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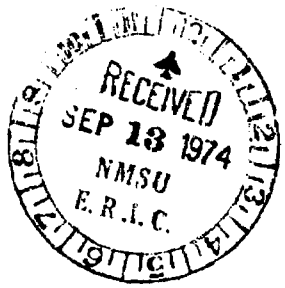
ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between occupational aspirations and early job attainment of Southern youth. Occupational goal deflection (OGD), defined as the difference between these, was analyzed by race, sex, and residence. Data were gathered in 1966 and 1972 in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. In 1966, 10th grade students attending selected high schools were interviewed. A stratified random sample of 1,228 young adults interviewed in 1966 were reinterviewed in 1972. The study analyzed only the 614 individuals who stated they were working full-time as of May 1, 1972. Interviewee responses were coded according to the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations. The most significant finding was that race appeared to be the major determinant of OGD. Sex also appeared to be a strong determinant, but the difference in OGD scores for males and females was partly due to a function of the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations. By itself, residence had no affect on OGD; when controlled for race and sex, significant differences did exist. (NQ)



OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EARLY ATTAINMENT OF SOUTHERN YOUTH*

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*Paper presented at the Rural Sociological Society annual meeting, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, August 23-25, 1974. Data reported in this paper were provided by the USDA (CSRS), Southern Regional Research Project, S-81. Cooperating state Agricultural Experiment Stations include Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas.

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Introduction

During the last two decades sociologists have contributed much to the understanding of American youth with their studies of occupational aspirations and attainment. The volume of research focusing on this subject is impressive (Kuvlesky and Reynolds, 1970). No doubt remains now that some youth have lower aspirations than others, and the evidence is clear that some youth achieve higher status occupations than others. Lipset (1955:20), for example, found a positive relationship between size of community of orientation (the community in which the teen years were spent) and the tendency toward upward mobility. Strauss and Sudia (1965:30) observed that farm-reared boys were less entrepreneurially-oriented than other boys. Kuvlesky and Ohlendorf (1968:33) noted that urban Negro youth aspired to professional and technical jobs at a higher rate than rural Negro youth. Holloway and Berreman (1961:2) found that middle and lower class whites aspired to higher status occupations than their black

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counterparts and Middleton and Grigg (1959:24) observed that occupational aspirations for both white and black females were consistently high. Haller concluded that farm-reared boys in a Wisconsin county had beliefs and aspirations which were not well suited to success in any pursuits other than farming (Haller, 1960:25).

The statement that occupational attainment varies needs no documentation, but studies of factors associated with differential attainment have provided additional insights into the occupational experiences of American youth. Rieger concluded that rural youth who migrate achieve higher occupational status than those who do not migrate (Rieger, 1972:37). Other studies have indicated that the predictive power of occupational aspirations is relatively low (Bohlen and Yoesting, 1968:33; Kuvlesky and Bealer, 1967:32). Featherman (1971:36, p. 123) observed that "it is differential education which appears to explain the residential background variation in achievement."

Both aspirations and attainment vary, but little attention has been directed to the question of goal deflection. That is, given the lower aspirations and achievement experience of some youth, do they also experience less goal deflection? The relevance of this question is seen in light of the statement that "the degree or extent of failure (to achieve one's aspirations) may influence the extent and/or nature of possible adjustment problems." (Kuvlesky and Bealer, 1967:32, p. 291).

The Problem

The purpose of this report is to examine the relationship between occupational aspirations and early job attainment of Southern youth. Although research on aspirations of American youth has contributed much to the understanding of youth, relatively little attention has been given to the relationship between aspirations and attainment. Kuvlesky and Bealer (1967:32) reported that they were able to find only six studies that dealt with this question, and that only weak positive relationships were found between the two variables.

Procedures

Source of data. Data for this report were collected at two points in time by researchers in five Southern states.[1] In 1966, students attending the tenth grade in selected high schools in the participating states were interviewed. In 1972, a stratified random sample of 1,228 young adults from among those youths interviewed in 1966 was located and reinterviewed.[2] Included in this report, however, are only 614 young adults, the loss of cases resulting from exclusion of those who indicated in 1972 that they were students and those who indicated that they were working only part-time. Our analysis is of those 614 individuals who stated that as of May 1, 1972, they were working full-time.

Major variables. Our major variable is occupational goal deflection (OGD). We treated it as the dependent variable in this report, defining it operationally as the difference between

occupational aspirations and early occupational attainment, both of which were operationalized by coding responses of our interviewees according to the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations.[3]

OGD was analyzed in terms of three independent variables -- sex, race and place of residence of respondents reported in 1966.

