

# **College Students' Impressions of Managers without a College Degree: The Impact of Parents' Educational Attainment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the impressions which college students held concerning managers who did not possess a college degree compared to those who possess a degree. Contrary to expectations the results showed no difference between the perceptions when analyzed by the educational level of the parent or the industry of parents' employment.

## **INTRODUCTION**

While there are many articles written concerning impressions or attitudes of managers with different characteristics including being Hispanic, African American, female and even gay or lesbian (2,3,4,5,6,9 & 10); there is scant information available regarding the impression held of managers without college degrees. Either through promotion or entrepreneurial activity many individuals find themselves as managers without a college education supporting that appointment. As there are no licensing requirements for most managerial jobs in the non-technical private sector this is likely to occur at least part of the time. Surprisingly, there is very little written about these managers including attitudes of coworkers or the impressions of potential subordinates or peers. Smith *et al.* in 2009 indicated that while impressions were favorable overall there tended to be no difference with regard to college major. (7)

Educational attainment might be a factor in how the others in the command group perceive those individuals in the command group. Therefore, these perceptions could influence how subordinates or peers interact and work with others.

This paper will investigate college students' impressions of managers that do not hold a degree. Based on Adam's equity theory, there will be a variation in the perceptions that subordinates hold of their supervisors (1). The student impressions are expected to be inversely related to the parent's educational levels. It is believed that these impressions held by subordinates of their supervisors will be reflected in their subsequent behavior toward those supervisors. Thus knowing something about the impression of future peers and subordinates will help in understanding the place of these managers in the organization.

## **SAMPLE**

The sample was collected in the Fall semester of 2008 and was composed of students enrolled in the entry level management course at a large regional university in the southeast. The students were a mix of business and non-business majors. There were 285 completed surveys. Table One displays the sample demographics.

**TABLE ONE**  
**SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS**

Average age	21.2 years
Male	59.3 percent
Currently employed	58.2 percent
Years in current job	2.2 years
Business major	51.8 percent

The instrument for this study is a modified version of the Blacks in Business Scale [BIBS], developed in the 1970's by Stevens (8) and used to measure attitudes toward Blacks as managers. This scale is widely accepted and has been modified for several uses. For this study the scale is modified to assess attitudes toward managers without college degrees. Managers without a degree are thus compared to other managers who possess a degree. The type of degree or major is not specified. Respondents are asked to indicate agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Likert-type scale with each of 33 statements (The BIBS as modified for this study is displayed in Appendix One.) Scores can range from 33, indicating a highly unfavorable attitude toward those without a degree as managers, to 231, indicating a highly favorable attitude toward individuals with a college degree as managers. Neutral attitudes are indicated by a total BIBS score of 132. Since scores above the mean indicate more positive attitudes concerning the group in question, several questions were reversed in coding. Total BIBS scores significantly greater than 132 indicate a more positive attitude about managers without a college degree than those at or below the mean. The higher the score the more positive the perceptions; conversely the lower the score the more negative the perceptions.

Questions were also asked as to the level of educational attainment of each parent and the industry of the parent's occupation. Both father's and mother's level of educational attainment were surveyed. The data were collected categorically as follows:

**TABLE TWO**  
**PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL LEVEL**

LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
SOME COLLEGE
COLLEGE DEGREE
MASTER'S DEGREE OR HIGHER

**TABLE THREE**  
**PARENTS' INDUSTRY OF OCCUPATION**

RETAIL
EDUCATION
GOVERNMENT
NONPROFIT
MANUFACTURING
FINANCIAL
OTHER/NOT EMPLOYED/DECEASED

### **ANALYSIS**

Previous research has indicated that there was very little variation in any aspect of the BIBS with regard to overall score or individual items when the data were subjected to ANOVA by sex, college major or employment status of the respondent.(7) However it was assumed that the respondents' perceptions would be related to the educational level of their parents, and that this would be an inverse relationship. That is, the higher the educational attainment of the parent the more negative the overall perception of the respondent toward managers without degrees. There was no expectation as to industry of employment and its relationship to the total BIBS score.

The data were subjected to ANOVA by mothers' educational level, father's educational, mother's industry of employment and father's industry of employment. In all cases there was no

significant difference found between the total BIBS scores for each group and the mean of 132. Further, there was no difference found between any two groups. In fact, there was nothing approaching even a significant difference at the .10 level.

