Reprinted from SOCIAL FORCES Vol. 37, No. 3, March, 1959 Printed in U.S.A.

3/59

PLANNING TO FARM: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION*

A. O. HALLER

Michigan State University

T DOUBTLESS is true that purely economic factors have a great deal to do with deterining who does and who does not enter farming. Even so, it is clear that many to whom farms apparently are economically accessible elect to leave farming and enter other occupations. Recent research theory aimed at explained and predicting differential plans regarding farming has been drawn from social psychology. Implicitly, the social psychological approach holds that entering farming as a career is a single continuous act often occurring over many years; that is, the position assumes that the plan to farm is simply an early phase of the total act of entering farming. Accordingly social psychological research to date has centered upon the plan to farm.

Two such studies are known to the writer. One, conducted on Washington rural youth, was published by Murray A. Straus in 1956;¹ the other, conducted on Wisconsin rural youth, was the subject of Charles E. Ramsey's doctoral dissertation at the University of Wisconsin in 1952.² Despite the strikingly different types of farming characteristic of the two areas the results are quite similar. Ramsey's study shows that the plan—whether or not to farm—is essentially a realistic appraisal of one's own chances of success, thus showing that the plan does represent the first stage of an act. In addition, his data show that the person who plans to farm

* Journal article number 2308 of the Michigan State Agricultural Experiment Station. In part, the research reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the United States Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The writer wishes to acknowledge the invaluable aid of I. W. Miller and the MSU computer and tabulating services, as well as the cooperation of the Lenawee County school officials.

¹ Murray A. Straus, "Personal Characteristics and Functional Needs in the Choice of Farming as an Occupation," *Rural Sociology* 21 (September-December 1956), pp. 257-266.

²Charles E. Ramsey, Vocational Intentions of Wisconsin Farm Boys, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1952). tends to have a farm accessible to him and to have values supporting farming as an occupation. Straus, who appears to take the realism of the choice for granted, shows that the economic potential of the home farm, the existence of a value system functionally related to farming, and primary group support are the general factors influencing the plan to farm.

From a review of literature on occupational behavior and related matters,3 it appears that a general social psychological explanation for the selection of farming as an occupation may be found in action theory.⁴ On the whole, this explanation holds that the act is the resultant of the situation within which the act takes place together with the orientations to action brought to the situation by the actor. The situation within which action takes place includes the objective probability of carrying out the act as well as the supportive or nonsupportive attitudes of those surrounding the actor. In the case of differential plans regarding farming, this means the objective accessibility or inaccessibility of a farm together with primary group support for the plan regarding farming. The orientations to action include all the value, attitude, and personality factors relevant to the act. In the case of differential plans regarding farming, these include orientations toward farm work and nonfarm work, as well as deeper values and personality characteristics supporting either.

A comparison of this theoretical formulation with the research done to date shows a tendency to overstress the factors supporting the plan to farm, to the relative neglect of its alternative, the plan not to farm; that is, according to action theory the plan not to farm is as much an incipient act as is the plan to farm. Therefore, it is

³ A. O. Haller, "Research Problems on the Occupational Achievement Levels of Farm-Reared People," *Rural So-iology*, 23 (December 1958), pp. 355-362.

⁴ Talcott Parsons, et al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action," in T. Parsons and E. A. Shils (eds.), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 53 ff. to be expected that choosing to leave farming requires group support, attitudes, values, and personality factors which facilitate it, just as choosing to farm has similar factors facilitating it.

The purpose of the present paper is to augment existing information on planning to farm by showing that those planning not to farm tend to have the primary group attitudes, and personal values, attitudes, and personality characteristics supporting success in nonfarm occupations. This means that predictions of who will and who will not plan to farm will be more accurate if we take into account not only the previously stressed factors supporting farming as a choice but also the factors supporting nonfarming. Stated differently, planning not to farm is more than the negation of planning to farm. It is part of the act of entering the nonfarm world, and it must be studied in its own right.

The hypotheses of the study follow directly from the theoretical framework outlined above. In most cases their rationale is obvious. When it is not, the rationale is stated following the hypothesis.

- A. Hypotheses regarding primary group support relevant to success in nonfarm occupations.
 - (1) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to have parents having high levels of educational aspiration for them.
 - (2) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to have parents having high levels of occupational aspiration for them.
 - (3) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to choose and be chosen by farm boys who plan not to farm.

B. Hypotheses regarding values relevant to success in nonfarm occupations.

- (4) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to place a lower value on remaining in one community (thus being more ready to move with job opportunities).
- (5) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to place a higher value on change.

C. Hypotheses regarding attitudes relevant to success in nonfarm occupations.

- (6) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to have higher levels of educational aspiration.
- (7) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to have higher levels of occupational aspiration.
- (8) Farm boys who plan not to farm tend

to have more flexibility regarding their occupational preference. (This hypothesis is included because in a complex labor market a person needs a certain amount of flexibility if he is to be a success.)

