

STATUS ASPIRATIONS FOR CHILDREN:
DO PARENTS REALLY KNOW WHAT THEY WANT?

Susan L.G. Janssen

CDE Working Paper 84-1

STATUS ASPIRATIONS FOR CHILDREN:
DO PARENTS REALLY KNOW WHAT THEY WANT?

Susan L. G. Janssen
University of Minnesota-Duluth

Support for this research was provided by the National Science Foundation (Grant SES-80-10640), the National Institute of Mental Health (Grant MH-06275) and the University of Wisconsin Center for Demography and Ecology (National Institute for Child Health and Development Grants 5P30-HD-05876 and 5732-HD-07014). The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments of Robert M. Hauser, William H. Sewell, Peter Mossel, J. Clark Laundergan, and William Fleischman.

The effect of parental influence on children's status aspirations and attainments has been documented in a large number of studies (Bordua, 1960; Rehberg and Westby, 1967; Sewell and Shah, 1968; Kandel and Lesser, 1969; Rehberg, et al., 1970; Sewell, et al., 1970; Alexander and Eckland, 1974; Kerckhoff, 1974; Sewell, Hauser, and Wolf, 1974; Alexander, Eckland, and Griffin, 1975; Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Davies and Kandel, 1981). In each of these studies, actual or perceived parental aspirations, expectations, encouragement, and related behaviors have been found to have a positive effect on the aspirations, intentions, and eventual attainments of adolescents and young adults. But do these parental goals actually exist? To what extent do parents really know what they want for their children?

The great majority of status attainment studies deal with perceived rather than actual parental aspirations and expectations. It is not known whether these perceptions accurately reflect the feelings of the parents themselves. It has been suggested that children may project their own aspirations and intentions onto the parent (Kerckhoff and Huff, 1974; Davies and Kandel, 1981). However, even those who question the accuracy of adolescents' perceptions of parental attitudes implicitly assume that parents define and in some way communicate their goals for their children's attainments. The possibility that some parents may not have aspirations for their children, or that some would prefer to let their children decide for themselves, has not been addressed in any of these studies.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, we look for the actual existence of parental aspirations and expectations for children's education and occupation by asking questions of the parents themselves. Second, we attempt to predict which parents are able and willing to state their aspirations and

expectations for their children and which are not. A number of hypotheses relating to these issues are tested and discussed.

Educational and occupational aspirations will herein be defined as the levels of education or occupational status a parent desires for his or her child; expectations refer to the levels of education or occupational status the parent perceives as likely for the child. While aspirations may be based on norms, values, hopes, and dreams, expectations should be based (at least in part) upon a realistic assessment of such factors as the child's ability, motivation, opportunities, and the family's financial situation. To the extent that it is possible to distinguish between the two, aspirations may be taken as indicators of the ideal situation, while expectations reflect reality.

THEORY AND RESEARCH

Under what circumstances are parents able and willing to state their aspirations and expectations for their children's attainments?

In answering this question, it may be useful to first consider cultural norms regarding educational and occupational choice. There exists in this culture an image of education as the route to social mobility, the road to security, status, and the "good life." A college education is highly valued in this society; it is reasonable to believe that regardless of their expectations, most parents would consider a college education desirable for their children. It should be relatively easy, then, for parents to respond to questions concerning their aspirations and expectations for their children's education.

Most parents will likely find it more difficult to state their aspirations and expectations for their children's occupation. Not only is the range of socially desirable choices greater than for education, but there is also a cultural norm favoring "finding oneself" or "doing one's own thing." In other

words, society encourages children to make their own occupational choices and discourages parents from interfering too much in the process. Thus, it is likely that many parents will respond, "I don't know" or "whatever he/she wants to do" when asked about their occupational aspirations and expectations for their children. It is our hypothesis that parents are more likely to give substantive responses to questions concerning educational goals than to questions concerning occupational goals for their children.

A parent will be considered to have or express aspirations or expectations for a child's attainments if he/she gives a substantive response (such as "college," "bachelor's degree," "teacher," "policeman," etc.) to questions concerning desires for the child's future education or occupation. Examples of nonsubstantive responses are "I don't know" or "whatever he/she decides."

A search of the literature reveals little, if any, theory and research concerning the existence or nonexistence of parental aspirations and expectations for children. However, those studies which have focused on the determinants of the level of parental goals for children are helpful in developing testable hypotheses. This discussion will consider parental characteristics first, and then turn to characteristics of the child.

