negative path is much the same with delinquents during the process of internalizing a label and living up to a life of crime rather than a conventional path of college attainment.

Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi (1990: 162) state “Offenders do not do well in school. They do not like school. They are often truant and drop out at an early age. As a result every ‘school’ variable correlates strongly with crime and delinquency.” However, it is found if they stick with it, education makes a difference in the future outcomes of delinquents. Elizabeth Monk Turner (1989) conducted a study that shows how education is a mediating factor for adolescent delinquents and future outcomes. It is not their ability that is lacking, she finds, as delinquents who attain the same number of years of education as their counterparts subsequently obtain the same level of occupational prestige (Monk-Turner, 1989).

Educational attainment is clearly important for the future paths of youth, especially if the delinquent label and acts do not affect future outcomes and they continue to pushing forward with their educational aspirations. As noted above, educational aspirations are higher than they have ever been in our society and growing with

generations (Goyette, 2008). Due to the power of negative labels, however, some youth have a harder time on the path of educational attainment. Hannon (2003: 577) states, “Once labeled a delinquent, these juveniles find it difficult to gain access to conventional social networks (e.g. good students and supportive teachers) and easy to fit in with the wrong crowd.” Some youth may not begin to try.

Students already in disadvantaged situations lack counselors and have no one to prepare them. They can have high aspirations but no one guiding them through the college testing and application process (Goyette, 2008) or no one there to provide support or advice. Sampson and Laub (1993), in their work about turning points in the life course and changes, speak of differential association in explaining why some labeled youth keep thriving and some fall off the path. Differential association theory speaks of associating with those believed to be “like others,” such as delinquents, and adopting like attitudes and norms of the group (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). A youth labeled delinquent will often go down that path accepting the label rather than ignoring it. They then make changes within their lives adapting to a new subculture easier to fit into. Within many rebellious subcultures, resenting “conventional activities of school and work” is supported (Hannon, 2003, p.578).

Hannon’s (2003) study using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) raises some intriguing findings regarding the damaging effect of labeling and delinquency among different social classes and varying levels of educational attainment. As other studies note, the disadvantaged are more likely to be negatively labeled, and Hannon finds that the impact of the label on education to be greater among the higher classes, net of delinquency (Hannon, 2003). These studies suggest that where

one is more easily labeled, another is more harshly damaged from the label. Hannon (2003) notes that more research needs to shift focus from who is labeled to who receives the most negative consequences of the label. This study is an attempt to address this need, in part, by examining the impact of negative labeling on educational aspirations for young people with varying levels of academic achievement.

School Connectedness

Other researchers indicate more work is needed in areas of school connectedness, believing this could be the link between deviance and educational aspirations (Barry, Chaney, and Chaney, 2011). In a study exploring Monitoring the Future data, researchers find that delinquent acts such as increased alcohol use, truancy, and sexual activity to be related to lower educational aspirations among high school seniors. However, school connectedness has a strong positive relationship to educational outcomes (Barry, Chaney, and Chaney, 2011). This overlaps with the findings from Heimer and Matsueda (1994) regarding the influence of school organization, attachment, and teacher reference group. They find that such factors influence who goes to college. They find as well as that peer influences are in part conditioned by the conventional social organization and interactional patterns of the school.

The importance of school was also reflected among alternative schools. Kim and Taylor (2008) conducted research within a school to examine the myths of the authoritarian, intimidating, and disciplining environment. Through in-depth interviews they find a sense of security in the youth coupled with a sense of trust, a loving environment, and along with very high educational aspirations. Thus, the relationship between positive labeling from teachers, connectedness, and high educational aspirations

us apparent. However, they also uncover a dead end path for those aspirations. The school did not offer career counseling or the “college-bound curriculum” needed to fulfill their educational aspirations (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p.213). The researchers state that the school was helping the students graduate but preparation beyond graduation was not part of their vision or purpose (Kim & Taylor, 2008). With students leaving alternative schools with no avenues to pursue their educational aspirations and now possibly a negative label from being forced there due to discipline, one can wonder how quickly those in-depth interviews filled with aspirations dissolved.

Stigma

Alternative schools in themselves receive much stigma in society being called “dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents” (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p 207). Kim and Taylor further state that dealing with the stigma is one of the school’s biggest obstacles to success (p 207). If the schools receive such stigma from being “the dumping grounds,” imagine the damaging effect of the stigma on the students inside who are being “dumped.” Negative labels can range from anything from expressions like “bad kid,” “messed up,” “needs help,” to simply “not likely to succeed” (Elliot, 1978). There are many stereotypes and stigmas that can turn into labels, with the most profound effect coming from the world right around them (Cechavicute & Kenny, 2007; Felson, 1985; Kinch, 1963; Matsueda, 1992).

Methods

As mentioned throughout, continuing through the lens of labeling theory as the theoretical framework was ideal because it provided valuable insight for studying this relationship between negative labeling and educational aspirations, especially among the vulnerable population of youth. Such relationship had never been explored and separated from delinquency when examining negative labels. Prior research had demonstrated the transformative effects of a label upon an individual through this process of internalization. It built upon previous literature that spoke of individuals' transformative self-identity and the path of self-fulfilling prophecy paved by significant others. This study separated those significant others as well as the sample into varying achievement levels to examine how people reacted differently to negative labeling and the extent of the damage done by labeling. It revealed the true influence of being looked down upon with a negative label, despite the role of delinquent acts, which are much a part of previous literature. It also revealed who is being most harmed. The research question for this study is "does negative labeling lower educational aspirations?"

