THE EFFECT OF AN EXPRESSED LEVEL OF ASPIRATION
IN DETERMINING PERFORMANCE ON A
SUBSEQUENT TASK

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THE EFFECT OF AN EXPRESSED LEVEL OF ASPIRATION IN DETERMINING PERFORMANCE ON A SUBSEQUENT TASK

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The study of man and his behavior preceded science. Man has long attempted to answer the question, why is one individual so similar and yet so different from another? One attempt to answer this question is in terms of motivation.

At least from the time of Plato, Western philosophers have tended to see reason and desire as two distinctly different elements in the human mind. The desire element always represented a kind of motivational force often opposed but ultimately controllable by reason. At the beginning of modern scientific psychology this relationship took on a very specific meaning largely under the influence of Darwin and the wide interest he aroused in his theory of evolution. Man was conceived as an animal engaged in a struggle for survival with nature. The assumption behind this conceptualization was that he struggled because he had a desire to survive. Later, Freud, who was influenced by Darwin in his analytic and dynamic system, stated many hypotheses about the behavior resulting from society's erection of barriers between the individual and his biological needs and the means for gratifying
those needs. Thus from the work of these two men, one could grasp
the concept of primary motivation. That is, the innate, biological
needs of man are present at birth and are most basic to the survival
of this organism.

There are also motives which are considered to be learned
and which begin to develop shortly after birth. There is seldom a
direct expression of the biological needs in people after cultural
restrictions and facilitations have operated upon the individual for a
few years of life. This does not mean that the biological needs no
longer function or that they have an insignificant role. There is an
interaction between the two kinds of needs; and as long as the primary
motes are gratified or controlled to some degree, the secondary
motes are able to function. Some examples of secondary motives
are sentiments, preferences, tastes in esthetic matters, ambitions,
attitudes, and aspirations.

The present study was concerned with the last example of
secondary motives, aspiration. There have been many investigations
in the area of level of aspiration. These studies have always, with
few exceptions, used the aspiration level as a dependent variable with
other conditions manipulated to see what effect they had on this level.
However, there have been very few studies concerning the relation-
ship between the aspiration level and a subsequent level of
performance on a task: that is, there have been few investigations employing the level of aspiration as a motivational independent variable. This was the purpose of the present study.

Survey of the Literature

A review of the literature revealed a voluminous amount of material in this area. This survey is general and will emphasize the use of the level of aspiration as a dependent variable with other conditions being manipulated to determine their effects. These investigations can generally be viewed as being concerned with a combination of three conditions: the social, economic and psychological factors which create, develop and facilitate an individual frame of reference.

Frank (7, p. 215) defined the level of aspiration operationally as "... the level of future performance in a familiar task which an individual, knowing his level of past performance in that task, explicitly undertakes to reach." The effect of all the conditions mentioned earlier on level of aspiration has been the subject of numerous research and theoretical studies. One group of these studies is concerned with the relationship of success and failure to LOA (level of aspiration).
Lewin (14) reported that the level of aspiration is fundamental for the experience of success and failure. The aspiration level itself can be changed depending upon these two conditions.

Sears (20) agreed when she found evidence showing that one factor in the production of individual differences is that LOA is the meaning of the task for the subject in terms of success and failure experiences. These have been built up during his lifetime, and he carries them in the form of attitudes toward the task.

Along the same line, Frank (8) carried these conclusions one step further when he stated that the variations in level of aspiration behavior may be due to three factors: (a) the need to seek success; (b) the need to avoid failure; and (c) the need to keep in touch with reality.

Finally, Steisel (23) found that, in general, failure experiences were followed by a lowering of aspiration levels. The more severe failures resulted in a greater drop than did mild failures.

Other studies of the psychological factors involved in level of aspiration behavior deal with conditions besides the direct experiencing of success and failure. Atkinson (2) differentiated between achievement motivation and achievement anxiety. He found that some people work to achieve success and the desire for success is greater than the fear of failure. However, these people usually have
a greater respect for the possibility of failure which they recognize to exist. On the other hand, there are those people who work primarily to avoid failure, with the desire for greater recognition a secondary one. The first type is characterized by achievement motivation, whereas the latter type exemplifies achievement anxiety.

