

A STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL
ASPIRATIONS OF ATHLETES AND NON-ATHLETES
AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

by

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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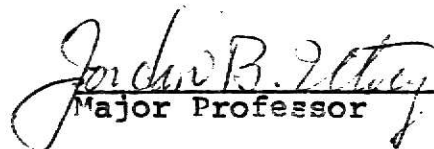
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many high school counselors today spend a significant proportion of their time in educational and vocational guidance and related activities. There is a continuous need for counselors to recognize the various differences among students as they attempt to work with individuals. In this study, the writer has endeavored to ascertain the differences between the level of educational and vocational aspirations of high school athletes and non-athletes.

As we move away from an era of scarcity and toward one of abundance of opportunity for athletes and non-athletes on the high school level, more and more students are seeking educational opportunities beyond high school for a variety of reasons. Some students know that a college education tends to lead to better jobs. Others hope to achieve a higher social status. Some students have been encouraged in academic pursuits by a dedicated teacher in school. Some hope that a college education will help prepare them to correct social inequities. Growing numbers are aspiring for athletic stardom, and still others hope to contribute to making a better world.

The question can be raised as to what effect, if any, interscholastic athletics have upon the education and vocational aspirations of high school students.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational and vocational aspirational levels of athletes and non-athletes.

The study endeavored to answer two specific questions:

1. Is the educational aspirational level of athletes different from the educational aspirational level of non-athletes?
2. Is the vocational aspirational level of athletes different from the vocational aspirational level of non-athletes?

Methodology

In order to obtain answers to the above questions, a questionnaire was used to explore the educational and vocational aspirational levels of 126 high school boys in Northern Louisiana (63 athletes and 63 non-athletes).

In attempting to assess educational aspirations, each student was asked to answer the following question: What are your educational plans?

Dropout of school
Complete high school
Attend trade school after completion of high school
Attend a two-year college
Attend a four-year college

The student answered this question by checking the level of education that he hoped to attain.

To obtain an indication of the student's vocational aspiration, he was given the following instructions: Check the type of job you want after you complete your education.

Professional, semiprofessional and managerial occupations
Clerical occupations
Sales occupations
Agricultural, fishery and forestry occupations
Skilled occupations
Semiskilled occupations
Service occupations
Unskilled occupations

The student respond by checking his job preference in the blank space provided at the end of the statement. The jobs listed were classifications used by Walter M. Lifton.¹ His basis for classifying jobs was education and training.

Two schools were chosen to provide varied ranges in socio-economic status and population. One school was in a small college town, whose social stratification was predominantly middle class. The other was in a small, but less affluent community. The writer, with the aid of the physical education teachers, conducted the survey during three physical education class periods at each school.

¹Walter M. Lifton, Keys to Vocational Decisions; (Chicago Science Research Associates Inc. 1964), p. 24.

Definitions

Educational Aspiration refers to the level of education that student hopes to reach.

Vocational Aspirations refers to the student's choice of job. What kind of work he would like to do after he completes his education. In other words, how far up the vocational ladder does the student wish to go.

An Athlete was defined as a male student who participates in interscholastic sports. He must be under 20 years of age and satisfactorily progressing in school. His participation is on a voluntary basis. He must have played at least one year on a varsity team, either football, basketball, baseball, or track.

A Non-Athlete was defined as a male student who does not presently participate in interscholastic sports, nor has he ever been a member of any varsity team.

CHAPTER II

RELATED LITERATURE

Research literature on the effects of athletic participation on education and vocational aspiration is virtually non-existent; however, this review includes literature that bears some relationship to the problem. The writer approached the problem from two indirect viewpoints. First, consideration is given to some variables that sociologists have linked with educational and vocational aspirations. Second, there is a presentation of some of the findings that have linked athletic participation with some of the variables that enhance educational and vocational aspirations.

In dealing with some factors that have influenced educational and vocational aspirations, the writer looked at the Coleman² reports of social structure and social climates in high schools. Coleman states:

At a crucial choice point in life, the peer-group social climate can help mold the adolescent into a responsible adult and guide him toward a fruitful career, or it can in contrast direct him to a misfitting occupation and leave him ill-equipped and poorly motivated for further education.

²James S. Coleman, Social Structure and Social Climate in High Schools (Chicago: United State Office of Education, 1959), p. 1-3.

