

LEVELS OF ASPIRATION AND FAMILY AFFECTION: RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE AS A VARIABLE*

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Upward social mobility has been the focus of both theoretical and empirical investigations in many disciplines. While American society emphasizes upward mobility as a cultural goal, individuals exhibit widely different levels of aspiration. Some persons show a greater desire to achieve the rewards of upward social mobility while others seem more content with lower expectations. Two viewpoints suggest possible factors which may account for these differential levels of aspiration.

One point of view focuses on interpersonal variables and their relationship to differential aspiration. This approach is illustrated by the psychoanalytic theory which suggests that certain types of interpersonal relations in early childhood produce insecurity which is later translated into striving for power, recognition, and success. Horney and Adler, among others, have emphasized this theoretical conception (Horney, 1937). In a previous paper, evidence was presented indicating that unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships in the family of orientation were significantly related to high levels of occupational aspiration while satisfactory relationships were related to low aspirational levels (Dynes, Clarke, Dinitz, 1956). It was suggested at that time, however, that the interpersonal interpretation of striving might be a more acceptable explanation for some segments of the population than for others.

A second viewpoint minimizes these interpersonal variables and emphasizes the fact that aspirational levels are frequently a function of the person's position in the social structure (Empey, 1956). Thus, when considering levels of aspiration in differing subcultural groups, modifications may be necessary in this interpersonal explanation. For example, are there segments of the population in which affectional relationships are not directly related to aspirations? In an attempt to provide evidence bearing on this question, this paper is concerned with the association between aspirational level and family affectional relationships in two different population groups representing somewhat different subcultures, i.e., Protestants and non-Protestants. As a result of this analysis of aspirational levels, certain questions were raised concerning the nature of affectional relationships within the two population groups. These differences seemed to be explained by differing family structure. This paper, therefore, is also concerned with the association between affectional relationships and differing family types as they seem to be represented by Protestants and non-Protestants.

THE STUDY DESIGN

The research design required a measure of aspirational level, an indication of religious preference, and certain measures of satisfaction with interpersonal relationships within the family of orientation. While aspirations have been measured in many ways, it was felt, for the purpose of this study, an occupational referent represented the most adequate single measure. The scale selected was developed by Reissman and was concerned with the willingness of individuals to forego certain satisfactions in order to achieve occupational advancement (Reissman, 1953). In this scale, eleven considerations were specified that might prevent a

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person from advancing in rank and salary in their occupation. Among these considerations were: leaving one's family for some time, endangering one's health, moving about the country, keeping quiet about political views, etc. Each consideration was evaluated in terms of three alternatives (1) whether it might stop the individual from making a change; (2) whether it might be a serious consideration but would not stop them; (3) whether it wouldn't matter at all. Only the first alternative was scored. The reasoning behind the scoring was based on the inference that persons permitting the considerations to stop them from making a change were expressing lower levels of aspiration than those disregarding these factors in order to attain higher occupational status. Since the scale had previously been used simply to differentiate gross categories rather than individual differences, the sample was divided into "high" and "low" aspirers, similar to the division employed by Reissman. Operationally, respondents who received scores from zero to 19 were defined as "high" aspirers and those who scored 20 or more comprised the "low" aspirers.

Data were also obtained on the affectional patterns in the family of orientation. The respondent's relationship with his parents was the major concern. Among the areas investigated were: amount of conflict, degree of attachment, feelings of rejection, parental favoritism and fear of punishment from parents. It should be noted that each dimension focused on the respondent's definition of his relationship. Even if the definitions were not objectively true to others, they were, of course, subjectively true to the respondent. The concern was with the respondent's definition of the situation.

Religious preference was indicated by each respondent. Approximately two-thirds of the individuals specified Protestant affiliations. The non-Protestant category included: Jews, 43.3 percent; Catholics, 38.3 percent; other (predominately Greek Orthodox), 18.3 percent. These respondents were combined for the purposes of this study since a comparison of affectional relationships among Catholics, Jews, and other non-Protestants indicated no significant differences. Although this combination might obscure differences for certain purposes, in this instance it was felt that they could justifiably be combined.

