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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in Brownsville, Texas, to identify the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of Hispanic females and to determine whether these expectations and aspirations differed from those of the dominant culture. Survey instruments were distributed to all senior females (N=853) in local high schools, requesting information on personal characteristics, family background, occupational and educational goals and perceived influences on attainment of these goals. Study findings, based on an 85% response rate, included the following: (1) 87% of the respondents were of Hispanic origin; (2) 70% expected to enter relatively high-status occupations, with the most frequently cited careers in the teaching and protective services areas; (3) the majority of the respondents were aware that factors such as finances and job scarcity could affect their opportunity to get a job; (4) 60% aspired and expected to obtain some type of postsecondary education; and (5) the survey results confirmed that Hispanic females were success oriented. Based on the findings, it was recommended that career education programs be designed to fit students' needs; that parents be increasingly involved with youth in determining their career lines and educational needs; and that educational and government policy makers reassess their operating assumptions about what Hispanic women need and want. A review of the literature concerning the status projections of Hispanic youth is included.
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EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ORIENTATIONS OF
YOUNG HISPANIC WOMEN IN THE BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS, AREA

Dr. Jaime Chahin

Introduction.

The purpose of this study is to explore, in a limited way, the widely held belief that Hispanic females are different from the dominant culture in relation to educational and occupational aspirations. The educational and occupational attainment of Hispanics is a problem whose magnitude needs to be explored in order to inform educators and social policy makers of the changing needs of this population.

In the United States, education has been used as a stepping stone to more desirable occupations, higher income and acceptance by society. Yet, the role that Hispanic females have played in this endeavor has been very minimal. In March, 1975, the median income for a Hispanic female was \$2,682 and \$6,154 for males. Furthermore, one-third of the Hispanic men and three-fourths of the Hispanic women had an income of less than \$5,000. Thus, it is obvious that the majority of the Hispanics were working in the lower paying occupations.

The aforementioned statistics are just as acute in the Rio Grande Valley and, in many cases, worse. The educational attainment of persons twenty-five (25) years and older is 5.8% for Hispanics. According to the Texas Employment Commission report of 1980, 50% of the families in the Rio Grande Valley are in the poverty level, and the Hispanics represent 90% of the poverty stricken citizenry. Furthermore, according

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to the Federal Register (June 2, 1977), the majority of the high schools in the Valley have high concentrations of students from low income families.

Pertinent Literature

A review of the pertinent literature reveals that there is a very limited research indicating status projections of Hispanic youth. Some of the relevant studies include Arturo de Hoyos, Irene Guerra, Rinaldo Juarez, Moises Venegas and Jaime Chahin. All of the data for these studies was collected along the Rio Grande, from Brownsville to El Paso, except the de Hoyos study which was conducted in Lansing, Michigan.

In 1959, Irene Guerra found that, regardless of socio-economic status, Hispanic youth in Laredo, Texas, had high educational and occupational aspirations. She also found that parents of these youth had similar goals for their children.

In 1961, Arturo de Hoyos conducted a study in Lansing, Michigan, of Hispanic youth. His data indicated that 50% of the Hispanic youth participating in the study wanted to attend an institution of higher education.

Rinaldo Juarez, in 1968, conducted a study in the Rio Grande Valley and found that, regardless of sex or socio-economic status, Hispanic youth desired and expected to obtain high level professional occupations.

In 1973, Venegas conducted a study of El Paso high school students and analyzed his data in terms of ethnicity, sex, grade level and type of school program in which they enrolled. His findings indicated that students in all groups, regardless of ethnicity, sex, grade level or school programs, had high aspirations and expectations for education and occupation.

In 1977, Jaime Chahin conducted a study in Eagle Pass, Texas, and analyzed his data in terms of ethnicity, sex, migrant status and type of school programs in which they enrolled. The findings indicated that, regardless of sex or socio-economic status, Hispanic youth have high educational and occupational aspirations.

