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## ABSTRACT

Identifying criteria instrumental in stimulating Mexican Americans to complete high school or college, this report presents interview results with 51 Mexican American college graduates and 51 high school graduates having the same identifying characteristics. Questionnaire data were analyzed by means of the Chi Square Test, the Median Test, and the Binomial Test. The Mexican American college graduate had a strong sense of identity with people of his cultural heritage, was more influenced by individuals outside the home, participated in more group activities, received more support from parents and siblings for his educational goals, was influenced most by the mother, could rely on greater economic resources, was less likely to be Catholic than the high school graduate, was more critical of responses of society and the school system, and felt that home conditions and discrimination were the main reasons for the Mexican American's failure to improve his position in the larger society. Four major recommendations were derived: (1) programs should be developed to restore a strong sense of identity; (2) parental and sibling support for educational goals should be encouraged; (3) sound educational practices should be applied; and (4) programs which recruit Mexican Americans for college and then provide support should be expanded and publicized. An appendix of analysis results is included. (MJE)

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# **Variables Differentiating Mexican-American College and High School Graduates**

Prepared for the  
**Mexican-American Education Research Project**  
**California State Department of Education**

By  
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## Preface

This product of educational research, which was funded through the Mexican-American Education Research Project, is an example of one of the many important aspects to be considered in efforts made to understand the educational milieu in which the American of Mexican descent is currently found. In this study Charles Godoy utilizes salient matters of fact upon which to build a mental picture of what some Mexican Americans have experienced within a prescribed period of time.

Predicating that, in comparison with peers of other ethnic groups, few persons of Mexican descent go to college, the author sets out to question Mexican Americans who graduated from high school and those who graduated from college. The goal he has in mind is to identify the criteria that might have been instrumental in stimulating these individuals to complete high school or to attain a college degree.

The work is well documented, and the recommendations to be found in this resume will be of interest to all educators, particularly to the teachers of children with a Mexican-American background.

We are pleased to make these findings available to you, and we thank those interviewed for their support in this important research.

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# Introduction

It is obvious that Mexican Americans are grossly underrepresented on college campuses. The common value system that the mass media unconsciously promote includes the belief that it is better to be educated than uneducated. It is part of the American dream that each segment of our technological society should have an equal opportunity to enter an institution of higher learning.

Legislators, administrators of institutions of higher learning, school boards, and community leaders are seeking ways of lessening the vast discrepancy between the percentage that Mexican Americans form of the general population and the percentage that they form of those on college campuses.

Between November, 1968, and June, 1969, a group of Mexican-American college and high school graduates were interviewed to identify those factors that differentiated the two groups. A further purpose of these interviews was to make recommendations that might help Mexican Americans to increase their numbers on college campuses. The investigation was carried on with the cooperation of the Mexican-American Education Research Project, California State Department of Education.

Some 51 Mexican-American college graduates, all leaders in education in California, together with 51 high school graduates who shared the same identifying characteristics, were given questionnaires in personal interviews. The data taken from the completed questionnaires were analyzed by means of the Chi Square Test (2 x 2 table), the Median Test, and the Binomial Test. In an effort to identify all relevant variables, responses to four open-ended questions were sought and were discussed.

# Summary of Findings

*Note:* In the following summary of findings, the term “significantly” refers to significance beyond the .05 level.

## Communication

1. More mothers of the college graduates than of the high school graduates worked before the subject was six years old.
2. The mothers of the high school graduates had significantly more schooling than did the mothers of the college graduates.
3. The fathers of the high school graduates had significantly more schooling than did the fathers of the college graduates.
4. The college graduates came from schools where Mexican Americans formed a significantly smaller percent of the population than did the high school graduate.
5. Significantly more college graduates than high school graduates came from homes where only one language was spoken. The ratio favoring Spanish only was approximately six to one.

## Economics

1. The college graduates reported significantly fewer siblings than did the high school graduates.
2. The fathers of the college graduates held a significantly higher occupational status than did the fathers of the high school graduates.
3. Among the mothers of the college graduates were significantly fewer housewives and significantly more employed mothers than among the mothers of the high school graduates.

## Religion

Significantly more of the high school graduates than of the college graduates were Catholics. Significantly more of the college graduates than of the high school graduates could not classify themselves as either Catholics or Protestants.

