

WP-66

Report on Study of Sweet Home
High School Students
Spring, 1982

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The sample includes all juniors and seniors in Sweet Home High School who were present in the required social studies classes on the day the questionnaires were distributed in the spring of 1982. The questionnaires were administered by the teachers, and student participation was voluntary. Two hundred sixty two students completed the schedules.

The results described below are given for students in each sex group and for two social class groups. The social class measure is developed from the students' reports of the highest level of education their mothers and fathers have attained. For the present analysis students from families where neither parent has any schooling beyond high school are termed working class (128 of the 260 students with data or 49% of the sample). Those from families where either the mother or father has some post high school training are termed middle class. It should be noted that this middle class group includes relatively few students whose mothers or fathers have graduated from college (17% of all fathers and 12% of all mothers). While the middle class students do not have an overly high status, they are those with the greatest exposure to models in the home with educational experiences beyond the secondary level. Their families might also be more likely than the others to have an orientation that extends beyond the immediate community.

The results discussed below involve academic grades, residence

patterns, educational and occupational aspirations, future family plans, and attitudes toward women's roles. All of the discussed results are summarized in numerical form on the attached printouts. The pages in parentheses below refer to the relevant pages on the printout. (Note that to conserve paper the page numbers on the printout do not correspond exactly to the actual pages.)

Grades -- The data regarding the students' grades should be interpreted cautiously, for at least some of the students appear to have overestimated their academic marks. Only one student reports a GPA lower than 1.50. The average GPA is 2.95 with a standard deviation of 0.6 (page 24). As would be expected from other studies, females have significantly higher grades than males, and middle class students have significantly higher grades than working class students. Even though the interaction term only approaches traditional levels of significance, the class difference is somewhat smaller with females and the sex difference is somewhat smaller with the middle class students than other studies would suggest. Despite the probable problems with overestimation of grades, the students' reports of their grade averages probably correlate relatively well with their actual grades. That is, a comparison of the rank ordering of students' self reports with their actual grades would probably show few large errors. Thus at times in the discussion below the students' reported grades are used as a control variable.

Residence Patterns -- Slightly over a third of the students report having lived in the Sweet Home area all of their lives (page 2). The middle class females are most likely to have lived elsewhere, but these

differences are not statistically significant.

Educational Plans -- The students were asked to check the highest level of education that they hoped to receive and what level they actually expected to receive. Almost a third of the students hope to graduate from college and an additional 15% hope to attend graduate school (p. 3). Yet the middle class students are much more likely than the others to hope to graduate from college and the middle class males are most likely to hope to attend graduate school. The working class students are much more likely than the middle class students to hope only to graduate from high school, but the working class males most often have the lowest aspirations.

When asked what level of education they actually expect to attain the students tend to report lower levels than when asked about their aspirations. The working class males and the middle class females are most likely to lower their expectations (p. 5), but these differences are not statistically significant.

Twenty-eight percent of the total group expect to graduate from college and 10% expect to do some graduate work, but the sex and class differences found with the educational aspirations also appear with the educational expectations (p. 4). Almost half of the working class males and a quarter of the working class females only expect to graduate from high school. (This includes two working class males who expect to drop out of high school before graduation.) Middle class students are much more likely to expect to graduate from college and middle class males most often expect to do graduate work.

Even when the students' grade averages are introduced as a control variable the class differences, and to a much smaller extent, the sex differences, persist. Among those with grade averages less than 3.00, 31% of the working class males and 22% of the working class females, but only 10% of the middle class males and 6% of the middle class females hope to graduate from high school. Thirty-one percent of the middle class males and 29% of the middle class females, but only 15% of the working class males and 17% of the working class females hope to graduate from college (p. 17). When aspirations of those with grade averages reported to be 3.0 or greater are examined, it may be seen that 39% of the middle class males and 26% of the middle class females hope to do college graduate work, but only 4% of the working class males and 13% of the working class females have these aspirations. Opposite patterns occur when those aspiring only to high school graduation are examined. Here 22% of the working class males and 10% of the working class females hope to graduate from high school, but only 2% of the high achieving middle class males and none of the middle class females have such low aspirations (p. 18). Similar results occur with the examination of educational expectations (pp. 19-20).

Occupational Plans -- The students were asked both what "kinds of work" they were "thinking about going into" and what "kinds of work" they would "really most like to do." These responses were coded both for the type of job and for the prestige (a standardized measure commonly used by sociologists) that they provide. Only results for the job they would

"most like to do" are described here (p. 6).