Some of the best-known studies have looked at the influence of social class on parental aspirations, expectations, values, and goals (both actual and perceived) for children. Early work by Kohn and his colleagues (Kohn, 1969) shows a small association between social class and the value parents place on self-direction (independence, creativity, and achievement) in their children. Middle class parents in the Kohn study were more likely than working class parents to value self-direction, focusing on internal rather than external standards of behavior. According to Kohn, this difference can be explained by

the differing conditions of the work environment encountered by the two classes. Middle class parents work mainly in white-collar occupations, where they are relatively free of supervision, frequently communicate with others, work with ideas rather than objects, and must often rely on their own thought and judgment. Working-class parents, on the other hand, tend to have jobs which are closely supervised, use fewer interpersonal skills, and involve relatively standardized work. Relating Kohn's ideas to the present study, we might hypothesize that since middle-class parents are more likely to value self-direction in their children, they will be more concerned with achievement and thus more likely than working-class parents to have clearly defined aspirations and expectations for their children.

Other researchers have defined a parent's rank in society not in terms of social class, but in terms of his or her socioeconomic status (a combination of education, occupation, and earnings). The findings from these studies are similar: socioeconomic status is positively related to perceived aspirations for children's attainments (Duncan, et al., 1972; Brook, et al., 1974; Sewell and Hauser, 1975). This relationship holds even in the presence of controls for race, sex, child's intelligence, and high school rank. It might be hypothesized that high status parents have a greater interest in transmitting their status to their children than do low status parents; therefore they are more likely than low status parents to have aspirations and expectations for their children.

Another parental characteristic which has been linked to aspirations and expectations for children is achievement motivation (Kahl, 1953; Rosen, 1956; Katkovsky, et al., 1964; Cohen, 1965). It seems reasonable to hypothesize that parents whose achievement motivation for themselves is high will also be concerned with the achievements of their children; therefore, they should be

more likely than those with low achievement motivation to have specific aspirations and expectations for their children.

There is some evidence that the gender of the parent may also be relevant (Cohen, 1965). It is our hypothesis that mothers will be more likely than fathers to have aspirations and expectations for their children. There are two reasons for this hypothesis. First, women in our society have traditionally derived their status from others (fathers, husbands, sons), while men's status is determined by their own attainments. Thus, women may be more attentive than men to the status of those close to them. Second, in many families, mothers spend more time with their children than fathers. They meet their children's teachers and friends. They are thus more likely than fathers to be aware of their children's interests and abilities.

There is another set of variables not mentioned in the literature which might also be relevant to the presence or absence of aspirations and expectations for children's attainments: the parent's own family experiences. The relationship the parent had with his or her own parents during adolescence and the emphasis placed on college and occupational attainment in the parent's family of orientation should affect that parent's attitudes toward his or her own children. For example, an individual whose parents stressed achievement and openly encouraged college attendance may, if "successful," internalize these values and pass them on to his or her children. One who grows up in a high status family, possesses sufficient ability, and values the achievement experience is most likely to end up in a high status position and reproduce this environment in the family of procreation. The parental role is learned by experience; one's own parents are important role models in this experience.

The characteristics of children themselves must also be expected to play a major role in the formation of parental attitudes. Research has shown that perceived parental encouragement to attend college is positively affected by the child's mental ability (Sewell, et al., 1969, 1970; Alexander and Eckland, 1974; Sewell and Hauser, 1975). High ability, then, is related to high aspirations and expectations. It should be easier for parents to state their goals for a talented child than for a below-average child: the talented child may be encouraged to take college preparatory courses, to consider a professional career, and to apply for scholarships and awards. College and the professions may be taken for granted. For the less able child, however, the choices and opportunities may not be so apparent; it may be easier for the parent to wait and see what happens.

Child's age has a negative effect on aspirations (Jaffe and Adams, 1964). This is not surprising; undoubtedly, some initially high hopes must be adjusted downward as the child's abilities and motivations become known to the parent. Such knowledge of the child's characteristics, however, should produce a positive relationship between age and the existence of specific parental goals for the child. The older a child gets, the easier it becomes for the parent to state his or her aspirations and expectations for the child.