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are offered:

H1: There will be an inverse (i.e., negative) relationship between negative labeling and educational aspirations. It is hypothesized that negative labels by parents, teachers, and peers will lower future educational aspirations.

H2: Parental labeling will have the strongest effect on educational aspirations compared to teacher and peer labeling. This is due to the enormous influence parents have in their children's life.

H3: Negative labeling by friends will have a significant negative relationship with educational aspirations.

H4: There will be no significant relationship between negative labeling by teachers and educational aspirations.

H5: When examining the influence of negative labeling on educational aspirations among varying achievement levels, it is expected that those with greater abilities will have a positive reaction. There may be a positive relationship between high achievers, those trying to prove others wrong, and educational aspirations.

H6: The low achievers will suffer the most damage having a strong negative relationship with educational aspirations. As posed by the literature, they may have the least support and therefore be more prone to accepting the negative labels, in turn more affected by them.

This study used the National Youth Survey (NYS) to test hypotheses. The NYS was a national longitudinal study of 1,725 adolescents that began in 1976. Then, the participants were between the ages of 11 and 17 years old and were selected by a probability sampling method to represent the national population. Then the youth and parents were interviewed about various deviant behaviors and events in the preceding year. Data were collected on topics such as disruptive events in the home, drug and alcohol use, neighborhood problems, parental discipline, aspirations, labeling, victimization, sexual activity, and many others that provided insight into the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of youth. The National Youth Survey was administered over seven years, or waves, of data collection: 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1983, and 1987. More recently, the research team responsible for this data collection effort has renamed

the project the National Youth Survey—Family Study, as the participants are now in their middle ages and have their own families.

For this study, which focuses only on teenagers, these analyses used the responses of youth surveyed in the third wave of data collection, when they were between 13 and 19 years old in 1978. This wave of data also included questions regarding self-reported delinquency along with negative labeling by parents, friends, and teachers. The National Youth Survey Wave III (1978) is an ideal dataset from which to examine possible troubled teens.

Given the importance of the internalization process of negative labels and their potential effects on future outcomes, this research examined how covariates measuring negative labeling, educational achievement, delinquency, and demographic characteristics in Wave 3 (1978) influenced the future educational aspirations of these youth using the educational aspiration measure from Wave 5 (1980) of the NYS data. Using a dependent variable measured two years after the measurement of the independent variable allowed time for the negative labels measured in 1978 to be internalized by the youth and to influence their sense of self and their belief in future prospects, such as educational aspirations, which were then measured in 1980.

Labeling measures were created through questions answered by respondents in the year 1978. It is of concern in this study the labels match actual abilities of the youth rather than actions (such as “break rules,” “get in trouble,” “break laws”) because of the exploration of their influence on self-identity and educational aspirations. While labels of actions may hint at personality traits, there are no variables within the dataset to explore that avenue. Due to the interest lying in the perception from society that could

hurt the most personal self and aspirations, labels “bad kid,” “messed up,” “needs help,” and “not likely to succeed” placed on youth by the significant others had been chosen. These labels contain wording that could cause harm to the identity of the youth. These labels had been separated into three different categories: (1) negative labeling by teachers, (2) negative labeling by parents, and (3) negative labeling by friends. It is of utmost importance to separate the label from possible delinquent acts, as this study strives to explore the transformative effects as outlined in the labeling theory (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). If a negative label affects self-identity, especially during the vulnerable teenage years when aspirations should be peaking, it can very well be a flag of concern linking the new found self-fulfilling prophecy to lowered educational aspirations as well. Educational aspirations was the dependent variable in this study and examined longitudinally over two waves of data spanning a two-year period as to explore the possible internalization of negative labels and their impact on educational aspirations. Further separating the sample into three categories of “high achievers,” “middle achievers,” and “low achievers” based on GPA allowed for further examination at who is being affected. It is the views of the youth themselves explored in this study, both the perception of the label upon them as well as perceived chances of completing college.

Measures

Dependent Variable

Educational Aspirations. Educational aspirations was measured with one question “What do you think your chances are for completing a college degree—poor, fair or good?” Respondents stating *poor* were coded as 0, individuals stating *fair* were coded

as 1 and those respondents with *good* chances coded as 2. Educational aspirations was examined from Wave V.

Independent Variables

Negative Labeling by Teachers. This variable was created by summing together four questions: A) “How much would your teachers agree that you are a bad kid? B) “How much would your teachers agree that you are messed up?” C) “How much would your teachers agree that you need help?” D) “How much would your teachers agree that you are likely to succeed?” For each question, the response categories were *strongly disagree (coded with a 0), disagree (1), neither (2), agree (3), strongly agree (4).*” Question D was reverse coded to make the directions of the scale consistent with Questions A-C. A Cronbach’s alpha of .74 suggested strong internal consistency with these four measures, which were summed into an additive index ranging from 0-16.

Negative Labeling by Parents. This variable was created by summing together four questions: A) “How much would your parents agree that you are a bad kid?” B) “How much would your parents agree that you are messed up?” C) “How much would your parents agree that you need help?” D) “How much would your parents agree that you are likely to succeed?” For each question, the response categories were *strongly disagree (coded with a 0), disagree (1), neither (2), agree (3), strongly agree (4).*” Question D was reverse coded to make the directions of the scale consistent with Questions A-C. A Cronbach’s alpha of .72 suggested strong internal consistency with these four measures, which were summed into an additive index ranging from 0-16.

