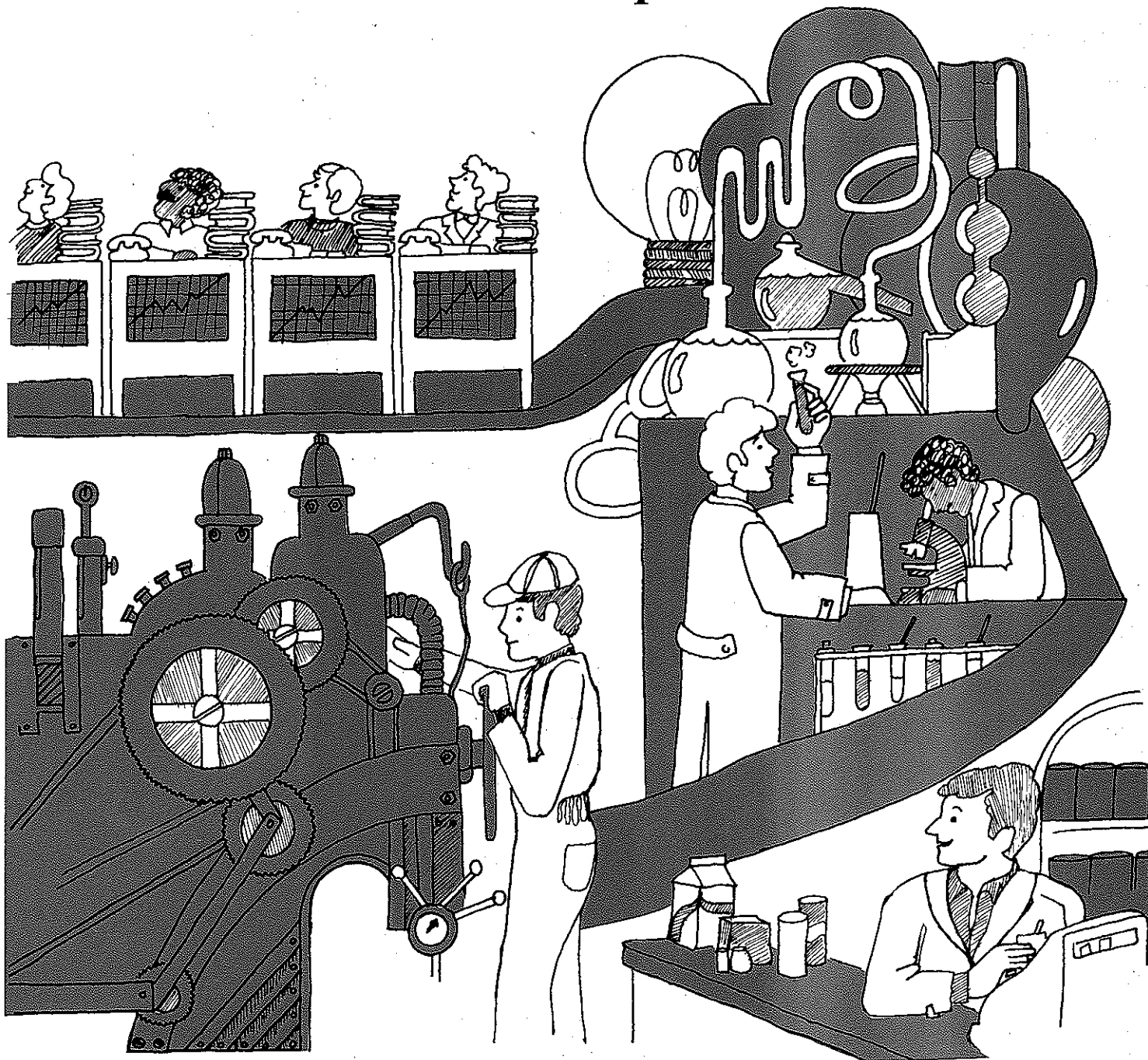


# Occupational Knowledge And The Vocational Aspirations And Expectations Of Southern Non-Metropolitan Male Youth



By Wolfgang Frese, Carlton R. Sollie and Frank M. Howell



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## PREFACE

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This bulletin is directed at high school educators with the hope that a better understanding of the role that occupational knowledge plays in determining vocational aspirations and expectations will aid them in their counseling endeavors. The results presented in this publication are taken from a technical

article on occupational knowledge based on data from the Southern Regional Project S-81. Due to the nature of the article, we felt it appropriate to present our findings in a less technical format. Copies of the technical paper entitled "Ginzberg's Theory of Occupational Choice: A Reanalysis of

Increasing Realism" may be obtained by writing the authors at the following address:

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# Occupational Knowledge and the Vocational Aspirations and Expectations of Southern Non-Metropolitan Male Youth

A popular notion among educators and social scientists interested in occupational aspirations and expectations is that knowledge about the dynamics of the labor force structure and the rewards and requirements that accompany various occupations are important factors which high school students take into consideration when formulating their occupational goals. This bulletin explores the role of such occupational knowledge in determining vocational aspirations and expectations of Southern non-metropolitan youth.

