

## VOCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS IN MEXICAN-AMERICAN SCHOOL CHILDREN<sup>1</sup>

IDEL R. BRUCKMAN

*St. Mary's University*

U.S.A.

**ABSTRACT.** The present study is concerned with vocational expectations and aspirations in Mexican-American eighth-grade children. The data were Ss' responses to questionnaire items about their own expected and wished-for vocations and about their fathers' vocations. The results, based on chi-square analyses, support hypotheses that expectations and aspirations are not equivalent ( $p < .001$ ), that Mexican-American Ss express significantly ( $p < .001$ ) lower levels of vocational expectations and aspirations when compared with those previously noted in other ethnic groups (Stephenson, 1957), and that the observed ethnic differences persist ( $p < .001$ ) when the data are analyzed within socioeconomic lines (father's occupational status). Implications for educational and vocational achievement are noted.

**RESUMEN.** El presente estudio se interesa con expectativas y aspiraciones vocacionales en niños mexicanoamericanos que estudian 8° año. Los datos provienen de respuestas de Ss a cuestionarios acerca de expectación vocacional, aspiración vocacional, y vocación del padre. Los resultados, basados en análisis de chi cuadrado, confirman las hipótesis que las expectativas y aspiraciones no son sinónimas ( $p < .001$ ), que los Ss mexicanoamericanos significativamente ( $p < .001$ ) expresan niveles más bajos en sus expectativas y aspiraciones vocacionales, cuando comparados con aquellos previamente notados en otros grupos étnicos (Stephenson, 1957) y que las diferencias étnicas observadas persisten ( $p < .001$ ) cuando los datos son analizados dentro de las líneas socioeconómicas (el status ocupacional del padre). Implicaciones para el aprovechamiento educacional y vocacional han sido notadas.

According to many indices, the Mexican-American is the most disadvantaged of the ethnic groups both vocationally and educationally (Browning and McLemore, 1964; Fogel, 1965). Further, as Heller (1966) noted, the Mexican-American, until recent years, has shown minimum intergeneration mobility. The present research was designed to study the stated vocational expectations and aspirations of Spanish surnamed children, a field of inquiry which has largely been neglected (Heller, 1966; Wright, 1968). Expectations and aspirations are seen as integral elements in achievement, factors which precede and are anticipatory of attainment.

The suggestion is made that there is a relationship between level of vocational accomplishment and level of vocational ambition and that the present low level of occupational attainment in Mexican-American adults is reflected in low levels of occupational expectations

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and aspirations in Mexican-American children. The basic hypothesis examined in this study is that the Mexican-American children express lower levels of occupational expectations and aspirations than do children from other ethnic groups, such as Negro and Anglo. The specific hypotheses tested were as follows:

1. Stated occupational expectations of Mexican-American Ss are not equivalent to their stated occupational aspirations.
2. With regard to stated vocational expectations, Mexican-American children more frequently subscribe to lower status occupational categories than either Anglo or Negro children.
3. With regard to stated vocational aspirations Mexican-American children more frequently subscribe to lower status occupational categories than either Anglo or Negro children.
4. The obtained relationships between ethnic group membership and vocational expectations are maintained when the data are analyzed within socioeconomic lines as determined by father's occupation.
5. The obtained relationships between ethnic group membership and vocational aspirations are maintained when the data are analyzed within socioeconomic lines as determined by father's occupation.

#### METHOD

Questionnaires incorporating some 22 socioeconomic, aspiration, and biographical questions were administered to all the eighth grade children in a predominantly (95%) Mexican-American school district. Questionnaires included in the present analysis were those completed by children identified as Mexican-American according to the commonly used criterion, namely, the U. S. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Service list of persons of Spanish surname (1963). Valid cases, excluding those who were not of Spanish surname and those who were not present or who failed to complete the questions in scorable manner, are given in Table 1. The Ss were tested in groups of about 100. At each session care was taken to establish rapport and to insure maximum participation and enthusiasm.

Three items included in the questionnaire provided the data for the present paper: 1. What kind of job do you expect you will probably do when you leave school? Describe it. 2. Supposing you could be anybody, go anywhere and do anything, what kind of work would you most of all wish to do when you leave school? Describe it. 3. What is the name of your father's job? Describe it. In cases where the father was deceased or not living at home, the occupation of the mother or head of the household was accepted.