Zelen (24) proposed the use of an ambiguous frame of reference which seemed to provide sufficient uncertainty to maximize personal tendencies toward rigidity or flexibility. The studies described thus far generally agree that there is a level of aspiration which can be exposed and manipulated under experimental conditions, but there are other studies which question this assumption.

Gould (10) stated that she doubted that any situation offering a potential threat of failure would yield an accurate picture of goal striving. This threat would distort the results and render any conclusions questionable.

Gardner (9) suggested that the so-called "Inner Level of Aspiration" may be a myth. It may be an artificial but objective and quantifiable indication which a person makes regarding his future performance on a given task.

Ausubel et al. (3) agreed with this conclusion when they found a lack of relationship between "real life" and laboratory measures of aspiration. This was attributed to the relatively greater
ego-involvement in real life measures. Measures of vocational aspiration were not related to adjustment levels, whereas the more anxious individuals showed higher aspirations for academic work.

Preston and Bayton (18) have indicated that there may be several types of level of aspiration, e.g., expectancies, minimum goals, etc., and they have provided evidence that these types of level of aspiration may be more or less independent. The studies discussed have dealt with investigations of level of aspirations in terms of the personal, psychological frame of reference. There have also been studies dealing with the social and economic factors (5, 12, 4, 22, 19, 16).

Bochow (5) stated that the individual's level of aspiration is determined by the inter-relationship of various factors of personality and culture. The study of these factors must take into account the following: (a) sequence of events; (b) individual goals; (c) conflicts arising from high levels of aspiration; and (d) individual differences.

Hilgard and Salt (12) studies the characteristics of level of aspiration as affected by relative standing in a group. They concluded that group pressure would explain the tendency to estimate the amount of time to solve a problem toward the mean of the group only if the desire for social conformity was somewhat internalized.
Bennett and Noel (4) studied the class and family influences on student aspirations. They found that aspirations and plans showed little variation among social classes. Only occupational plans varied significantly with class. Maternal influence appeared to be stronger and more effective relative to parental influence at lower class levels regardless of the race of the student.

Gould (11) detailed some sociological determinants of goal striving. He used eighty-one male college students who were divided into two groups according to aspiration level. There were marked contrasts in sociological background. The low group (small discrepancy between estimate of present and future performance) came from a predominantly Protestant American background of high economic status. The high group had a predominantly large percentage of foreign-born fathers of lower than average income, and more than half belonged to minority religious groups.

Silvertsen (22) reported a qualitative study of goal-setting by studying eleven- and twelve-year-old boys through interviews and class marks. He found that success tended to be associated with setting one's goals at a low level of performance so that success was assured, and failure with a high level of goal-setting so that success was much more difficult. High-goal categories were associated to a greater degree with various expressions of parental pressure.
Reissman (19) found no simple relationship between a person's social class position and his level of aspiration (regarding occupational advancement). He studied adult males selected from among policemen, members of a Junior Chamber of Commerce and residents of a Chicago suburb. Age, past achievements, reference groups and orientation to values other than success complicated the relationship.

McCandless (16, p. 543) found

... the achievement motive should be highest in the middle class, lowest in the lower class, and perhaps about the same for the upper-lower and the upper classes. School learning anxiety should be highest for the middle class children due to an interaction between their motives, parental love, or psychologically oriented punishment and self-punishment for failure to do well. This anxiety should be lowest for lower-lower class youngsters and upper-lower and upper class children should be aligned somewhere in between.

Related Studies

A number of other investigations were more specifically related to the present study. These were concerned with three major areas of relationships which the present study took into account. They could be grouped as follows: (a) investigations of the aspiration
level in children; (b) studies using a task similar to the one employed in this study; and (c) studies of the motivational properties involved in level of aspiration.

The development of level of aspiration in children was investigated by Muller (17). She found that from age 5 years, 10 months (5-10) to 6 years, 11 months (6-11), they exhibit all the features of aspiration level found in adults and older school children. From age 3 years, 11 months (3-11) to 4 years, 11 months (4-11), their attitude was one of play, and aspiration was found only sporadically. However, the beginning of a socially directed aspiration could be found. Finally, from age 3 years, 2 months (3-2) to 3 years, 11 months (3-11), neither aspiration nor true play was found but there was a marked demand for independence.