Data for this report are from a

longitudinal study of non-metropolitan youth in six Southern states.<sup>1</sup> The sample design was purposive in nature, emphasizing variation in socioeconomic characteristics of selected counties in participating states.<sup>2</sup>

While the respondents, strictly speaking, are not representative of a larger population, they are stratified by race and sex and do afford an appropriate research design for analyzing changes in occupational attitudes and attainment. Data analyzed in this report are from a subset of respondents from whom appropriate data were collected in

both 1966 and 1968. We limited this study to males, yielding a sample of 367 high school students of whom 221 are white and 146 non-white (more than 94% of the non-whites are black).

The 1966 and 1968 data were gathered via group-administered standardized questionnaires in the 10th and 12th grades, respectively. Those respondents who had dropped out of school or who had moved by 1968 were recontacted via personal interview and/or a mail questionnaire.



## GINZBERG'S THEORY OF OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE

The hypothetical perspective for this research report is derived from Ginzberg's theory of occupational choice.<sup>3</sup> The primary focus here is on the impact of occupational knowledge on male high school students' occupational aspirations and expectations. Ginzberg's position is that occupational choices act as mediators between a student's background or socioeconomic status and his occupational aspirations and expectations while

in high school. The term "occupational choice" is used here to imply an inclination toward a certain occupation, not an occupation (or goal) actually chosen to be embarked upon immediately.

Regardless of the particular application of Ginzberg's theory, an underlying central theme is the increasing rationality involved in the individual's occupational choice. The process is viewed as a number of compromises between

occupational aspirations and expectations. An adolescent's occupational aspiration refers to his occupational desire if he were free to choose any occupation he wished, while his occupational expectation refers to the occupation he actually expects to attain. This process becomes important in what Ginzberg has termed the "tentative period" in adolescent development (11-18 years of age). At this age the adolescent starts to recognize the

<sup>1</sup>The data used in this bulletin are from the S-81 Regional Project, "Development of Human Resource Potentials of Rural Youth in the South and Their Patterns of Mobility," sponsored by the USDA (CSRS) and carried out by the Agricultural Experiment Stations of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas.

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed discussion of the sampling procedures for the S-81 project see George W. Ohlendorf "The Education Status Attainment Process of Rural Males in the South," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University, 1973.

<sup>3</sup>E. Ginzberg, S.W. Ginzburg, S. Axelrad, J.L. Herma, *Occupational Choice*, New York: Columbia Press, 1951.

factors involved in attaining future occupational desires. In addition, the individual's perception of the lifestyle accompanying his occupational choice becomes increasingly important. Heightened awareness of the work world is the cornerstone of developing rationality that functions to shift fantasy desires (or aspirations) into realistic choices (or expectations).

Other researchers suggest that important areas within this per-

spective include the differential socialization of the adolescent (which determines occupational role perceptions) and his perception of obstacles or blocks which limit his desired occupational choices. For instance, the adolescent may perceive a lack of parental interest, lack of money, the absence of a nearby technical school or college, or his own reluctance to move.<sup>4</sup> If he thinks obstacles are too great, the adolescent's occupa-

tional goals will be lowered. However, research on this process of increasing realism has yielded mixed results. For example, while O'Hara and Tiedeman<sup>5</sup> found some support for vocational clarification and the existence of developmental stages, O'Hara<sup>6</sup> concluded that such stages were not clearly marked in the time span outlined by Ginzberg and colleagues. This report sheds additional light on these mixed findings.

## PURPOSE

Awareness of the work world and its structure; i.e., occupational knowledge, as a factor in the choice process is primarily a contribution of developmental theory. The concept, however, has encountered difficulty in finding its way into research on occupational choice processes. This report focuses on the role of occupational knowledge as it relates to the vocational orientations of Southern non-metropolitan high school males, their perceptions of reality, and the effects of these attitudes on their future plans. The objective is to assess empirically a model developed from Ginzberg's framework

that depicts the process of increasing realism in occupational choice attitudes. The empirical accuracy of this theoretical model (Figure 1) was tested to see to what extent our data support increasingly realistic occupational choices among Southern non-metropolitan high school males.

