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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with the extent to which the occupational aspirations of a group of black and white parents were related to the primary educational-vocational activity of their children six months after graduation from secondary school. Occupational aspiration is defined here as the social status level of an occupational title which is presented as a perception, hope, preference, or expectation. Subjects were 143 mothers, fathers, or guardians, and their children who had recently graduated from a senior high school. There were 29 parent informants whose child was a black male, 42 of white males, 31 of black females, and 41 of white females. Each parent was interviewed at home. As a rule, black interviewers were sent to black homes, and white interviewers to white homes. Six months earlier, upon high school graduation, each of the child subjects had completed a parallel questionnaire. Among the findings was that, regardless of race or sex, the child is more likely to start out in college immediately after high school graduation when both the senior and his parents entertain aspirations for a high status occupation. [Due to the quality of the original, part of Exhibit A is not sharply legible.] (Author/JM)

OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF BLACK AND WHITE PARENTS
FOR THEIR RECENTLY GRADUATED CHILDREN¹

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In a period of rapid socioeconomic change a comparison of the attitudes of black parents with those of white parents about the career development of their children may have value for theory and practice. Although there is a growing literature in vocational psychology which is concerned with blacks and other minorities, I have been able to find very few studies concerned with the total family in the career development of black youth. In the review by Dreger and Miller (1968) of comparative psychological studies of Negroes and whites in the United States from 1959 to 1965 only one such study is cited (Rosen, 1959). Negro mothers were comparable with the mothers of Jews, Protestants, and Greeks in that more than 80% said that they intended their sons go to college. However, the Negro mothers' vocational aspirations for their sons were lower than all but one of seven ethnic groups.

Objectives

Specifically, this study was concerned with the extent to which the occupational aspirations of a group of black and white parents were related to the primary educational-vocational activity of their children six months after graduation from secondary school. Occupational aspiration is defined for purposes of this research as the social status level (Reiss, 1961) of an occupational title which is presented as a perception, hope, preference, or expectation.

Among subordinate research questions were these: 1) How accurate were the parents in reporting their children's aspiration? 2) To what extent were selected parent variables (perceived freedom in plan attainment, school influence, conformity, and control) associated with educational-vocational activity? 3) To what extent were seniors' post-high school plans at graduation associated with parent occupational status aspirations?

Methods

The Subjects

Subjects were 143 mothers, fathers, or guardians and their children who had recently graduated from Costerville Senior High School. There were 29 parent informants whose child was a black male, 42 parents of white males, 31 parents of black females, and 41 of white females. The families of more than 80% of the 1969 graduating black seniors were included, but the families of the white students were drawn at random from the list of graduates and represented only approximately 25% of all the white seniors in the class.

In all four groups the typical informant was a mother who was in her middle forties, had completed 11 years of education, was born in Pennsylvania and had been a

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resident of the area for more than 25 years. The head of the family was reported to be a blue collar worker. In the black group approximately 9 out of every 10 fathers were blue collar workers as was true in respect to three out of every four of the white fathers.

Setting

Costerville is a pseudonym for a small industrial city in northeastern United States with a population of approximately 10,000. The largest employers are a steel company and a veterans hospital. The public schools were integrated about five years ago.

Data Collection

Each parent was interviewed at home by an undergraduate major in sociology at Lincoln University. As a general rule black interviewers were sent to black homes, and white interviewers were sent to white homes. The interviewers were prepared for the project by their instructor of sociology. Each interviewer submitted a written report on attitudes and reactions to the survey for each parent informant. Almost all parents who were approached were cooperative.

Six months earlier upon high school graduation each of the child subjects had completed a parallel questionnaire, You and Your Future (Dole & Passons, 1972). The guidance staff of three school counselors administered this instrument.

Variables

The investigator selected three variables as consequent measures: Major Fall Activity, College, and Work. On the basis of report by his parents each senior was classified as to (a) his primary activity, (b) whether or not six months after graduation he was attending a four-year college full time, and (c) whether or not he was employed in a full-time, permanent job. Each variable was treated independently of the other. (See exhibit A for a more complete description.)

From the parent questionnaire nine variables were treated as antecedent measures. (See exhibit A.) These included five measures of occupational aspiration to which an exact SES value had been assigned according to Reiss (1959): child's spring occupational preference, child's present occupational preference, occupational hope, occupation in 10 years expected by parent, and ideal occupation preferred by parent for child if "nothing could stop him." For certain analyses the five parent occupational variables were reduced by inspection to a combined parent aspiration level. That is the highest SES value of each parent was assigned to an SES level (high, middle, or low).