The number of children in the family and the birth order of the child have also been found to have a negative effect on parental aspirations (Jaffe and Adams, 1964; Shaver, et al., 1970). Both of these effects might be explained by reductions in per capita resources and parental attention as family size increases (Clausen and Clausen, 1973; Terhune, 1974). If it is true that the resources and attention invested in an individual child decrease as family size and birth order increase, then there are implications for the presence or

absence of aspirations and expectations as well. A reduction in resources may mean fewer opportunities for education. College cannot be taken for granted, and future plans may depend on factors outside the immediate control of the family or child. A reduction in parental attention may mean less knowledge of the child's abilities, motivations, and intentions. Therefore, both family size and birth order should have negative effects on the likelihood of holding aspirations or expectations for the child.

The child's gender should also be relevant to the existence of parental goals for children. Our society expects men to work and provide for their families; the same role is not necessarily given to women. Thus, from the day a son is born, his parents assume that he will eventually hold a job. It is likely that more thought is given to a son's future status than to that of a daughter. We therefore hypothesize that parents are more likely to state their aspirations and expectations for sons than for daughters.

HYPOTHESES

In summary, the preceding discussion suggests the following hypotheses:

1) Substantive responses (i.e., naming a specific job or level of education) are more likely for questions on educational aspirations and expectations than for questions on occupational aspirations and expectations.

2) Parents whose jobs require self-direction are more likely than those whose jobs are more routinized to express aspirations or expectations for their children.

3) The higher a parent's social class or socioeconomic status, the more likely he/she is to express aspirations or expectations for his/her children's attainments.

4) Mothers are more likely to express aspirations or expectations for their children than are fathers.

5) Parents whose high school and family experiences emphasized college and career are more likely to express aspirations and expectations for their children than those whose experiences were less achievement-oriented.

6) The likelihood that parents will express aspirations and expectations for their child's attainment increases as the age of the child increases.

7) The likelihood that parents will express aspirations and expectations for their child's attainments decreases as the family size increases.

8) The likelihood that parents will express aspirations and expectations for their child's attainments decreases as the child's birth order increases.

9) Parents are more likely to express aspirations and expectations for sons' attainments than for daughters' attainments.

10) The greater the child's ability, the more likely it is that the parent will express aspirations and expectations for the child's attainments.

Hypothesis 10 cannot be tested in the present study, because our data set does not contain a measure of the child's ability. It is stated here only for the sake of completeness.

DATA AND VARIABLES

The data for this paper come from the "Wisconsin Sample:" a sample of 10,317 of Wisconsin's 1957 high school seniors. The members of this sample, which has been described in detail elsewhere (Sewell and Hauser, 1980), have been participating in a longitudinal study of social and psychological factors in aspiration and achievement. Questionnaires dealing with socioeconomic background, parental, peer, and teacher influences on educational aspiration and attainments were administered to all high school seniors in Wisconsin in 1957.

A 1/3 sample of 10,317 of these seniors was followed up in 1964, and a lengthy interview, which covered the above topics as well as marital and family histories and questions concerning a randomly selected child of each respondent, was conducted on this 1/3 sample in 1975. Overall, 88.6 per cent of the original 1/3 sample responded to one or more waves of the survey. The present analysis is based on all married respondents who were living with their spouses and had one or more children in 1975, yielding an N of 7466.

Each of these parents was asked to give information on their educational and occupational aspirations and expectations for one of their children. If there were two or more children in the family, one child was selected at random during the interview. Aspirations for child's education and occupation are measured by the questions, "How far would you like (child) to go in school, less than high school graduate, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, or graduate or professional school?," "What degree would you like this child to get?," and "What type of occupation would you like him (or her) to go into?" In addition to aspirations, actual expectations for the child were also measured by asking, "How far do you think he (or she) probably will go in school, less than high school graduate, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, or graduate or professional school?," "What degree do you think this child will get?," and "What type of occupation do you think he (or she) will probably go into?"

Socioeconomic status is measured in terms of years of education and occupational status (Duncan SES). The emphasis on self-direction on the job is indicated by nonmanual (as opposed to manual) work, a need for verbal communication and thinking, the importance to the respondent of freedom, getting ahead, and using one's abilities on the job, and general job satisfaction. These are some of the same variables used in Kohn's (1969) definition of a white-collar job.

