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Citation	Cirino, P.T., Chin, C.E., Sevcik, R.A., Wolf, M., Lovett, M. & Morris, R.D. (2002). Measuring socioeconomic status: Reliability and preliminary validity of different approaches. <i>Assessment</i> , 9(2), 145-155. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/10791102009002005">https://doi.org/10.1177/10791102009002005</a>
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/10791102009002005">https://doi.org/10.1177/10791102009002005</a>
Download date	2026-06-06 19:23:17
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/13185">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/13185</a>

# Measuring Socioeconomic Status

## Reliability and Preliminary Validity for Different Approaches

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*This study investigated issues related to commonly used socioeconomic status (SES) measures in 140 participants from three cities (Atlanta, Boston, and Toronto) in two countries (United States and Canada). Measures of SES were two from the United States (four-factor Hollingshead scale, Nakao and Treas scale) and one from Canada (Blishen, Carroll, and Moore scale). Reliability was examined both within (interrater agreement) and across (intermeasure agreement) measures. Interrater reliability and classification agreement was high for the total sample (range  $r = .86$  to  $.91$ ), as were intermeasure correlations and classification agreement (range  $r = .81$  to  $.88$ ). The weakest agreement across measures was found when families had one wage earner who was female. Validity data for these SES measures with academic and intellectual measures also were obtained. Some support for a simplified approach to measuring SES was found. Implications of these findings for the use of SES in social and behavioral science research are discussed.*

*Keywords:* SES, measurement, reliability, agreement, validity

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a construct related to numerous variables of interest in the social and behavioral sciences. For example, SES has been utilized as a variable in studies of learning disabilities (Cornwall, 1992; Low et al., 1992), academic achievement (Selden, 1990; White, 1982), adolescent sexual behavior (Alonge, 1991), HIV high-risk groups (Spalding, 1995), and anxiety and depression (Murphy, Olivier, Monson, & Sobol, 1991). The usefulness of SES as a variable in behavioral research ultimately is influenced by the reliability and validity of the

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Support for this research was provided by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Grant HD30970 to RM, MW, and ML at Georgia State University, Tufts University, and Hospital for Sick Children/University of Toronto, respectively, and from a Research Program Enhancement Grant from Georgia State University. We thank the families of our participants for their cooperation and support. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Paul T. Cirino, Department of Psychology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA 30303; e-mail: [pcirino@gsu.edu](mailto:pcirino@gsu.edu).

particular method or instrument used in its measurement (White, 1982); little attention has been directed toward examining its measurement (Mueller & Parcel, 1981) despite the widespread use of SES.

The Hollingshead (1975) four-factor index of SES has been one of the most frequently used measures of SES (Edwards-Hewitt & Gray, 1995). The Hollingshead measure has been valuable as a predictor/covariate and/or as an outcome measure in studies of adult dyslexia (Felton, Naylor, & Wood, 1990), premature infants (Barratt, Roach, & Leavitt, 1996), and psychiatric disorders such as major depression (Cuffe, Waller, Cuccaro, Pumariega, & Garrison, 1995; Garrison, Waller, Cuffe, & McKeown, 1997). However, several other measures of SES are available (e.g., Blishen, Carroll, & Moore, 1987; Entwisle & Astone, 1994; Nakao & Treas, 1992). In addition, some scholars have raised questions regarding the use of the Hollingshead measure (Mueller & Parcel, 1981), including the use of both education and occupation in its score, the weighting procedure used, and the combination procedures for single and dual wage earners.

Few data are available regarding the interrater reliability of SES measures, particularly given that many such measures rely on a rater's subjective judgment (Edwards-Hewitt & Gray, 1995; see Gottfried, 1985, for an exception); this subjective rating becomes evident when occupations of individuals do not correspond directly to the job titles provided by a particular SES measure. Job titles may be outdated (e.g., the Hollingshead occupational codes are matched to those from the United States census of 1970), and respondents may not report their jobs according to census titles. The use of subjective ratings and the lack of interrater reliability become even more important when assessing SES across countries and cultures, as the same job may have differential status in different countries.

Relatively little information is available regarding relationships between established measures of SES (e.g., Hollingshead, 1975) and more recently developed SES measures (e.g., Nakao & Treas, 1992), or relationships between the Hollingshead measure and those SES measures developed in countries with different sociopolitical and economic systems (e.g., Blishen et al., 1987). An exception is Gottfried (1985), who compared the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status with the Revised Duncan Socioeconomic Index (Stevens & Featherman, 1981) and the Siegel Prestige Scale (Siegel, 1971). Gottfried found that the latter two indices, both of which utilize the 1970 census occupational codes, correlated .87 and that the Hollingshead measure correlated .79 with the Duncan index and .73 with the Siegel scale. Hollingshead (1975) found a significant correlation between his measure and an early prestige measure derived from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), but whether this correlation remains stable when the Hollingshead scale is compared to updated NORC measures, such as the social prestige scales of 1989 (Entwisle & Astone, 1994; Nakao & Treas, 1992), is unclear.