Four scales were defined on the basis of logic and previous factor analyses: The Freedom scale represented an absence of barriers to plan attainment, such as school bias in guidance and counseling services, School influence was the extent of importance attributed by the parent to the influence of teachers and counselors in plan making. Conformity represented the reported importance of parents, relatives, and peers. Control represented the extent to which the parent thought the child should consider his wishes in planning.

From the questionnaires of the seniors filled out just before graduation day two variables were selected for this study:

The child's Combined occupational aspiration was assigned to an SES level (high, middle, or low). By inspection of first and second preference among occupations, ideal occupation, and of expectation, the highest value was identified.

Each subject was classified on the basis of whether or not he planned on college or school, including community college or technical school, within the next six months.

Psychometric Properties

Evidence about the validity and reliability of many of the variables used in this research was obtained in other investigations previously reported (Dole, 1965, 1969). Since the reported fall activity of the child was a major dependent variable for this investigation, the reliability of parent responses was checked by including a separate item on current activity as of the fall succeeding the child's graduation from high school (work, school or college, military service, other, etc.). The correlation with the items used in this study was .89 with in school or college and -.55 with at work. As a further check on the validity of the parent survey the field investigator for this research (Burness Broussard) conducted independent tape recorded interviews with selected seniors and parents. Although there was some evidence of distrust and misinformation among these parents, in general there was sufficient congruence between their responses to the questionnaire and information obtained independently to compare the groups with confidence. Moreover, it is important to realize that the parents' responses can be valuable and revealing data in their own right although perhaps factually inaccurate. A case in point is that the father's occupation and classification level as reported by the parent correlated only .25 with senior response to the same item and that the parents tended to assign lower classifications than the seniors. The intercorrelation of parent with child variables and factor analyses which yielded further information on the psychometric properties of the variables will not be reported in detail here. However, it is important to note that the parent aspiration measures and parent scales were independent factorially of socioeconomic indices, such as father's occupational level and social origin.

Data Analyses

Each parent (P) informant was matched with the child (S). The pairs were then assigned to the appropriate one of the four subgroups on the basis of the sex and race of the child. Contingency analyses were then made by inspection on the consumation of post-high school plans by the seniors, the occupational status aspirations of seniors and parents in relation to children's college attendance, accuracy in parent report of child's occupational titles, and on agreement between the parents' report of child's occupational aspirations and seniors' occupational aspirations. Nine parent variables were correlated, each separately, with college and with work activity in the fall after high school graduation. The seniors' plans upon graduation were correlated with parent occupational status aspirations.

Results and Discussion

College Attendance

In Table 1 the relation between parent aspiration and child aspiration is shown in relation to whether or not the child entered college in the fall. Thus, of forty pairs in which SES values exceeded 70 for both seniors and parents, 35 children, 24% of all seniors, entered college. In contrast, among the 13 pairs with no aspiration scores above 45, none attended college. It seems quite apparent that, regardless of race or sex, the child is more likely to start out in college immediately after high school graduation when both the senior and his parents entertain aspirations for a high status occupation.

Occupational Title and SES Level

By inspecting the responses of each pair to the several questions about occupation it was possible to make a judgment about their agreement. In Table 2 59% of the parents were classified in respect to specific occupational titles as being in reasonable agreement with their children. Thus if the child checked "clerk" in response to any of the four occupational questions presented and the parent "secretary" to one of the five questions, this would be considered an agreement. When status levels by thirds are compared as shown in the preceding Table 1, approximately the same proportion of agreement (57%) as for occupational titles was evident. Finally, 12% of the parents either gave no answer to this question or said openly that they did not know what their child's occupational intentions were. (If both parent and child answered do not know, this would be scored as an accurate response.) When chi-square was applied, the proportion within each subgroup did not differ significantly from the proportions of all subjects on these three measures. However, there was a tendency for the blacks to be lower in accuracy and agreement than their white peers. One wonders whether those parents who were unable to report accurately on their children's occupational intentions were alienated from them. And, in fact, the written reports by some of the Lincoln University student interviewers confirmed the impression that some of these parents had lost touch with their children.

Post-High School Status

None of the parent variables (Table 3) was associated significantly for all four groups with either the post-high school status of attending college or of working full time. If the parent perceived that the child had a good deal of freedom in his planning, black daughters were likely to be at work and white daughters not at work in college. The parents of black and white coeds were more likely to perceive the school as influential in planning. Conformity, in the sense of parent stress that complying with the wishes of intimates was important in the child's planning, was significantly associated only for the black females with work, whereas black females whose parents believed in the control of child planning were likely to attend college. Control also was associated with work in the white males and an absence of control with college attendance among both male and female whites. These data suggest that the patterns of influence upon decision-making as reported by the parents were related in rather complex and subtle ways with later plan actualization. Perhaps the message in white homes--make up your own mind--is heard by the child as "but we hope you go to college!"