Negative Labeling by Friends. This variable was created by summing together four questions: A) “How much would your friends agree that you are a bad kid? B) “How much would your friends agree that you are messed up?” C) “How much would your friends agree that you need help?” D) “How much would your friends agree that you are likely to succeed? For each question, the response categories were *strongly disagree (coded with a 0), disagree (1), neither (2), agree (3), strongly agree (4).*” Question D was reverse coded to make the directions of the scale consistent with Questions A-C. A Cronbach’s alpha of .72 suggested strong internal consistency with these four measures, which were summed into an additive index ranging from 0-16.

Control Variables

Socioeconomic Status (SES). Respondents were asked globally in Wave I whether their family has received any money, food stamps, welfare, or other public assistance during the last year. A dichotomous variable was created with respondents answering “yes” to *receiving government assistance*, coded with a 1, and those answering “no” coded as 0.

Sex. A dichotomous variable was created to indicate whether a respondent was female (0) or *male* (1).

Race. One question was used to measure Race: “What is your ethnicity-Anglo, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian and Other?” The variable was dichotomized, Anglo was coded (0) and all other categories were coded with a *Minority* (1).

Delinquency. Delinquency was measured by thirteen variables measuring the extent to which respondents were runaways, suspended, stole, carried weapons, attacked,

drank in public, broke in, damaged property of others, school and home and whether or not respondents sold weed, smoked weed or skipped class. Cronbach's alpha of .74 suggested strong internal consistency with these thirteen measures. Each of these variables was recoded to never (0), once or twice (1), once every 2-3 months (2), once a month (3), once every 2-3 weeks (4), once a week (5), 2-3 times a week (6), once a day (7), 2-3 times a day (8). These variables were summed to create an index from 0 to 104, with zero indicating no delinquency and 104 extreme delinquency. The max and min in this study are 0 and 51. A principal components analysis was also performed using these 13 delinquency measures to examine the extent to which these indicators might load on unique factors. The results of this principal components analysis are presented in the appendix.

School Connectedness. School connectedness was measured by summing together six statements: a) "I don't feel that I fit in well with my friends." b) "Teachers don't call on me in class, even when I raise my hand." c) "I often feel nobody at school cares about me." d) "I don't feel as if I really belong at school." e) "Even though there are lots of kids around, I often feel lonely at school." f) "Teachers don't ask me to work on special classroom projects." Each variable was measured using a standard Likert scale of *strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree.* All variables were reverse coded so that *strongly agree* was 0 and *strongly disagree* was a 4. The range of the new variable is 6-24 with higher scores indicating higher levels of school connectedness. The Cronbach's alpha is .71.

Educational Achievement. One question was used to measure educational achievement: "Which of the following best describe the grades you are getting at school-

mostly A's, mostly B's, mostly C's, mostly D's and mostly F's.” These categories were coded 0-4 representing respondent’s GPA’s and were collapsed into three educational achievement levels. *Mostly A's* were coded as “High Achievers” (2), *Mostly B's* coded as the “Middle Achievers” (1), and *Mostly C's, D's, and F's* coded as “Low Achievers” (0).

Descriptive Statistics. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables that will be used for analysis.

Analytic Strategy

This analysis will be conducted by using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to examine the relationship between the multiple independent variables and the dependent variable educational aspirations. The independent variables include negative labeling by teachers, negative labeling by parents, and negative labeling by friends. The control variables include socioeconomic status (SES), sex, race, delinquency, and school connectedness. Further models will control for GPA by holding such constant within models examining different levels of educational achievement separately. A correlation matrix showing the bivariate relationships between all of the variables used in these OLS regression models is available in the appendix.

The first set of models will examine the effect of negative labeling by significant others, separately, on educational aspirations. These will include negative labeling by teachers, negative labeling by parents, and negative labeling by friends and their effect on educational aspirations. The next set of models will further explore negative labeling on educational aspirations for different educational achievement levels. The significant others are again separated by teacher, parent, and friend labeling, but analyses are

disaggregated so that the effects of negative labeling are examined for youth with varying levels of academic achievement, measured as high, middle, and low. The final set of models examine the influence of each type of negative labeling on educational aspirations for varying levels of academic achievement net of control variables, which again include SES, sex, race, delinquency, and school connectedness. These models allow for the best possible examination of the impact of negative labeling by significant others on the educational aspirations of teenagers with varying levels of academic achievement.

Analysis

Tables 2-6 illustrate the effects of negative labeling on the educational aspirations of youth 13-19 years old. Although the core research question of this study, illustrated in Table 2, is the effect of negative labeling on educational aspirations, it is of particular interest in this study to examine the effects of negative labeling on educational aspirations among youth with varying levels of educational achievement, relationships presented in tables 3-6. Bivariate correlations for all variables used in these analyses are provided for reference in the Appendix. The bivariate correlations were examined to test for possible multicollinearity issues among the independent variables and to demonstrate the bivariate relationships between the core independent variables and the dependent variable used in the study.