The feasibility of simplifying the calculation of SES also should be considered; doing so may increase its use among scientists. Although the derivation of SES varies between studies, many involve the use of such factors as family income level, parental education, parental occupation, and the occupation's social prestige (e.g., Edwards-Hewitt & Gray, 1995). If these basic attributes, in isolation, are highly correlated with established and published SES measures, their individual use could simplify the process of calculating SES scores. For example, Gottfried (1985) noted that the occupational scale of the Hollingshead scale alone correlated higher than did the full measure with other indices ( $r = .85$  with Duncan;  $r = .79$  with Siegel). However, for a more simplified approach to be useful, reliability and validity estimates should be comparable or higher than that of the longer form. As an example of these estimates, Gottfried (1985) found significant relationships between scores on the Hollingshead scale and those of the Bayley Mental Developmental Index or the McCarthy General Cognitive Index (e.g.,  $r = .41$  at 24 months and  $r = .39$  at 42 months). Significant but generally lower correlations were obtained between these measures of development with the Siegal (e.g.,  $r = .28$  at 24 months and  $r = .19$  at 42 months) or Duncan (e.g.,  $r = .28$  at 24 months and  $r = .26$  at 42 months) scales. Gottfried noted that scores on the Siegal scale were based on only male workers and that both the Siegal and Duncan scales were developed for use with the head of households.

The present study investigates the interrater reliability of three SES measures using data from two countries and examines the consistency of SES measurements across the different means of deriving SES. In addition, the usefulness of a more simplified approach to SES, using either the unweighted education or occupation classification of Hollingshead (1975), was examined. Finally, relationships between these SES measures and intellectual ability and achievement also were explored.

## METHOD

### Participants

SES data were derived from the parents of students recruited from schools in three large metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Boston, and Toronto). Students initially were referred by their teachers and screened for inclusion in an intervention research study targeting young children with severe reading problems. The use of such a sample is important given the influence of SES on reading and the frequency of reading problems. Study participants will be referred to as “children” or “individuals,” although the SES data collected are based on their parent/guardian’s occupation and education, or occupation alone. A parent/guardian or family member was asked to complete a questionnaire that included basic demographic information, including data used to rate SES, as part of the screening procedure for inclusion in the intervention study. Specifically, items included in the measurement of SES were the following: education level completed by each parent/ guardian, current work status of each parent/guardian, work status of each parent/guardian during the past year, current or most recent occupation of each parent/guardian, and legal custodian of the child. Individuals involved in the final coding or measurement of SES held doctoral or master’s degrees in clinical or related fields of psychology.

SES data were available for 177 families of the children who were screened for inclusion into the reading study. However, 37 were children whose parents/guardians were not working or participated in activities to which an SES score could not be directly assigned (e.g., student, volunteer, or homemaker); these data were excluded because of the artificial inflation of SES agreement scores. Therefore, the final sample consisted of the parents or guardians of 140 children (68 from Atlanta, 29 from Boston, and 43 from Toronto) whose mean age in months was 87.3 ( $SD = 5.6$ ). Thirty-two percent of the children were female, and 42% were of African heritage (the remainder were Caucasian). The mean IQ composite score on the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990), a brief screening measure of intellectual functioning, was 95.1 ( $SD = 11.5$ ). The mean total reading cluster score of the children on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests– Revised (WRMT-R) (Woodcock, 1987) was 89.6 ( $SD = 12.5$ ). These were administered as screening measures for the larger reading intervention study.

### Measures

SES data from all sites were derived using two scales from the United States (Hollingshead, 1975; Nakao & Treas, 1992) and one Canadian scale (Blisshen et al., 1987), resulting in three different SES measures for each child’s family. The Hollingshead scale was used because it is one of the most commonly used SES measures (Edwards- Hewitt & Gray, 1995). The Nakao and Treas scale was used because it has been referred to as “probably the best choice at present for determining status scores from job codes” (Entwisle & Aston, 1994, p. 1528). The Blisshen et al. scale was used because a substantial proportion (30%) of the children’s families involved in this study resided in Canada. Measures of IQ and academic achievement were also used, with specific measures chosen (K- BIT, WRMT-R, and Wide Range Achievement Test–3 [WRAT-3]) because they are well normed and commonly used.

*United States scale: Hollingshead Four Factor Scale.* Hollingshead’s four-factor SES score is derived from both education and occupation information. Occupation codes were based on the 1970 U.S. census. Occupation and education were highly correlated for both males ( $r = .84$ ) and females ( $r = .85$ ).

In the Hollingshead (1975) system, an SES score is computed in the following manner. An education score (1 through 7, with 1 equal to less than a seventh-grade education and 7 equal to graduate training) and an occupation score (1 through 9, with 1 equal to farm laborers/ menial service workers and 9 equal to higher executives, proprietors of large businesses, and major professionals) is assigned for each parent/guardian based on information provided by them. Education and occupation scores are then weighted to obtain a single score for each parent/ guardian (range 8 to 66) that reflects one of five social strata (1 through 5, with 1 a reference to unskilled laborers/ menial service workers and 5 a reference to executive/ proprietors/ major professionals). For families with multiple caretakers, scores for each are averaged to obtain a single SES score. Individuals whose primary activities are homemaking, school, or who receive state assistance do not have categorizable occupations according to the Hollingshead system and, as mentioned earlier, did not receive SES scores in this study.