In the model (Figure 1), occupational knowledge has two separate dimensions (awareness of occupational roles and knowledge of the current state of the labor force)<sup>7</sup>, both tending to influence a student's perception of reality factors or goal blockages. The level of these perceived goal blockages is

the individual's awareness of the social contingencies involved in maintenance of the present level of aspiration.<sup>8</sup> Level of perceived goal blockage is thus a key intervening variable between occupational aspirations and expectations. That is, this theoretical model of the realism approach posits that individuals modify their expectations for future occupational attainment on the basis of their occupational aspirations, perceived goal blockages, occupational knowledge and social origin (background).

Figure 1 indicates the time sequence and the major causal influences of the variables in the

<sup>4</sup>For a complete list of items used in this study see footnote 8.

<sup>5</sup>O'Hara, R.P. and D.V. Tiedeman "Vocational Self Concept in Adolescence," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 6, 1959, pp. 292-301.

<sup>6</sup>O'Hara, R.P. "Talks About Self--the Results of a Pilot Series of Interviews in Relation to Ginzberg's Theory of Occupational Choice," *Harvard Studies in Career Development* No. 14, Center for Research in Career, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Mass., October 1959.

<sup>7</sup>Occupational role knowledge was measured by the summed score of two questions which ascertained the respondent's knowledge of occupational role rewards and requirements. Labor force change knowledge was measured by the summed score of three questions dealing with the respondent's awareness of the dynamic shifts in the labor force. The questions dealt with current changes in industries, jobs and unemployment.

<sup>8</sup>Perceived goal blocks were measured using the summed score of ten items (lack of parental interest, schools previously attended, not enough money to attend technical school or college, race, not wanting to move, national scarcity of good jobs, local scarcity of good jobs, no technical school or college nearby, lack of information about existing opportunities, personal intelligence) which the respondents were asked to rank on a four-point continuum from "not at all" to "very much" as a response to the question: "How much effect do you think each of the following things will have in keeping you from getting the job you desire?"

theoretical model derived from the literature. This model was first tested using our 1966 data and then, in a revised form, with 1968 senior expectations. Our reasoning

here is that because the developmental model stresses increasing realism, a student's sophomore level of occupational knowledge might not have an immediate im-

act on his occupational expectations. But as time passes he will relate such knowledge to his occupational expectations.