Negative Labeling on Educational Aspirations for All Youth in the Sample

Throughout all analysis negative labeling is split into three categories of significant others, including negative labeling by teachers, negative labeling by parents,

and negative labeling by friends. Further analyses examine how negative labeling by these three groups varies for youth with different levels of educational achievement.

Table 2 presents bivariate regression models showing the impact of negative labeling by teachers, parents, and friends in Wave 3 of the NYS study on the youth's educational aspirations in Wave 5 of the NYS study (two years later). The data presented in Models 1-3 in Table 2 reveal that all types of negative labeling statistically lower educational aspirations among teenagers. Moreover, a one unit increase in each type of negative labeling reduces educational aspirations by .08. With such high significance shown ($p < .001$), further analyses were conducted to investigate if the harmful effects of negative labeling varied based on educational achievement.

Negative Labeling on Educational Aspirations for Different Achievement Levels

To examine how negative labeling by teachers, parents, and friends varies for youth with different levels of educational achievement, the youth in the study were divided into three categories according to GPA: "High Achieving Students," "Middle Achieving Students," and "Low Achieving Students." The "High Achieving Students" are those who reported receiving "Mostly A's." The "Middle Achieving Students" include the "Mostly B's" respondents, and the "Low Achieving Students" are the reported C, D, and F students.

Table 3 presents bivariate regression models showing the impact of negative labeling by teachers, parents, and friends on the youth's educational aspirations in each educational achievement level. It was discovered that negative labeling by teachers, parents, and friends has a statistically significant ($p < .001$) influence on youth for nearly

all achievement levels. The only group that was not significant was high achievers being negatively labeled by teachers. This is consistent with the review of the literature.

Negative labeling by teachers, when examined in a bivariate regression as illustrated in Table 3, has a significant negative impact among middle achieving students ($p < .01$) and low achieving students ($p < .001$). Low achieving students suffer the strongest negative impact from negative labeling by teachers, with each one unit increase in negative labeling reducing their educational aspirations by .08. Middle achieving students' educational aspirations lower by half at .04. Such conclusions can be drawn due to similar sample sizes among these two categories. While comparing effect sizes in all models is problematic due to different sample size, this is addressed throughout by only focusing on comparisons of unstandardized coefficients for relationships that are significant across groups.

Interestingly, outside the classroom, it is the middle and high achieving students who suffer the strongest damage. Negative labeling by parents has a strong negative influence on both middle and high achieving students. Moreover, a one unit increase in negative labeling by parents lowers both educational aspirations by .09. Low achieving students are still significantly influenced ($p < .01$) by negative parental labeling but the influence is much weaker, with each one unit increase in negative labeling reducing their educational aspirations by .04.

A similar pattern is revealed when examining negative labeling by friends on the various achievement levels. While negative labeling by friends is a statistically significant predictor for lowered educational aspirations for all achievement levels, as illustrated in Table 3, it is the middle and high achieving students again most affected.

Each one unit increase in negative labeling by friends significantly lowers ($p < .001$) educational aspirations for high achieving students by .08. Just under, each one unit increase in negative labeling by friends onto middle achieving students, significantly lowers ($p < .001$) educational aspirations by .07. Educational aspirations for low achieving students is statistically lower at .04. While significant ($p < .05$), negative friend labeling onto low achievers shows to have the smallest relationship throughout all categories based on the unstandardized coefficients. It is expected that friends would have the weakest influence out of the significant others regarding future aspirations.

Multivariate analysis examine the relationship between negative labeling by teachers (Table 4), parents (Table 5) and friends (Table 6) on educational aspirations net of controls. Within each table, unique models examine the impact of each form of negative labeling among youth who are high achievers (Model 1), moderate achievers (Model 2) and low achievers (Model 3).

Teacher Labeling on Various Achievement Levels

Table 4 presents the influence of negative labeling by teachers on teenagers of various achievement levels net of all controls. When examining this unique model, it is first evident that negative labeling by teachers no longer is a significant influence on educational aspirations among middle achieving students net of the control variables. For this level of achievers, socioeconomic status is a strong factor as well as school connectedness. For middle achieving students, being a recipient of government assistance is a statistically significant predictor of lowered educational aspirations.

However, there is a positive significant relationship ($p < .05$) with the school connectedness among middle achieving students and their educational aspirations. The

effects of negative labeling by teachers on educational aspirations of low achieving students remained significant ($p < .001$) and revealed to have a profound impact among this group in the multivariate analysis. Moreover, each one unit increase in negative labeling by teachers lowers the educational aspirations of low achieving students by .07. Interestingly, for this achievement level, being both a male and a minority has a significant positive relationship with educational aspirations. This is illustrated in Model 3 of Table 4.

Parent Labeling on Various Achievement Levels

Models 1-3 in Table 5 illustrate the influence of negative labeling by parents on teenagers of various achievement levels net of all controls. Within these models negative labeling by parents is no longer a significant influence on educational aspirations of both high and low achieving students net of the control variables. When holding constant the variables SES, sex, race, delinquency, and school connectedness, negative parental labeling has a significant, negative impact on educational aspirations among youth with moderate levels of education achievement. Each one unit increase in negative labeling by parents lowers the educational aspirations of moderate achievers by .07 and remains a significant predictor ($p < .001$). Socioeconomic status was again a statistically significant predictor ($p < .05$) among the middle achieving students, as illustrated in Model 2 of Table 5. Those receiving government assistance is a significant predictor of lower educational aspirations. Among the low achieving students being a minority remained a positive significant relationship with educational aspirations. Delinquency has a negative, statistically significant effect on educational aspirations among the low achieving students holding constant other variables in the model.

