

## PROFESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE VS. FARMING AS UNIQUE OCCUPATIONAL CHOICES<sup>1</sup>

Alejandro Portes

Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Archibald O. Haller

Department of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison

William H. Sewell

Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT** A previous article has shown that selected variables are uniquely related to choosing professional or executive occupations but do not discriminate among farming, blue-collar, and lower white-collar choice categories. This finding was based on 1957 data collected from a one-third random sample of Wisconsin farm boys. Using data collected in 1964 from the same sample, the authors extend the analysis to attainment variables, yielding results compatible with the first. In 1964 those entering professional and executive occupations were sharply differentiated from those entering farming, blue-collar, and lower white-collar occupations in measured intelligence and "significant other" influence regarding college. The same type of distribution was found for the relation between 1957 occupational aspirations and 1964 educational and occupational attainments. Contrary to much recent speculation the antecedents of becoming a farmer seem rather like those of other occupations of modest prestige.

It is widely assumed that planning to farm exerts a uniquely depressing influence on subsequent aspirations and attainments. This hypothesis was first enunciated by Haller<sup>3</sup> and has been expressed in more recent work.<sup>4</sup> If true, the hypothesis has obvious implications for practical action and for social mobility.

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<sup>2</sup> At present, Office of the Chancellor, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>3</sup> A. O. Haller, "The Influence of Planning to Enter Farming on Plans to Attend College," *Rural Sociology*, 22 (June, 1957), pp. 137-141.

<sup>4</sup> Archibald O. Haller, "Occupational Choices of Rural Youth," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, 4 (Summer, 1966), pp. 93-102; and Donald R. Kaldor et al., *Occupational Plans of Iowa Farm Boys*, Ames: Iowa Agr. Exp. Sta., Res. Bull. 508, September, 1962.

More recently, however, Haller and Sewell have adduced evidence to the effect that boys aspiring to farm, blue-collar, and lower white-collar occupations possess characteristics very similar to one another, which in turn differentiate all these from boys planning to enter professional or executive occupations.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, their analysis of a one-third sample of farm boys who were seniors in Wisconsin's high schools in 1957 showed that such independent variables as measured intelligence and "significant other" influence produced a pronounced division into professional-executive vs. each other category, but failed to differentiate among farm, blue-collar, and lower white-collar categories. Occupational aspirations, in turn, influenced educational aspirations according to the above dichotomy; that is, educational aspirations were significantly higher for professional-executive aspirers than for those planning on farm, blue-collar, or white-collar occupations, whereas differences among the last three categories were insignificant. Thus, there is an occupational choice category which has unique causes and consequences, but it consists not of farming, but of occupations at the professional and executive level.

We assume familiarity with the Haller-Sewell article, and have pursued the issue further here by examining data from a follow-up of the same sample of Wisconsin farm boys, conducted by Sewell. This study ascertained the levels of educational and occupational attainment that sample boys had reached by 1964. The basic question posed here is whether the choice of farming has unique antecedents and consequences for attainment, as Haller (1957 and 1966) and Kaldor have implied; or whether professional-executive choices have such consequences, as Haller and Sewell have argued. We approach this by asking two important questions: (1) Is one occupational achievement class, such as farming or professional-executive, uniquely different in terms of those variables (measured intelligence (MI) and "significant other" (SOI) influence) which significantly affect it; and (2) How do past occupational choices affect subsequent educational and occupational achievements? In this paper we are *not* attempting to explain variations in educational and occupational attainment, a topic treated fully in a future paper.<sup>6</sup>

## ANALYSIS

### *1964 Occupations in Relation to 1957 MI and SOI*

Tables 1 and 2 show the results of cross-tabulating occupational at-

<sup>5</sup> Archibald O. Haller and William H. Sewell, "Occupational Choices of Wisconsin Farm Boys," *Rural Sociology*, 32 (March, 1967), pp. 37-55.

<sup>6</sup> William H. Sewell, Archibald O. Haller, and Alejandro Portes, "The Educational and Early Occupational Attainment Process: Wisconsin Farm-Reared Men (1957-1964)," Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1968 (unpublished).