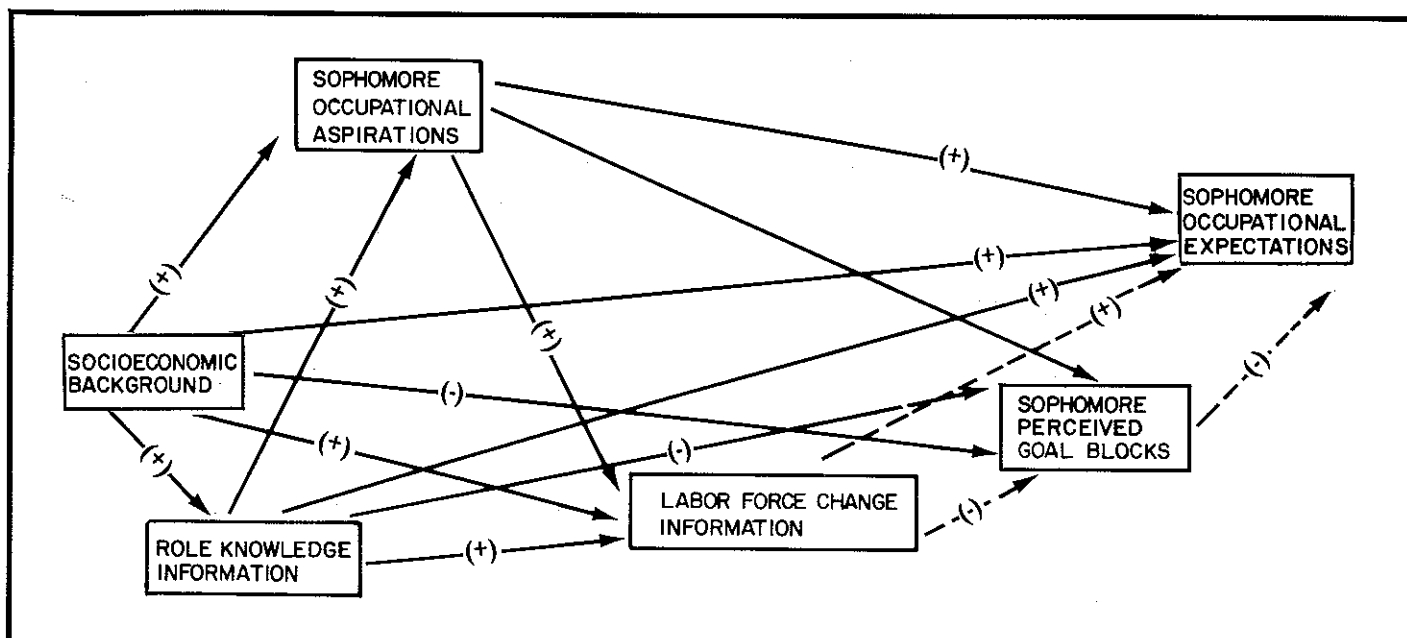


Figure 1. Model Developed From Ginzberg's Developmental Framework.\*

\*The arrows show the expected direct and indirect theoretical influences of the variables on sophomore occupational expectations. For example, the line (dashed for illustrative purposes) linking labor force change knowledge with sophomore occupational expectations indicates the direct influence and those lines (also dashed) linking labor force change knowledge, sophomore perceived goal blocks and sophomore occupational expectations indicate the indirect influences of labor force change knowledge on sophomore occupational expectations. The signs in the arrows indicate the expected direction of that influence.

## FINDINGS

### The Ginzberg Model

The results using the 1966 data did not support the general theoretical model of increasing realism (Figure 1). When the Southern Youth Study data were applied to the developmental model, several of the hypothesized causal influences were found to be unimpor-

tant. That is, no statistically significant relationships existed between occupational aspirations and perceived goal blocks or between perceived goal blocks and occupational expectations.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, there was no empirical evidence that labor force change

knowledge significantly influenced occupational expectations.

Because the hypothetically important relationships among social origin, types of occupational knowledge, perceived reality factors and occupational expectations in the derived Ginzberg model were

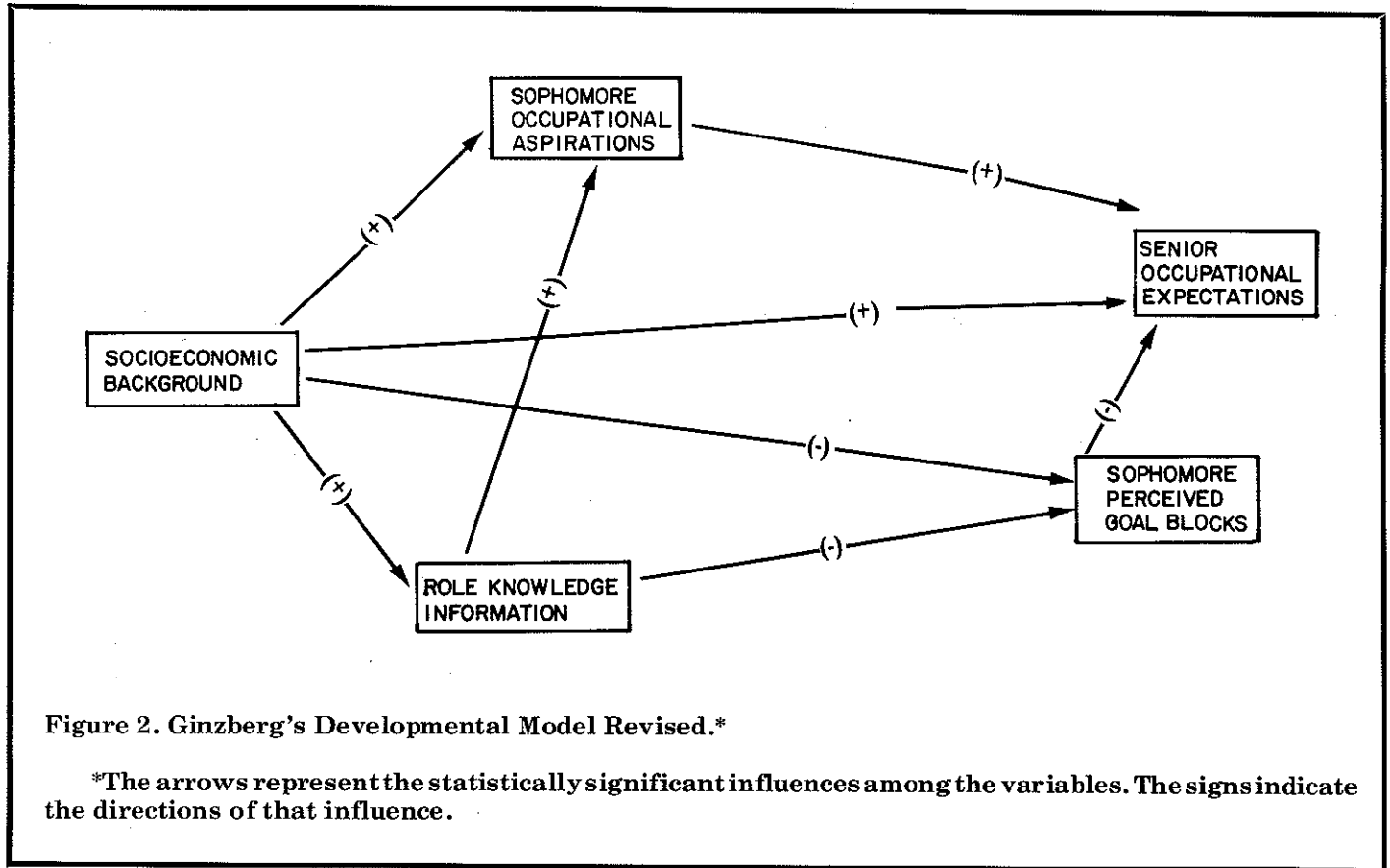
<sup>9</sup>For the statistical results of the models discussed in this bulletin see Howell, F.M., W. Frese and C.R. Sollie "Ginzberg's Theory of Occupational Choice: A Reanalysis of Increasing Realism," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 11, 1977, pp. 332-346.