Friend Labeling on Various Achievement Levels

Negative labeling by friends on the various achievement levels again mirrors much of what is seen with parental labeling. Just as with parents, negative labeling by friends is no longer a significant influence on educational aspirations of both high and low achieving students net of the control variables. The middle achieving students again suffer the strongest negative impact from negative labeling and negative labeling by friends remains a statistically significant predictor ($p < .01$) of lowering educational aspirations among this group. As illustrated in Model 2 of Table 6, each one unit increase in negative labeling by friends lowers educational aspirations by .05 when holding all other variables constant. Being a recipient of government assistance among this group again remained significant as well ($p < .05$). Being a minority also remained a statistically significant predictor ($p < .01$) of higher educational aspirations. And delinquency revealed again significant ($p < .05$) net of all controls. It is shown to have a statistically significant negative relationship with educational aspirations among low achieving students.

What is interesting throughout each multivariate analysis, Tables 4-6, is that not one variable remained a significant predictor of educational aspirations among the high achieving students. And no type of negative labeling appeared to have an impact on this group of teenagers. The smaller sample size among this group ($N = 243$) may have affected the results. Low achieving students suffered a profound impact from being negatively labeled by teachers. While middle achieving students were revealed to be most influenced by the labeling of parents and friends. Socioeconomic status played a role for all middle achievers. School connectedness helped raise educational aspirations

for middle achievers when holding constant teacher labeling. Oddly, being a male within this category did as well. Being a minority was a definite positive for all low achieving students when exploring negative labeling by all types of significant others. Delinquency showed its significance, as predicted in much of the literature, among (only) low achieving students in parent and friend labeling. Interestingly, though, delinquency did not matter when exploring negative labeling by teachers, even when the label remained significant.

Conclusion

Past research has focused on the link between delinquency and negative labeling theorized to spiral into a life of crime. This study separated negative labeling and investigated the influence it has upon teenagers and their future outcomes. Negative labeling by significant others consistently impacted and lowered educational aspirations in teenagers. This is separate from delinquent acts themselves and solely shaped by society deeming such kids as bad, needing help, messed up, or not likely to succeed. The internalization of such labels is apparent over time as the youth's self-identity is being shaped by what the significant others are saying. This study revealed the transformative effects of negative labeling as outlined in the labeling theory and confirmed that set up for a self-fulfilling prophecy. As hypothesized, all negative labels lowered educational aspirations.

Parental labeling was found to have the strongest impact among youth, as hypothesized as well, and reflected in the literature speaking of the enormous influence parents have in children's lives (Garg et al., 2002; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986).

The support for this hypothesis is shown best within table 3 which illustrates the bivariate relationships between all negative labeling by all significant others. This strong influence could be due to the intimate relationship between parent and child as well as invested interest in behaviors (Matsueda, 1992). Parents also have the highest influence on the child's self-image and thus aspirations. Parents are also noted as being the most critical and at times expressing different treatment toward a child due to the label (Liu, 2000: Matsueda, 1992). Again, these labels have nothing to do with intelligence, however, it is deeming the child as bad. This study reveals, once separating the sample into subgroups by achievement level, parental labeling has the most profound influence on the middle achievers. This category is composed of those students making "mostly B's." They have the intelligence and grades to go either way. It is suspected that the strong influence is significant because they are on that line. They have the grades to rise above successful or so close to the line they could fall through the cracks and not care. Perhaps this is where our concern should lie. If they are looked down upon with a negative label perhaps this group of teenagers can simply be pushed down. They can slide through those cracks never being acknowledged.

The same showed true for negative labeling by friends. It was the middle achievers most profoundly influenced. Maybe they do not shine with the straight A's, a group of whom was not affected, as hypothesized. While they did not have the spring effect trying to "prove people wrong," that group of achievers was not affected at all. It was the middle achievers as the flag of concern.

Negative labeling by teachers profoundly affected low achieving students, however. While much has been studied regarding teacher labeling and success (Good &

Brophy: Rist, 2011: Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) it is no surprise that those drifting in the classroom are being profoundly affected by what they feel is a negative label.

Teachers were noted to be prejudiced by information on ability and character and proven to treat high achievers and low achievers differently (Rist, 2011). While they may be trying to pull some to success, they are knocking the others down. Expectations become ingrained, good and bad. As seen in the literature, students who may perform poorly, are less motivated, or become alienated, may drift away and find “like others,” adopt new attitudes, and associate with delinquents (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Menard & Morse, 1984).

Analyses also revealed significant influences on educational aspirations among the control variables used in the multivariate regression models. School connectedness was found to be a link. The influence of negative labeling by teachers on middle achievers’ educational aspirations lost its significance when the control variables were added, one of which being school connectedness. School connectedness revealed to have a significant positive relationship with educational aspirations as mentioned in the literature (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994) among this group of middle achieving students, who could go either way. Being involved with school dissuades students from negative subcultures (Barry, Chaney, and Chaney, 2011). If not connected with the school there is more of a chance for association with “delinquents” or those with “weak identities” (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994). Naturally, that would lead to differential association, over the years adopting attitudes not concerned with scholastic achievement (Laub & Sampson, 1993). However, for this group of middle achievers, being rewarded and motivated within school and feeling connected can outweigh the label. Not only can

school connectedness outweigh the label and increase educational aspirations, those aspirations, as found by Barry, Chaney, and Chaney (2011) due to school connectedness, lead to better educational outcomes.