Even though the research pertinent to the status aspirations and expectation of Hispanics is limited, the findings suggest a trend of upward mobility projections. Also, the findings clearly convey that Hispanic youth want the same high levels of achieved status as do other groups of American young people. They are interested in college technical training, prestige jobs, employment security, plus all other opportunities that are available in our society.

The limited literature, however, has specifically addressed the career and occupational orientations of Hispanic women. Thus, it is imperative that we investigate Robert Merton's "success ethic" that has been inculcated by most youth of all social classes and, as a consequence, they maintain high level success goals, i.e., occupational and educational aspirations. Merton further maintains that having high aspirations is not unique to one group in society, but is a universal pattern that cuts across class and ethnic distinctions.

Description of Sample Population

In order to adequately identify the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of Hispanic females, a survey of all senior females was conducted in all of the local high schools in Brownsville, Texas. A total of 853 surveys were disseminated and 727 (85%) were

completed. Of the total number of respondents, 87% were of Hispanic origin (Table III). The majority of the respondents (79%) were between the ages of seventeen (17) and eighteen (18) (Table I).

Sixty-five per cent (65%) of the respondents in the sample indicated they were in a college preparatory curriculum (Table XIV). The remaining balance were enrolled in vocational or other programs.

Family socio-economic status was determined on the basis of the present occupation of the family's major money earner. As expected, over 50% of the respondents were in predominately low socio-economic levels (Table XXIV).

Respondents were also asked, "Have you ever migrated to perform farm work?" Less than half of the respondents (38%) indicated they were involved at one time or other in performing migrant work (Table XXVI).

The survey instrument is a questionnaire that provides fixed-choice stimulus questions to elicit responses which indicate educational and occupational aspirations and expectations. Aspirations have been defined as desires of the individual; expectations have been defined as the levels that the respondent really expects to attain. When differences exist, this is referred to as anticipatory goal deflection.

The occupational aspirations and expectations questions are open-ended and then coded according to a modified census classification of occupations which represents a hierarchy of occupations based upon prestige and income. This was done to facilitate a uniform grouping of occupations listed by the respondent's inventories.

The categories used were:

Occupational Levels

Type

High

1. High Professional (doctor, lawyer, scientist, architect)
2. Low Professional (teacher, registered nurse)
3. Glamour (professional ball, pop singer)
4. Managerial (executive management)
5. Draftsman
6. Farmer (own a ranch)

Intermediate

7. Skilled Worker (carpenter, foreman, auto mechanic)
8. Clerical and sales (typist, secretary, salesman)

Low

9. Operative (bus driver, machine operator)
10. Laborer and unskilled worker (waitress, farm worker)
11. Housewife

In terms of occupational aspirations, over 70% of the respondents (Table IV) expected to attain relatively high status occupations. The teaching profession and protective services reflected the highest number of responses. Furthermore, over 80% of the respondents (Table V) were very certain of their career choices. It should be pointed out that teachers and protective services personnel are influential role models in the everyday activities of students and families.

The majority of the respondents are aware of the factors that can affect the opportunity to get a job. Over 50% of the respondents identified money as having some effect on their job opportunities. On the other hand, over 50% of the respondents have the support of their

parents and are willing to relocate for employment. Over 50% of the respondents identified the scarcity of jobs and lack of opportunities as the primary obstacles in getting a job (Table VI).

Over 70% of the respondents were found to consider steady employment, money, opportunity to help others, independence and leadership as important things that need to be considered in picking a job (Table VII). Furthermore, education and getting a job were designated by the respondents as important life goals (Table VIII). Their orientation reflects an awareness of the need for education and steady employment.

Analysis of educational aspirations and expectations indicated that over 60% of the respondents aspire and expect to achieve some type of post-secondary education (Tables IX, X). Two-year and four-year institutions were clearly identified in their educational goals. Perhaps one explanation is that the respondents are aware of the institution in their community: Texas Southmost College and Pan American University. Thus, respondents' aspirations and expectations are very congruent. Over 80% of the respondents are very certain of their Educational Expectations (Table XI).