Analysis

Occupational goal deflection. The Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations has a maximum occupational score of 96; the maximum total score possible for our 614 respondents, therefore, was 58,944 for both aspiration and attainment. Their actual scores, however, were 30,429 for aspiration and 18,820 for attainment.

Translating these scores into percentages showed that our respondents' aspirational level was 51.1 percent of the possible top score, that their attainment was 32 percent of the top possible score, and that OGD was 38 percent. That is, the total attainment score was 62 percent of the total aspiration score. Stated another way, our respondents fell short of their aspirational goal by 38 percent. More accurately, they were 38 percent short of their goal six years after they identified their aspirations. Given more time they might well close the gap.

An OGD score of 38 tells us very little about our respondents, but the procedure for computing OGD proved to be useful in our analysis when we examined it while controlling for race, sex, and residence.

Our basic research question was: Does OGD vary by race, sex and residence? In order to test null hypotheses of no difference,

we used the Z test of difference for proportions. The .05 level of significance was adopted as our criterion for accepting or rejecting the null hypotheses, and the tabulated Z remained a constant 1.96 because we ran two tailed tests.

In Table 1 we show OGD by race and sex.

TABLE 1. TOTAL ASPIRATION AND ATTAINMENT SCORES BY SEX AND RACE, 614 RESPONDENTS*

	Total Aspiration Score	Total Attainment Score	OGD
Total Sample	30,429(49.7)	18,820(30.6)	38
Males	19,470(48.8)	9,972(25.0)	49
Females	10,959(50.9)	8,848(41.2)	19
Whites	18,954(52.4)	12,916(35.7)	32
Blacks	11,470(45.5)	5,904(23.4)	49

*Figures in parentheses represent mean scores.

Our first null hypothesis was that OGD does not vary by sex, and the Z test indicated that we should reject it (Z_c=7.07, $P>.001$). The obvious conclusion is that sex does affect OGD, and inspection of Table 1 confirms this, i.e., OGD for males was more than double what it was for females.

A difference this large begs for explanation. Why should females be more successful in attaining their aspired-to occupations than males? A number of possible explanations for the difference seem plausible. Perhaps the females experienced less goal deflection than males because the types of occupations they aspire to are more quickly accessible.

A girl may become a stenographer following graduation from high school, having learned typing as a high school student, but a boy does not become an electrician or a machinist that quickly. Related to this possible explanation is the fact that a number of the so-called traditional female occupations listed in the Duncan Index are assigned scores (or ranks) higher than traditional male occupations requiring about the same amount of education or training. A stenographer, for example, has a score of 61 in the Index, but a machinist merits a score of only 33 and an electrician scores 44.

Still another possible explanation is the matter of competition. Although less true today than formerly, boys probably are under more pressure to find work than girls. Girls do have the option of marriage, i.e., girls can look for a job or a husband, but boys who do not plan to go on to college are under the pressure of community norms to look for a job.

The second null hypothesis tested was that OGD does not vary by race, and the Z_c of 4.35 indicated that we should reject the hypothesis ($P>.001$). Table 1 again is our reference point, and there it is shown that blacks experienced about 53 percent more occupational goal deflection than whites. Interpretation here presents fewer difficulties than it does in other instances. The conclusion one is tempted to leap for immediately is that blacks still are subjected to inordinate discrimination and that this explains their failure to achieve occupational levels comparable with those of whites. This conclusion may be less valid than it would have been a few years ago, but at least some degree of validity probably still attaches to it.

An objective approach to the question, however, probably would lead to the discovery that blacks tend to achieve less formal education than whites, that they tend to drop out of school earlier and in greater numbers, and that they are less knowledgeable in terms of occupational alternatives. These factors combine to reduce black youths' ability to compete with their white counterparts. Add to these the factor of discrimination and the lower occupational achievement scores of blacks is better understood.

The third null hypothesis tested was that OGD does not vary by residence. Data used in testing this hypothesis are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. ASPIRATIONS AND ATTAINMENT BY RESIDENCE, 614 RESPONDENTS

Residence	Total Aspiration Score	Total Attainment Score	OGD
Small City	7437(55.1)	4252(31.5)	43
Small Town	6544(50.7)	4268(33.1)	35
Rural Nonfarm	7992(50.9)	4751(30.3)	41
Rural Farm	8456(43.8)	5549(28.8)	34

Testing of the hypothesis involved comparing each one of the residential categories with the others, and Z_c scores indicated that we should not reject the hypothesis. Based on previous studies which have shown that rural farm youth typically aspire to and achieve lower occupational status than their urban counterparts, we also expected to find that they would have lower occupational goal deflection scores. Our reasoning was that lower status occupations require less preparation than higher status occupations and thus are more easily achieved.