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The occupations stated by the Ss in answer to the three questions were coded according to Warner's (1949) socioeconomic index. Assigned ratings were based on a 7-level scale, varying from the highest level (one) which includes doctors and lawyers to the lowest level (seven) which includes unskilled laborers. As pointed out by Bendix and Lipset (1966) Warner's criteria for establishing socioeconomic status have been used to assess such status by many investigators. During the analysis obtained data were compared with those of Stephenson (1957) based on Anglo and Negro children.

RESULTS

The findings of the present study with respect to distribution of vocational expectations, aspirations, and present socioeconomic status (father's vocation) are expressed in Table 1. It can be noted therein that while less than one per cent of the fathers' vocations were reported to be in the two highest vocational categories, some 27 per cent of the Ss aspired for and 17 per cent expected such occupa-

TABLE 1  
Distribution of Expectations, Aspirations, and Father's Vocations  
Per cent

Vocational Categories	Aspirations N = 1,301	Expectations N = 1,311	Father's Vocations N = 1,367
I Professional	16	08	00.4
II Managerial	11	09	00.3
III Clerical, sales	33	33	03
IV Clerks, foremen	12	13	13
V Skilled	10	15	29
VI Semiskilled	17	22	38
VII Unskilled	02	00.5	15

tional placement. If one considers the top three job categories, the figures are 60 per cent, 50 per cent, and 3.7 per cent for aspiration, expectation, and father's vocation respectively. The children's aspirations and expectations are thus seen to exceed their present socioeconomic status as represented by their father's occupation.

The distribution of stated expectations and aspirations in the present Ss support the first hypothesis, namely, that the two concepts are not equivalent. The chi square (based on proportions for seven categories) was 225.46, with 6 df ( $p < .001$ ).

Table 2 presents the distribution of stated vocational expectations and aspirations of Mexican-American Ss in terms of present socioeconomic status as determined by father's vocational level. The data in Table 2 were used to compare Mexican-American expecta-

tions and aspirations with those of Anglo and Negro Ss in Stephenson (1957, Table 6, p. 209). Chi-square analyses based on a conversion of frequencies to proportions were used for these comparisons. This conversion was necessary in order to equate present data to those given in Stephenson (1957). Only the three lowest socioeco-

TABLE 2  
Mexican-American Expectation & Aspiration Frequencies Based  
on 3 Lowest Father's Vocational Levels (IV, V, & VI)  
Student Choice

Father's Vocational Level	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	DK* — NA	N
Expectations								
IV	3	10	9	27	18	13	*	80
V	8	10	17	51	14	40	*	140
VI	19	19	21	71	22	93	*	245
Total	30	39	47	149	54	146		465
Aspirations (Wish-for)								
IV	8	32	18	21	8	2	*	89
V	8	19	13	49	15	52	*	156
VI	32	35	22	68	25	61	*	243
Total	48	86	53	138	48	115		488

nomic levels are presented. In order to make the present occupational rating scale comparable to his 6-level scale, levels six and seven in the present study were combined. Since Stephenson (1957) had no Negro Ss with fathers in occupational groups I, II, and III, all the analyses were based on comparisons of Ss in occupational categories IV, V, and VI.

In computing the chi-squares, expected frequencies were based on Stephenson's data and observed frequencies on the present data. In order to meet the requirement of equal frequencies in observed and expected data, it was necessary to assume that the number of "don't know/didn't answer" responses was of equal proportion in both Stephenson's (1957) and the present data.<sup>2</sup>

Results of chi-square analyses comparing total Mexican-American expectation and aspiration frequencies with Stephenson's (1957) total Anglo and Negro frequencies are given in Table 3. These values reveal significant differences ( $p < .001$ ). Hypotheses 2 and 3 are

<sup>2</sup>The assumption that Mexican-American proportions of don't know/no answer responses was comparable to Stephenson's was confirmed by empirical comparison (i.e., both approximately equal to 20%).

