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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this comparison was to examine qualitative differences between male and female occupational aspirations to better understand similarities and/or differences in level of aspiration. Selected samples of students (3,123) and mothers (425) from 2 regional research projects constituted the source of data. Respondents were from low income families in predominantly rural areas of the Southern and Southwestern U.S. Data on 3 samples of black and white elementary students (North Carolina, Kentucky, and Mississippi) and 2 samples of mothers (Kentucky and Mississippi) from 1968 studies and data on East Texas black, white, and Chicano sophomores (1966 and 1972); Arizona Navaho sophomores (1972); and Mississippi Choctaw sophomores, juniors, and seniors (1974) were analyzed. One elementary sample was used in a high school followup analyzation. Group administered questionnaires with open-ended aspiration elicitors established some degree of sample comparability. Findings revealed that occupational aspirations of elementary females and their mothers were narrowly clustered in 2 categories--middle professional (50 percent to 66 percent) and clerical (20 percent). Considerably more dispersion was noted for elementary males. Among high school respondents there was some increase in dispersion for females, but middle professional and clerical categories showed clustering (66 percent). High school males showed increased dispersion. (JC)

SOME QUALITATIVE ASPECTS
of YOUTH'S OCCUPATIONAL STATUS PROJECTIONS:
A SEX COMPARISON¹



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INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result of a personal interest in the question of the construct validity of current measures of occupational status projections (Butler, 1974) which necessitates investigation of the content of occupational aspiration and expectation. An interest in the content or qualitative dimensions of aspiration has been subordinate in rural sociology to the focus on the level of aspiration and its correlates.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some qualitative differences between male and female occupational aspirations as a basis for a better understanding of similarities and/or differences in their levels of aspiration. A sex comparison has its precedent in qualitative dimension of occupational sex-role stereotyping. From preschool books for children (Weitzman, et. al., 1972) to the psychiatrists' couch (Chesler, 1971) females and males are subjected to different definitions of appropriate occupational orientations.

Previous research on sex differences in vocational preferences and behaviors suggests that females tend to choose a narrower range of occupations than do males. For example, in one study 45 percent of preschool girls (ages 3-6) express a preference for "nurse" and "teacher" while boys at this age have greater dispersion in their responses (Vondracek & Kirchner, 1974). This phenomena of "foreclosure" of females' occupational projections has been demonstrated at the elementary (Loft, 1971), high school (Powell & Bloom, 1972), and college levels (Almquist, 1974). Furthermore, elementary school boys are found to choose twice as many occupations as girls (Siegel, 1973).

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THE SAMPLES

Selected samples of students (N=3,123) and mothers (N=425) from two regional research projects constitute the source of data. The respondents are from low income families in predominantly rural areas of the Southern and Southwestern United States.

One of the regional projects dealt with 5th & 6th grade students and their mothers in 1968. Three samples of students (North Carolina, Kentucky, and Mississippi) and two samples of mothers (Kentucky and Mississippi) were selected. Both black and white students and mothers are represented.² A followup of the Mississippi 5th & 6th grade sample gives us one of our high school samples and the only longitudinal data on the same respondents through time.

From the second regional project data from East Texas black, white, and Chicano sophomores in 1966 and 1972 (for description, see Dowdell, 1973 and Lever, 1974), Arizona Navaho sophomores in 1972 (see Stout and Edington, 1974), and Mississippi Choctaw sophomores, juniors, and seniors in 1974 (see Spencer, et. al., 1974) are utilized.

A degree of comparability between the samples exists in that group administered questionnaires were used, aspiration elicitors were "open-ended" or "free response," although difference in wording may be noted.

Southern, elementary samples

If you could choose any job you wanted, what kind of job would you really like to have in the future? (Describe clearly what you would do.) _____

Southwestern, high school samples

If you were completely free to choose any job, what would you desire most as a lifetime job? (In answering this question give an exact job. For example, do not say "work on the railroad" but tell us what railroad job you would like to have.) Write your answer in the box below.

ANSWER: _____

² Complete description of these and related samples is to be found in Influences on Occupational Goals of Young People from three Subcultures in the South. Agricultural Experiment Stations of Ala., Ky., Ms., N. Car., S. Car., Tenn., Va., & USDA cooperating. Request for copies may be addressed to Dr. A. Lee Coleman, Dept. Sociology, Univ. Ky., Lexington, Ky.

Further comparability was achieved by recoding the elementary samples according to the more detailed occupational categories used with the high school samples.

Before moving to the findings of this paper, one further comparable feature should be noted. In both regional studies females tended to "have higher occupational aspirations" than males.

FINDINGS

The occupational aspirations of the elementary females and their mothers' aspirations for her child (Table 1.) are narrowly clustered in two categories-- "middle professional," from one-half to two-thirds, and "clerical" attracting another fifth of the responses. Considerably more dispersion is noted for elementary males (Table 2) and proportion of "high professional" and "middle professional" is much smaller than the females.