Among the black subgroups in only 2 of 20 instances was occupational status associated with post-high school activity (no more than could be expected by chance). In contrast, for both white males and white females high occupational SES values were rather strongly associated with college and low values with work, especially for the males. This may mean that the black parents were considerably less likely to be helpful to their children in entering post-high school activity.

Except for the black males those seniors who planned on school or college in the fall were likely to be in college and not at work according to parent report.

Post-High School Senior Plans

According to Table 4, a senior plan to attend school or college after graduation was significantly associated with all five measures of parent occupational status for white males and females and for three of the five occupational status measures in the case of black males. The black females were an exception. Results of the senior questionnaire, clinical data, and field observations were consistent with the interpretation that this particular subgroup of black girls included a number of strong individualists who were alienated from their parents.

As seems sensible, in all groups the parent occupational status measures were significantly correlated with each other. According to the interviewers' reports, many parents had not distinguished closely among the questions about the child's occupation. Some concepts which are important to vocational psychologists, such as preference versus expectation versus ideal, seem difficult to communicate precisely to nonspecialists. In other words, if I as a working-class parent see John now as planning on becoming a carpenter, then "carpenter" is likely to be my answer to questions about my hopes, my expectations in ten years, or my ideal if he had the ability.

Some Speculations

Many of these parents, especially those with low aspirations, seemed to be seriously alienated from their children, perceived their career development inaccurately and perhaps expected unreasonable control on the part of home and school. However, for others parent occupational aspiration as defined in this study was a potent force in the entry stage of career development.

On a practical level, this study provided a basis for school and community action. For instance, the investigator and his associates have recommended that the school and community collaborate in offering intensive services (counseling, placement, and information) during the crucial transitional period just before and after graduation to black and white youngsters and their parents who have low occupational aspirations.

So far as theory in career development is concerned, the black graduates and their parents were indeed consistent in many respects with generalizations suggested by other studies. For example, a large portion of black males hoped to attend college although slightly more of the black females actually enrolled.

This study tends to confirm anecdotal and clinical evidence about the relation between family and career development in minority groups. The family was indeed a potent force in the entry stage of career development but in black homes the interpersonal dynamics may be distinct from the white parent-child dyad especially in respect to girls.

The black parents and their children were reacting to rapid social change and to economic crises. For both black and white our results could be interpreted in many instances as intergenerational alienation. The dynamics of parental aspiration and student response pose challenging questions. Why, for example, were some but not all of the parents unable to express even a hope for their children? Why were the aspirations of black parents less frequently associated with senior plans and post-high school status than the white parents?

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EXHIBIT A

DEFINITIONS OF SELECTED CONSEQUENT AND ANTECEDENT VARIABLES

Consequent Variables

Major Fall Activity (P) "What is your child doing this fall (major activity), e.g., school, military, at work, etc.?" Open-end responses were classified, school and college, work and other. For some analyses school and college versus all other activities was treated as a dichotomous variable.

College (P) "Since he graduated last spring my child has: (Circle the number of your answer 1--yes, 2--unsure, 3--no, after each plan. More than one plan acceptable.) . . . Entered a four-year college--Yes, doing this now." Replies were analyzed for consistency with major fall activity. Replies treated dichotomously "yes" versus "unsure" or "no."

Work "Since he graduated last spring, my child has: . . . Gone to work full time . . . Yes, doing this now." Replies analyzed for consistency with major fall activity. Replies treated dichotomously, "yes" versus "unsure" or "no."

Antecedent Variables

Plan on School or College (S) "Within six months after I graduate I plan to: (Circle the number of your answer 1--yes, 2--no, or 3--not sure, after each underlined plan.) . . . Enter a four-year college . . . Enter a two-year community college . . . Enter a business or commercial school . . . Enter other school . . . "Student replies categorized positive if he answered yes to one or more of the above plans.

Occupational Status Aspiration For purposes of this study, five questions were presented to the parents and four questions presented to the seniors in response to a standard list of 93 occupational titles. During analysis each occupational title was then assigned an SES score based on Reiss (1961) from 1 to 90. The parents were asked the following (P): "Thinking back to last spring at graduation time, do you happen to recall the occupation that your child would most like to be in at that time (farmer, carpenter, banker, etc.)? Please write it below, don't leave it blank. Look at the list of occupations on the opposite page; please look at it carefully."

. . . "Your Child's Occupation" . . .

