In this book we presented an extensive analysis of the achievements of a large sample of Wisconsin men during the 10 years following their graduation from high school. The analysis focused on the causes and consequences of higher education. It provided new and important evidence concerning: the effects of socioeconomic background and academic ability on subsequent educational and occupational attainments and earnings; the role of social psychological factors in the achievement process; the influence of college quality on occupational and economic attainments; and the effects of military service on earnings.

The data are of unique quality because they come from a longitudinal study that has been successful in obtaining follow-up information on almost 90 percent of the original sample. The data include information on the socioeconomic origins of children in the sample, as well as measures of academic ability, high-school grades, significant others' encouragement, educational and occupational aspirations, and military service.

The analysis extends and elaborates an earlier structural equation model of achievement, commonly known as the "Wisconsin Model," by adding earnings as the final dependent variable and by disaggregating the parents' socioeconomic status measure into its components: income, occupation, and education; and the significant others' influence index into its components: parents', teachers', and peers' influence. This made it possible to measure the direct and indirect effects of each of these variables on the achievement variables. This model successfully elaborates the complex process by which social psychological variables mediate the influence of socioeconomic origins on educational, occupational, and earnings attainments. The model was then used to examine the effects of quality of college on socioeconomic attainments and, finally, the effects of ability, educational attainment, and military service on earnings.

Since the publication of this book, we have compiled new information from interviews with our original sample members and with a probability sample of their siblings. These data have enabled us to examine the differences between socioeconomic achievements of males and females at mid-life; to determine the effects of measurement error on these variables; to construct models to study the effects of family structure on achievement; to examine the effects of birth order on educational attainment in full sibships; and to study the extent of sibling similarity in age at marriage, fertility patterns, and socioeconomic achievements.

The book has been frequently cited because it provided a highly visible model, based on successful longitudinal data collection, at a time when sociologists had just become interested in explaining individual socioeconomic attainments.