

## Longitudinal Influences of Educational Aspirations and Romantic Relationships on Adolescent Women's Vocational Interests

Martha O. Meinster

*Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Holy Family College*

and

Karen C. Rose

*Widener University*

The influence of educational aspirations and romantic relationships on the development of vocational interests in adolescent women in a single-sex educational environment was investigated. A sample of 92 high school students from a private high school for young women was followed from freshman year until senior year in high school. Contrary to expectations, over time all students endorsed more strongly interests in traditionally female-dominated occupations. Students with relatively lower educational aspirations who engaged in relatively more dating, however, had an overall lower and less differentiated interest profile by senior year than was true for other students. As was expected, students with relatively higher educational aspirations expressed more investment in work roles than family roles, but students with relatively lower educational aspirations expressed equivalent investment in work and family roles. © 2001 Academic Press

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Research in the area of the career psychology of women has burgeoned in recent years and has contributed significantly to our understanding of the dynamic and complex processes involved in career choice for women. Women's career interests and choice have been shown to be influenced by an extensive set of factors that include but are not limited to demographic variables such as race, age, and socioeconomic level (Farmer, 1985; Farmer, Wardrop, Anderson, & Risinger, 1995); abilities (Farmer, 1985; Fassinger, 1990; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993); agentic characteristics (Eccles, 1987; Fassinger, 1990; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993; Schaefer, Epperson, & Nauta, 1997); gender role attitudes (Eccles, 1987; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993; Rainey & Border, 1997); and parental and teacher

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Martha O. Meinster, Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Holy Family College, Grant and Frankford Avenues, Philadelphia, PA 19114. E-mail: [mmeister@hfc.edu](mailto:mmeister@hfc.edu).

support (Farmer, 1985; Rainey & Borders, 1997). More recently, constructs such as attitudes toward multiple role planning (McCracken & Weitzman, 1997), relational characteristics such as identity development and psychological separation (Lucas, 1997; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993; Rainey & Borders, 1997), role model influences (Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998), and support and barriers (Schaefer et al., 1997) have been added to this list. These latter studies have begun to highlight the influence of significant others on women's career development process, focusing particularly on parents and teachers or mentors. Less consistently studied and therefore less well understood, however, is the potential impact of peer relationships, particularly male, romantic peers, on the process of career choice.

The present study investigated heterosexual romantic relationships in relation to young women's vocational interests; these relationships have received little attention in the literature despite the widespread acknowledgement of the importance of family relationships in the career decision-making process for women (Eccles, 1994; Larson, Butler, Wilson, Medora, & Allgood, 1994; Nauta et al., 1997). Most prior research on peer influence on women's educational and occupational choices has considered only same-sex friends. For example, Idle, Parkerson, Haertel, and Walberg (1981) performed a meta-analysis on the influence of friends on educational outcomes and found a small effect not only on school achievement measures but also on educational and occupational aspirations.

More recently, Eisenhardt and Holland (1992) explored both same-sex friendships and heterosexual romantic relationships in a longitudinal, ethnographic study of college women and found that the attention of peer groups focused on romantic, not academic, involvements. Further, over the college years, they found that involvement in romance often derailed women's plans for prestigious, nontraditional careers. Women fell back to more traditional careers, such as teaching, which fit better with the demands of their romantic relationships. Thus, not only were the romantic relationships themselves related to altered life plans, but this effect was amplified by the almost exclusive interest of the peer group in these relationships.

Gustafson, Stattin, and Magnusson (1992) provided more direct evidence for the influence of both same-sex peers and heterosexual romantic relationships on career outcomes. They followed a group of 450 Swedish students, who were taking part in a larger longitudinal study, from compulsory school to adulthood. Educational aspirations and leisure-time peer networks were measured at age 15 (1 year before compulsory education ended) and compared with educational outcomes at age 26. Two types of peer networks were distinguished: "conventional" networks composed of same-age, same-school, and same-sex peers; and "nonconventional" peer networks composed of friends who were either older or younger, friends who had already left school, or a steady boyfriend. They found that women who had associated with working friends, with older friends, or with boyfriends at 15 were more likely to have had children and less likely to have completed postcompulsory education at 26 than those who did not have such networks. Further, the boyfriend relationship was more powerful than other nonconventional peer relationships; high educational aspirations buffered the effects of all nonconventional

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