## Self

1. The college graduates reported significantly less favorable public school attitudes toward Mexican ancestry than did the high school graduates.
2. The college graduates reported significantly less favorable attitudes toward Mexican ancestry on the part of persons in other ethnic groups than did the high school graduates.
3. The college graduates reported significantly less favorable police attitudes toward Mexican ancestry than did the high school graduates.
4. The college graduates tended to view their ancestry more positively and favorably than the police appeared to do.
5. The college graduates joined significantly more clubs in high school and held more offices than did the high school graduates.

6. Significantly more of the high school graduates than of the college graduates identified themselves as Americans and as Americans of Mexican descent while growing up.

7. Significantly more of the college graduates than of the high school graduates identified themselves as “myself” while growing up.

8. Significantly more of the high school graduates than of the college graduates identified themselves as Americans and as Americans of Mexican descent at the time of the study.

9. Significantly more of the college graduates than of the high school graduates identified themselves as “myself” at the time of the study.

10. Both the high school and the college graduates considered going to college while in high school; there was no significant difference in this area.

11. While in high school, the college graduates were significantly more certain that they would attend college than were the high school graduates.

12. While in high school, significantly more college graduates than high school graduates had thought seriously of what they wanted to become.

13. Significantly more of the college graduates than of the high school graduates were involved in delinquent gangs while in high school.

14. The college graduates married at a significantly later age than did the high school graduates.

### **Parents**

1. Both the high school graduates and the college graduates ascribed significantly greater influence to their mothers than to their fathers.

2. The college graduates ascribed significantly greater influence to peers as opposed to relatives than did the high school graduates.

3. The fathers of the college graduates were reported significantly more interested in the subjects’ obtaining an education than were the fathers of the high school graduates.

4. The mothers of the college graduates were reported significantly more interested in the subjects’ obtaining an education than were the mothers of the high school graduates.

### **Related Variables**

1. Teachers reportedly encouraged the high school graduates significantly more than they did the college graduates at the high school level or at other levels.

2. There was no significant difference between the types of courses the high school graduates and the college graduates were counseled to take in high school.

3. The high school graduates were significantly less critical of society’s treatment of the Mexican American than were the college graduates.

4. The high school graduates were significantly less critical of the schools’ treatment of the Mexican American than were the college graduates.

### **Open-Ended Questions**

Important variables affecting educational attainment were identified through responses to the open-ended questions, including (1) affective or motivational factors; (2) general attitudes toward Mexican descent; (3) economic factors; (4) the extent of parental and sibling support; (5) the subject’s attitude toward formal education; (6) peer values; (7) school attitudes toward the bicultural child; and (8) high school preparation for college.

The main objective of this study was to find out what variables differentiate between the college graduates and the high school graduates of Mexican-American descent. In addition to the critical variables identified for objective study, interviewees were given the opportunity to state their personal beliefs regarding the topic under study in an open-ended manner.

### Procedure

Each group was consequently asked four open-ended questions. Each of the high school graduates was asked the following questions:

1. How were you able to earn a high school diploma when so many Mexican Americans of your age didn't?
2. Why didn't you go to college?
3. What do you think would help the Mexican-American group to do better?
4. How do you explain the Mexican-American group's relative failure to improve its position in the larger society?

Each of the college graduates was asked the following questions:

1. What factors do you feel have enabled you to succeed?
2. When did you decide to go to college, and why?
3. What do you think would help the Mexican-American group to do better?
4. How do you explain the Mexican-American group's relative failure to improve its position in the larger society?

### Responses to Questions

*High school graduates' first question.* How were you able to earn a high school diploma when so many Mexican Americans of your age didn't?

1. The largest group cited parental support. The following answers were typical:

I felt a family obligation to finish.

I had interested parents that were concerned.

Dad kept an eye on us. My dad believed in the value of a high school education.

Because my mother encouraged me. I was ready to join the CCC camp, where there was an opening, and my mother said that was out.

I wanted to make my parents happy. I had five sisters and none of them finished.

2. The second largest group felt they were able to finish because of economic support:

Jobs were not plentiful, and a lot of the guys had to help by bringing home some money. This was why they dropped out. My father was employed.

We had peace and tranquility in the home and no money problems.