- D. Hypotheses regarding personality characteristics relevant to success in nonfarm occupations.
 - (9) Farm boys not planning to farm tend to be higher in measured intelligence. Intelligence is taken here to mean the ability—learned or unlearned—to effectively manipulate the symbols required and rewarded by social systems stressing technical and economic skills. Presumably nonfarm occupations require these symbolic skills more than the occupation of farming.
- (10) Farm boys planning not to farm tend to exhibit greater interest in events external to the self. Interest in persons and activities outside one's immediate environment is the motivational counterpart of intellectual ability. It focuses on the readiness to be involved with the external world rather than the capacity to do so. (This dimension has a superficial resemblance to introversionextroversion. However both extroverts and introverts may be concerned with technically relevant symbolic skills.)

PROCEDURE

Data testing the hypotheses were collected from all 109 17-year old farm boys in school in Lenawee County, Michigan, in the spring of 1957. The county is in the corn belt and is one of the richest of Michigan's agricultural areas. It has a thriving light industry in its own right and is also near the metropolitan industrial area of Detroit and Toledo. This means that the boys in the sample have unusually good opportunities for both farm and nonfarm work within the general area. The opportunities for higher education are excellent. There are several small colleges and four universities within commuting distance of the county.

The data consist of questionnaires and standardized test forms filled out by the boys during school time. Trained social psychologists administered all forms. The hypotheses were tested by means of chi-square tests of significance, using the .05 level as the critical point for acceptance or rejection.⁵

The plan regarding farming was measured by an open-ended question asking each boy the occupation he planned to follow. All had at least one occupational choice, though some were quite tentative. Boys stating that they planned to farm were so classified, and those not stating that they planned to farm were correspondingly classified.

Data to test the hypotheses concerning primary group influences were taken from questions about the boys' parents and peers. Each boy's parents' level of educational aspiration for him (used in Hypothesis 1) was measured by his responses to two identical questions, one for each parent, worded as follows:

As to continuing my education beyond high school, my father (mother):

- () has strongly encouraged me to continue.
-) has given me some encouragement to continue.
- () has never said much about it.
- () feels I'd be better off going to work after high school.
- () feels I should quit high school and go to work.

Responses to each question were arbitrarily scored from zero to four, and the scores for both were summed to provide an over-all index of the boy's parents' level of educational aspiration for him. The parents' level of occupational aspiration for the boys (used in Hypothesis 2) were measured analogously. Each boy was asked:

As to the kind of job I go into, my father (mother):

- () wants me to have a very important job.
- () wants me to have a job that's quite a bit better than most jobs around here.
- () wants me to have a job that's a little better than most around here.
- () feels the job I take should be as good as most around here.
- () doesn't care how good the job I go into is.

Again, the responses to each of the two questions were arbitrarily scored from zero to four, and the scores for both were summed to provide an over all index of the boys' parents' level of occupational aspiration for him. Measurement of peer

⁵ See A. L. Edwards, *Statistical Methods for the Behavioral Sciences* (Rinehart and Company, Inc., New York, 1954), pp. 379–380.

group influences on planning to enter nonfarm work (used in Hypothesis 3) was attempted by asking each boy to name his best friends. A peerclique or interaction group was defined as consisting of two farm boys who chose each other. As it happened, there were only 12 such pairs of farm-reared boys, too few to test directly the hypothesis for which the questions were asked. But the lack of information itself provides a test about which we shall have more to say later.

Hypotheses regarding values relevant to success in nonfarm occupations were tested by responses to questions on two of the areas of the Work Beliefs Check-List.⁶ This is a form consisting of a number of questions sociologists believe are important in determining one's behavior in the labor market. The questions are grouped into six Belief-Value Areas, only two of which would be expected to differentiate between those who plan to farm and those who plan not to farm. All the Work Beliefs Check-List questions are answered by checking Agree or Disagree. The first of these (B-V Area 3, used in Hypothesis 4) measures the degree to which the person values living permanently in one community. It includes such questions as, "A man's first loyalty should be to his home community" and "People who can't leave their homefowns are hard for me to understand." The lowest possible total score for B-V Area 3 is zero and the highest is six. The second of the value instruments (used in Hypothesis 5) is B-V Area 4, which measures the degree to which the person values change. It consists of such questions as "Life would be boring without new experiences" and "The happiest people are those who do things the way their parents did." The possible scores on B-V Area 4 range from zero to seven.