For the purposes of this study, when more than one parent/guardian was present in the home, their scores were averaged (as per the original Hollingshead scale). However, it is possible that scores combining widely discrepant occupations may be misleading. For example, when one parent has an occupation with a very high SES score and a second parent has an occupation with a very low SES score, the resultant average may not be the best estimate of SES status for that family. To address this measurement issue, the averaged results (the standard procedure) were compared to those derived using an alternative method that corrects for the calculation of the occupation score for families with two parents working but with widely discrepant occupations. Specifically, SES was calculated only on the individual with higher occupation score when two parents had widely discrepant occupation scores. However, only eight families obtained different SES scores under the standard and corrected procedures, and the alternate means of SES calculation using the correction described above did not lead to major changes in the SES status of the children (e.g., the two sets of SES scores correlated  $r = .96, p < .0001$ ). In addition, the determination of “widely discrepant” occupations is admittedly somewhat arbitrary. Hence, the following results are based on SES scores derived strictly following Hollingshead’s (1975) system, averaging the scores from multiple caretakers.

In addition to the continuous scores produced, SES scores for each family also were dichotomized into low or average groups for purposes of the larger reading intervention study (e.g., design balance). Because continuous data also were available, the loss of variance attributed to the scale reduction associated with this dichotomization could be evaluated. Participants were placed in the low group if their overall Hollingshead (1975) SES score was in the lower two strata, corresponding to continuous scores of 8 to 30; otherwise, participants were placed in the average group. A second dichotomy also was explored (low group: 8 to 20; average group: 21 to 66), but the results did not change; therefore, only the results of the original dichotomy are reported below.

Unweighted Hollingshead education and occupation scores also were dichotomized to evaluate their consistency of measurement. For education, participants were placed in the low group if their Hollingshead education score was 4 (high school graduate) or lower and in the average group if their score was above this level. For occupation, participants were placed in the low group if their Hollingshead occupation score was 4 (craftsmen, skilled manual workers) or lower and in the average group if their score was above this level.

*United States scale: Nakao and Treas.* SES scores were derived for the 503 job codes listed in the 1980 U.S. census and are based on the education and income of individuals who had jobs at that time. Where data were available for only one adult (e.g., only one parent/guardian was working), the code for the employed individual was used. In families in which data were available for more than one parent/guardian, their SES scores were averaged. This is the same method used in the calculation of a total score on the Hollingshead four-factor scale. In our analysis, the obtained continuous SES value also was dichotomized into average or low groups for the purposes associated with the larger reading study. A low classification was given if the score was more than one half of a standard deviation below the mean score of all occupations (i.e., below the 30th percentile); otherwise, the score was classified as average.

*Canadian scale: Blisshen et al.* This scale provides an occupational socioeconomic index that considers the median income for men and women and the net proportion of well-educated individuals for a given occupation. The scale was calibrated to the Pineo and Porter (1967) metric of occupational prestige, although the authors indicate that their scale is not a measure of prestige because only income and education are considered. An SES score was derived for each of the 514 occupational codes from the 1981 Canadian census. In cases in which data were available for only one adult (e.g., only one parent/guardian was working or there was a single parent/guardian providing for the child), the code for the employed individual was used. In families in which data were available for more than one parent/guardian, their SES scores were averaged, following the same method used in the calculation of a total score on the Hollingshead four-factor scale and the Nakao and Treas scale. As with the Nakao and Treas scale, continuous SES values also were assigned a dichotomous label (average or low). A low classification was assigned if a score was more than one half of a standard deviation below the mean score of all occupations; otherwise, the score was classified as average.

*WRMT-R.* The total reading cluster of the WRMT-R (Woodcock, 1987) was used as a measure of reading skill. This cluster is a composite of the subtests of individual word decoding (Word Identification) and comprehension (Passage Comprehension); the latter subtest requires participants to supply a missing word in a short passage (cloze task). The

standardization sample for the WRMT-R consisted of 6,089 participants selected to approximate the population distribution of the United States based on 1980 census information, and reliability estimates for the total reading cluster were high (Grade 1 split-half reliability,  $r = .98$ ).

*WRAT-3.* The WRAT-3 (Wilkinson, 1993) includes subtests of writing letters and words to dictation (Spelling) and mechanically solving oral and written computations (Arithmetic). A sample of 4,433 participants, stratified based on age, regional residence, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level to approximate the 1990 census data was used for standardization. The median coefficient alpha across all three subtests using both forms ranged from .85 to .95. Rasch Pearson separation indices were also calculated and suggested excellent reliability (.98 to .99).

*K-BIT.* The K-BIT (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990) is a brief measure of verbal (vocabulary) and nonverbal abilities (matrices) for children and adults (ages 4 through 90). The K-BIT is a well-normed instrument and has a mean split-half reliability coefficient of .94 (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990).

## Procedure

Two raters from the Atlanta site independently derived Hollingshead SES scores for each child in the study in accord with the scoring criteria described above. The interrater agreement for the Blishen et al. scale and the Nakao and Treas scales proceeded somewhat differently. For them, independent groups of raters, rather than individual raters, derived SES scores. One group was composed of persons from only the Atlanta site, whereas the second group (independent from the first) was composed of other persons from the Atlanta site, as well as persons from either Boston or Toronto (depending on the child's location). This procedure was followed because these two SES measures were used to classify children for purposes related to the reading study, and input from persons who lived in the same city as the child and their family was deemed necessary. Four of the children who were assigned Hollingshead SES scores (where only a job category is necessary) were not assigned Nakao and Treas and/or Blishen et al. SES scores because the specific job titles necessary for these scales were not available.