3. Other responses may be grouped under the broad category of positive attitudes toward formal education:

Getting a high school diploma then was just like getting a college degree now.

I liked high school math and accounting.

I wanted to finish high school. Nobody forced me. A lot of guys got married young.

I figured I'd better myself by getting an education.

*College graduates' first question.* What factors do you feel have enabled you to succeed?

1. The largest group cited support from parents and siblings:

We are a highly competitive family. I have brothers that are in the professions.

There was encouragement and support in the family. My brother helped me with geometry in college.

Our home life was stable. We did not move around like other families. We had a good family name to uphold.

My sister told me about the variety of positions that a person could prepare for. I was aware that most of my peers were going to work in the cement plant or on railroad track crews, while others would pick oranges.



My mother was very pushy and ambitious. She always wanted me to be somebody. I received a lot of encouragement from my brother and sister, even being as poor as we were. I learned diligence and tenacity from my father and my grandfather. We have a close family unit in which my father became the stabilizer. If there were no pushy parents I might have slipped off.

2. The second largest group of answers had to do with personal affective reasons:

I wanted to prove myself in a competitive culture that degrades us.  
I have a desire to mingle with people. I've always had an interest in traveling.  
I lived in abject poverty and couldn't enjoy the social graces of others in athletics; therefore, I excelled in the academic area.

Basic to me was my desire to always be first. I received great amounts of encouragement from my folks.

3. Another important reason was peer values:

Everybody was going to college.

In our area it was assumed that you would go to college. The kids weren't satisfied with a high school education.

Although we were poor my mother preferred we live with poor whites.

I was going with a girl who had finished college.

A couple of my friends were bright and they were going to college.

*High school graduates' second question. Why didn't you go to college?*

1. The majority of the answers revealed a lack of economic support:

My folks didn't have that kind of money.

I had to go out to work. There was no choice. I never had a chance.

I had to help my father in the family business. I had to work as long as 15 and 18 hours a day.

I couldn't afford it. There was no four-year college nearby.

I had to go out and work. My dad became sick and we had three smaller children still going to school.

It was strictly financial. I had to help my dad.

I had to help my dad support our large family.

Because of our large family. I was the eldest son. I tried working on the construction job and going to junior college, but it didn't work out.

I didn't want my wife to have to go and work.

2. The next largest group indicated poor preparation for college:

I didn't take the college preparatory courses.

I was not counseled to take college preparatory classes.

I couldn't qualify because I hadn't taken the right courses.

*College graduates' second question. When did you decide to go to college, and why?*

1. The largest group of answers were classified as economic reasons:

The number one reason is that when I got out of the service after three years, I had the economic resources.

Wouldn't have gone if there wasn't a junior college in the area.

Because the government was going to pay me.

In the service I was able to buy the comforts of life. I decided there was a connection.

2. The second largest group of answers came under the affective area:

When in the service I found out about the better life. I didn't want to be a donkey. I wanted to work for the recreation department.

Because I realized what the alternatives were.

Because through involvement in the service, I began to recognize I had the physical potential and began to set goals.

I knew I didn't want to become a miner.

After the service I went to college. I didn't want to pick beans.

I wanted to help Spanish-speaking people.

Since high school I wanted to work in a profession and not in a cannery.

3. Another reason given was parental support:

Because my mother had hoped I would go ever since I was in high school.

I was never allowed to think any other way.

It had been decided for me by my parents.

My parents encouraged me to have a total education.

My father worked his head off to keep me in college.

*High school graduates' third question.* What do you think would help the Mexican-American group to do better?

1. The largest group of replies had to do with changes in schools. Examples are:

Teach the Mexican Americans about the history of their culture.

Help the group to understand their culture. A lot of Mexican kids think we are nothing.

We should develop pride in being a Mexican American.

2. The second largest group of answers came under the personal affective area:

Too many succeed and forget where they came from.

We need good leadership. More idealism and realism.

We have to overcome many years of indifference and brainwashing.

3. The third largest group had to do with parental support:

Get to the parents. You're not going to do anything with the kids of this age. The majority are set in their ways.

We should teach them to accept responsibility. We should be taught to get along with others. The student should be taught to accept the school course.

The parent should give guidance to his kids. We can't blame the school.

Start at the beginning of school to try to encourage the kids that they should want more education.