The label showed to matter among middle achievers, more than delinquent acts for both parent and friend labeling. Thus, if the label were not present, delinquency for this group of middle achievers would not be a predictor of lowered educational aspirations. The label is harming this group of teenagers more so than the acts, significantly. These are “above average students” falling through the cracks.

Delinquency was however a significant predictor of for low achieving students. As the literature had stated, students who may perform poorly, are less motivated, or become alienated may drift away and find “like others,” adopt new attitudes, and associate with delinquents (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Menard & Morse, 1984). Delinquency revealed a statistically significant predictor of lower educational aspirations when exploring parental and friend labeling of low achievers when the negative label did not show to be significant. Delinquent acts themselves have a larger influence than a label unless teachers are negatively labeling this group of low achievers. Interestingly, teacher labeling affects low achieving students more than delinquency. Delinquency is not even a significant predictor in the classroom, however when outside the walls, it outweighs the labels for the low achieving students.

Socioeconomic status remained a significant predictor of educational aspirations among middle achieving students when examining all types of labeling. Being a recipient of government assistance statistically lowered educational aspirations for all middle achieving students. Interestingly, however, being a minority showed to be a

positive predictor of educational aspirations constantly among the low achieving students.

Implications for Policy

By identifying the influence of negative labeling, policy makers as well as researchers can have a better understanding of the risk factors associated with negative labeling by significant others. More specifically, this study reveals the consequences negative labeling has on educational aspirations, and the influence on the various educational achievement levels. There is obvious concern for the middle achieving students. While the hypotheses of this study were supported, there was no prediction that the “above average” students would be suffering the most profound effect. Parental labeling was deemed the strongest and action needs to begin within the home. Perhaps we need to enforce family counseling for troubled teens. It could strengthen the bond between parents and children and decrease the chances of the damaging effects of negative label or the risk of distancing and treatment associated with such labels (Liu, 2000; Matsueda, 1992). Schools have the opportunity to increase positive labeling by increasing parental/teacher interactions. There can be more programs offered, whether required or just available, that build teens into a good light and give them the opportunity for positive labels. School connectedness did reveal to be a link, even if the positive labels do not result in increasing aspirations.

Regarding delinquents, this could mean community service with an actual acknowledgment of good work. Perhaps we need to redefine what delinquent acts are, as well as look at alternative schools and treatment centers. This study sheds valuable light among places with at-risk youth or housing juvenile delinquents, where it is suspected

that a negative label already exists. These students have potential behind that label if peeled off. It is noted within literature the lack of significant others pushing that potential in such individuals toward success. This can be a first step toward positive changes that not only help shape a path for youth, but make a path possible.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

As with any secondary data there are limitations involved in these analyses. Questions could not be asked and variables that could not be analyzed because they were not included in the National Youth Survey wave III dataset. Other factors, such as personality traits of the teenagers could not be explored, and while the variables such as delinquency and negative labeling were thoroughly defined, the dependent variable consisted only of one question to measure educational aspirations. The variable educational aspirations was also dropped in the sixth wave of data collection, so the longitudinal study could not exceed a two year span. It could be of interest for future research to begin the analyses at an earlier period, not only can the younger youth be more influential, but a look at the internalization can span more years. Further exploration of the minority variable that consistently showed a positive relationship with educational aspirations among low-achieving students could be of interest for future research as well. Another limitation within this study was using ordinary least squares regression for the ordinal variable. Future research may want to explore other options. It also needs to be noted that there is much unexplained variance in the models. Adding GPA into the regression models would allow for a better fit, however, it was of interest in this study to separate the sample by achievement level thus controlling for GPA by holding it constant, as to focus more so on the influence of negative labeling on various

groups. A consequence of such a decision was leaving a lot of unexplained variance within the models. The researcher acknowledges that the data are a bit outdated. However, a decision was made to use the National Youth Survey due to the direct look through the lens of the labeling theory and availability of both delinquency and negative labeling variables. It is still believed to have been the best option in exploring the relationship between negative labeling and educational aspirations of teenagers.

Future research needs to focus solely on these negative labels and work to extinguish myths that only delinquency can lead down that path. Society does have a hand in who is successful and in molding that self-fulfilling prophecy. Significant others can have a profound impact. It is owed to the next generation to pull that label off and expose potential. Teenagers are not yet fully developed. They deserve that chance to become whatever they want to be. This study can offer hope into curbing that influence before the damage is done.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics				
Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Dependent Variable:				
Educational Aspirations: Chances for completing a college degree	1.29	.79	0	2
Independent Variables:				
Negative Labeling by Teachers	4.17	2.14	0	14
Negative Labeling by Parents	3.75	2.24	0	16
Negative Labeling by Friends	3.80	1.93	0	13
Control Variables:				
Received Government Assistance	.18	.39	0	1
Male	.53	.50	0	1
Minority	.19	.39	0	1
Delinquency	4.20	6.20	0	51
School Connectedness	17.70	3.05	6	24
Educational Achievement	.77	.72	0	2

Table 2: OLS Regression: Negative Labeling on Educational Aspirations for All Youth in Sample