**Table 1.** "Significant other" influence and occupational attainment of Wisconsin farm boys<sup>a</sup>

Occupational attainment	"Significant other" influence		Totals
	Low (No influence to 1-group influence)	High (2-group influence to 3-group influence)	
Professional and executive	35	65	100 (174)
Lower white-collar	58	42	100 (69)
Farm	77	23	100 (152)
Blue-collar	82	18	100 (448)
No information	85	15	100 (86)
Totals	(657)	(272)	(929)

$$\chi^2 = 136.57 \quad (3 \text{ df.}) \quad p < .001$$

<sup>a</sup> For this and subsequent tables, all figures represent percentages, except that marginal frequencies are given within parentheses.

tainments with MI and SOI. Both variables were found, through a previous correlational analysis, to affect significantly occupational aspirations and occupational attainments. MI was measured by the Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability<sup>7</sup> administered when the boys were in the second year of high school. SOI is a weighted sum of three specific indicators: the respondent's perception of the presence or absence of parental encouragement to attend college, his perception of teachers' encouragement toward college, and his statement of whether or not his closest friends planned to go to college after graduation from high school. "Low" SOI indicates a total absence of influence toward college or influence from one of the three groups only. "High" SOI stands for influence toward college from two or all groups. Because our purpose was not to ascertain how much MI and SOI influence attainments but in what way they are related to different occupational attainment categories, both Tables 1 and 2 present row rather than column percentages. This serves to clarify the differences among the patterns of relationship of each independent variable to each category of the dependent variable.

Results in both tables are highly significant statistically. The chi-squares, which were computed excluding the "No information" rows, have values several times those needed for significance at the .001 level. More important, we need to know what pattern of differences accounts for the significance of results, *i.e.*, whether there are sub-

<sup>7</sup> V. A. C. Henmon and M. J. Nelson, *The Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942.

*Table 2. Measured intelligence and occupational attainment of Wisconsin farm boys*

Occupational attainment	Measured intelligence (Henmon-Nelson raw scores)		Totals
	Low (0 to 29)	High (30 to 99)	
Professional and executive	25	75	100 (174)
Lower white-collar	51	49	100 (69)
Farm	59	41	100 (152)
Blue-collar	67	33	100 (448)
No information	63	37	100 (86)
Totals	(518)	(407)	(929)
$\chi^2 = 87.44$ (3 df.) $p < .001$			

stantial differences between each pair of the occupational attainment groups. The percentages given in the tables provide the answer.

In both tables, two things are immediately apparent. (a) For all occupational attainment groups, the proportion of the "lows" in MI and in SOI decreases in a perfect monotonic pattern from blue-collar to farmer to lower white-collar to professional or executive. Among the "highs" the opposite occurs. In other words, among the different occupational groups, the professional-executive draws most heavily from the pool of subjects with high intellectual ability and with high "significant other" influence regarding college. This high-prestige occupational group is then followed by the white-collar, the farmer, and the blue-collar groups in respect to both initial dimensions.

(b) The percentages corresponding to the farm and blue-collar groups are very similar, with those of the white-collar groups leaning a little more to the high MI and high SOI categories. The largest difference occurs between the white-collar percentages and those corresponding to the professional-executive group.

Thus the results led us to conclude that in attainments as in aspirations, the crucial effect of these independent variables is to distinguish between the occupations of high prestige and all the others.

#### *1964 Education and Occupation in Relation to 1957 Occupational Choice*

The second question has to do with the influence of occupational choice category on subsequent educational and occupational achievements.

Table 3 presents the relation of occupational plans to educational attainments. The latter variable was dichotomized into those having "some" college education and those not having any college at all. Re-

*Table 3. Occupational choice and educational attainment of Wisconsin farm boys*

Educational attainment (1957-1964)	Occupational aspirations (1957)					Totals
	Blue-collar	Farm	Lower white-collar	Professional and executive	No information	
College	7	9	20	69	14	(230)
Noncollege	93	91	80	31	86	(699)
Totals	100 (238)	100 (255)	100 (96)	100 (222)	100 (118)	(929)
	$\chi^2 = 299.40$		(3 df.)	$p < .001$		

sults are again highly significant and in the predicted direction: high-prestige aspirations lead to high (college) educational attainments. For three degrees of freedom, the chi-square value needed for significance at the .001 level is 16.27. The obtained value ("No information" column excluded) reaches 299.40. The pattern of percentages clearly shows that the great difference between the professional and executive group and all others is again the essential factor accounting for the significance of results.

Table 4 presents the cross-tabulation of occupational aspirations with occupational attainments. The chi-square value corresponding to a .001 level of significance with nine degrees of freedom is 27.88: the actual value came to 289.84.

