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OCCUPATIONAL PLANS AND ASPIRATIONS OF DEAF ADOLESCENTS

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Often repeated are statements to the effect that exceptional children must possess the capacities and skills for the job if they are to be successful at it (Williams, 1963). Historically, exceptional children have been provided training in skills that are presumably compatible with their disabilities, a practice which led, in the case of the deaf, to a heavy concentration of workers in skilled and semi-skilled industrial placements involving a limited demand for communication skills (Crammatte, 1939). Printing, for example, has for a number of years served as a major vocational placement for the deaf (Patterson, 1926). Occupational education programs for the deaf have often been organized around the assumption that the most successful form of programming involves conditioning the student into the skills and values that are appropriate for jobs entailing limited communication and abstract-symbolic demands (Owsley, 1964).

However, there is a growing awareness within the profession that the occupational scene is undergoing rapid change wherein many traditional skilled and semi-skilled occupational titles are decreasing in number because of the introduction of automated procedures and changes in consumer demands (Nace, 1965). New and greater occupational opportunities are developing for professional and skilled workers whose training is academic-scientific (Doctor, 1964). This present paper raises the question, "Is there an accompanying change in the occupational aspirations and plans of deaf adolescents,

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or do they still hold occupational ideals which are more compatible with past occupational conditions?"

The data reported here summarizes the response of a sample of 73 deaf adolescents in academic programs in two residential schools for the deaf to the following questions:

1. If you could have any job, which one would you like to have after you finish school? (Aspiration)
2. Sometimes the job you get is not the job you wish for. What kind of job do you think you *will* get after you finish school? (Plans)

Only the answers given by male, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades are reported. It should be noted that the questions were asked in the written form that appears above and were simultaneously presented in manual signs by an examiner in a mass testing situation (Joiner and Erickson, 1967).

RESULTS

The first question raised was whether there was a significant difference in the socio-economic status level of the occupational plans of the deaf and the hearing. Table 1 shows means obtained by coding responses to the plans and aspiration questions according to Duncan's SES scale (Reiss, 1961). This is actually an index of the "prestige and status" attributed to various occupations by the American public. None of the differences in means shown in Table 1 are large enough to be considered due to any underlying difference above and beyond sampling error.

TABLE 1. Means (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) of the Socio-Economic Status Rating of Occupations which the Deaf Students: 1) Aspired Toward or 2) Planned to Enter

	(Deaf (N=73))		*Non-Impaired (N=40)		t
	X	SD	X	SD	
ASP	36.7	21.2	No Data	-	
PLANS	34.8	19.7	39.38	20.5	n.s.

* A random sample of hearing adolescents, grade 12, mid-western, urban, public school (See Brookover, Erickson, and Joiner, 1969).

On the average, the SES level of the plans of the deaf equal that of the hearing. Similarly, there is no significant difference between the mean plan and aspiration levels of the deaf.

The fact that there is no significant difference in the mean SES of plans and aspirations is clarified somewhat by the data in Table 2. While ordinarily students wish for or aspire toward more than they actually foresee obtaining, forty-

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four percent of the deaf adolescents indicated aspiration and plans which were exactly equal in socio-economic status. More surprising is the twenty-five percent who saw themselves actually entering occupations of higher social status than they aspired toward.

TABLE II. Comparative Socio-Economic Status (SES) of the Occupational Aspirations and Plans of Deaf, Male, Adolescents.

%	%	%
SES of Aspirations Exceeds SES of Plans	SES of Aspirations Equals SES of Plans	SES of Plans Exceeds SES of Aspirations
30	44	25

Table 3 was modeled around some of the categories that emerged in Lunde and Bigman's (1959) study of occupational conditions among the deaf. For example about thirty-six percent of their respondents were classified as craftsman, foreman, and related workers. About the same percentage of the adolescents surveyed here aspired toward that type of occupation, but less than twenty-seven percent saw themselves actually participating in the occupation. This may be due to the fact that a fairly substantial percentage of the students did not indicate a specific plan. More were willing to say what job they would *like to have* than what kind of job they *would get*.

TABLE III. Percent of Deaf, Male, Adolescents Aspiring Toward and Planning on Entering Selected Occupational Areas (N=73)

% Aspire Toward	% Plan to Enter	Occupational Area
38	27	1. Skilled and semi-skilled occupations (e.g. tool and die, machinist)
18	12	2. Professional, Technical, Sales or other occupations demanding advanced academic-scientific-communication skills.
1	4	3. Printing Trades
1	1	4. Business ownership and management
32	23	5. Unskilled occupations
7	26	6. No Response
3	7	7. Other (sports, office work)

As one might expect, only twelve percent of the deaf adolescents planned on entering professional, technical, sales, or other occupations demanding advanced academic, scientific, or communication skills. Most of the respondents who indicated preferences or plans for entering this occupational

area named specific scientific occupations: computers, engineers, medicine, and electronics.