Over 60% of the students would like a professional-technical or managerial job, although middle class students are much more likely than working class students to have this preference. About 7% of all the students prefer clerical jobs, with working class females being most likely to choose this area. About 15% of the students aspire to jobs that are termed crafts or operatives, and about 5% of the students prefer work classified as general labor, with working class males most often preferring both of these fields. About 9% of the students desire jobs in the service sector, mainly females from both social class groups. In general, then, the occupational preferences appear to reflect both sex and class differences. Even though the majority of the students aspire to professional and managerial positions, middle class males and females more often choose professions. Working class males more often choose blue collar crafts, operatives, and laboring positions; working class females more often choose clerical posts; and females of both class groups choose service positions.

When the students' grades are introduced as a control variable the variations by social class alter somewhat (pp. 21-22). Among those with grade averages lower than 3.0, working class males and middle class females most often prefer professional-technical or managerial jobs. Crafts, operative, and laboring posts are preferred more often by middle class males than by working class males. While some of the professional-technical positions require relatively limited training, these differences

are surprising and may suggest more realistic planning on the part of the lower-achieving middle class males. Among those with grades of 3.0 or higher, the class differences are magnified from those in the zero-order table on page 6. Ninety-one percent of the middle class males and 85% of the middle class females, but only 48% of the working class males and 62% of the working class females aspire to professional-technical or managerial posts. Forty-three percent of these high achieving working class males aspire to crafts and operative positions and 18% of the working class females aspire to clerical and sales posts.

When the prestige of the occupations the students would like to enter is examined, differences between the class groups, but not between the sex groups appear, with middle class students aspiring to more prestigious positions (p. 25). These findings are expected even though females are in different types of occupations and earn much less than males. Middle class students tend to aspire to jobs that have greater social valuation. Jobs females often hold, such as secretary, nurse, or clerk, may be valued as highly as male-typed jobs, such as plumber, or carpenter, but pay much less.

The students were asked what appeals to them about the job they would most like to hold. These responses were coded as to whether or not they mentioned working with or helping people, monetary reward, the ability to be creative and use one's abilities, or the challenge of the job itself. It was possible for students to mention more than one reason, but a minority of students gave any one of the possible reasons. No sex or

class differences appear in the tendency to mention money (p. 8) although a slight trend indicate that males are more likely than females to do so. There are no sex or class differences in the tendency to mention the chance to be creative (p. 9). Some differences appeared in the mention of the job as a challenge (p. 10), with working class females being less likely than those in the other groups to give this reason. The largest and most consistent differences appear in the tendency to mention people (p. 7). Both working and middle class females are much more likely than the males to mention the opportunity to work with people as a reason for preferring their chosen job.

Future Family and Life Style Plans -- Only about 5% of the students indicate that they never plan to marry (p. 12), and only 9% that they might never be parents (p. 13). Females in both social class groups are more likely than the males to say that they definitely plan to get married in the future. There are no sex or class differences in the plans to be a parent.

On the average the students report that they ideally would like to have slightly more than two children (p. 27). Working class females desire more children than students in the other sex and social class groups, but these differences are not significant.

When asked what their main reasons are for wanting children, the students give a variety of responses. These were coded in a manner that taps the extent to which the responses reflect more "expressive" reasons, those dealing with interpersonal relations, and the extent to which they

reflect more "instrumental" reasons, those dealing with goals beyond immediate relations. Females of both social class groups are much more likely than the males to give expressive reasons, such as loving children. Males are more likely to give less expressive reasons or responses that indicate they are ambivalent about having children (p. 11).

The students were also asked to imagine the type of life style that they would envision both themselves (p. 14) and their spouses (p. 15) having when they were married, choosing between a life which gives top priority to one's job, one which gives top priority to one's family, and one in which one tries to give both job and family equal priority. Only a small minority (mainly middle class males) expect their job to have the highest priority in their lives. The majority of both males and females expect to give the greatest priority to their families, but this response is significantly more likely for females of both class groups than for males. When asked about the life style of their spouse, the sex differences persist, with females less often and males more often expecting their spouses to give top priority to the family.

Attitudes -- Finally, in a series of questions, the subjects' views toward the role of women were examined. Scores on the eight question scale (with the third item on the questionnaire omitted) may range from 8 to 40. The students have an average score of 24, about at the neutral point (p. 26). In comparison to a sample of college students their attitudes are somewhat more conservative, although the differences are not statistically significant. The females have significantly more liberal views than the males, but there

are no social class differences in the responses. (In the general population middle class respondents usually have more liberal views than working class respondents. The lack of such a finding here probably reflects the liberalizing effect of advanced education, which middle class respondents have. This is also a possible explanation for the more liberal views of college students.)