*College graduates' third question.* What do you think would help the Mexican-American group to do better?

1. The largest group of replies had to do with changes in the schools:

The schools should allow the Mexican American to recognize himself. The child should be told there is a child in Mexico who looks just like him and is going to become a doctor.

We should take education to the home. It should be mandatory that teachers visit the home. The Chicano hasn't learned the system.

We should start teaching an understanding of the system and what the personality makeup is.

The teacher should understand the child. It shouldn't be a crime to speak Spanish.

We should learn how to teach the middle-class Mexican American.

We should have preschool experiences for the child in order to provide him with the tools to survive.

Each child should be assessed as to his experiential background, and any deficiencies should be made up.

We should teach history as it really was and stress the Chicano background to make up for the years of its neglect.

We should have counseling in the elementary grades.

We should get the Mexican-American mother involved as a room mother.

We should raise the teachers' expectancies of pupils.  
 We should take advantage of the bilingual education programs.  
 We should treat children as first-class citizens with some potential.  
 We should teach more than the subject.  
 We should have people interpreting the school to the community and vice-versa.

2. The second largest category had to do with the affective area:

We should do things for ourselves. We should develop cohesion in the group.  
 We should participate in the running of the society.  
 We should develop community organizations.  
 We should develop an economic and political base.  
 Every single student should develop a responsibility to the group.  
 We should enlarge the concept of "machismo" to include education.  
 We should develop a different attitude in industry and in public agencies.  
 Should never admit defeat. Do away with defeatism.  
 Should develop better employment opportunities.

*High school graduates' fourth question.* How do you explain the Mexican-American group's relative failure to improve its position in the larger society?

1. The answers given by the majority of the respondents in this group were in the affective area:

We are complacent. We are a happy people.  
 We have a lack of ambition.  
 Parents show no interest.  
 The Mexican American wants to be there.  
 Because the home teaches him to be there.  
 Because the family wants him to go to work rather than get an education.  
 We have a defeatist attitude that has been planted by our parents.  
 Unfortunately, we are extremely proud and don't want something for nothing.  
 We are complacent. We don't strive. We are lethargic.  
 Mexican Americans get discouraged easily.

2. The only other large group of replies was classified as de facto discrimination:

We have to reach out a lot farther to get an education.  
 The Mexican American isn't given better jobs as long as there are Anglos available.  
 He has been denied a good education.  
 Old Anglos are owners, managers, foremen, and Mexicans are field workers.  
 Insensitivity, incompetence in that the low IQ for the Mexican is accepted on slight evidence.  
 We don't count as a problem.  
 Racial discrimination has caused a low concept of self.

*College graduates' fourth question.* How do you explain the Mexican-American group's relative failure to improve its position in the larger society?

1. The largest group of replies had to do with de facto discrimination:

We were a surrendering people, and the spirit still prevails today.  
 We were conquered. We were subjugated and discriminated against.  
 The Anglo culture is antagonistic and suspect of the foreigner.  
 We are in complete isolation. There is no program geared to the Mexican-American community.  
 We are made to feel we should negate our cultural heritage.  
 Unconcern by the majority.  
 The schools don't meet the needs of the group.  
 Mexican politeness is taken advantage of.  
 The system is geared for the Anglo American.

At the time of Fremont everything was going to be bilingual. Thirty years later that was changed. Things have steadily deteriorated. Old Anglos are owners, managers, and foremen, and Mexicans are field workers.

Insensitivity, incompetence in that the low IQ for the Mexican is accepted on the slightest evidence.

We don't count as a problem.

Racial discrimination has caused a low concept of self.

2. The next largest group of answers had to do with the affective area:

Our defeatist attitude. The Germans knew what to do. (The respondent, of course, refers to post-World War II Germany.)

We are the benign Mexican.

We have no political muscle.

Our basic personality set is one of acquiescence to their severe system.

We never identified with what we were. We identified ourselves as whites.

Parents take no responsibility.

The Mexican does not value achievement. He just adjusts to where he is at.

We are not aware of opportunities; and when we are aware, we are not sure they are worth it.

We don't know how or care to move out.

We hesitate to take any radical action.

We are unable to identify our needs and organize ourselves into a potent force.

### Summary of Responses

The answers to the open-ended questions asked in this study are summarized in this section.