It is interesting to note that the respondents ranked their parents and personal job experience as the most helpful in deciding for a job. This is very interesting because the majority of the parents have a low level of education, yet have very much influence on their daughters. Teachers and counselors were also ranked high (Table XII). Job experience was considered important, yet there are limited opportunities available for students in this area.

The schools should continuously assess their relationship with parents and the business community in order to maintain close communication lines.

Over 80% of the respondents are considering attending college. (Table XVII). The respondents also indicated that they plan to finance their education by working and with assistance from their parents (Table XVIII). As much information as possible concerning financial aid should be provided to students, so that they can become aware of the different financial aid programs available for post-secondary education.

As far as family characteristics, over 70% of the respondents came from families of four or more children (Table XX). Over 50% of the parents were employed either full time or part time. A high incidence of unemployment perhaps reflects their lack of formal training and skills (Table XXIII). Sixty-two per cent (62%) of the households were bilingual with English and Spanish spoken at home (Table XXI). Furthermore, over 50% of the parents have less than a high school education which is reflected on the occupations of the main bread winners.

Over 30% of the respondents are interested in attending a two-year junior college or technical school; others are interested in state universities and private colleges (Table XV). Over 50% of the respondents are interested in commuting on a daily basis to college (Table VXI). The majority of the respondents are not interested in joining the military.

The survey has confirmed that Hispanic females are success oriented. Moreover, the majority of the respondents indicated that their parents were the most influential people in helping to determine their

occupation. Although this survey does not provide the necessary data to substantiate exactly how their parents feel about their children, there is reason to believe that they would positively endorse the high goals of their children. Even though some parents will be able to provide financial support to their children, the extent to which youth with parents from low socio-economic levels can receive support from their parents is highly questionable. First, the majority of the occupations of the heads of household are in unskilled labor, which does not generate enough family financial resources. Furthermore, more than 50% of the families in the sample came from families composed of five or more children. Secondly, very few of the parents have any high school or college education experience, thus, they are not familiar with the new expenses their children will encounter in higher education. Therefore, parents are at a disadvantage in helping to prepare their children for post-secondary education. Thus, if there are students who do not reach their goals, it is not necessarily because they lack motivation and desire, but it may be due to the lack of opportunities, finances and educational institutions that do not provide for their needs.

Recommendations

Quite explicitly, this survey further substantiates the fact that regardless of sex, Hispanics have high educational and occupational orientations. Furthermore, Hispanic females are strongly committed to their goals; however, the realization of the orientations of the youth will be highly influenced by the educational and vocational resources that are made available to them.

First, it is imperative that schools design career education programs that adhere to the needs of the students. Career education programs in high school should be part of the curriculum throughout the Hispanic female's high school education. This will provide the student with a better understanding of what is expected of workers, what occupations exist, and what educational and occupational paths lead to a particular career goal. This will also allow individual students to discover their interest, attitudes and values toward certain careers.

Counselors should continuously provide information concerning post-secondary education, since respondents do not seem to be aware of all the financial aid resources available for them. Even though a high percentage of the respondents indicated that they were enrolled in the college preparatory curriculum, counselors should continuously review their course loads to ascertain that they are indeed enrolled in college preparatory courses and not just meeting the minimum requirements. It is imperative that counselors explore all the possible alternatives before determining the program that adequately serves the needs of the individual. High school counselors should work very closely with colleges in order to have access to information concerning financial aid, admissions, programs, etc.

Furthermore, there is a dire need to get parents involved with youth in thinking through life plans, career lines and educational needs. Considering the low level of education of the parents, a parental involvement program should be designed so that parents themselves can be informed and educated in an on-going basis and thus be able to help their daughters more. In undertaking the aforementioned role, parents will support the

school system's goals while working constructively to improve the development of the school programs.