Correlation coefficients (for continuous data),  $T$ -scores derived from an  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation (Hays, 1988) of these correlations (to determine differences in magnitude among correlations), percent agreement, and kappa coefficients (for dichotomous data) were used to determine the adequacy of interrater and intermeasure agreement. There were no differences in interrater concordance as a function of cities on any of the three SES measures (e.g., for the total sample on the Hollingshead scale, correlations of the independent raters with one another using the  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation, Boston vs. Toronto, Atlanta vs. Boston, and Atlanta vs. Toronto; similar comparisons were made for the other two SES scales) after correcting for multiple comparisons (nine). There were also no differences in intermeasure concordance across the three sites (e.g., for the participants from Atlanta, correlations of the independent groups of raters with one another using the  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation, Hollingshead vs. Nakao & Treas, Hollingshead vs. Blishen et al., and Nakao & Treas vs. Blishen et al.; similar comparisons were made for the other two cities) after correction for multiple comparisons (nine). Given these results, data were combined across the three sites for all future analyses.

## RESULTS

Throughout the following sections, numerous correlation coefficients are described and compared. However, statistical comparisons were generally performed only in the total sample and to address specific questions of interest. Reasons for not computing every possible statistical comparison included the rather large number of possible comparisons (and the associated necessity of requiring a very stringent alpha level), the small number of individuals in certain family groups (and associated loss of power), and the fact that statistical comparisons could not be made for percent agreements or for kappa coefficients. These issues were evaluated, in part, by the use of the Power Analysis and Sample Size program (Hintze, 1996). On the other hand, qualitative differences of a minimum of 15 points in correlations or percent agreements were described as *higher* or *lower*; terms such as *similar* were used when differences in correlations or percent agreements were less than 10 points for any referred-to comparison. When describing correlations or percent agreement, the term *high* was used for correlations (or percent agreements) greater than .76, the term *moderate* for correlations (or percent agreements) of .50 to .75, and *modest* for

significant correlations (or percent agreements) less than .50. In describing kappa coefficients, the labels given by Landis and Koch (1977) were used to describe different levels of agreement (e.g., coefficients from .61 to .81 correspond to *substantial* agreement). When kappa coefficients were assigned different labels, they were described as *higher* or *lower*; when the labels were the same, terms such as *similar* were used. Exceptions to the above rules are noted in text.

### Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability was assessed using both continuous and dichotomized (low, average) data (see Table 1). All Pearson product-moment correlations for ratings on the Hollingshead scale, Nakao and Treas scale, and Blishen et al. scale were significant and high. When dichotomous information was used, the percent agreement of classification between the raters (or groups of raters) also was high. Kappa coefficients (Cohen, 1960) were computed (Table 1), and interrater agreement appeared highest for the Nakao and Treas scale; this coefficient corresponds to Landis and Koch's (1977) classification of "almost perfect" agreement (.81 or higher); the other scales demonstrated "substantial" agreement (.61 to .80). Although the procedure used to derive the Hollingshead scale differed from that used with the other measures (independent raters versus independent groups of raters), interrater agreement was comparable (Table 1) in the total sample.

Differential effects on SES scores may occur when families have two gainfully employed adults versus only one gainfully employed adult (Hollingshead, 1975). To address this issue, interrater reliabilities were calculated separately for families with two wage earners ( $n = 75$ ) and for those families with only one wage earner ( $n = 65$ ); families with one wage earner do not necessarily correspond to single-parent households. Results by these family groups were comparable to those based on the sample as a whole (see Table 1). However, within one-wage-earner families, interrater correlations, percent agreements for dichotomous data, and kappa coefficients each appeared higher when SES scores were generated from male wage earners ( $n = 38$ ) relative to those SES scores generated from female wage earners ( $n = 27$ ; Table 1). In addition, confidence bounds of the kappa coefficients revealed a wider range of error for families with one female wage earner compared to families with one male wage earner.

**TABLE 1**  
**Interrater Agreement**

Group	%			
	$r$	Agreement	$\kappa$	95% $\kappa$ CI
Total sample ( $N = 140$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Hollingshead	.91	89	.68	.53 to .82
Nakao and Treas	.89	91	.81	.71 to .91
Blishen, Carroll, and Moore	.86	87	.70	.57 to .83
Two-wage-earner families ( $n = 75$ )				
Hollingshead	.95	96	.82	.62 to 1.02
Nakao and Treas	.92	95	.85	.70 to .99
Blishen et al.	.89	92	.78	.61 to .95
One-wage-earner families ( $n = 65$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Hollingshead	.87	80	.56	.35 to .77
Nakao and Treas	.85	87	.74	.57 to .91
Blishen et al.	.83	80	.60	.40 to .80
One-male-wage-earner families ( $n = 38$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Hollingshead	.95	89	.76	.53 to .98
Nakao and Treas	.94	95	.89	.75 to 1.04
Blishen et al.	.87	89	.72	.49 to .95
One-female-wage-earner families ( $n = 27$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Hollingshead	.73	67	.31	.05 to .66
Nakao and Treas	.53	75	.49	.14 to .84
Blishen et al.	.68	71	.42	.05 to .78

NOTE: Hollingshead = Hollingshead (1975) Four Factor Scale of Social Status; Nakao and Treas = Nakao and Treas (1992) Socioeconomic Index of Occupations; Blishen et al. = Blishen, Carroll, and Moore (1981) Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in Canada (Blishen, Carroll, & Moore, 1987); 95%  $\kappa$  CI = 95% confidence intervals for kappa coefficients.

a. For two families, Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. socioeconomic status (SES) scores were not derived (a superordinate job category was available but not a specific job title). One additional family had a Blishen et al. SES score from one rater but not the other; a second additional family had a Nakao and Treas SES score from one rater but not the other.