Yet little is known about this adolescent climate and status system. Their consequences are only dimly seen, and their sources are the subjects of speculation.³

After indicating some reasons for the increasing importance of peer group to the students themselves, Coleman proceeded to talk about some educational implication of this trend. He pointed out that:

These implications stem from the simple fact that adolescents are looking, not to the adult community for their social rewards, but to each other. To be sure parents and parental desires are of great importance to children in a long range sense, but for their sveryday activities, in school and out, it is their peers who approval, admiration, and respect they attempt to win. As a consequence, the old "levers" by which children are motivated are less efficient. The old levers of course, meet approval or disapproval of parents and teacher. Our educational practices have never ceased to use those levers for it has recognized that if a child is to learn and to work at learning, he needs both a challenge and meaningful social reward for meeting the challenge.

So long as those social rewards could be directly provided by adults there was little need to be explicit about them in educational theory, for they were naturally provided by the very process of interaction between parent and child or student and teacher. To be sure these rewards were often distributed in ways which reinforced the stratification system and took away the lower class child's meagre chance for equality.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid, p. 2-2

In the same vein, Davis⁵ has emphasized that the middle class backgrounds of teachers often make them unable to hold out reasonable rewards for reasonable achievement to lower class children. Yet, according to Coleman, the situation was fundamentally simpler than it is today, because teachers and parents had direct control over the levers they could apply to motivate children.

In other reports, the emphasis has not been so much on peer group influence of students' aspirations, but rather, on a wide range of factors. For example, Sewell and Shah⁶ reported in an even wider area of social stratification. Children of higher social class origins are more likely to aspire to higher educational and occupational goals than are children of lower social class origins.

Another study, Sewell, Haller and Porties⁷ developed a model to measure the effects of socio-economic status, mental ability effect on academic performance, and the influence of significant others on a student's educational and vocational aspiration.

⁵Allison Davis, Father of the Man: How Your Child His Personality (Boston: Houghton Mottlin Co. 1947), Cited by James S. Coleman, Social Structures and Social Climates in High Schools (Chicago: United States Office of Education, 1959), p. 2-2.

⁶William H. Sewell and Vimal P. Shah, "Parents Education and Children Education Aspiration and Achievement," American Sociological Review, XXXIII (April, 1968), p. 191.

⁷William H. Sewell, Archibald Haller, and Alejandro Portes, "The Educational and Early Occupational Attainment Process," The American Sociological Review (February, 1969), p. 82.

Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf⁸ pointed out that the higher a person's socio-economic status, the higher will be the socio-economic status of those with whom he interacts; and the more likely he will be to except from them behavior signaling higher socio-economic aspirations. In this case, significant others refer to persons with educational and occupational goals expected of a youth. We, therefore, expect that a youth's level of aspiration will be fairly consistent with status levels expected of him or exhibited to him by significant others. Finally, the authors concluded that levels of educational and occupational aspirations should have a substantial effect on educational and occupational attainment. Also they contended that self-conception of one's ability will exert a direct effect on a student's educational aspirations, and that educational performance has a direct effect on his vocational aspirations.

The second viewpoint this study took was to look at findings that have linked athletic participation with some of the variables that enhance educational and vocational aspirations.

Another group of studies were concerned with athletic participation and academic performance, and academic performance and education expectations. A positive association has been reported by several investigators, including Eidsmore.⁹

⁸William H. Sewell, Archibald Haller, and George W. Ohlendorf, "The Educational and Early Attainment Process: Application and Revision," American Sociological Review, XXXV (December, 1970), p. 1015.

⁹Russell M. Eidsmore, "High School Athletes Are Brighter," School Activities (November 1963), pp. 75-77. Cited by Richard A. Renberg and Walter E. Schafer, "Participation in Athletic and College Expectation," American Journal of Sociology, LXXXII (July, 1967-May, 1968), p. 732.

Shafer and Armer,¹⁰ and, indirectly, Coleman.¹¹ In a study of participants and non-participants in varsity football teams from twenty-four of the top thirty Iowa high school teams for the year of 1962, Fidsmore¹² reported that: "The total grade-point average of the 592 players in all subjects carried was 2.523; whereas, the grade-point average of their non-participating classmates was 2.085."¹³ In Coleman's report of ten mid-western high schools, athletes in six of the schools had a higher grade-point average than the male student body as a whole.¹⁴ The report of Shafer and Armer also showed association between athletic participation and academic performance. In this study of 585 boys in two middle-western high schools, athletes showed a grade-point average of 2.35; and non-athletes showed a grade-point average of 1.83.¹⁵

¹⁰Walter E. Shafer and J. Michael Armer, "On Scholarship and Interscholastic Athletics," Trans-action (1968); Cited by Richard A. Rehberg and Walter E. Schafer, "Participation in Athletic and College Expectation," American Journal of Sociology, LXXXII (July 1967-May 1968), p. 732.