Moving to the distribution of high school students (Tables 3 & 4) some increase in dispersion of females' responses occurs. However "Md. Prof." and "clerical" show clustering, receiving two-thirds of the responses. Males show increased dispersion, "Glamor" remaining stable, "Hi. Prof." shrinking, and "skilled" showing significant gains.

An explanation for the female narrow clustering, and hence higher prestige level of aspirations, is to be found in the rank order and percentage of occupational responses by title rather than ordinal categories. In table 5 a brief glance at the top twelve titles of three groups by sex reveals that two-thirds of the females' responses were to three titles within the two ordinal categories. For example, the 54 percent "Md. Prof." response of the North Carolina 5th & 6th grade girls is comprised only of "teacher" and "nurse" responses.

The "truncated" feature of females' professional opportunity projection is further revealed in the fact that males did give over twice as many titles as females. Likewise, the key contribution to the prestige level of females is contained within the first three titles of "teacher", "nurse", and "secretary". This is not the case for males. The 29 percent of North Carolina males' responses in the "other" category had a higher prestige score than the first 4 titles which constitutes 35 percent of their responses.

Given the narrowness of females' aspirations relative to males', certain questions arise concerning the influence of this characteristic on expectations, anticipatory deflection, and correlations with other status projections over time. In Table 6 the congruence of six status projections of the Mississippi black samples is examined. Although a relative high amount of congruence is generally found between aspiration and expectation in most status projection research, this is generally presented in terms of the status projections having similar prestige scores or location with the same ordinal

category. In this treatment of congruence the rate of identical responses is examined. Perhaps it is not too surprising to find that 50 percent of the females gave expectations in '68 and '74 that were identical to aspirations at the same time periods. This could be anticipated from the fact that "teacher", "nurse", and "secretary" constituted from 50 to 70 percent of the four projections. A more or less parallel "identical response" rate for males on the four status projections is somewhat surprising and cannot be explained in terms of a narrowness of response to culturally restricted and sexually appropriate professions. It is also interesting that high school students' identical response rate is comparable to their responses as elementary students.

Consideration of the congruence between the same status projection at two time periods reveals a very pronounced drop in identical response and a corresponding increase in both negative and positive deflection. This trend is parallel to the finding that changes in level of occupational expectation between sophomore and senior years for Texas youth were divided between a 43 percent increase and a 38 percent decrease (Cosby, 1974).

Finally the identical response rate of mothers and daughters is somewhat higher than the rate for mothers and sons. This is hardly surprising in that "teacher", "nurse", and "secretary" constituted between 60 and 80 percent of the mothers' responses for both time periods. Thus, considerable congruence is insured by this pattern of responses.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This presentation is obviously limited by analysis of data conceptualized and coded with other purposes in mind. The current "after thought" type of analysis is further limited by the question of comparability of samples and the unavailability of "specific job titles" of the Southwestern high school samples (at this writing). Despite these problems the objective of this paper, a sex comparison, was not greatly hindered because sex differences were far more apparent than differences by age, race, or region.

Hopefully this very brief exploration of some qualitative aspects of youths' status projections merits raising the following questions for future research.

First, to what extent does relative narrowness of occupational status projections characterize females and males of different socioeconomic, ethnic, type of residence, and age categories.

Secondly, to what extent does the "clustering effect" of responses and the high rate of "identical response" virtually guarantee some correlation with other status projections of the respondent and with significant other responses? In other words, when can we equate congruence of status projections with "socialization," "transmission of values," and "influence?" (For brief exploration of this question see Furstenberg, 1971.)

Thirdly, to what extent does the narrowness of responses, especially for females, inhibit the magnitude of the relationships with the antecedent and dependent correlates of occupational projections?

Finally, to what extent do status projections reflect individual acquiescence to cultural stereotypes and value orientations, rather than the psychological and motivational component that is conceptualized in most current research in status projections. And should such a cultural-psychological dualism exist in response sets, is the psychological response set primarily responsible for demonstrated relationships among variables, while the cultural response set inhibits analytical relationships?

Answers to such questions necessitate more attention to the qualitative content of variables upon which the quantitative method is operating. For example, within these data the high amount of positive anticipating deflection of Mississippi females results in part from deflection to the title of "teacher." This is a qualitative component that now sheds light on why the deflection variables were not related to the other variables in earlier regression analysis. Deflection was primarily a qualitative change, rather than quantitative.

In closing I am reminded of Lee Taylor's comment on the "narrowness" of occupational aspirations.