Data pertaining to the total BIBS score alone were tested here as it was thought that the individual items would lose their meaning when spread over such broad categories.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The results, while rejecting the notion that the respondents have clear preferences in their perceptions about managers without degrees, are in line with past research taken as a whole. There are several possible reasons for the basically neutral perceptions, each of which could be tested further. It could be supposed that these respondents were completely neutral, having no expectations, towards working with or for managers who did not have a degree, perhaps because they themselves did not have a degree yet. If they are representative of their generation perhaps they are truly indifferent as to credentials and will be more impressed with results. Much has been made of this generation – millennials - being less biased than those in the past. If attitudes toward sexual orientation are an indicator this might be true. (6) Also the results could indicate complete indifference to the overall research question.

Future research needs to continue to examine this question. While these results found no significant difference, other sample groups may indicate statistically significant differences. Some potential samples that may find interesting differences are those who are currently working who are not working towards attaining a degree, those who have already attained a degree, and even those who are working toward a Master's degree. Also, it may be interesting to see differences of perceptions for those in various industries.

In conclusion, this study hopes to begin the discussion of employee attitudes towards individuals without degrees. More research needs to be completed in order to more fully develop this understanding and model. This area of research could be an important area of understanding for the academic community as well as practice.

## APPENDIX ONE

### MODIFIED BIBS

#### QUESTION

- 1 In business situations, it is not acceptable to have Managers without a college degree in positions of authority.
- 2 Managers without a college degree possess the dominance to be a successful leader.
- 3 Managers without a college degree tend to allow their emotions to influence their managerial behavior more than would Managers with a college degree.
- 4 Managers with a college degree should be given preference over Managers without a college degree in being hired or promoted.
- 5 Managers without a college degree cannot cope with stressful situations as effectively as Managers with a college degree can.
- 6 In general, Managers with a college degree and Managers without a college degree are equally suitable for the professions (e.g., lawyer, doctor, etc.) and management positions.
- 7 It is as desirable for Managers without a college degree as for Managers with a college degree to have a job that requires responsibility.
- 8 Managers without a college degree lack the objectivity required to evaluate business situations properly.
- 9 Challenging work is as important to Managers without a college degree as it is to Managers with a college degree.
- 10 If a job as manager were available, given two equally qualified applicants, one Manager with a college degree and one Manager without a college degree, the Manager with a college degree should be recommended.
- 11 A job that allows one to develop their own special abilities is more important to Managers with a college degree than it is to Managers without a college degree.
- 12 In a demanding situation, a Manager without a college degree would be no more likely to break down than would a Manager with a college degree.
- 13 Recognition for a job well done is equally important to Managers without a college degree and to Managers with a college degree.
- 14 Managers without a college degree are less capable of learning mathematical and mechanical skills than are Managers with a college degree.
- 15 Managers without a college degree are ambitious enough to be successful in the business world.
- 16 Managers with a college degree and Managers without a college degree should not be given equal opportunity for participation in management training programs.

- 17 Managers without a college degree do not have the capability to acquire the necessary skills to be successful managers.
- 18 Manager without a college degree can acquire full job equality without any loss of their identity.
- 19 On the average, Managers without a college degree are equally capable of contributing to an organization's overall goals as are Managers with a college degree.
- 20 It is acceptable for Managers without a college degree to assume leadership roles as often as Managers with a college degree.
- 21 It is justifiable for a Manager with a college degree to resent working for a Manager without a college degree as a superior.
- 22 Managers with a college degree have justifiable reason to feel uncomfortable having to take orders from Managers without a college degree.
- 23 The business community should never accept Managers without a college degree in key managerial positions.
- 24 In job appointment and promotion, Managers with a college degree should be preferred to Managers without a college degree.
- 25 All things considered, Managers with a college degree are intellectually superior to Managers without a college degree.
- 26 Society should regard work by Managers without a college degree as valuable as work by Managers with a college degree.
- 27 It is not acceptable for Managers without a college degree to compete with Managers with a college degree for top executive positions.
- 28 It is only fair that Managers without a college degree and Managers with a college degree should receive the same pay for identical work.
- 29 Managers without a college degree can be aggressive in business situations that demand it.
- 30 Most Managers without a college degree are capable of making managerial decisions under stress.
- 31 Managers without a college degree are competitive enough to be successful in the business world.
- 32 Managers without a college degree possess the self-confidence required of a good leader.
- 33 It is as important for Managers without a college degree as for Managers with a college degree that their work be interesting.

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