Spring Occupation--"Please write the number of the answer your child would have given at graduation time last spring."

Present Occupation--"Please write the number of the answer you think your child would give today."

Hoped for Occupation--"What are your hopes for your child? Of all the people listed, which ones would you most like him to be?"

Occupation in Ten Years--"Which of the occupations is most like the one your child will probably be in 10 years from now. Write the number here of the occupation which is most likely for him."

Ideal Occupation--"Suppose your child could enter and succeed in any of the occupations listed above. Nothing could stop him. Which one would you prefer for him? Write the number here."

Combined Parent Occupational Aspiration After auditing and key-punching, SES values for each occupation in response to the five aspiration questions were assigned by computer. Highest SES value of the above assigned to level: 1-44, 45-69 or 70 and above on the basis of inspection.

The seniors had been presented the same list of 93 occupation titles as their parents. They were instructed (S) "Of all the people listed below, which one would you most like to be. Circle the number beside your first choice."

First Occupational Preference "Write the number here of your first choice of all the above."

Second Occupational Preference "Write the number here of your second choice of all the above."

Ideal "If you could enter and succeed in any of the occupations listed above, which one would you prefer? Write in its number here."

Occupation in Ten Years "Suppose again you are a gambler. Which of the people on the list is most like the one you will probably be ten years from now. Write the number here of the one on which you would lay your bets."

Preference was introduced into the factor analysis.

The Combined Child Aspiration score represented the highest SES value of the four above assigned to level: 1-44, 45-69, 70 or above on the basis of inspection.

For purposes of this study only the combined score of the child, stratified by level, was used.

Freedom (P) Degree to which parents "felt" the child was really free to do what he really wants. "Has your child been unable to do what he really wants this year because . . . he lacks the ability, the money, . . . his grades were too low, . . . he was drafted, . . . his parents objected, . . . his school counselor advised against it, . . . his race prevented it, . . . his teacher advised against it, . . . friends advised against it, . . . he lacked the personality."

School Influence (P) How important do you think each of the following persons was in influencing your child's next plans after graduating?" "High school teacher . . . high school counselor . . . the principal."

Conformity (P) "How important do you think each of the following persons was in influencing your child's plans after graduating . . . his parents . . . relatives . . . his friends."

Parent Control (P) This variable was designed to measure the extent to which the parent explicitly exerted control over the child's plans. The parent answered "yes" to the item "Frankly, I wish he was doing something else" and to the item "So far as your child is concerned, how much do you think he should consider your wishes about his occupation?" he indicated one of the following options: "To some degree. I'd like him to consider my wishes carefully. . . . A great deal. He should do what I think is best for him unless he has a very good reason not to. . . . Entirely, he should do what I believe is best for him."

(S) indicates source was student questionnaire, administered in spring 1969.

(P) indicates source was parent questionnaire, administered in fall 1969.

TABLE 1

THE OCCUPATIONAL STATUS ASPIRATIONS OF PARENTS AND
THEIR CHILDREN IN RELATION TO COLLEGE ATTENDANCE BY SEX AND RACE OF SENIORS

Combined Parent Aspiration		Combined Child Aspiration Score							
		1-44 or DK ¹		45-69		70 and above		Total	
Score	Group ²	f	College	f	College	f	College	f	College
70 and above	BM	1(3)	-(0)	4(14)	1(3)	9(31)	7(24)	14(48)	8(28)
	BF	-(0)	-(0)	2(6)	-(0)	4(13)	3(10)	6(19)	3(10)
	WM	-(0)	-(0)	1(2)	1(2)	13(32)	13(32)	14(34)	14(34)
	WF	1(2)	1(2)	1(2)	1(2)	14(33)	12(29)	16(38)	14(33)
	All	2(1)	1(1)	8(6)	3(2)	40(28)	35(24)	50(35)	39(27)
45-69	BM	-(0)	-(0)	5(17)	-(0)	2(7)	-(0)	7(24)	-(0)
	BF	5(16)	2(6)	9(29)	2(6)	5(16)	2(6)	19(61)	6(18)
	WM	1(2)	-(0)	6(15)	-(0)	5(12)	4(10)	12(29)	4(10)
	WF	1(2)	-(0)	8(19)	3(7)	1(2)	1(2)	10(24)	4(10)
	All	7(5)	2(1)	28(20)	5(4)	13(9)	7(5)	48(34)	14(10)
1-44 or DK ¹	BM	1(3)	-(0)	5(17)	-(0)	2(6)	-(0)	8(27)	-(0)
	BF	2(6)	-(0)	3(11)	-(0)	1(3)	1(3)	6(19)	1(3)
	WM	6(14)	-(0)	4(9)	1(2)	5(12)	2(5)	15(36)	3(7)
	WF	4(9)	-(0)	10(24)	-(0)	2(5)	-(0)	17(38)	-(0)
	All	13(9)	-(0)	22(15)	1(1)	10(7)	3(2)	45(32)	4(2)
Total	BM	2(7)	-(0)	14(49)	1(3)	13(45)	7(24)	29(100)	8(28)
	BF	7(24)	2(7)	14(45)	2(7)	10(33)	6(19)	31(100)	10(33)
	WM	7(17)	-(0)	11(27)	2(5)	23(56)	19(46)	41(100)	21(51)
	WF	6(14)	1(2)	19(45)	4(10)	17(40)	13(31)	42(100)	18(43)
	All	22(15)	3(3)	58(41)	9(6)	63(44)	45(32)	143(100)	57(40)