Sears (21) also investigated aspiration level in young children. Her study included nineteen preschool children, four and five years old. Two sessions of a level of aspiration situation involving six separate tasks graded into five difficulty levels were used. She concluded:

(1) Children could discriminate among the levels of difficulty and tended to choose the easier levels of the task, the levels at which success was more probable.
(2) The choices of the levels of difficulty and the choices following success changed in the second session in the direction of insuring more frequent success by remaining at the easy levels of difficulty.

(3) The children tended to be individually consistent from session to session in the reaction to successful achievements at the level chosen.

(4) There were no consistent patterns of responses following failure to achieve a previously set goal.

There have been other studies with children in which a task similar to the one used in the author's study has been proposed. Davids and White (6) used a cancellation task to study the effects of success, failure and social facilitation in emotionally disturbed and normal children. This task provided measures of performance, level of aspiration, and latencies of response in stating level of aspiration. They found:

(1) The initial level of aspiration, without experience in the experimental situation, was higher in the disturbed group, and there was no difference in the initial-response latencies of the two groups.

(2) The two groups improved on the second task, but the normal scores were significantly higher.
(3) Before the failure trial the two groups did not differ in response latencies, whereas after the failure, the disturbed were significantly slower in stating aspiration levels.

(4) It was concluded that the subjects who were judged to be relatively better adjusted tended to show higher levels of aspiration and more success in the experimental situation.

In another study using a cancellation task, Anderson and Bryant (1) used fifty grade-school children. This was a study of motivation which involved self-pronounced goals in a level-of-aspiration situation. The test had little relationship to school work or mental age. It was found that

(1) Those who set goals produced achievement significantly superior to those who did not.

(2) Those in the lowest ranks of achievement set goals above their pre-achievement.

(3) Those in the upper ranks consistently set goals below their pre-achievement.

(4) The level of aspiration in all achievement groups tended consistently toward mediocrity.

Marks (15) attempted to determine whether children's predicted performance in situations in which they were confronted with a task would be influenced by (a) the desirability of outcomes;
(b) the socio-economic status of the subject; and (c) the probability of outcome. The subjects were sixty privileged and sixty underprivileged children. The results suggested that motivational factors may influence the cognitive appreciation of the situation in the direction of need satisfaction.

Kausler (13) investigated the motivational properties of expression of aspiration level, using three groups of college students performing simple arithmetic tests under varying conditions. It was found that expressing an aspiration level served to increase performance level on subsequent tasks. Also, there was no correlation between magnitude of aspiration level and magnitude of performance score when differences in task aptitude were eliminated. In the experimental group, the mean level of aspiration was greater than that for the control group, but the mean-performance score was not significantly different. These results suggested the operation of a "set" which is introduced only by the expressing of an aspiration level. This "set" is then modified by the frame of reference surrounding the expressing of an aspiration level.

In summary, much of the literature suggested significant variables in regard to the effects of LOA regarding many psychological factors such as success and failure (14, 20, 8, 23, 21, 6), anxiety (2, 24) and motivation (1, 13). Others dealt with the
socio-economic factors involved (5, 12, 4, 11, 19, 16). The majority of the studies were concerned with the development, determination and variance in the aspiration level, that is, studying these different conditions to see what effect they had on LOA.

There has been a relative paucity of studies concerning the motivational properties of LOA, that is, using the LOA as a motivational independent variable and determining its effect on a subsequent level of performance (13). This study was designed to determine the effects of this property of LOA.

The present study was similar to the work of Kausler and yet quite different. The similarity was in the choice of three groups, two experimental and one control, which duplicated that of Kausler's work. The differences were the subjects (elementary students instead of college students) and the task (a cancellation task instead of arithmetic problems). The present study also went a step further by testing the effect on the experimental procedure of a socio-economic classification of the students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the present study was to investigate the effect of an expressed level of aspiration on a subsequent level of
performance on a cancellation task and to relate this effect to socio-economic classifications.

Hypotheses

The following two hypotheses were tested in the present study: **Hypothesis 1**—There would be a significant difference between mean cancellation scores of those children in the two experimental groups (those stating a LOA) and those in the control group. **Hypothesis 2**—There would be a significant interaction effect between the expression of level of aspiration and socio-economic level. The experimental effect would be relatively greater for the middle class group.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

The range of ages for all the children employed was from 8 years, 2 months (8-2) to 10 years, 4 months (10-4). Due to the randomization process, to be explained later in the chapter, there were no efforts to actively control racial, sex, or ethnic differences in the groups for the purpose of the present study. Intelligence factors were, in general, controlled by the fact of the student's passing into the fourth-grade class. Subjects of all groups were selected according to presence in class, age, and willingness to participate in each of the three populations used.