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TABLE 3

Comparison of Vocational Expectations & Aspirations of Mexican-American Ss with Those of Stephenson's (1957) Negro & Anglo Ss

Ethnic Group	df*	Chi-square	P
Vocational Expectations			
Mex-Amer. & Anglo	5	1748.40	.001
Mex-Amer. & Negro	4	781.66	.001
Vocational Aspirations			
Mex-Amer. & Anglo	4	97.53	.001
Mex-Amer. & Negro	5	2512.56	.001

\*Variations in df based on cases where some comparisons were deleted because of "0" frequency in cells.

supported in that when compared with the Negro and Anglo Ss in Stephenson's (1957) study, the Mexican-American Ss in the present study subscribed more frequently to both vocational expectations and aspirations found in the lower status occupational categories.

To examine ethnic differences in expectations and aspirations in each of the three lower socioeconomic levels chi-square analyses were computed separately for father's occupational levels IV, V, and VI (i.e., levels shown in Table 2). As shown in Table 4, the results of these analyses revealed that for both expectations and aspirations there were significant ( $p < .001$ ) ethnic group differences at each of the tested levels, with the exception of the Negro vs. Mexican-American comparison of expectations at Level IV. This non-significant value is probably attributable to zero expected frequencies. The findings presented in Table 4 support hypotheses 4 and 5 in that within each of the three levels of father's occupation for which comparisons were possible, the Mexican-American Ss tended to subscribe more frequently to occupations in lower status categories than did the Anglo and Negro Ss of Stephenson's (1957) study.

DISCUSSION

Present findings substantiated that the Mexican-American Ss expressed low levels of both vocational expectations and aspirations when compared with Anglo and Negro Ss of a previous study (Stephenson, 1957). These findings were maintained when the data were analyzed within father's occupational level. Unless there is an increment in vocational placement from one generation to the next, the children of people now at the bottom of the occupational ladder will tend to remain there. This situation is indicative of the vicious cycle of poverty. Intergeneration mobility has not characterized the Mexican-American population, since its members still maintain over-

TABLE 4  
Separate Analyses by Father's Occupational Levels

Level	Anglo			Negro		
	Chi-square	df	p	Chi-square	df	p

## Aspirations

IV	198.12	4	< .001	200.54	3	< .001
V	1501.23	5	< .001	357.84	4	< .001
VI	44.44	4	< .001	293.38	4	< .001

## Expectations

IV	245.95	5	< .001	2.09	3	≅ .50
V	405.82	5	< .001	339.17	4	< .001
VI	495.51	5	< .001	493.42	4	< .001

representation in the lower job categories. There is some indication in the literature that educationally and vocationally (Browning and McLemore, 1964; Heller, 1966; Wright, 1968) some change is taking place. The present study confirmed Wright's findings that current levels of adolescent expectations and aspirations show a rise over father's occupational status; however, the present data imply that the vocational striving and expectation of Mexican-American Ss are associated with lower occupational categories than those of other ethnic groups.

Heller (1966), Madsen (1964), and Kluckhohn (1961) are among the writers who have pointed out that differences in cultural orientation lead to different views toward ambition, striving, competitiveness, the value of education, and other attitudes and values that bear directly upon aspiration and achievement. The traditions of the Mexican-American, the traditions of *La Raza*, are in many instances contrary to those that make for success in the Anglo-American educational and vocational setting. On the other hand, it has been

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pointed out that there is a distinction between values and attainability of goals. Turner (1964) noted that social classes differ not so much in the values which they endorse in general as in the extent to which they regard these values as applicable to themselves as goals for their own striving. Thus, the apparent lack of positive value of education and high status vocational aims may in large part reflect the feeling that such high level aims are not attainable and consequently not to be seriously considered as goals. In this context the child's stated vocational expectations are seen as more reality oriented than his vocational aspirations, which are more of a dream or ideal. In the present study the expectations, the more reality based choices, were significantly lower than the aspirations. Both, however, were significantly lower than the expectations and aspirations of both Negro and Anglo Ss.

Change in the vocational status of the Mexican-American is possible, as augured in the difference between father's level and offspring's dream and as noted in the vocational mobility which has been taking place. On the other hand, the relative position with regard to other ethnic groups is still low. A significant implication from the present study is that one aspect of raising the present status of vocational and educational achievements may lie in the area of *prior* augmentation of the children's levels of vocational expectation and aspiration.

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