The parent's high school experiences used in this study are the socioeconomic status of the parent's family of orientation, the expression (or lack of it) of educational aspirations by the parent's own parents, the value the parent placed on college at age 16, the intention (or lack of it) to go to college at age 16, mental ability, and the parent's occupational aspirations for him- or herself at age 16. The measures of these variables are described in detail below.

The independent variables used in testing our nine hypotheses are measured as follows:

PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Background socioeconomic status is a composite index based on the education, occupation, and income of the respondent's parents when the respondent was a senior in high school. The scale ranges from 0 to 99.

Respondent's sex is coded 1 if the respondent is a male (father) and 0 if the respondent is a female (mother). There are 3910 mothers and 3556 fathers in the sample.

Respondent's IQ is the normalized score on the Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability, which was administered to all respondents during their junior year of high school.

Respondent's parents expressed aspirations for R's education is a dummy variable which is coded 1 if a respondent said his or her parents either encouraged or discouraged his or her college attendance in 1957, and 0 otherwise.

Respondent's value of college is a scale created by Michael Armer (1964) from eighteen weighted "value statements" regarding respondent's value of going to college when respondent was a senior in high school. Examples of the value statements are "I would rather start earning money quickly, and learn on the job," "College life and activities (like athletics) attract me very much," "College graduates get jobs with better pay," "Going to college costs more than it is worth," and "Going to college has just been accepted; I have never thought of anything else." The scale ranges from 1 to 99.

Respondent's college plans at age 16 is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent said he or she planned to attend college when he or she was a senior in high school.

Respondent's education is coded in years.

Time spent working with hands is the number of hours in an average week the respondent spends working with hands, tools, or equipment.

Time spent working with written materials is the number of hours in an average week the respondent spends reading, writing, or dealing with written materials.

Supervises others is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent said he or she supervises the work of others in terms of what they produce and how much.

Satisfaction with current job has as possible responses (1) "Very dissatisfied," (2) "Somewhat dissatisfied," (3) "Fairly satisfied," and (4) "Very satisfied."

Importance in judging jobs of freedom is a measure of the extent to which respondent feels amount of freedom is important in judging jobs. Possible responses are (1) "Not particularly important," (2) "Fairly important," (3) "Very important."

Importance in judging jobs of chance to get ahead is coded same as above.

Importance in judging jobs of chance to use abilities is coded same as above.

Respondent's occupational status is the Duncan S.E.I. score for the respondent's occupation in 1975.

Spouse's education is measured in years.

Spouse's occupational status is the Duncan S.E.I. score for the respondent's spouse's current or last job.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

Child's sex is coded 1 if the child is a male and 0 if the child is a female. There are 3639 sons and 3313 daughters in the sample.

Child's age is measured in years.

Number of children in the family includes the selected child and his or her siblings as of 1975.

Child's birth order is the birth order of the selected child.

The definitions and codes of the above variables are summarized for easier reference in Table 1.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The dependent variables in this analysis (substantive or nonsubstantive response on educational aspirations, educational expectations, occupational aspirations, and occupational expectations) are dichotomous variables which have been coded 1 if the respondent gave a substantive response (a specific occupation or level of education) and 0 if the respondent gave a nonsubstantive response (such as "don't know" or "whatever he/she decides"). As the results will show, their distributions are skewed. An appropriate technique for

TABLE 1. VARIABLE DEFINITIONS AND CODES

| Variable | Code |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| R's educational aspiration for child | years |
| R's educational expectation for child | years |
| R's occupational aspiration for child | U.S. Census detailed occ. code |
| R's occupational expectation for child | same |
| Composite score for socioeconomic status of R's family of origin based on R's parents' education, occupation, and income | 1 to 99 |
| R's sex | 0 (female) 1 (male) |
| R's IQ when R was a junior in high school (normalized Henmon-Nelson score) | IQ units |
| R's parents expressed aspirations for R's education (as reported by R during senior year of high school) | 0 (no) 1 (yes) |
| R's value of college as measured when R was a senior in high school | 1 (low) to 99 (high) |
| R planned to go to college when R was a senior in high school | 0 (no) 1 (yes) |
| R's occupational aspiration when R was a senior in high school (Duncan SEI transform of NORC transform of Duncan SEI score) | 0 to 98 |
| R's equivalent years of regular education | years |
| Occupational status of R's current or last job | Duncan SEI |
| # of hours per week R spends working with hands, tools, or equipment | hours |
| # of hours per week R spends reading, writing, and dealing with written materials | hours |
| R supervises the work of others | 0 (no) 1 (yes) |