When asked how they had been able to earn a high school diploma when so many other Mexican Americans of their age had not, the high school graduates gave answers that can be classified under the headings of (1) parental support; (2) economic support; and (3) positive attitudes toward formal education.

When asked how they had been able to succeed, the college graduates provided responses that can be classified under the headings of (1) support from parents and siblings; (2) personal affective reasons; and (3) peer values.

When asked why they did not go to college, the high school graduates gave as the main reasons their lack of economic support and their poor preparation for college.

When asked what had motivated them to go to college, the college graduates provided responses that can be classified under the headings of (1) economic ability; (2) affective reasons; and (3) parental support.

When asked what might help the Mexican-American group to do better, the high school graduates stressed the need for changes in the schools, and for affective motivations.

When asked what would help the Mexican-American group to do better, the college graduates gave as their main answers changes in the schools and in the affective areas.

When asked to explain the Mexican-American group's relative failure to improve its position in the larger society, the high school graduates cited as major obstacles the lack of affective motivation and the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes.

The college graduates cited the same difficulties, but in general they considered discrimination the primary hindrance.

## Conclusions

The following conclusions appear to be warranted on the basis of evidence provided by this study:

1. The Mexican-American college graduate had a stronger sense of identity with people of his cultural heritage than did the high school graduate.
2. The Mexican-American college graduate was more influenced by individuals outside the home than was the high school graduate.
3. The college graduate participated more in group activities both in and out of high school than did the high school graduate.
4. Support from both parents and siblings for the subjects' educational goals was greater among the college graduates than among the high school graduates.
5. The person with the most influence on all respondents was the mother.
6. High school teachers and counselors were ineffective in working with the college graduates.
7. The college graduate generally could rely on greater economic resources than could the high school graduate because of differences in the outside employment of the mother, the occupational level of the father, and family size.
8. The college graduates lived in areas where Mexican Americans formed a smaller proportion of the population than did the high school graduates.
9. Because of many factors the members of the college graduate's extended family have not been able to follow in his footsteps leading to a college degree.
10. Fewer college graduates than high school graduates were Catholic.
11. The Mexican-American college graduate was more critical of the responses of society and the school system to the Mexican American than was the high school graduate.
12. The high school graduate felt that home conditions were the main reason for the Mexican American's relative failure to improve his position in the larger society; the college graduate felt that discrimination in various forms was the chief cause.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were derived from an analysis of the data and from consideration of the pertinent literature:

1. Programs should be developed to restore a strong sense of identity in the Mexican American. Some suggestions are as follows:

- a. We should consider introducing new materials dealing with the Mexican-American cultural heritage. The new materials would be available at all levels of instruction.
- b. The schools should invite prominent Mexican Americans who have been able to succeed in the larger culture to return as guest speakers.
- c. Community members should be used as resource people and aides in the school. Their physical presence will help the pupil to identify with the educational program.
- d. Teacher-training institutions should stress courses on educational psychology, sensitivity training, role analysis, and reference groups to make adults who work with Mexican Americans aware of what they can do to help develop a strong sense of cultural identity.
- e. Bilingual education and instruction in English as a second language should be made available.
- f. People of Mexican-American descent should be brought into all organizations in the society, and especially into the school. They should reflect the complete range of occupations found in the larger society.
- g. Mexican-American professionals and leaders should be visible in all the mass media.

2. Parental and sibling support of the furtherance of the Mexican-American's education is to be encouraged. Some ways to promote this support are as follows:

- a. Educational programs designed to teach the Mexican-American parent the requirements and ways of a technological society should be made available.
- b. When Mexican-American parents cannot be persuaded to come to the school, whether because of fear, resentment, or apathy, teachers should meet them in their home.
- c. The professional educator should speak Spanish or should have someone who can translate for him when communicating with Mexican Americans who find it difficult to verbalize in English.

3. Sound educational practices should be applied. Some suggestions are as follows:

- a. Each child should be individually assessed as to his potentiality as early as possible in his school career.
- b. Each child should receive counseling early in his school experience to ensure maximum development of his capacities.
- c. The curriculum should be geared to the individual.

4. Programs that recruit Mexican Americans for college and then provide financial assistance, tutoring, and counseling for them on campus should be expanded and publicized.