¹¹James S. Coleman, The Adolescent Society, (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press 1961), pp. 274 and 275.

¹²Fidsmore, op. cit., p. 732.

¹³Ibid, p. 732.

¹⁴Coleman, op. cit., p. 274.

¹⁵Schafer and Armer, op. cit., p. 732.

There are also relevant studies that are concerned with athletic participation and peer group membership, and with peer group membership and education aspirations. One of Coleman's clearest findings was the relationship between athletic participation and membership in the leading crowd. He writes: "The relationship is striking. Going out for football is related to being a member of the various elites more than any other variable in this study."¹⁶ As to the social background of such elites, he reports that: "There is a tendency toward control by the higher-educated, more middle-class students in the school...."¹⁷ In reference to the educational aspirations of the elites, Coleman mentioned that "The elites more often intend to go to college than do the students as a whole."¹⁸

In the same vein, Schafer reports that "Athletics often serve as a channel for upward mobility, especially for boys from lower socio-economic strata."¹⁹ He has pointed out that "Athletics might contribute to educational attainment which in turn increases occupational success chances."²¹ His findings

¹⁶Coleman, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 109.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 115.

¹⁹Walter E. Schafer, "Some Social Sources and Consequences of Interscholastic Athletics: The Case of Participation and Delinquency," International Review of Sports Sociology, IV (1968), p. 69.

²⁰Ibid, p. 68.

also suggest that participation in high school athletics, in fact, increases one's chances of attending colleges. Further, he reveals that participation in athletics might develop those personal qualities which make for vocational success.

In a study made by Spady,²¹ emphasis was given to the effects of perceived status as a result of athletic participation on one's educational aspirations. It was pointed out that the student's role in the high school peer group is a definite source of his success aspirations, particularly when his attitudinal, financial, intellectual, and academic resources are low. Participation in athletics was strongly associated with having status perceptions. This feeling of being recognized and important in the peer group in turn stimulates a desire for further status and recognition after high school. Spady stated that: "Since the most visible and widely accepted form of success-striving is college, educational aspirations become for many proximate for high status and personal recognition."²²

²¹William G. Spady, "Lament, for the Letterman: Effects of Peer Status and Extracurricular Activities on Goals and Achievements," American Journal of Sociology, LXXXV (January 1970), p. 680.

²²Ibid, p. 700.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter deals with specific outcomes of the study on educational and vocational aspiration levels of athletes and non-athletes in the two Louisiana high schools.

An analysis of the collected data was made in accordance with the questions stated in Chapter I. There is a restatement of each question, followed by an analysis of the response given by the students.

The first question was: Is the educational aspiration level of athletes different from the educational aspiration level of the non-athlete?

Table 1 summarizes the responses of athletes and non-athletes relative to their educational aspirations. It is revealed that athletes showed a higher level of educational aspiration than did non-athletes. This is shown by the 73 per cent of athletes who aspired to go to four year college, as compared with 40 per cent of non-athletes who aspired to go to four year college. It was also found that no athlete planned to drop out of school prior to high school graduation. One non-athlete planned to drop out before completion of high school. A close look at Table 1 also reveals that more athletes planned

to go beyond high school than did non-athletes. More non-athletes aspired to go to trade school than did athletes, with 22 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively.

TABLE 1

A comparison of educational aspirations of athletes and non-athletes by numbers and percentages.

Education Aspiration Level	Athletes		Non-athletes	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Dropout	0	0	1	2
Complete high school	11	17	20	32
Trade school	3	5	14	22
Junior College	3	5	2	4
Four year college	46	73	26	40

The second question stated:

Is the vocational aspiration level of athletes different from the vocational aspiration level of non-athletes?

Table 2 summarizes the responses of athletes and non-athletes relative to their vocational aspirations. It is revealed that athletes have a higher level of vocational

aspiration than non-athletes. This is represented in Table 2 by the 64 per cent of athletes who aspired to professional, semi-professional and managerial occupations, as compared to 43 per cent of the non-athletes who aspired to the same occupational level. Twenty-one percent of the non-athletes aspired to semiskilled occupations, as compared to 4 per cent of athletes who aspired to semiskilled occupations. In all other variables the differences were negligible.

TABLE 2

A comparison of vocational aspirations of athletes and non-athletes by numbers and percentages.