Educational and governmental policy makers concerned with the educational plight of Hispanic women should carefully check their operating assumptions about what Hispanic females want or need. A continuous evaluation of present programs and assessments of forthcoming needs should be conducted at the local, state and federal level. This would provide legislators and policy makers with a more realistic appraisal of needs which, in turn, will create a more effective procedure for the development of programs and the appropriation of funds. In this manner, existing resources can be used to develop more adequate programs that will better equalize the educational opportunities of Hispanic women in isolated communities in the Southwest.

The cooperative efforts of school administrators, parents, program planners and legislators will be needed in order to meet the educational plight of Hispanic females. It is evident that Hispanic females have the desire and the motivation for high educational and occupational attainment, but it is up to society and its educational institutions to promote opportunities and learning experiences that will help fulfill those desires.

DESCRIPTIVE TABLES

TABLE I

Age of Respondents

<u>Age</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
13	0	0
14	1	0
15	4	1
16	150	20
17	371	51
18	160	22
19	35	5
20	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE II

Marriage Aspirations

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	718	99
No	7	1
Already Married	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE III

Ethnicity of Respondents

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Hispanic	630	87
White	95	13
Black	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE IV
Number of Respondents Classified into Actual
Categories for Occupational Aspirations

<u>Occupational Categories</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Skilled Worker	25	3
Military	0	0
Management	40	6
Farmer	2	1
Salesman	60	8
Clerical	60	8
Protective Services	165	23
Physician	80	11
Teacher	220	30
Draftsman	16	2
Glamour	59	8
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE V
How Certain are Respondents Concerning
the Job They Want to Have

<u>Response</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Very Certain	200	28
Certain	224	31
Not Very Certain	212	29
Uncertain	75	10
Very Certain	16	2
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE VI
Things That Will Affect Respondents
from Getting Jobs

	Very Much		Much		Some		Not at All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not Enough Money	47	7	108	16	310	16	210	31
Lack of Parents Interest	68	10	57	8	100	15	449	67
Don't Want to Move	54	8	73	11	174	26	365	55
Scarce Jobs	78	12	132	20	257	39	198	30
Lack of Opportunities	102	14	154	22	243	35	200	29
No Technical School or College	43	6	51	8	165	25	401	61
Not Smart Enough	23	3	57	9	251	37	340	51

TABLE VII
Importance of the Following Things
In Picking a Job

	Very Important		Important		Not Very Important		Not at all Important	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Opportunity to Make Money	78	17	258	57	93	20	28	6
Chance to Help Other People	357	50	278	38	72	10	13	2
Chance to Become an Important Person	250	35	261	37	156	22	44	6
Steady Employment	336	48	251	35	71	10	48	7
Opportunity to be Your Own Boss	279	40	214	31	160	23	41	6
Chance for Excitement	265	39	237	35	132	19	51	7

TABLE VIII
Valuation of Life Ends

<u>Responses</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Free Time	80	8
Develop Mind	248	26
Earn Money	124	13
Getting a Job	227	23
Living in Best Place	95	10
Material Things	97	10
Marriage, and Family	99	10

TABLE IX
Educational Aspirations

<u>Responses</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Quit School	2	0
Complete High School	83	11
Graduate Technical or Terminal Program	71	10
Graduate Junior College	61	8
Graduate from University	321	44
Additional Studies	199	27

TABLE X
Educational Expectations

<u>Responses</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Quit School	0	
Complete High School	56	8
Graduate Terminal or Technical Program	44	6
Graduate Junior College	158	22
Graduate University	285	39
Additional Studies	184	25
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XI
Certainty of Educational Expectations

<u>Responses</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Very Certain	260	36
Certain	330	45
Not Very Certain	121	17
Uncertain	10	1
Very Uncertain	6	1
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XII
How Helpful Have Each of the Following People
and Things been in Deciding on a Job