There were no systematic patterns to the differences in agreement for one-female-wage-earner families by rater. For example, the difference in Hollingshead scores between raters was not significantly different from zero,  $t(25) = 1.17, p > .05$ ; similar results were obtained for the other two scales as well, Nakao and Treas,  $t(22) = 1.00, p > .05$ ; Blishen et al.,  $t(22) = -0.65, p > .05$ . In addition, although 17 (63%) of the 27 one-female-wage-earner families had differences in their dichotomous ranking (average or low) on the SES measures, raters or rating groups differed on only one of the three measures for 13 (76%) of these families.

Some differences occurred between raters or rating groups when continuous data were examined but not when dichotomous data were examined; the opposite pattern was also observed. For example, one family (occupation: gate clerk) differed in dichotomous ranking on all three SES measures; however, closer examination revealed that there were small differences on the Hollingshead scale, Blishen et al. scale, and Nakao and Treas scale (7, 4, and 5 points, respectively). In other cases (e.g., some nursing occupations), there were larger differences (up to 15 points) in the continuous score applied, but this did not lead to differences in dichotomous ranking.

Only the scores from one rater were used in the remaining analyses given the high interrater agreement in the total sample and in most family groups, as well as the lack of systematic differences between the two raters. However, because of the differences in agreement for different family groups (dual-wage-earner families, one-female-wage-earner families, etc.), intermeasure and validity analyses were performed by family group.

### **Intermeasure Concordance**

Correlations between SES measures in the total sample generally were high (range  $r = .81$  to  $.86$ ; see Table 2). The correlations between the Blishen et al. SES scale and the other two SES scales were higher than those of the other two SES scales with one another (relations of Blishen et al./Nakao & Treas versus Hollingshead/Nakao & Treas,  $t(134) = 3.30, p < .002$ ; relations of Blishen et al./Hollingshead versus Nakao & Treas/Hollingshead,  $t(134) = 2.37, p < .05$ ). However, in practical terms, these differences were not extreme. When dichotomous information was used, the percent agreement of classification between measures also was high (range = 82% to 85%). When kappa coefficients were computed, the Nakao and Treas scale and the Blishen et al. scale agreed more strongly with one another (substantial agreement) than either of these measures agreed with the Hollingshead scale, where there was only “moderate” agreement, according to Landis and Koch’s (1977) classification (kappa coefficients between .41 and .60).

Intermeasure reliabilities also were calculated separately for families with two wage earners ( $n = 75$ ) and for those families with only one wage earner ( $n = 62$ ). For these family groups (see Table 2), results comparable to those based on the sample as a whole were obtained. However, as was the case with interrater concordance, within one-wage-earner families intermeasure correlations, percent agreements for dichotomous data, and kappa coefficients each appeared higher when SES scores were generated from male wage earners ( $n = 37$ ) relative to those SES scores generated from female wage earners ( $n = 25$ ) (see Table 2). In addition, confidence bounds of the kappa coefficients revealed a wider range of error for families with one female wage earner compared to families with one male wage earner. Finally, within the one-wage-earner families, female wage earners had significantly lower scores on the Blishen et al. SES scale than male wage earners,  $t(60) = 2.43, p < .02$ . Similar trends were observed for the Hollingshead and Nakao and Treas SES scales, although the results were not significant.

**TABLE 2**  
**Intermeasure Agreement**

<i>Group</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>κ</i>	<i>95% κ CI</i>
Total sample ( <i>N</i> = 137) <sup>a</sup>			
HH versus NT	.81 <sub>y</sub>	.59	.44 to .73
HH versus CA	.86 <sub>z</sub>	.54	.39 to .69
NT versus CA	.88 <sub>z</sub>	.67	.54 to .81
Two-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 75)			
HH versus NT	.86	.54	.29 to .79
HH versus CA	.89	.57	.34 to .80
NT versus CA	.87	.62	.41 to .83
One-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 62) <sup>a</sup>			
HH versus NT	.76	.58	.40 to .77
HH versus CA	.83	.49	.28 to .70
NT versus CA	.89	.68	.50 to .86
One-male-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 37) <sup>a</sup>			
HH versus NT	.92	.67	.43 to .90
HH versus CA	.91	.58	.31 to .85
NT versus CA	.93	.72	.50 to .95
One-female-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 25) <sup>a</sup>			
HH versus NT	.42	.47	.19 to .75
HH versus CA	.68	.37	.05 to .69
NT versus CA	.74	.60	.28 to .91

NOTE: HH = Hollingshead (1975) Four Factor Scale of Social Status; NT = Nakao and Treas (1992) Socioeconomic Index of Occupations; CA = Blishen, Carroll, and Moore (1987) Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in Canada; 95%  $\kappa$  CI = 95% confidence intervals for kappa coefficients. Correlation coefficients with different subscripts are significantly different from one another,  $p < .05$ , in the total sample.

a. For two families, Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. socioeconomic status (SES) scores were not derived (a superordinate job category was available but not a specific job title). One additional family was missing a Blishen et al. SES score; a second additional family was missing a Nakao and Treas SES score. Therefore, for total sample comparisons, data for three families were missing for any combination of SES variables; all were one-wage-earner families, and two of these were from one-female-wage-earner families.