The scale measuring aspiration levels and the indices of family affection were administered in questionnaire form to 350 university students enrolled in introductory and advanced social science classes. All questionnaires were answered anonymously. This analysis is confined to the 151 male respondents. Female respondents were not included here because of insufficient numbers in certain categories. Where analysis of the female respondents was possible, however, the results tended to parallel the findings of the male sample.

THE FINDINGS

Aspirational Level and Family Affectional Relationships

In analyzing the association between aspirational level and family affectional relationships, the sample was first divided into Protestants and non-Protestants and, within these categories, differences in the affectional relationships between high and low aspirers were analyzed. In other words, within each group, high and low aspirers were compared in regard to their early affectional relationships.

The results of these classifications tended to support the psychoanalytic theory for the Protestant segment of the sample. Protestants with high aspirations generally showed poorer affectional relationships in the family of orientation than did those with low aspirations. Specifically, a significantly greater proportion of the high aspirers rated their own childhoods as "unhappy," perceived that both their parents had defined a favorite child within the family, confided rarely in their fathers, were fearful of punishment from their mothers, and more frequently had felt unwanted by both of their parents. These findings are summarized in table 1, columns one and two.

Contrary to the analytic theory, however, no significant differences were found between non-Protestant high and low aspirers in reference to their early affectional relationships. Affection, or the lack of it, was not related to levels of aspiration among the non-Protestants (table 1, columns three and four).

A second classification compared Protestants and non-Protestants *within* the high aspiration category and then compared these groups within the lower aspiration category. In other words, the high aspirers in both groups were compared in terms of their affectional relationships. The low aspirers were compared in the same manner.

In this analysis, it was found that the two groups did not differ significantly on affectional variables at the high aspiration level. (An exception to this finding occurred between Protestant and non-Protestant high aspirers who "felt unwanted by mother" [$P < .05$].) (Compare columns one and three, table 1.) In general, *high* aspirers, both Protestant and non-Protestant, might be characterized as having experienced generally poorer affectional relationships.

TABLE 1
Affectional relationships of Protestant and non-Protestant males in relation to levels of aspiration, in percentages

Ratings of affectional relationships	Protestant Aspiration level			Non-Protestant Aspiration level		
	High (N=38)	Low (N=53)	P*	High (N=22)	Low (N=38)	P†
	(1)	(2)		(3)	(4)	
"Unhappy" childhood	31.6	7.7	.02	47.4	36.8	—
Favoritism shown by father	44.4	17.5	.02	46.7	53.1	—
Favoritism shown by mother	40.7	12.5	.01	40.0	40.6	—
Rarely confided in father	52.8	30.8	.05	57.1	54.1	—
Fear of punishment by mother	57.9	36.5	.05	36.4	34.2	—
Felt unwanted by father	41.7	17.3	.02	50.0	45.9	—
Felt unwanted by mother	26.3	5.8	.01	45.5	32.4	—

*Probability of obtaining a Chi-square as great or greater by chance.

†Each Chi-square in this column is below the .05 level of significance.

At the *low* aspiration level, however, the data revealed a pattern of significant differences. In contrast to the non-Protestants, the Protestant *low* aspirers indicated more satisfactory relationships (Compare columns two and four, table 1). For example, they rated their childhoods as generally happy ($P < .01$), confided more often in their fathers ($P < .05$) and perceived their fathers as showing less favoritism toward children in their family ($P < .05$). In addition, they experienced fewer feelings of being unwanted by either their father ($P < .02$) or their mother ($P < .01$).

The evidence presented thus far can be summarized briefly at this point. *High aspirational level for the Protestants was significantly related to unsatisfactory affectional relationships and low aspirational level was related to satisfactory relationships. For the non-Protestants, however, affection was less directly related to aspiration as both high and low aspirers reported relatively less satisfactory affectional relationships.*

Interpreting these results, it would appear that while poor affectional relationships may be associated with high aspirations in the Protestant group, other factors probably operate in similar manner for the non-Protestants. For example, it has frequently been observed that a "success" orientation is characteristic of at least some segments of the Jewish subculture and that education often serves as a

vehicle for achieving higher status. It may be that what is called the Protestant ethic is no longer peculiarly Protestant, if ever it was. One could argue that the Protestant ethic in the United States is in many respects a minority group ethic.