Table 1. Continued

| Variable | Code |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Satisfaction with current job | 1 (not very sat.) to 4 (very sat.) |
| Importance of freedom in judging jobs in general | 1 (not very imp.) to 3 (very imp.) |
| Importance of chance to get ahead in judging jobs in general | same |
| Importance of chance to use abilities in judging jobs in general | same |
| Spouse's years of education | years |
| Status of spouse's current or last job | Duncan S.E.I. |
| Number of children ever born to R | |
| Child's birth order | |
| Child's age in years | |
| Child's sex | 0 (female) 1 (male) |

estimating the effects of a set of independent variables on a skewed dichotomous dependent variable is logistic regression (Hanushek and Jackson, 1977).

RESULTS

The distribution of responses to the items asking about educational and occupational aspirations and expectations for the respondents' children is presented in Table 2. The data in this table clearly support hypothesis 1: substantive responses are far more frequent for the educational items than for the occupational items. Nonsubstantive answers on educational aspirations and expectations make up only 8.0% and 11.6% respectively, of the total responses, while nonsubstantive answers make up 61.6% of the occupational aspiration responses and 53.7% of the occupational expectation responses. Thus the assumption often made by researchers in the status attainment field - that parents hold clearly defined goals for their children - appears to be justified for education but not for occupation. Among those parents who do give substantive responses, most prefer college and a professional-technical occupation for their children - evidence that education and the "good life" are highly valued goals for one's offspring.

The remaining hypotheses may be tested by examining the logistic regression coefficients displayed in Table 3, which shows the coefficients for the educational items, and Table 4, which gives the coefficients for the occupational items. Turning first to Table 3, we find that few of our hypotheses are supported. Only sex of parent and age of child have clear effects in the predicted direction. Mothers are 1.35 times as likely as fathers to give a substantive response on educational aspirations and 1.25 times as likely to give a substantive response on educational expectations ($e^{.298} = 1.35$,

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENT'S ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION

| EDUCATION | Aspiration | Expectation |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| 12 years or less | 14.6% | 20.1% |
| 13 to 15 years | 19.1 | 19.7 |
| 16 years or more | 58.3 | 48.6 |
| Nonsubstantive response | 8.0 | 11.6 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Number of cases [*] | 6817 | 6826 |
| | | |
| OCCUPATION | Aspiration | Expectation |
| Professional, technical managerial, administrative | 31.0% | 33.1% |
| Sales, clerical, crafts | 4.1 | 5.9 |
| Operative, laborer, farm, service, housewife | 3.4 | 7.3 |
| Nonsubstantive response | 61.6 | 53.7 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Number of cases [*] | 6604 | 6581 |

* This is the number of respondents who were interviewed in 1975, were married and had one or more children at the time of the interview, and responded to the above items.

TABLE 3. LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILD'S EDUCATION: SUBSTANTIVE VS. NON-SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSES

| Independent Variable | Dependent Variable | |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | Aspiration (EDASSK) | Expectation (EDEXSK) |
| Background SES | -0.00261 | -0.00119 |
| IQ at age 16 | -0.00018 | -0.00147 |
| R's Parents expressed educ. aspirations for R | 0.117 | 0.172 |
| R's Value of college at age 16 | 0.00457* | 0.00114 |
| R planned to go to college at age 16 | 0.00458 | -0.219 |
| R's occup. aspir. at age 16 | -0.00079 | -0.00077 |
| R's sex | -0.298* | -0.224* |
| R's education | 0.00007 | -0.00518 |
| Spouse's education | -0.0425 | 0.0648* |
| Supervises others | 0.261* | -0.0522 |
| Hours working with hands | -0.00618 | -0.00646* |
| Hours working with written materials | 0.00073 | 0.00511 |
| Satisfaction with job | 0.0459 | -0.0417 |
| Importance of freedom | -0.245* | -0.149* |
| Importance of getting ahead | 0.262* | 0.114 |
| Importance of using ability | -0.193 | -0.102 |
| Child's sex | -0.0232 | 0.0262 |
| # of children | -0.0865 | -0.0857 |
| Child's birth order | 0.105 | 0.0397 |

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

| Independent Variable | Dependent Variable | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | Aspiration (EDASSK) | Expectation (EDEXSK) |
| Child's age | 0.0579* | 0.124* |
| Constant | 2.514* | 0.496 |
| Likelihood Chi Square | 2834 | 3504 |
| DF | 5111 | 5114 |

* Coefficient is at least twice its standard error.