Experimental Design

The basic design employed in the present study was a 3 X 3 factorial analysis of variance with equal N's. The three major dimensions and conditions of each are as follows: no expressed LOA, expressed LOA, and expressed LOA with frame of reference for high, middle, and low socio-economic classes respectively.
A schematic presentation of the basic experimental design is presented in Figure 1. Numbers in the cells represent the numbers of subjects assigned to the treatment combination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Classes</th>
<th>No Expression</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Expression With Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1--Experimental Design Model

The assignment of the subjects to the dimensions was based on the work of Hollingshead and Redlich (1). Ninety children were selected and divided into three groups of thirty each based on their socio-economic level. The thirty highest socio-economic positions would comprise the "high" classification. The next thirty would coincide with the "middle" class and the last thirty, the "low" class. Then the subjects from each group were assigned at random to each of the treatment conditions. This process was repeated until all dimensions and conditions were completed.
The randomization process for the selection of the subjects was as follows: thirty slips of paper numbered from 1-30 were placed in a container. Each number corresponded with a seat in a classroom and ten slips were chosen in each of the classrooms (N = 30). This procedure was repeated three times and then the groups were selected (N = 90). The children were tested in groups of thirty for each of the conditions in an empty classroom chosen for this study.

The symbols used in this study were also chosen randomly. Nine slips of paper, each corresponding to one of the symbols on the digit-symbol test, were placed in a container and one was chosen for the practice trial. The slip of paper was then placed back in the container and the symbol for the test trial was drawn.

Task

The standard digit symbol from the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale was chosen to be used in the present study. Only the symbols without any reference to the numbers were employed. The task itself was a cancellation test with the appropriate symbol to be cancelled. The symbols were chosen at random as stated earlier. The same symbol was used for all three groups in the pretest situation and another symbol was chosen for the actual testing situation.
This task appeared to fulfill the requirements of the criteria noted by Rotter (2) with regard to the selection of the appropriate instrument:

(1) The task should be novel. Subjects should not be able to guess how others have scored nor should they have previously formed attitudes about their abilities with regard to the specific task.

(2) The task should be interesting enough to maintain attention over a few trials.

(3) The task should be adaptable. It should not be too easy or too difficult.

(4) There should be a minimum of learning from one trial to the next so that the subject does not rely on increasing ability to any extent for higher scores.

The task was presented to the subjects on 8-1/2" X 5-1/2" sheets of mimeograph paper (a specimen copy is presented in the Appendix). The total number of symbols on the first page was 250. The symbols were in individual boxes and were arranged twenty-five across the page and in ten rows vertically. The second page was identical to the first with the exception of the key, which was absent.

The object of the task was to cancel the appropriate symbol within a specified amount of time. Performance on the task was
determined by the total number of responses on the test trial. A stopwatch was employed for timing.

Procedure

The children from all three groups were approached in the same manner. They were all in class and all agreed to take part in the testing situation. The samples for each of the three conditions left their own room and went to one room for the actual test. All of the groups were administered the task in two trials.

The actual instructions for all groups were identical in the pretest situation. They were as follows:

Here is the test. Look at the paper that I have handed out. Look at the ten boxes at the top of the page. I want you to cancel (take your pencil and put a line through) just the symbol that I will write on the board. You will be timed. You will have fifteen seconds to cancel as many as you can of this symbol (point to the board). Any questions? Ready. Begin.

This would constitute the practice trial. After the trial, the subjects were given the individual instructions for each of the three conditions. The test trial instructions for the control group or Group A are as follows:

Now, I will write another symbol on the board. I want you to cancel as many of this symbol (point to the board) as you can. This time you will have thirty seconds. Any questions? Ready. Begin.
The instructions for the first experimental group, Group B, are as follows:

Now, I want you to count how many symbols you were able to cancel in fifteen seconds. Write the number at the top of the page. Next, put the number of symbols that you think you will be able to cancel in thirty seconds at the top of the page. Any questions? Ready. Begin.

The test trial instructions for the second experimental group, Group C, are as follows:

Now, I want you to count how many symbols you were able to cancel in fifteen seconds and write the number at the top of the page. Next, write the number of symbols that you think you will be able to cancel in thirty seconds at the top of the page. By the way, the other group was able to cancel thirteen in thirty seconds (the average performance achieved by Group B). Any questions? Ready. Begin.