Unskilled occupational placements rank high among the choices of the deaf students, only slightly fewer students planning and aspiring toward unskilled than skilled occupation. It is interesting to note that most responses which were coded as "unskilled" simply indicated "working" at a specific factory. About one-half of the students who aspired toward or planned on entering unskilled occupations mentioned a specific employing firm by name. In contrast, not a single college was named by those selecting college or a college dependent occupation. Nor did any of the respondents mentioning skilled and semi-skilled occupations connect the job with a specific company. While about fifteen percent of Lunde and Bigman's (1959) respondents were employed as printing craftsmen only one percent of the present sample planned on entering that trade. Certainly this change is consistent with the recent decline in printing related occupational opportunities.

Paralleling Lunde and Bigman's (1959) findings, teaching appears, even among adolescents, to be an unattractive occupational avenue for the deaf. Only one of the seventy-three males in the present sample mentioned teaching as a desirable occupation.

The ownership and management of business was an occupational category in which Lunde and Bigman (1959) found many dissatisfied deaf adults. But while the majority of deaf persons who had worked longest in business management and ownership saw the occupation as relatively unattractive, those outside viewed it in the reverse, quite attractive. In contrast, only a negligible proportion of the residential school deaf boys reported business ownership and management as an occupational possibility.

Although not shown in a table, separate analysis was conducted on the responses to determine how frequently "unrealistic" aspirations or plans appeared. Only four examples of what might be generally agreed upon as unrealistic aspirations or plans for deaf persons were disclosed. It so happened that one student wished to become a professional football player for a Canadian team and a second wished to become a television actor. Balancing this out, however, was the fact that these two boys planned on actually becoming employed in the fields of graphic arts and architecture. The remaining two boys planned on becoming professional football players but at the same time expressed a desire to begin working for two specifically named companies.

To summarize the results of this study:

1. There was no significant difference in the mean

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- socio-economic (SES) status of the occupational plans of deaf and hearing adolescents.
2. The occupational aspirations of deaf students were not significantly higher in SES than their plans.
 3. Only about one-third of the deaf adolescents aspired toward occupations which were higher in SES than those they planned on entering.
 4. About the same percentage (38%) of deaf adolescents aspired toward skilled and semi-skilled occupations as were found in those occupations (36%) in 1958.
 5. A number of the deaf students (26%) had not yet formulated a specific occupational plan but only a few (7%) were unable or unwilling to articulate an occupational aspiration.
 6. A relatively small percentage (12%) of the deaf students planned on entering professional, technical, sales or other occupations demanding advanced academic, scientific, or communication skills.
 7. Unskilled occupations ranked second in frequency among the selections of the deaf (23% - 32%). One-half of their responses involved the mentioning of a specific employing firm.
 8. Printing, teaching, and business ownership and management were rarely perceived as being part of the occupational future of deaf, adolescent, males.
 9. Extremely few examples were found of what would be considered "unrealistic" occupational aspirations or plans.

IMPLICATIONS

The fact that the subjects of this study represented a population of residential students in academic programs is important because they are the most academically capable of the residential population. But not included in the study is the population of deaf students functioning successfully in the home and community. These students might represent more "enlightened" communities where special provisions exist for education of the deaf in the public schools or simply be those more capable of functioning in a society which stresses verbal proficiency. Even though a general survey including subjects in all educational settings would have been preferable, it would have been extremely difficult to conduct such a study because of the cost of sampling and the logistic difficulties entailed. Nonetheless, information contained in the present study does not necessarily represent deaf adolescents' views in other kinds of educational situations.

Directing comments to the residential programs represented by these students, it seems safe to say that the findings reflect some successes on the part of the residential programs. Justifying this contention is the fact that in nearly all cases, student responses reflected aspirations and plans which are attainable. What might be considered absolutely unreasonable choices given the nature of the impairment typifying this group only rarely appeared. Apparently, there is also some provision made for exposing students to knowledge of specific employing companies which might become possible job sources. While it is difficult to attribute the mentioning of a substantial number of specific firms to the effect of some education program addressed to that objective, the attainment of the objective has occurred for a number of students.

On the negative side, there seems to be little evidence to suggest changing occupational orientation of deaf youth. Especially noteworthy is the small percent of respondents who selected academic-scientific-communication based occupations. It may be that students have not been made aware of some of the emerging opportunities in those fields, or that present curriculums for the deaf do not stress antecedent skills; formal discussions of many modern occupational opportunities might not be included in the programs.

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