

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Stephen Whitney, Educational, School & Counseling Psychology

Long-term effects of the achievement gap

Jeffrey Pollmann, Elisabeth Mealy, Emily Dehner, and Stephen Whitney

The achievement gap has been a perennial problem in education over the past 70 years when it was first discovered through the work of the Coleman report. However, little is known about the long-term effects of the achievement gap. Using a Nationally representative, longitudinal dataset (Add-Health), we examine the long-term effects of the achievement gap, defined as class and race, in the educational attainment and income in adults. Add Health follows 20,000 individuals beginning in grade 7-8 in the 1994-95 school year. The data includes five waves, with the most recent wave of data collected in 2016-18, the first four waves were utilized in this analysis. Cases who completed all four waves were included in the analysis (N=12,092). Race and SES were used to define the comparison groups, biological sex was included as a control. Cumulative GPA in waves 1-2 was used to predict highest level of education attained and yearly income in wave four. A ANOVA with Bonferroni correction was used to compare the groups. Results indicate a significant overall interaction between groups and highest education attained and income. Selected post-hoc comparisons indicate a significant difference between several subgroups. For example, Asian poor student had significantly higher levels of education when compared to White poor student and Black poor students. White poor students had significantly higher education levels of education when compared to Black poor students. Asian poor student also had significantly higher levels of income when compared to White poor student and Black poor students. White poor students also had significantly higher income levels when compared to Black poor students. This study highlights the long-term influence of educational differences across the lifespan and calls for the continued need for programs to ensure educational equality across race and class groups.