Hypotheses regarding attitudes relevant to success in nonfarm occupations were tested by responses to several different types of data. Level of educational aspiration (used in Hypothesis 6) was measured by asking where and how long each boy planned to attend college. Those who did not plan to attend a college leading to a regular fouryear degree were classified as wanting zero years. All other responses were grouped into rough categories of one to two years, three to four years, etc. Level of occupational aspiration (used in Hypoth-

⁶ A. O. Haller, *The MSU Work Beliefs Check-List* (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Michigan State University, 1957). esis 7) was measured by means of the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS),⁷ a multiple question test based upon the 1947 NORC study of the prestige of occupations.⁸ In the OAS, the respondent is forced to choose the one job he prefers from among ten occupations of widely different prestige value. He makes such a choice eight different times, always choosing among jobs which have not been presented before. His score for any one question may range from zero to nine. Thus the lowest possible total OAS score is zero, and the highest is 72. (In this study no one chose either extreme.)

The flexibility of the boys' commitment to one particular occupational choice (used in Hypothesis 8) was inferred from two sources: the open-ended questions regarding occupational choice and another question concerning the degree to which the respondent had made up his mind. A boy's occupational choice would have been classified as "Completely Flexible" (there were none such) if he failed to mention any possible occupational choices at all. He was classified as "Highly flexible" if he mentioned two or more alternatives in openended questions regarding job plans and if he also checked "I'm not sure my mind is made up" in response to a question regarding the certainty of his choice. He was classified as "Flexible" if he answered the closed question on certainty of choice by checking "I'm not too sure but I think my mind is made up". He was classified as "Inflexible" if he answered the question on certainty of choice by checking "I feel sure my mind is made up."

Hypotheses regarding personality characteristics relevant to success in nonfarm occupations were tested by data taken from Cattell's tests called *Test of G-Culture Free*⁹ and the 16 P. F. *Test.*¹⁰ Data on measured intelligence (used in Hypothesis 9) were taken from the *Test of G*. This is an intelligence test which does not directly involve the use of language or number symbols.

⁷ A. O. Haller, Occupational Aspiration Scale (East Lansing, Michigan, 1957). Also see I. W. Miller, Jr., "Normalized Data for the O.A.S. Raw Scores" (mimeographed paper published by the Social Research Service, Michigan State University, April 1958).

⁸ National Opinion Research Center, "Jobs and Occupations: A Popular Evaluation," *Opinion News*, 9 (September 1947), pp. 3-13.

⁹ R. B. Cattell and A. K. S. Cattell, *Test of G-Culture Free-Scale 3A*, (Champaign, Illinois: Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 1950).

¹⁰ The 16 P. F. Test, Form B, (Champaign, Illinois: Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 1950). Rather, it depends upon analogies in visual forms to elicit differences in logical reasoning ability. Interest in events external to the self was measured by Factor H on the 16 P. F. Test. This variable differentiates between persons who have a highly developed interest in other people and things as compared to persons who are shy, withdrawn, and feel inferior. It is based upon "yes-no" responses to questions on the person's conceptions of his behavior and feelings.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents a summary of the hypotheses and their respective tests. Hypotheses (1) and (2), which refer to parental support for successfully entering the nonfarm occupational world, are clearly congruent with the evidence. The parents of those who plan not to farm tend to have higher levels of educational and occupational aspiration for their sons than do parents of those who plan to farm.

Hypothesis (3) refers to peer group support for the plan not to farm. A peer group was operationally defined as a pair of sample members who chose each other as best friends. The hypothesis could not be tested as planned because there were only 12 peer groups so defined. Thus there were too few peer groups on which to base a test. But this fact alone is enough to make the hypothesis untenable. That there are so few peer groups among farm boys of the same age doubtless is due to the residential dispersion of farm boys. In this area, peer groups appear to be formed among school mates rather than neighbors. When one reflects upon this and upon the fact that the farm boys attend school with nonfarm boys, it becomes clear that the probability is quite low that farm boys in this limited age bracket would choose each other. This is without regard to whether a given boy does or does not choose to farm. So it may be tentatively concluded that on the average neither the one who chooses to farm nor the one who chooses not to farm has any substantial amount of peer group support for his choice among other farm boys.11

¹¹ In a forthcoming article we shall show that among all the 17-year old boys in school in Lenawee County, there is a tendency for members of the peer group to have similar levels of educational and occupational aspiration. While we have not tested these hypotheses specifically among farm boys except as in Hypothesis (3), it may be argued by inference that nonfarm peers influence the levels of aspiration of farm boys.

