

Studying the Vocational Maturity of High School Freshmen  
(APGA Seminar, Sect. II - 1958)

Nine years ago this month Don Super, in discussing in class the relatedness of new vocational decisions to former ones, confessed a recent self-committment to a project of such scope that his subsequent research and personal life were pretty well determined for the rest of his life. Knowing Super, we knew something big was in the wind.

But what starts, and how big, is such a project as the Career Pattern Study? Essentially, a select group of scholars at Columbia University had begun to voice some concerns that vocational counselors were too frequently busy practitioners with little time for needed theory development and testing, working in an area with unusual and unsolved demands on research design. It was felt that an intensive study of individuals, and environmental factors affecting their social, personal, and vocational development, was needed of a group of young adolescents who could be restudied at intervals until their establishment, some twenty years later, in adult working life. The community of Middletown, N. Y., felt to be relatively self-contained and stable, was selected from a circle around N.Y.C. with 75 mile radius.

A year of planning, in seminars and out, left us feeling that another year or two might permit us to get something significant on paper, and a few new instruments appropriately pilot-tested. We found ~~too~~, As Don and two research assistants tightened belts in the face of finding financial support difficult with long wait for results, the phrase "on a shoestring" creeping into our conversation. But HMLI provided assurance of adequate

financial support, after smaller votes of monetary confidence from the TC Faculty Research Fund and the APS. Three of us crossed the George Washington Bridge in September, 1951, for a first year of data collection in Middletown.

Backed as before by many of the staff and students at TC, <sup>took</sup> we ~~made~~ considerable efforts to gain local interest, cooperation, and support from teachers, school administrators, key townspeople. With the 142 boys in the 9th grade, and an additional reservoir of 134 in the 8th, we attempted to get the many kinds of data a year of thinking by such people as Super, Charles Morris, Al Thomson, and their students could judge would be significant. We obtained four recorded interviews with each boy, using a standardized but relatively unstructured interview schedule, covering free time activities, school, family, and vocational thinking. Questionnaire data on and from parents was supplemented by another hour of recorded interview with all but ten parents, as Phoebe Overstreet and some part-timers joined us. Some twenty-seven tests or questionnaires, covering the areas of interest, biographical data, vocational and scholastic aptitude, personality and sociometric status, and the like, were administered. Homes were visited and rated, dances were chaperoned, and the dark back booths of teen age hangouts were occupied. Thompson and Brochard subjected social attitudes in the community to formal study, and Beilin came in, acquired teams of local college students, and questioned all local employers and self-employed about occupational opportunities and requirements, to round out the picture of the environment in which most of our boys would develop. Special analyses of census data were purchased from Washington.

All in all, it was quite a year. Three ~~months~~ years were required for verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews,

At the time of the publication of the first monograph in 1957 ten doctoral dissertations had been completed using CPS data, and fifteen others were well under way. Many more problems lie in wait in the files at HMLI.

I may be biased by the tender and moving experience of hearing Don Super sing grand opera in a 6 a.m. shower, but perhaps there is more to it than this: I also recall approaching the junior high school, recorder underarm, when case 8-36-14 shouted "Kill it quick before it multiplies." Although at the time we frequently felt concerned by limitations of budget, time, and the inability to tie up a great many specific experimental variables in a neat design, we also knew, without question, the thrill that comes from being a part of some truly significant and needed research, of finding our ~~rich and~~ varied data a rich source of new hypotheses. The challenge seemed very real and exciting. I shall now join with you in determining, from the panelists following, if these perceptions of the Career Pattern Study were justified.