Although there was a difference in intermeasure concordance between males and females within one-wage-earner households, this finding may result from the small sample size and particular features within that subgroup. When the entire sample was divided into either all males ( $n = 111$ ) or all females ( $n = 101$ ) who had codeable jobs regardless of their family status, interrater concordance was high and significant for all scales for both all females (Hollingshead,  $r = .87$ ; Nakao & Treas,  $r = .75$ ; Blishen et al.,  $r = .79$ ) and all males (Hollingshead,  $r = .93$ ; Nakao & Treas,  $r = .93$ ; Blishen et al.,  $r = .87$ ). The correlations for the all-female group were higher than the subset of females who were the only wage earner for the Hollingshead and the Nakao and Treas SES scales (see Table 1). For intermeasure concordance, there were only minor differences between males and females. For example, the correlation of the Hollingshead and Nakao and Treas SES measures for all males ( $r = .86$ ) was significantly higher than that of all females ( $r = .75$ ),  $t(205) = 2.44, p < .05$ ; however, the concordance for all females was higher than the subset of females who were the only wage earner (see Table 2). There were no differences between all males and all females in the correlation of the Hollingshead and Blishen et al. SES measures,  $t(205) = 1.51, p > .05$ , or the Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. SES measures,  $t(208) = 0.76, p > .05$ .

### A Simplified Approach

Interrater reliability and intermeasure concordance also were calculated using either (unweighted) education or occupation classifications alone from the Hollingshead scale. These measures were expected to

correspond more closely with the full Hollingshead scale than with the other two SES scales.

Spearman correlation coefficients assessing interrater reliability were high for both education ( $r = .99$ ) and occupation ( $r = .88$ ) classifications. Interrater percent agreement (education = 99%; occupation = 87%) and kappa coefficients were substantial to almost perfect (education  $\kappa = .99$ ; occupation  $\kappa = .69$ ).

With regard to intermeasure concordance, correlations using occupation alone were high with all three SES measures (see Table 3). A similar pattern was found for kappa coefficients; most demonstrated substantial agreement. Correlations using education alone were moderate with the three measures; however, kappa coefficients were low (all demonstrated only fair agreement). Both the correlations and kappa coefficients using education alone were lower than those obtained using occupation alone. A similar pattern of relations was obtained for two-wage-earner families and one-wage-earner families (higher correlations and higher kappa coefficients for occupation relative to education; see Table 3).

Within the one-wage-earner families, education correlated equivalently (and modestly to moderately) with the full SES measures, regardless of whether they were male or female (see Table 3). With regard to occupation, however, intermeasure correlations were higher for male wage earners than female wage earners for the Blishen et al. and the Nakao and Treas SES scales (see Table 3); concordance between occupation alone and the full Hollingshead scale was similar in these family groups.

For intermeasure occupational scores, the pattern of correlations in the sample as a whole, for the one- and two-wage-earner families, and within one-wage-earner families (see Table 3) was similar to that obtained when the full Hollingshead scale was compared to the Nakao and Treas and the Blishen et al. SES scales (see Table 2). Results also generally were similar when dichotomous scores (kappa coefficients) were examined; where there were differences, kappa coefficients of agreement between the Hollingshead occupation score and the Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. SES scales were higher than those obtained between the full Hollingshead and the other two SES scales.

### **Relations to Relevant Measures**

The relation between SES and intellectual functioning and academic achievement is well established. Therefore, to provide support for the validity of the three SES measures used in the current study, we examined the relations of the intellectual and academic achievement test scores of our sample with the three full SES scores obtained and with the unweighted education and occupation scores from the Hollingshead scale. For the sample as a whole, all three of the measures of SES correlated significantly with IQ (range  $r = .43$  to  $.51$ ) and academic achievement in reading (range  $r = .20$  to  $.27$ ) despite a somewhat restricted range on the reading measures; when corrected for the number of comparisons performed, only the Hollingshead SES score correlated significantly with WRMT-R reading performances. SES correlations with academic achievement in spelling (range  $r = .10$  to  $.17$ ), as measured by the Spelling subtest of the WRAT-3, and in math (range  $r = .12$  to  $.17$ ), as measured by the Arithmetic subtest of the WRAT-3, was not significant when corrected for the number of comparisons performed (see Table 4).

**TABLE 3**  
**Concordance of Hollingshead Education and Occupation Categories**  
**Alone With Full Socioeconomic Status Measures**

Group	Education			Occupation		
	r	κ	95% κ CI	r	κ	95% κ CI
Total sample ( <i>N</i> = 140) <sup>a</sup>						
With NT	.55	.32	.15 to .48	.82	.67	.54 to .80
With CA	.51	.31	.15 to .47	.86	.60	.45 to .74
With HH	.70	.32	.17 to .47	.96	.72	.59 to .85
Two-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 75)						
With NT	.56	.22	.00 to .45	.85	.60	.38 to .83
With CA	.55	.30	.08 to .53	.90	.54	.32 to .77
With HH	.74	.24	.35 to .45	.97	.72	.52 to .93
One-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 65) <sup>a</sup>						
With NT	.50	.35	.12 to .59	.78	.68	.50 to .86
With CA	.44***	.28	.05 to .52	.82	.61	.41 to .81
With HH	.60	.37	.15 to .59	.95	.69	.52 to .87
One-male wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 38) <sup>a</sup>						
With NT	.51***	.29	-.02 to .60	.94	.89	.74 to 1.00
With CA	.46***	.22	-.10 to .53	.93	.84	.66 to 1.00
With HH	.64	.49	.21 to .76	.96	.67	.43 to .90
One-female-wage-earner families ( <i>n</i> = 27) <sup>a</sup>						
With NT	.57***	.44	.09 to .79	.48***	.38	.03 to .72
With CA	.39***	.36	.00 to .73	.56***	.29	-.08 to .65
With HH	.50***	.21	-.12 to .55	.91	.74	.47 to 1.00