Dependent variables are coded 1 = substantive response
0 = non-substantive response

Likelihood chi square for null model is $L^2 = 2907$, $df = 5131$
for EDASSK and $L^2 = 3663$, $df = 5134$ for EDEXSK.

$e^{.224} = 1.25$). Hypothesis 4 is thus supported with respect to the educational items.

Hypothesis 6 is also supported. For each additional year of the child's age, parents are 1.1 times more likely to express educational aspirations or expectations.

The data show some weak support for Hypothesis 2, that self-direction on the job is related to substantive response. Supervising others increases the probability of substantive response for aspirations but not for expectations. Doing manual labor decreases the probability of substantive response for expectations but not for aspirations, although the magnitude of the two effects is nearly the same. Valuing freedom on the job has a negative effect on both variables, while valuing the chance to get ahead has a positive effect on aspirations only. Freedom on the job need not necessarily be connected with achievement in a respondent's mind; the chance to "get ahead," on the other hand, is more closely related to achievement motivation.

There is little or no support for the remaining hypotheses. A parent's own educational status does not affect the likelihood of substantive response, though spouse's education has a weak positive effect on expectations. Of all the parent's high school experiences, only the value the parent placed on college when he/she was 16 is significant, and its effect is small. The child's sex and birth order, as well as the number of children in the family, all have insignificant effects.

A similar model is estimated for the occupational items in Table 4. For this analysis, father's and mother's occupations have been added to the equation. Which of these variables reflects the respondent's own occupation depends on the sex of the respondent. The reason for constructing the variable

TABLE 4. LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF PARENT'S ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILD'S OCCUPATION: SUBSTANTIVE VS. NONSUBSTANTIVE RESPONSES

| Independent Variable | Aspiration (OCASSK) | Expectation (OCEXSK) |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Backgrd. ses | -0.00569 | -0.0100* |
| Father's occup. | 0.00472 | -0.0853 |
| Mother's occup. | -0.117 | -0.140 |
| R's sex | -0.090 | -0.489* |
| R's education | -0.0222 | -0.00050 |
| Spouse's education | 0.0113 | 0.0450* |
| Supervises others | 0.0137 | 0.133* |
| Hours working with hands | -0.00243 | -0.00036 |
| Hours working with written materials | 0.00009 | 0.00451 |
| Satisfaction with job | 0.0529 | 0.0199 |
| Importance of freedom | 0.0253 | 0.0447 |
| Importance of getting ahead | 0.195* | 0.0114 |
| Importance of using ability | -0.00516 | -0.0180 |
| Child's sex | -0.124* | -0.140* |
| # of children | -0.0519 | -0.0388 |
| Child's birth order | 0.0350 | -0.0270 |
| Child's age | 0.0333* | 0.154* |
| Constant | -1.297* | -2.644* |
| Likelihood Chi Square | 7070 | 6749 |
| DF | 5311 | 5312 |

(Continued)

TABLE 4. (Continued)

*Coefficient is at least twice its standard error.

Dependent variables are coded 1 = substantive response; 0 = nonsubstantive response.

Likelihood chi square for the null model is $L^2 = 7135$, $df = 5328$ for occupational aspiration and $L^2 = 7360$, $df = 5329$ for occupational expectation.

in such a way is that it is possible that father's and mother's occupations have different effects on occupational aspirations or expectations; these effects should not depend on which parent happens to be the respondent. If the occupational variables were coded in terms of respondent and spouse, rather than father or mother, it would be necessary to estimate four coefficients (one each for male and female respondents and one each for male and female spouses) to look for differences in the effects of father's and mother's occupations.

A second difference between the occupational and educational analyses is the omission of most of the high school experience variables from the occupational equations. With the exception of background socioeconomic status, these variables are more relevant to educational than to occupational attainments.

The data in Table 4 clearly support only one hypothesis - Hypothesis 6. As with the educational items, the likelihood of substantive response to the occupational items increases as the child's age increases. Each year of the child's age increases the probability of substantive response by 1.03 for aspirations and 1.2 for expectations.