One of the most definitive characteristics of the occupational structure of our society is the conspicuous absence of appropriate mechanisms of communicating occupational knowledge. Therefore, the entire array of some 20,000 occupations are not systematically aspired to, but perhaps a dozen or less are typically aspired to, or put another way, freedom to choose in a structure of ignorance is considerably less than real freedom (Taylor, 1968: 189).

In conjunction with Taylor's explanation of the narrowness of youths' projections is the fact that youth perceive prestige in an order almost identical to that of adults (Simmons and Rosenberg, 1971) and as indicated by these data, occupational sex-role stereotypes have substantial influence on the content as well as the level of occupational aspirations.

Table 1. Occupational Aspirations of Selected Samples of Elementary School Females and their Mothers (in percent)

Occupational Aspiration	Student			Mother	
	White '68 N.C.	White '68 Ky.	Black '68 Ms.	White '68 Ky.	Black '68 Ms.
	Hi. Prof.	3		2	2
Md. Prof.	54	65	62	66	63
Lo. Prof.	1	1	1	1	2
Glamor	10	8	7	1	3
Manag.		1			1
Clerical	18	18	7	22	20
Sales					1
Skilled	8	6	6	5	10
Operative	3		3		
Military	1				
Farm					
Unskilled		2	10	1	1
Housewife	2	1	2	2	
Percent	100	100	100	100	100
Number	115	90	110	95	115

Table 2. Occupational Aspirations of Selected Samples of Elementary School Males and their Mothers (in percent)

Occupational Aspiration	Student			Mother	
	White '68 N.C.	White '68 Ky.	Black '68 Ms.	White '68 Ky.	Black '68 Ms.
Hi. Prof.	16	10	20	33	19
Md. Prof.	4	15	15	25	51
Lo. Prof.	10	2	9	9	3
Glamor	31	24	21	2	5
Manag.		8	7	2	2
Clerical	1	1	5	13	3
Sales	1				1
Skilled	23	15	6	7	5
Operative	4	13	7	5	3
Military	3			1	
Farm	6	9	3	2	5
Unskilled	1	2	7		2
Percent	100	100	100	100	100
Number	100	98	112	93	66

Table 3. Occupational Aspirations of Selected Samples of High School Females (in percent)

Occupational Aspiration	Black		White		Chicano		Nav.		Choc.	
	'66 Tex.	'72 Tex.	'75 Ms.	'66 Tex.	'72 Tex.	'67 Tex.	'73 Tex.	'72 Ariz.	'74 Ms.	
Hi. Prof.	9	2	8	5	4	3	6	6	3	
Md. Prof.	41	35	46	34	26	46	43	24	37	
Lo. Prof.			1	4	8	2	8	2	10	
Glamor	10	17	17	10	17	6	10	2	3	
Manag.	2		1		2	1	2	3		
Clerical	21	24	23	25	29	26	20	42	29	
Sales	1				1	2	1	1		
Skilled	11	10	2	17	3	7	5	10	8	
Operative			1				2	1		
Military						2				
Form				2						
Unskilled	4	4	1	2	3		2	7	2	
Housewife			1	1	7	2		1	3	
Percent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Number	98	92	72	129	135	299	193	208	62	



Table 4. Occupational Aspirations of Selected Samples of High School Males (in percent)

Occupational Aspiration	Black		White		Chicano		Nav.		Choc.	
	'66 Tex.	'72 Tex.	'75 Ms.	'66 Tex.	'72 Tex.	'67 Tex.	'73 Tex.	'72 Ariz.	'74 Ms.	
Hi. Prof.	7	8	6	11	8	12	10	12	10	
Md. Prof.	17	10	10	18	18	30	24	7	20	
Lo. Prof.	3	2	4	7	2	2	3	3	9	
Glamor	16	31	28	10	10	6	10	5	12	
Manag.	3	6	4	6	13	6	13	6	3	
Clerical	7	2	1	2		4	1			
Sales	3	1	1	2	2	4			5	
Skilled	11	21	30	22	22	20	35	41	24	
Operative	14	8	7	4	4	2	2	19	3	
Military	9	1	3	4		4	2	1	7	
Farm	2	1	1	11	20	2	9	5		
Unskilled	7	6	3	1	1	3	4	1	7	
Percent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Number	97	84	66	143	126	290	177	156	71	

Table 6. Congruence of Occupational Aspirations and Expectations of Mississippi Black Students and Their Mothers by Sex (in percent)

	Student						Mother and Child					
	Asp/Exp '68		Asp/Exp '74		Asp '68/'74		Exp '68/'74		Asp '68		Asp '74	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Identical	50	50	42	51	14	10	4	6	20	30	18	48
Situs	25	5	22	14	16	4	18	2				
Neg. Defl.	25	31	42	23	48	36	47	45				
Pos. Defl.	11	22	2	8	22	41	28	32				
Totals are	< 100%											
N =	61	73	48	48	48	48	48	48	61	73	48	48

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