If any questions were asked by the subjects, the answer was either direct or neutral depending on the context of the proposed question. At no time were the subjects given any help with regard to the number of symbols to be cancelled.
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results obtained and a statistical analysis of those results are illustrated in the present chapter. The treatment effects were measured in terms of the total number of correct responses made by the subject. A correct response was defined as the cancellation of the specific symbol called for during the treatment condition of the thirty-second trial. The scores for each subject were then placed in its respective group. The basic interest was in calculating and comparing the mean scores of each of the groups across the different treatment conditions and different socio-economic classifications.

A 3 X 3 factorial analysis of variance was utilized as the major statistical procedure in the present study. Its function was to determine the acceptance or rejection of the two working hypotheses.

Table 1 contains the means of each of the nine groups involved in this study. In addition, this table also includes the total mean scores for the different treatment conditions and socio-
economic classifications. The cells across the bottom row are the total mean scores of each of the different treatment conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic Classes</th>
<th>Expression of Aspiration Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>12.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>13.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>12.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cells on the far right are the total mean scores for the different socio-economic classes. The cell on the far right, bottom, is the total mean score for all of the conditions and classifications.

It will be recalled that the two working hypotheses given in Chapter I included specific predictions about the relative magnitudes of the means as shown in Table I. In the following paragraphs each hypothesis is repeated and is accompanied by the appropriate test of
statistical significance. Since both working hypotheses were tested by the $3 \times 3$ factorial analysis of variance technique, the summary table of the analysis will be presented before the consideration of the individual hypotheses. Shown in Table II is the summary of the analysis results. As each hypothesis is presented, the appropriate references to Table II will be made.

**TABLE II**

**SUMMARY TABLE OF THE TREATMENT BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVEL ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE CANCELLATION SCORES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of LOA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.1555</td>
<td>5.0777</td>
<td>&lt;1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Economic Classes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>143.0222</td>
<td>71.5111</td>
<td>7.235*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed LOA $\times$ Socio-Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.8445</td>
<td>1.7111</td>
<td>&lt;1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Cells</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>800.1000</td>
<td>9.8777</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>960.1222</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

Hypothesis 1 of the study was that there would be a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental groups (those who stated a level of aspiration) and those in the control
group. The statistical evidence appropriate to Hypothesis 1 was obtained by testing the significance of the main effect for expression of an aspiration level. The $F$ ratio in Table II revealed that this effect was non-significant ($F = <1.00$). The treatment results indicated that the relative effects of expressing an aspiration level were not significantly different from the non-expression of this level, though the differences were in the predicted direction. On the basis of these results, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 was that there would be a significant interaction effect between the expression of an aspiration level and the socio-economic level. The experimental effect would be relatively greater for the middle class group.

The evidence appropriate to Hypothesis 2 was obtained by testing the significance of the interaction of the expression of an aspiration level by the socio-economic classifications. The $F$ ratio in Table II again reveals that the results were non significant ($F = <1.00$). This test showed that the relative effects of the aspiration-level expression $\times$ the socio-economic classes were not significant, though the means of the middle class were in the predicted direction. On the basis of these results, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

While both of the major hypotheses were rejected, it was of interest to note that there was a significant difference between the
mean scores across the socio-economic classifications. Table II revealed that this effect ($F = 7.235$) was statistically significant at a level of probability less than .05.

Table III contains the means of each of the nine groups involved in the practice trial. In addition this table also includes the total mean scores for the different treatment conditions and socio-economic classifications. The cells across the bottom row are the total mean scores of each of the different treatment conditions.

**TABLE III**

**MEANS OF CORRECT RESPONSES FOR THE PRACTICE TRIAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Classes</th>
<th>Expression of Aspiration Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>9.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>7.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The cells on the far right are the total mean scores for the different socio-economic classes. The cell on the far right, bottom, is the total mean score for all of the conditions and classifications.

Discussion

The occurrence of the non-significant differences between the two groups which expressed an aspiration level and the control group was quite unexpected. Based on the previous research available, it was expected that a commitment made on the part of a subject would lead to goal-directed and highly motivated performance on a task. While this did not appear to be the case, the trend of the means as illustrated in Table I was in the direction of the predicted hypothesis. The direction of these results does tend to agree with the results of Kausler's study (1), which suggested the operation of a "set" that is introduced only by the expression of an aspiration level. However, the results in the present study were not significant.