Educational Aspirations						
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta
Core IVs						
Negative Labeling by Teachers	-.08 (.01)	-.23***	----	----	----	----
Negative Labeling by Parents	----	----	-.08 (.01)	-.23***	----	----
Negative Labeling by Friends	----	----	----	----	-.08 (.01)	-.20***
Constant	1.69 (.04)		1.63 (.04)		1.64 (.04)	
N	1366		1366		1366	
R-Square	5.27%		5.16%		3.96%	
F-Statistic	75.87		74.19		56.28	
* = p < .05						
** = P <.01						
*** = p < .001						

Table 3: OLS Regression: Negative Labeling on Educational Aspirations for Different Educational Achievement Levels					
	b	SE	Beta	r²	N
Teacher Labeling					
High Achieving Students	-.01	.02	-.05	.23%	245
Middle Achieving Students	-.04	.02	-.11**	1.12%	606
Low Achieving Students	-.08	.02	-.21***	4.39%	534
Parent Labeling					
High Achieving Students	-.09	.02	-.27***	7.06%	334
Middle Achieving Students	-.09	.01	-.25***	6.36%	695
Low Achieving Students	-.04	.01	-.11**	1.22%	621
Friend Labeling					
High Achieving Students	-.08	.02	-.20***	4.1%	332
Middle Achieving Students	-.07	.02	-.18***	3.22%	698
Low Achieving Students	-.04	.02	-.09*	.84%	622
* = p < .05					
** = p < .01					
*** = p < .001					

Table 4: OLS Regression: Teacher Labeling on Various Achievement Levels

Educational Aspirations						
	Model 1 High Achieving Students		Model 2 Middle Achieving Students		Model 3 Low Achieving Students	
	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta
Core IVs						
Negative Teacher Labeling	-.01 (.02)	-.05	.01 (.02)	.04	.07 (.02)	-.19***
Controls						
Received Government Assistance	-.01 (.12)	-.01	-.23 (.09)	-.12*	-.11 (.09)	-.06
Male	.12 (.07)	.11	.08 (.06)	.06	.14 (.07)	.09*
Minority	.08 (.11)	.05	-.01 (.08)	-.01	.28 (.08)	.15**
Delinquency	-.01 (.01)	-.12	-.01 (.01)	-.06	-.01 (.01)	-.05
School Connectedness	.00 (.02)	.01	.03 (.01)	.11*	.01 (.01)	.03
Constant	1.73 (.35)		1.02 (.25)		1.15 (.26)	
N	243		595		522	
R-Square	2.8%		3.9%		7.4%	
F-Statistic	1.13		3.93		6.81	
* = p < .05						
** = P < .01						
*** = p < .001						

Table 5: OLS Regression: Parent Labeling on Various Achievement Levels

Educational Aspirations						
	Model 1 High Achieving Students		Model 2 Middle Achieving Students		Model 3 Low Achieving Students	
	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta
Core IVs						
Negative Parent Labeling	-.02 (.02)	-.09	-.07 (.02)	-.20***	-.02 (.02)	-.05
Controls						
Received Government Assistance	-.00 (.12)	-.00	-.20 (.09)	-.11*	-.10 (.09)	-.05
Male	.12 (.07)	.11	.08 (.06)	.06	.12 (.07)	.07
Minority	.09 (.11)	.06	.02 (.08)	-.01	.27 (.09)	.15**
Delinquency	-.01 (.01)	-.12	-.00 (.01)	-.02	-.01 (.00)	-.11*
School Connectedness	-.00 (.01)	-.01	.01 (.01)	.04	.02 (.01)	.08
Constant	1.81 (.32)		1.53 (.24)		.75 (.27)	
N	244		594		519	
R-Square	3.12%		6.5%		5.5%	
F-Statistic	1.27		6.82		4.96	
* = p < .05						
** = P < .01						
*** = p < .001						

Table 6: OLS Regression: Friend Labeling on Various Achievement Levels

Educational Aspirations						
	Model 1 High Achieving Students		Model 2 Middle Achieving Students		Model 3 Low Achieving Students	
	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta	b (s.e.)	Beta
Core IVs						
Negative Friend Labeling	-.02 (.02)	-.05	-.05 (.02)	-.13**	-.03 (.02)	-.07
Controls						
Received Government Assistance	-.02 (.12)	-.01	-.21 (.09)	-.11*	-.09 (.09)	-.05
Male	.12 (.07)	.11	.10 (.06)	.07	.12 (.07)	.07
Minority	.08 (.11)	.05	-.00 (.08)	-.00	.27 (.09)	.14**
Delinquency	-.01 (.01)	-.12	-.01 (.01)	-.05	-.01 (.00)	-.10*
School Connectedness	.00 (.01)	.00	.02 (.01)	.07	.02 (.01)	.08
Constant	1.75 (.32)		1.33 (.25)		.80 (.28)	
N	243		598		521	
R-Square	2.8%		4.82%		5.22%	
F-Statistic	1.13		4.99		4.72	
* = p < .05						
** = P < .01						
*** = p < .001						