Appendix  
Differences Between the High School and College  
Groups on Responses to All Questions Directly  
Derived from the Theoretical Model

Question		$\chi^2$ or P	Significant Differences
<b>Mobility</b>			
1.	How many times did his parents move during the subject's public school years (grades 1-12)?	1.5	
<b>Communication</b>			
1.	Did the mother work before the subject was six years old?	7.2	S
2.	How many years of schooling did the father complete?	4.0	S
3.	How many years of schooling did the mother complete?	7.5	S
4.	What percentage of high school peers was Mexican American?	5.0	S
5.	What was the language spoken at home?	5.0	S
6.	What were the discipline patterns of parents?	.1	
<b>Economics</b>			
1.	Was the subject born in a hospital or at home?	1.0	

(Continued)

Question		$\chi^2$ or P	Significant Differences
2.	Who was present as his birth?	.1	
3.	How many children were in the family while subject was in school?	5.8	S
4.	What kind of work was done by the father?	6.3	S
5.	What kind of work was done by the mother?	6.8	S
Civic Responsibility			
1.	Were his parents registered voters?	.0	
Religion			
1.	What is the religious denomination of subject at present?		
	Catholic	7.2	S
	Other	8.2	S
2.	How important was religion to the subject when he was growing up?	2.6	
3.	How important is religion to the subject now?	3.8	



(Continued)

Question	$\chi^2$ or P	Significant Differences
Self		
1. How did the subject's parents generally make him feel regarding his Mexican ancestry?	.2	
2. How did the subject's relatives generally make him feel regarding his Mexican ancestry?	.2	
3. How did the schools generally make the subject feel regarding his Mexican ancestry?	7.2	S
4. How did the newspapers and other media generally make the subject feel regarding his Mexican ancestry?	.0	
5. How did other ethnic groups generally make the subject feel regarding his Mexican ancestry?	9.0	S
6. How did the police generally make the subject feel regarding his Mexican ancestry?	4.6	S
7. How does the subject feel now regarding his Mexican ancestry?	1.2	

Special:

Comparison of difference between Mexican-American college graduates' attitude toward their Mexican ancestry and

(Continued)

Question	x <sup>2</sup> or P	Significant Differences
their perception of police attitudes toward such ancestry.	29.7	S
8. Did the subject join clubs in high school?	7.2	S
9. Of what ancestry were most of high school friends?	2.6	
10. What did the subject consider himself to be while growing up?		
American	.003*	S
Myself	.03*	S
11. What does the subject con- sider himself to be now?		
American	.024*	S
Myself	.009*	S
12. Did the subject, while in high school, consider going to college?	.4	
13. How certain was the subject of entering college?	11.7	S
14. What type of vocation did the subject want to enter?	10.8	S
15. Was the subject involved in delinquent gangs while grow- ing up?	6.3	S
16. How old was the subject when he married?	5.6	S

\*Binomial Test Probability

(Continued)

Questions		$\chi^2$ or P	Significant Differences
Parents			
1.	Who most influenced him in terms of the following forced-choice alternatives?	4.6	S
2.	How interested were his parents in Mexican-American matters?	3.7	
3.	What were his father's aspirations?	2.8	
4.	What were his mother's aspirations?	3.4	
5.	Was his father interested in the subject's getting an education?	4.1	S
6.	Was his mother interested in the subject's getting an education?	4.7	S
7.	Did someone read to the subject while he was growing up?	.1	
8.	If so, who read to the subject?	.06*	
9.	How often was the subject read to?	.8	
10.	Did subject's family take him on educational trips while he was growing up?	1.0	

\*Binomial Test Probabilities.

(Continued)

Question	x <sup>2</sup> or P	Significant Differences
Related Variables		
1. How many members of his family had attended or graduated from college before his high school graduation?	2.7	
2. How many members of his family have attended or graduated from college since his high school graduation?	.5	
3. Did most of his high school friends have plans for their future?	.8	
4. Did teachers generally encourage the subject to further his education?	8.8	S
5. Did he receive any high school counseling?	1.3	
6. Did counselors generally encourage the subject to further his education?	3.3	
7. Was the subject counseled to take vocational, academic, or business courses?	.8	
8. How would he characterize our present society's reaction to the Mexican American?	32.2	S
9. How would he characterize the schools' reactions to the Mexican American?	13.8	S