not confirmed by our data, we constructed a revised model (Figure 2), using senior level occupational expectations (1968 data) and omitting labor force change knowledge because it has no impact on goal blocks or sophomore occupational

expectations in the model tested using 1966 data.

Results using the revised model (Figure 2) indicated a significant intervening function played by perceived goal blockages and a small direct impact of the social

origin variable on senior occupational expectations. Thus, the revised model using senior occupational expectations better supported Ginzberg's theoretical position.



### The Ginzberg Model Incorporating Race as a Variable

Because Cosby found that black youth tend to lower their occupational expectations over time while white youth do not,<sup>10</sup> race was introduced as a variable in the model. Results, applying Southern Youth Study data to the model, showed that race had no direct statistically significant impact on senior occupational expectations; however,

race was a factor in influencing occupational aspirations.<sup>11</sup> That is, role knowledge acted as a mediator of about 35% of the total causal effects of race on occupational aspirations.<sup>12</sup>

Since the direct negative effect of race on senior occupational expectations was not significant, the major causal processes were indi-

rect effects via occupational knowledge and perceived goal blockage. About half (52.4%) of the total association of race on senior occupational expectations was mediated through the intervening variable of perceived goal blocks and occupational knowledge. In addition, the statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic

<sup>10</sup>Cosby, A.G. "Occupational Expectations and the Hypothesis of Increasing Realism of Choice," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 5, 1974, pp. 53-65.

<sup>11</sup>See footnote 8.

<sup>12</sup>For a detailed statistical report on how we ascertained the direct and indirect effects of the various variables in these models, see reference in footnote 8 or write for a copy of our technical paper (see preface).



background and perceived goal blocks present in the first two models tested (Figures 1 and 2) disappeared when race was introduced into the model.

In general, most of the total effect of race on occupational expectations of senior males in our

panel was actually due to its associations with socioeconomic background. These socioeconomic-based processes functioned primarily through the formation of occupational aspirations. Race and socioeconomic background affected differential role knowledge

significantly, and this in turn lowered perceived goal blockage. These intervening variables accounted for more than half of the effects of socioeconomic background and half of the effects of race on senior occupational expectation.

## SUMMARY

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Some of our more important conclusions about Southern non-metropolitan male high school students that might be useful in high school counseling are outlined below.

A. Results from the models derived from Ginzberg's developmental framework:

1. During their sophomore year in high school, socioeconomic status and level of occupational knowledge (both role knowledge and labor force change knowledge) did not influence students' occupational expectations directly nor indirectly via perceived goal blocks. Socioeconomic status and role knowledge did have

some indirect influence via sophomore aspirations.