It is true that only nine points on the OGD scale separated rural farm youth from urban youth, but goal deflection was about 26 percent higher for urban youth. Although not significant according to the test of proportions, the difference of 26 percent in OGD scores does suggest that some speculation about explanations might not be counter-productive.

Because the review of literature showed that residence did affect aspirations and attainment, additional tests were conducted controlling for both race and residence and for sex and residence. Table 3 contains data used in these tests, which indicated that OGD was significantly greater for small city blacks than it was for small city whites, and for rural nonfarm blacks than for rural nonfarm whites. Only for these categories, however, could the null hypotheses be rejected.

We then examined OGD with sex and residence held constant. Data used in statistical tests are shown in Table 4. We first tested the null hypothesis for males, using the OGD scores for small city and small town (both scores were 52) and the OGD score (43) for rural farm males. The Z_c of 1.30 indicated that we should not reject the null hypothesis, and the conclusion was that residence does not affect OGD for males. On the other hand, we did find that OGD for small town females was significantly smaller than OGD for small city and rural nonfarm females.

To provide additional insights we examined OGD while holding race and sex constant at the same time. The statistical test indicated that black males experienced higher OGD than white males, and that black females experienced higher OGD than white females. See Table 5.

TABLE 3. ASPIRATION, ATTAINMENT AND OGD BY RACE AND RESIDENCE, 614 RESPONDENTS

Residence	Total Aspiration Score	Total Attainment Score	OGD
Small City			
Whites	5133(57.7)	3295(37.0)	36
Blacks	2304(50.0)	957(20.8)	58
Small Town			
Whites	4644(55.3)	3167(37.7)	32
Blacks	1900(42.2)	1101(24.5)	42
Rural Nonfarm			
Whites	4776(53.7)	3132(35.2)	34
Blacks	3216(47.3)	1619(23.8)	50
Rural Farm			
Whites	4406(44.1)	3322(33.2)	25
Blacks	4050(43.5)	2227(23.9)	45

TABLE 4. ASPIRATION, ATTAINMENT AND OGD BY SEX AND RESIDENCE, 614 RESPONDENTS

Residence	Total Aspiration Score	Total Attainment Score	OGD
Small City			
Males	4440(54.8)	2131(26.3)	52
Females	2997(55.5)	2121(39.3)	29
Small Town			
Males	4154(50.7)	1987(20.0)	52
Females	2390(51.2)	2281(48.5)	05
Rural Nonfarm			
Males	5133(28.9)	2564(26.0)	50
Females	2859(49.3)	2187(37.7)	24
Rural Farm			
Males	5743(41.9)	3290(24.0)	43
Females	2713(48.4)	2259(40.3)	17

TABLE 5. ASPIRATIONS, ATTAINMENT AND OGD BY RACE AND SEX, 614 RESPONDENTS

Race	Total Aspiration Score	Total Attainment Score	OGD
White			
Male	12546(52.3)	6813(28.4)	46
Female	6413(52.6)	6103(50.0)	05
Black			
Male	6924(43.5)	3159(19.9)	54
Female	4546(48.9)	2745(29.5)	40

We then ran tests which indicated that OGD was significantly higher for white males than for white females. The same relationship was found between black males and females.

Finally, we examined OGD while holding all three independent variables constant. This procedure resulted in sixteen OGD scores ranging from a low of -03 to a high of 62. These scores are arranged in rank order in Table 6. The score of -03 reflects an attainment level greater than that of aspiration.

Computation of Z scores for all possible combinations would have been laborious. We therefore began our analysis on an experimental basis, comparing the OGD score of 62 for black males with small city residence with the second highest OGD score of 56 for white males with small town residence. The difference was not significant. We continued with the OGD score of 62 and moved down the scale until we found that the OGD score of 32 was significantly smaller, i.e., white males with rural farm residence experienced less goal deflection than black males with small city residence.

We also found that OGD was significantly smaller for white males with rural farm residence than for black males with the same residence.