Given these subcultural values, centered on achievement, poor affectional relationships would appear to add little to the explanation of high aspirational levels in this instance. Consequently, in order to explain more adequately differing or even similar levels of aspiration within and among some groups, it may be necessary to give greater consideration to such factors as minority group status, ethnic origin and family structure, rather than focusing primarily on early interpersonal relationships. The same level of aspiration may be explained by differing means—cultural as well as interpersonal.

Affectional Relationships and Differing Family Types

The preceding analysis has attempted to indicate and interpret differences in the degree of satisfaction with early family affectional relationships between (1) high and low aspirers within Protestant and non-Protestant groups, and between (2) Protestants and non-Protestants at similar levels of aspiration. Since neither the mean aspirational level nor the social background characteristics of the Protestant and non-Protestant groups in the sample varied significantly, these groups were again compared, this time *disregarding aspirational level as a factor*. As may be seen in table 2, this analysis supported the previous conclusion that non-Protestants in general, had experienced less satisfactory affectional relationships.

TABLE 2
*Affectional relationships of Protestant and Non-Protestant
males, in percentages*

Ratings of affectional relationships	Protestant (N=91)	Non-Protestant (N=60)	P*
"Unhappy" childhood	17.6	39.7	.01
Rarely confided in mother	24.2	38.7	.02
Conflict with mother	17.0	40.0	.01
Felt unwanted by father	27.0	47.5	.02
Felt unwanted by mother	15.4	37.3	.01

*Probability of obtaining a Chi-square as great or greater by chance.

At this point the question arises as to why the non-Protestants reported less satisfaction with their early family affectional relationships. One possible explanation would seem to be found in the types of family structure which these two groups may be presumed to have experienced. It is probable that the non-Protestants are to a greater extent products of the "traditional" family. This type of family is characterized by greater paternal authority, strong family ties, and emphasis on the role obligations of family members. Individuals fulfilling these rigid role obligations may conceive of their relationships within the family of orientation as being overly restrictive, hence, unsatisfactory. When new standards for evaluating family experiences are presented in a more permissive social atmosphere (e.g., a college campus), and prior to the formation of one's own family of procreation, these relationships may appear in retrospect to have been less satisfactory.

On the other hand, the family structure of Protestants is usually assumed to

correspond more closely to the "companionship" type, emphasizing personal independence, absence of the more rigid types of control, and companionship in interpersonal relations. As a consequence, members of this type of family may consider their relationships, or at least look back on them, as having been more personally satisfying.

If the inference is correct concerning differences in the nature of the family type of Protestants and non-Protestants, this would seem to imply that satisfactory interpersonal relationships *are not* necessarily the by-product of the cohesiveness of the "traditional" family. This would contradict a conventional view in the sociology of the family literature and the public image which interprets individual happiness as a function of this cohesiveness. It may well be that as affection becomes increasingly separated from the fulfillment of role obligations, as it does in the "companionship" family, relationships between parents and children, and, perhaps, between husband and wife, become more personally satisfying. Empirical evidence bearing on some aspects of this issue is to be found in Landis and Stone (1952).

SUMMARY

It was found, in support of the psychoanalytic theory, that in a Protestant population high levels of occupational aspiration were significantly associated with unsatisfactory family affectional relationships and low aspirational levels were related to satisfactory affectional relationships. Affection, or the lack of it, was not related to levels of aspiration among a comparable sample of non-Protestants. It was suggested, therefore, that the etiology of high aspirational levels among persons in this category may have to be explained primarily in terms of subcultural factors rather than purely interpersonal variables.

It was also found that regardless of aspirational level, the early affectional relationships of the Protestants were generally more satisfactory than those of the non-Protestants. Differences in family structure were posited as a plausible explanation for this latter finding. However, as subculture differences in family structure diminish and families more closely approximate the "companionship" type, it may well be that all groups will more directly channel unsatisfactory interpersonal relations into high levels of occupational aspiration. In this event, perhaps disciplinary differences between the sociologist and psychoanalyst will become less important and a more unified view of the etiology of aspirations may emerge.

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