Three important facts can be detected from the percentages in the table. (1) For this sample, plans are moderately related to attainment. Among all choice groups, the highest proportion of boys who ended up as farmers came from the group of those who aspired to farm. The same is true for the relations between blue-collar attainments and blue-collar choices, between white-collar attainments and choices (though in this case more of those choosing lower white-collar jobs ended up in professional or executive occupations than in white-collar ones), and between professional-executive achievements and aspirations. In other words, the highest proportion of individuals filling roles in a given occupational category comes from those who initially desired to enter it. This is in agreement with most past research and theory in the area. (Interestingly, only 39 percent of those choosing to farm actually became farmers, while 50 percent of those choosing the professional-executive level occupation actually attained that level.)

(2) A fairly large proportion of subjects in each plan category entered blue-collar occupations. It has usually been held that those individuals who desire to farm but cannot become farmers will fill the lowest-prestige (*i.e.*, blue-collar) positions since they lack the necessary education for doing anything else. In the light of the present

Table 4. - Occupational choice and occupational attainment of Wisconsin farm boys

Occupational attainment (1964)	Occupational aspiration (1957)					Totals
	Blue-collar	Farm	Lower white-collar	Professional and executive	No information	
Professional and executive	8	5	17	50	12	(174)
Lower white-collar	6	4	15	9	7	(69)
Farm	9	39	6	8	7	(152)
Blue-collar	68	43	51	28	57	(448)
No information	9	9	11	5	17	(86)
Totals	100 (238)	100 (255)	100 (96)	100 (222)	100 (118)	(929)
	$\chi^2 = 289.84$		(9 df.)	$p < .001$		

evidence, we suggest that the "achieving down" pattern may apply to the other occupational categories as well. This reconfirms the conclusion that farming as an occupational aspiration does not have the "unique" effects, distinct from those of any other choice group.

(3) Finally, the pattern of results also shows that although the above finding is true for all choice groups, it is less so for those aspiring to professional-executive occupations: the proportion of boys ending up in blue-collar jobs is significantly smaller for the professional-executive aspiration group than for all the others. Conversely, the *only* substantial proportion of individuals becoming professionals or executives came from those who initially aspired to those occupations. To put it in still clearer form, *only* high occupational aspirations lead to high occupational achievements (and then only half the time), whereas low occupational aspirations, whether farm, blue-collar, or lower white-collar, almost always lead to low-prestige jobs. The sharp occupational dichotomy, high-prestige vs. low-prestige occupations, is again present.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> We have reclassified the Kuvlesky-Bealer data from their Table 4, p. 299 (William P. Kuvlesky and Robert C. Bealer, "The Relevance of Adolescent's Occupational Aspirations for Subsequent Job Attainments," *Rural Sociology*, 32 (September, 1967), pp. 290-301). Recognizing that neither their sample nor their occupational categories are or can be made to be exactly comparable with ours, we have grouped together the categories they call Professional, Glamour, and Managerial, and those they call Skilled and Unskilled. The first is roughly similar to our Professional-Executive and the second to our Blue-collar. The remaining two categories of each seem to be about the same—Farmer and Lower white-collar—in our terms. The reclassification yields a  $4 \times 4$  table of the relationship between 1947 aspirations and 1957 attainments. Evidently almost everyone in the 1947-1957 Pennsylvania data on *rural* boys entered blue-collar or lower white-collar occupations, regardless of aspiration. Our 1957-1964 Wisconsin data on *farm* boys differ from theirs in that a smaller proportion of low aspirers entered high-prestige occupations and a much

## CONCLUSION

Our results lend strong support to the previous findings reported by Sewell and Haller which indicated a lack of significant differences between farm, blue-collar, and lower white-collar occupational categories, and a marked difference between all these and the professional-executive category. Generalizations to other places and times are not warranted, rigorously speaking. The claim that planning to farm has relatively unique social and intellectual causes as well as unique consequences for later nonfarm attainment is an inference drawn from studies in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan conducted during the last two decades. These data, and the earlier Haller-Sewell findings (as well as others cited by them) therefore probably indicate that the belief in the uniqueness of planning to farm was itself over-generalized. Those who wish to explore more fully the implications of this conclusion may consult the Haller-Sewell paper.

Our analysis suggests that research on attainment will be more fruitful if thinking is reoriented towards consideration of similarities among the lower occupational groups (farm, blue-collar, lower white-collar) and away from a search for unique characteristics of each one. Also, policy makers concerned with orienting more people toward high-level occupations might pay greater attention to the influence of low aspirations in general and not only to those of specific choice categories such as farming.

greater proportion of high aspirers entered high-prestige occupations. It is obvious that the positive correlation between aspirations and attainments is substantially higher in our data.

In view of regional, temporal, and sampling differences between the two studies, it would be foolish to speculate on social structural or cultural factors that might account for the differences. We should be wary of generalizations concerning the predictive efficiency of occupational aspirations.