Vocational Aspiration Level	Athletes		Non-athletes	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Professional semi- professional & managerial occupations	40	64	27	43
Clerical occupations	5	8	3	5
Sales occupations	4	6	0	0
Agricultural, fishery forestry occupations	1	2	3	5
Skilled occupations	4	6	5	9
Semiskilled occupations	3	4	13	21
Service occupations	2	4	7	11
Unskilled occupations	4	6	5	9

There was no attempt in this study to equate aspirations with expectations. The only concerns were what the students' plans were in terms of educational and vocational goals. Even though both groups appeared to have high aspiration for college training, our data did not reveal the realism involved in the choice.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These data have shown that a greater percentage of athletes than non-athletes aspire to continue their education after high school. It has also been shown that a greater proportion of athletes than non-athletes plan to attend a four year college. There is, also, a greater number of managerial occupations.

All of these are considered to be positive variables on the side of athletic participation.

There was one variable that was positive on the side of the non-athlete. There were a greater percentage of non-athletes aspiring to attend trade school. There was also a greater percentage of non-athletes who aspired to enter the service occupations. However, this was considered neither positive or negative. In all other variables the difference was negligible.

After looking closely at the above data from the two high schools and after reading several studies and articles that were relevant to this study, one must conclude that there appears to be a positive relationship between athletic participation and educational and vocational aspirations levels.

If further research reveals that the above observation is true, one could suspect that one or more of the following experiences could have had a positive effect on the participants.

First, because of the importance of sports in American high schools, athletes are usually involved in the leading peer group; this group usually has higher educational and vocational aspirations.

Second, the tendency for those in sports to believe in hard work, self-improvement, and persistence could carry over from the playing field, thereby increasing aspirations for a higher education and a better vocation.

Third, social-psychological theory suggests that "level of aspiration is partly determined by self-esteem and that self-esteem results partly from positive appraisals from significant others." It is likely, then, that prestige and popularity enjoyed by successful athletes enhance their self-esteem, which in turn results in higher educational and vocational goals.

As a result of the findings reported in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. That the counselor solicit student's educational and vocational aspirations early in high school.
2. That all students have access to a course of study commensurate their educational and vocational aspirations.

3. That the students be apprised early in high school of entry requirements of local educational and vocational institutions.

4. That students be encouraged to participate in any extracurricula activity that helps him build a better self-concept.

Finally, to the extent that future research substantiates the relationship reported here, interscholastic athletics will have been shown to be one channel for upward mobility insofar as mobility is contingent upon higher education and vocational aspirations.

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APPENDIX

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

School _____

Name _____

Last

First

Middle

The following information about you is needed for a guidance study. Your cooperation in filling out the blanks below will be greatly appreciated.

Age _____

Grade _____

Number of children in household _____

Father's Occupation _____

Mother's Occupation _____

Educational level of Parents: School grade completed:
(Circle one)

Father: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 College

Mother: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 College

Please check one.

What team do you play on?

_____ Basketball

_____ Football

_____ Baseball

_____ Other

_____ Do not play varsity sports

What are your educational plans?

 Dropout of high school

 Finish high school

 Attend trade school after finishing high school

 Attend a two year college

 Attend a four year college

List the type of job you want after you finish your education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational and vocational aspirational levels of athletes and non-athletes.

This study endeavored to answer two specific questions:

1. Is the educational aspirational level of athletes different from the educational aspirational level of the non-athletes?
2. Is the vocational aspirational level for athletes different from the vocational aspirational level of the non-athletes?

In order to obtain answers to the above questions: A questionnaire was used to explore the educational and vocational aspirations of 126 high school boys in Northern Louisiana (63 athletes and 63 non-athletes).

In attempting to assess educational and vocational aspirational levels, each student was asked to give responses to the following questions by checking the phrases that applied to his planning:

1. What are your educational plans?

Dropout of high school
Complete high school
Attend trade school after completion of high school
Attend a two year college
Attend a four year college

2. List the type of job you want after you complete your education.

Professional, semiprofessional, and managerial occupations
Clerical occupations
Agricultural, fishery, and forestry occupations

Skilled occupations
Semiskilled occupations
Service occupations
Unskilled occupations

The jobs listed were classifications used by Walter M. Lifton. His basis for classifying jobs were education and training.

Two schools were chosen to provide varied ranges in socio-economic status and populations. The writer conducted the survey during three physical education class periods at each school.

It was found that there was a difference in the level of educational and vocational aspirations for the two groups, in favor of the athletes. More athletes than non-athletes aspired to go beyond high school. Seventy-three percent of the athletes aspired to go to four year colleges, as compared with forty percent of the non-athletes. In terms of vocational aspiration, more athletes than non-athletes aspired to the professional, semiprofessional, and managerial occupations.