Mothers are significantly more likely than fathers to give a substantive response on expectations but not aspirations. If aspirations reflect the ideal, while expectations reflect what is more realistic, then mothers and fathers with similar aspirations might be expected to differ in their perceptions of the child's actual chances. As suggested earlier, mothers may be more aware of their children's interests and abilities than fathers.

Only one of the variables used to measure self-direction is significant in each equation. Parents who value the chance to get ahead on the job are more likely to express aspirations for their children's occupations than those who do not. Substantive responses for expectations are found more frequently among

those who supervise others on the job than among those who do not. It appears that self-direction as measured here has limited value in predicting substantive responses for child's occupation.

Hypothesis 9, that substantive responses are more frequent for sons than for daughters, is contradicted by the data. Child's sex has a significant negative effect, indicating that substantive responses are more likely for daughters. There is reason to suspect that this finding may be specific to this particular sample. A very popular response among these parents was that they would like their daughters to become registered nurses or "something in the health field." The combination of these two response categories makes up about 12% of all responses and about 27% of the substantive responses for daughters.

DISCUSSION

Parents do indeed hold aspirations and expectations for their children's status attainments - when the attainment in question is education. The majority of parents, however, are unwilling to express substantive aspirations or expectations for their children's occupation. Education in our society is viewed as an asset or investment. Wanting a college education for one's child is no different from hoping that the child will grow up to be rich, healthy, or happy; indeed, education is generally thought to increase the chances of attaining these goals. Thus, parents have little difficulty expressing aspirations or expectations for their children's education. Occupation, on the other hand, is a return on one's investment. It is a reward for time and money put into education. In our culture it is regarded as a matter of personal choice. Most parents assume that their children will make their own occupational decisions when the time comes.

In predicting the likelihood of substantive response to the four questions on educational and occupational aspirations and expectations for a child, only one variable stands out as a strong and consistent predictor: child's age. That age should be so important is not surprising. As children progress through school, their abilities and interests become more apparent, both to themselves and to their parents. As they reach high school, they begin to think about and discuss educational and occupational choices with their parents and peers. Thus, the older a child gets, the easier it is for a parent to state what he or she wants and expects for the child.

None of the remaining hypotheses are clearly supported in all four cases. In three out of four cases, mothers are more likely to give substantive responses than are fathers. This is as expected; mothers probably spend more time with their children than fathers. There is only weak evidence that an emphasis on self-direction on the job is related to substantive response. Valuing the chance to "get ahead" and supervision of others on the job in particular have significant effects. The effects of the other measures are not consistent in all four cases. It is possible that more complete measures of Kohn's concept of "self-directed" work might produce more interpretable results.

The findings concerning the sex of the child are mixed. There is no difference between parents of sons and daughters in the likelihood of expressing educational aspirations and expectations. For occupational aspirations and expectations a significant difference was found, but in the opposite direction from the one expected. While the latter should not be generalized to other groups of parents, it is likely that the former holds true among most parents in our society. The value placed on education is so universal that perhaps no difference should have been expected between sons and daughters. If education

is the route to the "good life," then it should be desirable for daughters as well as sons.

The remaining hypotheses are not supported by these data. Parent's background, parent's current status, and child's birth order do nothing to improve the prediction of substantive response.

The lack of significant effects in these equations is in itself significant. These data contain a great deal of information about the parents. Yet very little of this information is of any use in predicting which parents have aspirations and expectations for their children's attainments and which do not. The conclusion which may be drawn here is that the existence of aspirations and expectations depends not so much on the parent as it does on the child. The importance of child's age in these models is further evidence to support this point. The older a child gets, the closer educational and occupational decisions get. The child's own abilities, desires, intentions, and opportunities become clearer. It is likely that some parents will express their aspirations and expectations only after they know what the child has, in one way or another, already decided. Parents' attitudes do have an influence on children's decisions, but children's decisions can also influence their parents' attitudes.

An implication for counselors who assist youths in making educational and occupational decisions is that parents may have less to say about such decisions than is commonly thought - especially where occupation and career are concerned. Societal values, the characteristics of the child, and perhaps even chance or environmental factors may be more important than differences among parents.