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Appendix A

Correlation Matrix of Educational Aspirations, Labeling, and Control Variables For All Youth In the Sample (N = 1366)									
Variable	Educational Aspirations	Negative Labeling by Teachers	Negative Labeling by Parents	Negative Labeling by Friends	SES	Sex	Race	Delinquency	School Connectedness
Educational Aspirations	---								
Negative Labeling by Teachers	-.23*	---							
Negative Labeling by Parents	-.23*	.69*	---						
Negative Labeling by Friends	-.19*	.74*	.73*	---					
SES	-.10*	.12*	.15*	.16*	---				
Sex	-.01	.22*	.12*	.21*	-.00	---			
Race	.03	.09*	.13*	.12*	.36*	.02	---		
Delinquency	-.14*	.33*	.27*	.25*	.06*	.21	-.08*	---	
School Connectedness	.18*	-.52	-.52*	-.54*	-.11	-.11*	-.06	-.16*	---

* = $p < .05$

Correlation Matrix of Educational Aspirations, Labeling, and Control Variables for High Achievers (N= 257)									
Variable	Educational Aspirations	Negative Labeling by Teachers	Negative Labeling by Parents	Negative Labeling by Friends	SES	Sex	Race	Delinquency	School Connectedness
Educational Aspirations	---								
Negative Labeling by Teachers	-.05	---							
Negative Labeling by Parents	-.27*	.75*	---						
Negative Labeling by Friends	-.20*	.75*	.78*	---					
SES	-.16*	.22*	.27*	.22*	---				
Sex	.04	.19*	.11*	.15*	.02	---			
Race	.06	.19*	.23*	.22*	.29*	.04	---		
Delinquency	-.16*	.32*	.29*	.33*	.15*	.23*	-.02*	---	
School Connectedness	.02*	-.62*	-.56*	-.54*	-.20*	-.18*	-.13*	-.24*	---

* = p < .05

Correlation Matrix of Educational Aspirations, Labeling, and Control Variables for Middle Achievers (N= 658)									
Variable	Educational Aspirations	Negative Labeling by Teachers	Negative Labeling by Parents	Negative Labeling by Friends	SES	Sex	Race	Delinquency	School Connectedness
Educational Aspirations	---								
Negative Labeling by Teachers	-.11*	---							
Negative Labeling by Parents	-.25*	.66*	---						
Negative Labeling by Friends	-.18*	.72*	.70*	---					
SES	-.15*	.14*	.16*	.16*	---				
Sex	-.01	.18*	.12*	.22*	-.00	---			
Race	.02	.11*	.15*	.14*	.41*	.06	---		
Delinquency	-.09*	.25*	.28*	.20*	.05*	.23*	-.05	---	
School Connectedness	.12*	-.48*	-.46*	-.49*	-.08*	-.11*	-.06	-.13*	---

* = $p < .05$

**Correlation Matrix of Educational Aspirations, Labeling, and Control Variables
for Low Achievers (N= 604)**

Variable	Educational Aspirations	Negative Labeling by Teachers	Negative Labeling by Parents	Negative Labeling by Friends	SES	Sex	Race	Delinquency	School Connectedness
Educational Aspirations	---								
Negative Labeling by Teachers	-.21*	---							
Negative Labeling by Parents	-.11*	.61*	---						
Negative Labeling by Friends	-.09*	.66*	.72*	---					
SES	-.04*	.02	.10*	.13*	---				
Sex	-.05	.17*	.03	.13*	-.06	---			
Race	.15	-.01	.05	.06*	.28*	-.04	---		
Delinquency	-.09*	.37*	.24*	.24*	.05*	.16*	-.10*	---	
School Connectedness	.12*	-.45*	-.46*	-.49*	-.09*	-.02*	-.02	-.11*	---

* = $p < .05$

Appendix B

Factor Loading for Delinquency Measure		
	Eigenvalue	% Variance Explained
Factor 1	4.07	18%
Factor 2	1.49	16%
Factor 3	1.10	14%
Factor 4	1.04	10%

Factor Loading for Delinquency Measure				
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Runaway	0.138	-0.016	0.106	0.813
Suspended	0.119	0.293	0.146	0.572
Stole	0.228	0.619	0.208	0.269
Carried weapons	0.219	0.525	0.162	-0.196
Attacked someone	0.132	0.767	0.067	0.034
Drunk in public	0.787	0.144	0.118	-0.116
Broke in	0.082	0.694	0.129	0.294
Damaged property of others	0.117	0.313	0.723	-0.020
Damaged property of school	0.179	0.100	0.773	0.103
Damaged property at home	-0.010	0.052	0.752	0.186
Sold weed	0.638	0.386	0.025	0.175
Smoked weed	0.813	0.120	0.019	0.210
Skipped Class	0.707	0.104	0.164	0.158

A single item delinquency measure was used for the study presented in this thesis. This single item measure comprised 13 measures and had a Cronbach's Alpha of .74. The analyses presented in this appendix are an attempt to show how these 13 delinquency measures would be divided using a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation. Four factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. Factor 1 explains 18% of the variance. Delinquency variables reflecting self-medication and illegal substances such as drunk in public, selling weed, and smoking weed are highly correlated, as well as skipping class. In Factor 2, 16% of the variance is explained with high correlations of stealing, carrying weapons, attacking, and breaking in. These are violent delinquent acts or crimes against others. Factor 3 explains 14% of the variance and composed more of

destructive delinquent acts, such as damaging property of others, school, and home. Factor 4, explaining 10% of the variance, reflects more general delinquency that is neither violent nor destructive, but rebellious at both home and school, with correlated variables such as running away and suspended.