TABLE 6. ASPIRATIONS, ATTAINMENT AND OGD BY RACE, SEX AND RESIDENCE, RANK ORDERED BY OGD, 614 RESPONDENTS

Category	Aspiration	Attainment	OGD
White female, small town	1870(50.5)	1935(52.3)	-03
White female, rural nonfarm	1380(47.6)	1365(47.1)	01
White female, rural farm	1230(53.5)	1168(50.8)	05
Black female, rural farm	1483(44.9)	1091(33.1)	26
White male, rural farm	3176(41.2)	2154(27.9)	32
Black female, small town	520(52.0)	346(34.6)	33
Black female, rural nonfarm	1479(51.0)	822(28.3)	44
Black male, small town	1380(39.4)	755(21.6)	45
White male, small city	3200(57.1)	1660(29.6)	48
White male, rural nonfarm	3396(56.6)	1767(29.4)	48
Black female, small city	1064(50.7)	486(23.1)	54
Black male, rural nonfarm	1737(44.5)	797(20.4)	54
Black male, rural farm	2567(42.8)	1136(18.9)	56
White male, small town	2774(59.0)	1232(26.2)	56
Black male, small city	1240(49.6)	471(18.8)	62

A significant difference was found between white females with rural nonfarm residence and white females with small city residence.*

Worth noting about data in Table 6 is the fact that black males dominated the top end of the rank ordered OGD scores and that white females dominated the opposite end, i.e., the low OGD scores.

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*Z_c scores are affected by N and it should not be concluded that a numerical difference between two OGD scores is significant in itself. For example, the OGD score of 01 was found to be significantly smaller than the OGD score of 16 (numerical difference = 15), but a numerical difference of 17 (between black males, small city and black males, small town) was not significant.

Summary and Conclusions

Our objective was to determine whether occupational goal deflection, defined as the difference between occupational aspirations and early occupational attainment, for a group of Southern youth varied by race, sex and residence. As we pointed out in the introduction, aspirations and attainment have been found to vary by race, sex, residence, IQ, and other factors. These facts are well documented in the literature, but very few attempts have been made to examine the question we raised, i.e., does occupational goal deflection also vary. We found that OGD does vary; females in our example experienced less goal deflection than males, and whites experienced less goal deflection than blacks.

We found that residence by itself apparently has no affect on OGD, but when we controlled for race and sex we did find significant differences. These differences are presented in abbreviated form as follows:

$OGD_{WMRF} < OGD_{BMRF}$

$OGD_{WFRF} < OGD_{WFRF}$

$OGD_{WFST} < OGD_{BFST}$

$OGD_{WFSC} < OGD_{BFSC}$

Probably the most significant finding of this study is the fact that race appears to be the major determinant (of those we examined) of occupational goal deflection. Sex also appeared to be a strong determinant, but it was pointed out that part of the difference in OGD scores for males and females might be a function of the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations.

We view this study as an initital effort in the examination of occupational experiences of Southern youth. Our effort to gain insights into those experiences by focusing on aspirations and early occupational attainment resulted in several questions that we feel should be studied.

It seems to us that the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations needs to be modified. It is suggested, on the basis of our experience, that the occupational structure of American society should be treated differently for females. This suggestion is based on the fact that females in our sample experienced much less disparity than males between what they aspired to occupationally and what they achieved. Other writers have also questioned the utility of a unidemensional index or scale which encompasses all types of work (Morris and Murphy, 1959).

We also feel that it might improve our understanding of occupational achievement if achievement could be measured against some differential bases. For example, while rural youth typically aspire to and achieve lower occupational levels than their urban counterparts, who is to say they do not achieve more, considering their less advantaged point of beginning? The fact that rural farm youth in our study experienced 26 percent less goal deflection than urban youth points to the need for more detailed studies of points of beginning. For example, new insights might result from a study of type and extent of knowledge of occupational alternatives.

A third suggestion is that more information is needed about attainment. A young man who aspired to and ultimately achieved the status of farmer, for example, might have been forced to show more

iniative, more managerial know-how and more entrepreneurship, than a young man who achieved the status of electrician. His score on the Duncan Index, however, would be lower than the electrician's score.

Data collection at two points in time, six years apart, is seen as one of the advantages of this study. A third data collection phase eight years after the first would increase the value of the study.

Footnotes

[1]Although six states participated in the Regional Research Project, Louisiana did not collect data in 1966, consequently, this report contains data for only 5 of the states -- Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas.

[2]Because Mississippi entered the reinterview phase of the study later than other states, a decision was made to contact as many individuals as possible in the limited time available. As a result, slightly more than 60 percent of those interviewed in 1966 were reinterviewed in 1972.

[3]See Chapter VI and VII by Otis Dudley Duncan in Albert J. Reiss, Jr., Occupations and Social Status. The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961.

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