One major problem intrinsic to the present study was that while the task did, in general, agree with the criteria of Rotter (3), it may have been too mechanical in nature. For this reason the subjects may have found the task too easy to sustain motivation and promote wide differences in the scores. The basis of the present study, which was motivation, could have been interfered with because of the
task employed. Related to this idea, there is a possibility that the subjects did not perceive the achievement of this task as very important.

The insignificance of the results of the second major hypothesis involving the interaction effect between the expression of LOA and socio-economic classes disagreed also with the results of previous research. This research indicated that the level of aspiration may be a function of middle class or at least it should be greater for the middle than the high or low classes. While the results of this present study did not bear this out, since they were not significant, the direction of the means was again toward the predicted hypothesis. This could also be accounted for by the difficulties involved in the task, which were discussed earlier.

The present study found that there were significant differences among the means across the socio-economic classes. These results should be placed in their proper perspective. The practice trial was indicative of a wide difference in the scores among the classes. The significant differences among the means of the classes during the treatment condition was really portraying an already existing difference among the classes. These results tend to support McCandless (2), who found that there was a difference in the achievement motive and performance based on socio-economic classes. The middle
class did portray the highest mean scores across socio-economic levels; the high and low classes were approximately the same as he suggested.

In summary, these insignificant results of the two major hypotheses may have been a function of a difficulty inherent in the study. The positive direction of the means in both cases seems to bear this out. A future replication of this study seems to be in order, with a more interesting and difficult type of task employed and some further effort to increase the perceived importance of the task.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was designed to determine the relative effects of an expressed level of aspiration on a subsequent level of performance on a cancellation task and to relate this effect to socio-economic classifications.

The subjects were ninety fourth-grade elementary children enrolled in a public school located in a large Southwestern city. Their chronological ages ranged from eight years, two months to ten years, four months. Factors such as race, sex, and ethnic differences were controlled by random assignment of the subjects to the various treatments. Intelligence factors were controlled to some extent by the acceptance of each child into the fourth grade.

The basic design was a 3 X 3 factorial analysis of variance. The three major treatments were as follows: no expressed LOA, expressed LOA, and expressed LOA with a frame of reference. The three major conditions were high, middle, and low socio-economic classes. The ninety children were selected and divided into three groups of thirty each, based on their socio-economic level.
The thirty highest socio-economic positions comprised the "high" classification. The next thirty coincided with the "middle" class, and the last thirty the "low" class. Then the subjects from each group were assigned at random to each of the treatment conditions.

The task was taken from the standard digit symbol of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale. Only the symbol without reference to the numbers was employed and the task itself was to cancel the appropriate symbol called for by the experimenter.

The procedure was one in which a practice and a test trial were used. The practice trial was the same for all of the conditions and the subjects had fifteen seconds to cancel the appropriate symbol. During the test trial, each of the different treatment conditions was employed and all the subjects had thirty seconds for their cancellation. The treatment effects were measured in terms of the total of correct responses made by the subject. A correct response was defined as the cancellation of the specific symbol called for during the treatment condition for a thirty-second trial. The basic interest was in calculating and comparing the mean scores of each of the groups across the different treatment conditions and socio-economic classifications. A 3 X 3 factorial analysis of variance was then employed.

Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a significant difference between the mean scores of those children in the two
experimental groups (those stating a LOA) and those in the control group. This hypothesis was based on the expectation that children who made a commitment on their future performance on a task would be more highly motivated to perform well than those who did not make a prior commitment.

An investigation of the mean scores of the treatment conditions and a statistical analysis of these means yielded results leading to the rejection of the stated empirical hypothesis. However, the trends of the various experimental conditions were consistent with the hypothesized direction.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be a significant interaction effect between the expression of a level of aspiration and socio-economic level. The experimental effect would be relatively greater for the middle class group.

The statistical test applied to the interaction effect provided insignificant results. Therefore, on the basis of these results, Hypothesis 2 was also rejected. While the hypothesis was rejected, it was of interest to note that there was a significant difference between the mean scores in the different socio-economic classifications. However, this difference appeared to exist between the groups before the treatment condition was applied.
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