NOTE: HH = Hollingshead (1975) Four Factor Scale of Social Status; NT = Nakao and Treas (1992) Socioeconomic Index of Occupations; CA = Blishen, Carroll, and Moore (1981) Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in Canada; 95% κ CI = 95% confidence intervals for kappa coefficients.

a. For two families, Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. socioeconomic status (SES) scores were not derived (a superordinate job category was available but not a specific job title). One additional family was missing a Blishen et al. SES score; a second additional family was missing a Nakao and Treas SES score. Therefore, for total sample comparisons, the *N* for correlations within the Hollingshead SES measure was 140; the *N* for correlations of the Hollingshead Education or Occupation with the Nakao and Treas or Blishen SES scales was 137. Because of constraints on the calculation of kappa coefficients, the *N* for the kappa coefficients was 137 within the Hollingshead SES measure and 136 for the other comparisons. All missing data were from one-wage-earner families, and two of these were from one-female-wage-earner families. Therefore, the *N* for correlations was reduced accordingly (i.e., by up to 3 for correlational and kappa comparisons that involved the Hollingshead and another SES measure).  
.0001 > *p* < .05; all other correlations *p* < .0001\*\*\*.

Correlations of SES measures with IQ and academic achievement generally were similar relative to the sample as a whole when obtained within subgroups based on which family members were working (one versus two wage earners and within the one-wage-earner families by the gender of the wage earner; see Table 4). However, some exceptions were identified in these results; for example, the correlation of SES and IQ was not significant when SES was measured by the Hollingshead scale within one- female-wage-earner families ( $r = .22, p > .05$ ). In addition, for SES and reading, correlations generally were modest and not significant across subgroups, with the exception of the one-wage-earner families; these correlations appeared to be driven by the subsample of one-wage earners who were male, even though values within this subgroup were not significant given the number of comparisons and relatively small sample size.

Correlations between education or occupation alone with IQ and academic achievement also were investigated (see Table 4). Education and occupation correlated significantly with IQ scores for the total sample and for two- wage-earner families; for one-wage-earner families, and within one-wage-earner families, only occupation correlated significantly with IQ, and only when the wage earner was male. For the correlations of education and occupation with reading, a pattern similar to that obtained using the full SES measures was obtained; the correlations with the highest values were obtained in the subsample of wage earners who were male, even though these values were not significant given the number of comparisons and relatively small sample size. Education and occupation alone did not correlate significantly with WRAT-3 Spelling or Math scores for the sample as a whole or for any subgroup.

**TABLE 4**  
**Correlation of Socioeconomic Status Measures to IQ**  
**and Academic Achievement Measures**

<i>Group</i>	<i>K-BIT</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Spelling</i>	<i>Math</i>
Total sample ( $N = 140$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Nakao and Treas	.51**	.23*	.11	.16
Blishen et al.	.43**	.20*	.10	.12
Hollingshead	.43**	.27**	.17*	.17*
Education	.40**	.30**	.15	.10
Occupation	.41**	.22*	.15	.15
Two-wage-earner families				
Nakao and Treas	.52**	.12	-.01	.14
Blishen et al.	.37**	.02	-.08	.08
Hollingshead	.47**	.13	.04	.24*
Education	.50**	.26*	.12	.13
Occupation	.40**	.08	.02	.26*
One-wage-earner families ( $n = 65$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Nakao and Treas	.45*	.32*	.21	.14
Blishen	.45**	.40**	.29	.16
Hollingshead	.35*	.39**	.29*	.10
Education	.24*	.33*	.17	.07
Occupation	.37*	.34*	.26*	.05
One-male-wage-earner families ( $n = 38$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Nakao and Treas	.44*	.46*	.31	.19
Blishen	.46*	.43*	.31	.15
Hollingshead	.43*	.50*	.37*	.20
Education	.22	.41*	.24	-.02
Occupation	.48**	.46*	.35*	.20
One-female-wage-earner families ( $n = 27$ ) <sup>a</sup>				
Nakao and Treas	.48*	.04	-.06	.10
Blishen	.48*	.30	.14	.23
Hollingshead	.22	.24	.14	.00
Education	.29	.27	.11	.16
Occupation	.17	.16	.06	-.15

NOTE: Hollingshead = Hollingshead (1975) Four Factor Scale of Social Status; Nakao and Treas = Nakao and Treas (1992) Socioeconomic Index of Occupations; Blishen et al. = Blishen, Carroll, and Moore (1981) Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in Canada; K-BIT = Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test composite IQ score (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990); Reading = Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised total reading scaled score (passage comprehension and letter-word identification; Woodcock, 1987); Spelling = Wide Range Achievement Test-3 (WRAT-3) Spelling subtest (Wilkinson, 1997); Math = WRAT-3 Arithmetic subtest (Wilkinson, 1997). Given the large number of comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was used ( $.05/20 = .0025$ ) for each set of correlations.

a. For two families, Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. socioeconomic status (SES) scores were not derived (a superordinate job category was available but not a specific job title). One additional family was missing a Blishen et al. SES score; a second additional family was missing a Nakao and Treas SES score. Therefore, for total sample comparisons, the possible  $N$  for correlations of the Hollingshead SES scales with other measures was 140; the total possible  $N$  for correlations of the Nakao and Treas or Blishen et al. SES scales with other measures was 137. All missing data were from one-wage-earner families, and two of these were from one-female-wage-earner families. In addition, one child was missing a K-BIT score, two children were missing the Reading score, and three children were missing the Spelling and Math measures. Therefore, the  $N$  for correlations was reduced accordingly (i.e., by up to 6 for correlational comparisons that involved the Nakao and Treas or Blishen et al. SES scales and the Spelling or Math measures).