Such an assertion is not meant to negate or contradict the relationship found in numerous studies between parents' aspirations or expectations and

the aspirations or expectations for their children. To the extent that parents know what they want for their children, such a relationship should indeed exist. But that relationship is most probably the result of a dynamic process in which the parent responds to the child's abilities and interests by developing expectations, and the child in turn responds to those expectations. The fact that child's age, which is a proxy for the passage of time and for mutual knowledge between parent and child, is a strong and consistent predictor of the existence of parental goals supports such a model. Thus, the existence of aspirations and expectations - especially occupational - should not be taken for granted for all parents.

Future research on parental aspirations and expectations for children's attainments will need to include the information which our data, unfortunately, do not provide: child's ability, child's aspirations, and child's intentions.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, K.L. and B.K. Eckland. 1974. "Sex Differences in the Educational Attainment Process." American Sociological Review 39:668-682.
- Alexander, K.L., B.K. Eckland, and L.J. Griffin. 1975. "The Wisconsin Model of Socioeconomic Achievements: A Replication." American Journal of Sociology 81:324-342.
- Armer, Michael. 1964. "Community and School Environments and College Plans of Public High School Seniors." Unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin.
- Bordua, D. 1960. "Educational Aspirations and Parental Stress on College." Social Forces 38:262-269.
- Brook, J.S., M. Whiteman, E. Peisach, and M. Deutsch. 1974. "Aspiration Levels of and for Children: Age, Sex, Race, and Socioeconomic Correlates." Journal of Genetic Psychology 124:3-16.
- Clausen, J., and S. Clausen. 1973. "The Effects of Family Size on Parents and children." pp.185-298 in James F. Fawcett (ed.) Psychological Perspectives on Population. New York: Basic Books
- Cohen, E.G. 1965. "Parental Factors in Educational Mobility." Sociology of Education 38:404-425.
- Davies, M. and D.B. Kandel. 1981. "Parental and Peer Influence on Adolescents' Educational Plans: Some Further Evidence." American Journal of Sociology 87:363-383.
- Duncan, O.D., D.L. Featherman, and B.D. Duncan. 1972. Socioeconomic Background and Achievement. New York: Seminar Press.
- Hanushek, E. A., and J. E. Jackson. 1977. Statistical Methods for Social Sciences. New York: Academic Press.
- Jaffe, A.J. and W. Adams. 1964. "College Education for U.S. Youth: Attitudes of Parents and Children." American Journal of Economics and Sociology 23:269-284.

- Kohl, J.A. 1953. "Educational and Occupational Aspirations of 'Common Man' Boys." Harvard Educational Review 23:186-203.
- Kandel, D.B. and G.S. Lesser. 1969. "Parental and Peer Influences on Educational Plans of Adolescents." American Sociological Review 34:212-223.
- Katkovsky, W., A. Preston, and V.J. Crandall. 1964. "Parents' Attitudes Toward the Achievement Behaviors of Their Children." Journal of Genetic Psychology 104:67-82.
- Kerckhoff, Alan C. and L. Huff. 1974. "Parental Influence on Educational Goals." Sociometry 37:307-327.
- Kohn, M.L. 1969. Class and Conformity. Homewood, IL: Dorsey.
- Rehberg, R.A., J. Sinclair, and W.E. Schafer. 1970. "Adolescent Achievement Behavior, Family Authority Structure, and Parental Socialization Practices." American Journal of Sociology 75:1012-1034.
- Rehberg, R.A. and D.L. Westby. 1967. "Parental Encouragement, Occupation, Education, and Family Size: Artifactual or Independent Determinants of Adolescent Educational Expectations?" Social Forces 45:362-374.
- Rosen, B.C. 1956. "The Achievement Syndrome: A Psychocultural Dimension of Social Stratification." American Sociological Review 21:203-211.
- Sewell, W.H. and V.P. Shah. 1968. "Social Class, Parental Encouragement, and Educational Aspirations." American Journal of Sociology 73:559-572.
- Sewell, W.H. and R.M. Hauser. 1975. Education, Occupation, and Earnings: Achievement in the Early Career. New York: Academic Press.
- _____. 1980. "The Wisconsin Study of Social and Psychological Factors in Aspirations and Achievements." In A.C. Kerckhoff (ed.) Research in the Sociology of Education and Socialization, Vol. I. Connecticut: JAI Press.

Terhune, K. 1974. A Review of the Actual and Expected Consequences of Family Size. Calspan Report No. DP-5333-G-1, prepared for the Center for Population Research, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. National Institute of Health Publication No. (NIH) 76-779. Washington, D.C.: GPO.