266

PLANNING TO FARM

Hypothesis: Farm boys who plan not to farm tend to:	X2	df	P	Direction	Conclusion Concerning Hypothesis
(1) Have parents with high levels of educational as- piration for them. (Questionnaire data)	6.16	1	<.05	Nonfarm High	Accept
(2) Have parents with high levels of occupational as- piration for them. (Questionnaire data)	7.11	2	<.05	Nonfarm High	Accept
(3) Choose and be chosen by farm boys who plan not to farm. (Sociometric choice questionnaire data)	Too few cases of farm-to-farm choices for test planned				Tentatively Reject
(4) Place a lower value on living in one community.(Work Beliefs Check-list scores)	2.10	2) > .05	} 	Reject
(5) Place a higher value on change. (Work Beliefs Check-list scores)	6.40	2	<.05	Nonfarm High	Accept
(6) Have higher levels of educational aspiration. (Ouestionnaire data)	25.29	2	<.001	Nonfarm High	Accept
(7) Have higher levels of occupational aspiration. (OAS scores)	7.99	2	<.05	Nonfarm High	Accept
(8) Have less commitment to their particular occupa- tional preference. (Ouestionnaire data)	10.03	2	<.01	Nonfarm Less	Accept
(9) Be higher in measured intelligence. (Cattell's Test of G-Culture Free)	0.27	2	>.05		Reject
(10) Exhibit greater interest in events external to the self. (Cattell's 16 P. F. Test, Factor H)	6.61	2	<.05	Nonfarm greater	Accept

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES AND TESTS CONCERNING PLANNING TO ENTER NONFARM WORK

The hypotheses regarding work-related values are numbers (4) and (5) in Table 1. Here the conclusions are at variance with one another. While it is true that those who plan not to farm tend to value change most highly, it is not true that they place a lower value on staying in one community. It must be concluded that only one of the value areas supports planning not to farm.

The hypotheses regarding attitudes presumably supporting nonfarm work are numbers (6), (7), and (8). Each of these must be accepted. The boy who chooses not to farm tends to have higher levels of educational and occupational aspiration and to be more flexible regarding his occupational preference than does the boy who plans to farm. High levels of educational and occupational aspiration support a successful move to nonfarm work,¹²

But there appears to be no reason to suppose that even this influence should be distributed differently among those who plan to farm than it is among those who plan not to farm. Hence the educational and occupational aspiration levels of both groups are probably influenced equally.

¹² This was found by W. H. Sewell and the writer in unpublished longitudinal research in Wisconsin. Levels of educational and occupational aspiration of high school upper-classmen are positively correlated with their actual levels of educational and occupational achievement some years later. and given the relatively limited number of openings in most specific nonfarm occupations, so also does flexibility in occupational choice.

Personality factors presumably related to choosing or not choosing to farm are tested in Hypotheses (9) and (10). Here the two tests are in disagreement. There is no difference in measured intelligence between those who choose to farm and those who choose not to farm in this sample.¹³ The variable measuring concern with events external to the self, which is interpreted as the motivation to utilize one's intellectual capacity, is positively related to planning not to farm, however. This is in accord with the result predicted by Hypothesis (10). Thus it must be concluded that only one of the two personality variables logically supporting success in nonfarm work is empirically related to the choice.¹⁴

¹³ Most other studies (see Ramsey, op. cit.; and A. O. Haller, "The Influence of Planning to Enter Farming on Plans to Attend College," *Rural Sociology* 22 (1957), pp. 137–141 show a positive correlation between intelligence and planning not to farm. Straus', (op. cit.) findings regarding the relation of intelligence to plans regarding farming, however, are consistent with those of the present study. It may be that there are regional differences in the behavior of these variables.

¹⁴ Additional analysis shows that three other 16

267

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have used the general theory of action to interpret the farm boy's choice of farming or nonfarming as incipient acts, each logically tending to work itself out to a corresponding behavioral conclusion. Looked at in this way we have seen that scientific knowledge of planning not to

P. F. Test factors are significantly related to plans regarding farming. These are Factor C ("Emotional stability or ego strength versus dissatisfied emotionality"), Factor Q2 ("Independent self-sufficiency versus lack of resolution"), and Factor Q3 ("Will control and character stability"). Perhaps one or more of these may be interpreted as indicating a general factor of self-reliance. Interestingly, Ramsey (op. cit.) also found self-reliance to be correlated with planning not to farm. If in fact this variable is measured by one or more of the three above factors, we may speculate that the act of leaving farming requires a more self-reliant type of person than does simply remaining in farming. To the writer this seems tenuous because of the lack of clear theoretical justification, but it may be true nevertheless.

farm can augment our knowledge about planning to farm. This is because each of these alternatives is a phase of a human act. Acts are never performed *in vacuo*; they require social and psychological underpinning. Other investigators have shown that accessibility of a farm, values functionally related to farming as an occupation, and primary group influence support the plan to enter farming. The present research shows that parental support for success in nonfarm work and certain values, attitudes, and personality characteristics supporting success in nonfarm work tend to be significantly associated with planning not to farm.

The findings of this study, coupled with the findings of Ramsey and Straus, indicate a promising approach to social psychological research attempting to predict which farm boys will plan to farm. Future studies should measure the primary group, value, attitude, and personality characteristics supporting both farm and nonfarm occupational choices. This should substantially increase our predictive efficiency.