\*.0025 >  $p$  < .05. \*\* $p$  < .0025.

## DISCUSSION

A primary purpose of this study was to investigate the degree of interrater reliability of several commonly used SES measures and to examine the relations between these SES measures. The results of this study show that independent raters using the same measure to derive an SES score demonstrate a substantial level of agreement for

most family groups. In contrast to some previous findings (Edwards-Hewitt & Gray, 1995), results also provide evidence that scores derived from seemingly disparate measures yield similar results (Gottfried, 1985), again for most family groups. Importantly, the high level of agreement across SES measures suggests that comparisons related to the construct of SES might justifiably be made across studies that employ different SES measures. For instance, studies using the Hollingshead scale to derive SES scores can be compared to studies using more recently developed measures. Similarly, studies using SES measures based on the U.S. census can be compared with those using a Canadian-based SES measure.

Another aim of this study was to investigate the utility of a more simplified approach to deriving SES. Results suggested that when using a more simplified model to derive SES, occupation is a more useful single factor than education. This result is similar to that reported by Gottfried (1985), who noted that occupation from the Hollingshead scale was interchangeable with the other SES measures he examined. Indeed, derivation of SES based on an individual's occupational category alone, for some purposes, may provide scores that are comparable to those obtained through other more involved or time-consuming approaches. Using such an approach has several benefits, particularly because the chances for labeling and detail errors are substantially reduced. For instance, the weighting procedure of the Hollingshead scale, whose rationale and quality are unspecified, is not required (Mueller & Parcel, 1981). In addition, broadly categorizing occupations into one of nine levels obviates the necessity for gathering specific information regarding job titles as required by the Nakao and Treas and Blishen et al. SES scales. The advantage of needing only a superordinate job category to classify SES would likely assist researchers with obtaining and using SES data in their studies.

However, the results of this study should not be taken to imply that educational attainment, specific job titles, or other family information are unnecessary. The present study employed a range of information in determining a job category. In addition, results may differ among dissimilar populations or in a study with a different purpose. Also, the differences in interrater and intermeasure concordance within and across different family groups highlight the need for individual attention to be given to each individual case, even if overall values of agreement are high. We also used only IQ and achievement performances as validation measures hypothesized to be related to SES. We also did not obtain direct measurements of prestige or income, and we did not take into account other factors that may have affected SES categorization (e.g., interviews with participant families to further elucidate child support payments, recent changes to jobs, and other sources of income). Finally, the higher correlations between occupation and the full SES measures compared to those between education and the full SES measures may in part be related to measurement issues; both the Blishen et al. and Nakao and Treas scales rate occupations/job titles directly, but neither explicitly includes education in deriving its final score.

A final purpose of this study was to add to validity information for the measures utilized. Consistent with previous findings, SES measures were found to be related to measures of IQ and to at least some degree to academic achievement in reading (Cornwall, 1992; Low et al., 1992; White, 1982). The correlations, although small to moderate, were consistent across all three of the full SES measures used, as well as with occupational or educational category alone. The correlations with SES measures were lower for reading achievement than for IQ, which may in part be related to relatively low scores and slightly reduced variance on the reading measure; this pattern of performance is not surprising given that the participants were referred based on difficulty in reading. However, issues associated with the range and level of reading performance cannot explain the difference in correlation entirely because both IQ and reading scores were relatively normally distributed in the total sample. The overall relation of these measures of SES to IQ was consistent with, and in most cases higher than, the relations of SES with developmental indices reported by Gottfried (1985). Spelling and math achievement generally were unrelated to SES, which suggests that the SES procedure to follow may vary with the object of study.

One of the more interesting findings from this study was that within families with only one wage earner, interrater and intermeasure concordance was lower for female wage earners ( $\kappa$  range = .36 to .64) than male wage earners ( $\kappa$  range = .58 to .72). The reduced interrater concordance does not appear to be due to systematic bias

among the raters themselves. In addition, the reduced intermeasure concordance does not appear to be due to difficulty in classifying female occupations per se but appeared specific to one-wage-earner families. Findings of lower concordance may also be related to sample characteristics and/or the distribution of SES scores in the female wage earners, such as a low  $N$ , truncated ranges, outliers, nonnormal distributions, or overall level of SES (e.g., more male wage earners coming from two-parent households in which only a single income is necessary, or the relatively greater number of males in current high-income positions such as computer and technological sciences). The above issues are especially relevant given the development of newer measures of SES in the context of an increasing number of dual-wage-earner families, the developing (but certainly not complete) equity of male and female jobs, and the growing percentage of female workers and a wider variety of jobs that women now perform relative to when the SES scales were derived.

Future work could address some of the limitations of this study by the use of additional or alternate modes of data collection (e.g., extended interview versus predominantly questionnaire), by the use of more recent indices of SES, the incorporation of other related information such as income, and the measurement and utilization of SES in different familial contexts, as well as additional measurements of validity measures, and in differing populations. Such a direction will improve the utility of the SES construct in studies of achievement and other areas of behavioral research.

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