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Attitudes and Careers

Not enough is known about the relationship of attitudes to careers, but some recent studies are of interest. Public Opinion Surveys has recently completed, for the Department of Defense, a study of attitudes toward 19 careers. Inasmuch as the results have not been widely publicized in detail, it is worth while to make some of the findings accessible to the scientific public.

The data were gathered by interviewers who asked the respondents to indicate the relative desirability of each career by pointing to one of ten squares, which ranged from most desirable (+5) to least desirable (-5). By using such an intensity scale, it was possible to compute a score for each occupation by multiplying each rating by the percentage (as a whole number) of the respondents who selected it and adding the results. If, for example, 50 percent rated a career at +5 and the rest at +4, the score would be 450 [that is, $(5 \times 50) + (4 \times 50)$].

The 2004 adult respondents of both sexes rated some of the careers in the following descending order (intensity scores in parentheses): physician (400), scientist (329), college professor (309), minister or priest (306), lawyer (302), public school teacher (252), officer in the armed services (227), farm owner or operator (221), carpenter (172), radio or television announcer (170). The nine remaining occupations ranged from mail carrier (140) to sales clerk in a store (-16) and truck driver (-27).

The 1031 males from 16 to 20 years of age rated most careers less highly than did the adult group. In descending order, the teen-agers' first ten were: physician (289), scientist (262), lawyer (240), college professor (204), and officer in the armed services (204), minister or priest (176), radio or television announcer (165), public school teacher (124), farm owner or operator (122), owner of a small store in a city (115). The remaining occupations ranged from carpenter (77) to truck driver (-13), sales clerk (-27), barber (-50).

It may be noted that the teen-agers rated some occupations higher in rank than did the adults: lawyer, officer in the armed services, radio or television announcer, and owner of a small store in a city. Some they ranked in a lower position: college professor, minister or priest, and public school teacher. No estimate to show that any of these differences are statistically significant was made.

The two groups agreed in ranking physicians and scientists at the head of the list. Doubtless the general public has a better idea of what is meant by "physician" than it has of "scientist." It would be instructive to know what "scientist" connotes to the general public. "Scientist" probably includes engineers and may even have picked up glamor from its association with the imaginary exploits of the tight-lipped navigators of interstellar space.

More penetrating studies of career attitudes and motivations of the high-school student are needed. The recent fifth annual report of the National Science Foundation gives preliminary results of several studies carried out under its auspices. The studies are concerned with the serious loss to the future intellectual resources of the nation represented by those qualified students who fail to continue their education as well as with the questions of attitude and motivation toward careers. When complete reports of these studies become available, it will be possible to make a fresh appraisal of what steps should be taken.—G. DuS.