<u>Source of Help</u>	<u>(Number of Frequencies)</u>							
	<u>No Help</u>		<u>Little Help</u>		<u>Some Help</u>		<u>Very Helpful</u>	
Parents	4	1%	10	1%	40	6%	673	92%
Friends	300	41%	200	28%	122	17%	105	14%
Counselor	100	12%	227	28%	150	18%	350	42%
Teacher	69	9%	120	17%	210	29%	328	45%
Relatives	229	30%	100	14%	160	22%	250	34%
Media	250	34%	167	23%	130	18%	180	25%
Occupational Handbooks	122	17%	155	21%	200	28%	250	34%
Personal Job Experience	101	12%	176	21%	150	18%	400	49%

TABLE XIII
Military Interest

<u>Classification</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	50	7
Not Sure	98	13
No	<u>579</u>	<u>80</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XIV
Distribution of Respondents in School Programs

<u>School Program</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
College Preparatory	471	65
Vocational	202	28
Other	<u>54</u>	<u>7</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XV
Type of College They Would Attend

<u>Type of College</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Technical Vocational School	134	18
Community/Junior College	151	21
Small Private College	68	9
A Large Private University	50	7
A Small State University	186	26
A Large State University	<u>138</u>	<u>19</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XVI
Where They Would Attend College

<u>Location</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
As Close to Home as Possible	226	32
Within Daily Traveling Distance	299	41
Somewhere Else in Texas	155	21
Out-of-State	<u>47</u>	<u>6</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XVII
College Attendance

<u>Attend</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Full Time	208	29
Part Time	392	54
Once In A While	40	5
Don't Know	<u>87</u>	<u>12</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XVIII
Financing of College Education

<u>How Financed</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Working While in School	257	35
Summer Job	160	22
Parents Assistance	205	28
Loan	86	12
Scholarship	10	1
Already Have Money	2	1
Other	<u>7</u>	<u>.1</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XIX
Siblings Location in Family

<u>Sibling of Respondents</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Youngest Child	161	22
Oldest Child	191	26
Neither Youngest nor Oldest	353	49
Only Child	<u>22</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XX

Number of Children in Family

<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
1	27	4
2	78	11
3	111	14
4	142	20
5	103	14
6	<u>266</u>	<u>37</u>
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XXI

Language Spoken at Home

<u>Language Spoken</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
None	10	1
English and Spanish	451	62
Only Spanish	<u>215</u>	<u>30</u>
Only English	51	7
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XXII

Higher Education Achieved by Parents

	<u>Father</u>		<u>Mother</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
None	39	5	40	6
Grade 1-7	271	37	259	36
Eighth Grade	36	5	47	6
Some High School	97	13	98	13
High School Graduate	88	12	105	15
Vocational School	5	1	29	4
Some College	51	7	52	7
College Graduate	118	16	80	11
Don't Know	<u>28</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>2</u>
TOTAL	727	100	727	100

TABLE XXIII
Employment of Parents

<u>Employed</u>	<u>Father</u>		<u>Mother</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes-Full Time	372	51	250	34
Yes-Part Time	120	17	145	20
Unemployed	150	20	245	34
Don't Know	85	12	87	12
TOTAL	727	100	727	100

TABLE XXIV
Main Bread Winner Jobs

<u>Job</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Physician	4	1
Teacher	30	4
Farmer	10	1
Management	23	3
Draftsman	5	1
Skilled	135	19
Operative	45	6
Salesman	50	7
Clerical	60	8
Social Work	15	2
Farm Labor	200	27
Unemployed	150	21
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XXV
Major Money Earner

<u>Responses</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Father	300	41
Mother	225	31
Brother or Sister	125	17
Other	77	11
TOTAL	727	100

TABLE XXVI
Migrant Status

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Does Not Apply	359	49
Never Migrated	98	13
Used to Migrate	85	12
Yes-Migrates	185	26

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