¹Seventeen parents did not know or did not answer, of whose children 2 attended school or college. One child did not know and she did not attend college.

²Group: BM=Black male seniors, BF=black females, WM=white males, WF=white females.

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages of each subgroup. Each senior's combined occupational aspiration and his parent's aspiration for him were assigned SES scores based on Raiss (1961). See Exhibit A for explanation of combined aspiration scores.

Dole
AERA, 1972

Table 2

ACCURACY AND SES AGREEMENT IN PARENT REPORT OF CHILD'S OCCUPATIONAL
ASPIRATIONS BY SEX AND RACE OF SENIORS

Parent report on spring occ, present occ, hopes, 10 year occ, and ideal (combined) vs. Senior preference, hope, and expectation at gradua- tion (combined).	Blacks		Whites		All (N=143) %
	Males (N=29) %	Females (N=31) %	Males (N=41) %	Females (N=42) %	
Accuracy (Any reasonable agreement by occupation- al title.)	48	55	57	71	59
SES agreement (By status levels for highest value. See Table 1)	52	48	61	62	57
Parent no answer or don't know.	7	16	12	12	12

Note: The above proportions for each subgroup do not differ significantly from the proportion of all subjects.

Dole
AERA, 1972

Table 3

RELATION OF SELECTED PARENT VARIABLES AND SENIOR COLLEGE PLAN

TO CHILD'S POST H.S. STATUS BY SEX AND RACE OF SENIORS

Variable	Blacks				Whites			
	males (N=29)		females (N=31)		males (N=41)		females (N=42)	
	college	work	college	work	college	work	college	work
(P) Freedom	26	-30	-01	37*	16	-15	32*	-33*
(P) School influence	12	-09	49**	-05	06	-06	36*	-21
(P) Conformity	11	-07	-19	36*	09	-05	20	-15
(P) Control	-15	00	41*	-05	-35*	37*	-34*	28
(P) Spring occ SES	18	-02	30	15	59**	-46**	66**	-30*
(P) Present occ SES	46**	-23	26	10	61**	-50**	69**	-26
(P) Occ hope SES	03	13	18	26	42**	-35*	68**	-16
(P) Occ 10 yrs. SES	42	-40*	18	10	67**	-57**	79**	-32*
(P) Ideal occ.	13	14	26	06	44**	-30*	59**	-30
(S) Senior plans college	25	-05	54**	-47**	54**	-52**	61**	-37*

*p < .05

**p < .01

Note: (P) = parent questionnaire, (S) = Senior Questionnaire

Table 4

INTERCORRELATIONS OF PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS
ASPIRATIONS WITH THEIR CHILDRENS' COLLEGE PLAN BY SEX AND RACE OF SENIORS

Occupational Status Aspiration	Blacks				Whites															
	Males		Females		Males		Females													
	Spring occ	Present occ	Occ hope	Occ 10 yrs.	Ideal occ	Spring occ	Present occ	Occ hope	Occ 10 yrs.	Ideal occ										
(P) Spring occupation	X					X														
(P) Present occupation	59	X			69	X				85	X				89	X				
(P) Occupational hope	65	54	X		71	67	X			61	63	X			69	86	X			
(P) Occupation in 10 years	55	50	45	X	57	54	73	X		86	86	54	X		59	64	63	X		
(P) Ideal occupation	36	50	60	46	X	58	60	83	72	X	57	63	63	60	X	49	53	69	51	X
(S) Senior plans college	37	52	39	33 ⁿ	29 ⁿ	26 ⁿ	14 ⁿ	23 ⁿ	27 ⁿ		45	39	42	49	39	55	52	44	46	50

ⁿ = not significant at .05 level. All other values significant.

Note: (P)=Parent questionnaire, (S)=Senior questionnaire