2. Sophomore socioeconomic status and role knowledge, however, did have some effect on senior occupational expectations directly and via perceived goal blocks. Both socioeconomic status and role knowledge had effects on senior expectations via sophomore aspirations.

B. Results from the model using senior expectations and introducing race:

1. Sophomore labor force knowledge had no direct or indirect effects on senior occupational expectations.
2. While socioeconomic status had direct and indirect impacts (via occupational aspirations and via role

knowledge-perceived goal blocks) on senior expectations, its effects channeled through perceived goal blocks were not significant.

3. Race did not directly affect senior occupational expectations; however, because perceived goal blocks affected senior occupational expectations race had indirect impacts by affecting perceived goal blocks and also by affecting role knowledge which in turn affects perceived goal blocks.

C. None of the models tested supported the theoretically important mediating role that perceived goal blocks were expected to play between occupational aspirations and expectations.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

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For a young person perhaps the most important aspect of an occupational choice is the degree of realism associated with that choice. The most realistic choice is one in which the individual's aptitudes, aspirations, expectations, knowledge and training coincide with job opportunities. In other words, the job he gets is the one he wants and the one he is best equipped, by aptitudes and training, to perform. The least realistic

choice is one in which these factors are most divergent.

Of the variables included in this study that affected occupational choice, labor force change knowledge and occupational role knowledge appeared to be the ones that counseling could handle most effectively to help young people make more realistic choices. Results of our study of Southern non-metropolitan high school males indicated that, while knowledge of re-

quirements and rewards associated with various occupations affected occupational expectations, labor force change knowledge did not affect students' occupational expectations. A possible explanation as to why knowledge of labor force changes did not have an impact upon sophomore expectations is given by Parnes et al.:

For youth in school, for example, it is particularly important that they be aware . . . of oc-

cupations potentially available to them, of the characteristics and rewards of different types of work, and of the entrance requirements . . . For adults . . . it is important to have knowledge of available . . . opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

This statement implies that occupational role knowledge (i.e., characteristics and rewards associated with various occupations) should have specific relevance for earlier occupational choices, with labor force change knowledge (i.e., dynamic shifts occurring in the labor force structure including such things as employment rates and changes in job opportunities in various industries) increasing its impact on later choices. These findings seem to indicate that individuals counseling male high school students should concentrate their time and energy on supplying students with role knowledge rather than information dealing with labor force changes.

Imparting male high school students with role knowledge, however, does not appear to have an

immediate, direct effect on their occupational aspirations. The amount of occupational knowledge possessed by high school sophomores affects their occupational aspirations and their perception of barriers to occupational goals and these, in turn, affect occupational expectations at the senior level.

The indirect effect of occupational knowledge on occupational expectations indicates that counseling can affect occupational choice realism by providing occupational role knowledge at the sophomore level.<sup>14</sup>

A goal of educators should be that of helping young people achieve the best possible match between aptitudes, aspirations, expectations and job opportunities. Counselors, teachers and principals with limited time and resources might help students align these variables more effectively by concentrating on the dissemination of knowledge about entrance requirements (e.g., education, skills) and rewards (e.g., income, fringe benefits) associated with various occupations. To the extent

that such knowledge affects occupational choice realism, the counseling process can play a significant role in helping students make more realistic choices.

Our data do not enable us to explain how occupational role knowledge is acquired by young people. Until such information is available, a variety of teaching techniques seems appropriate, depending on the counselor's individual guidance strategy, time and resources. An occupational knowledge program for sophomore high school students might include such things as individual counseling sessions, small group discussions, lectures, guest speakers, films, posters and brochures. The aim should be to communicate information about the role requirements of various types of occupations or at least a broad representation of occupations---especially those with present and future job market potential. This information should concentrate on such things as the amount of education and/or training required, specific tasks involved in doing the job, amount of travel involved and pay.

<sup>13</sup>Parnes, H.S., R.C. Miljus, R.A. Spitz and Associates, "Career Thresholds: A Longitudinal Study of the Educational and Labor Market Experience of Male Youth," U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, Research Monograph No. 16, Vol. 1. (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1970.)

<sup>14</sup>Imparting occupational knowledge at an earlier age might be just as appropriate. We cannot specify an optimal age for this counseling activity because we do not have appropriate longitudinal data on our respondents. Additional research on occupational knowledge, how it is acquired and how it affects career choices, is critically needed.

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