L. CARROLL DeWEESE

Status Concerns and Library Professionalism

In an exploratory study, specific hypotheses concerning the relationship between status concerns and professionalization of individual university librarians were tested. Status concerns are found to be an important socio-psychological determinant of professionalization. They are related to such factors as age, marital status, work importance, work alternatives, importance of library associations, desire for autonomy, and degree of conflict with faculty.

THE URGE to professionalize occupational groups can be attributed to the status concerns of individuals comprising the "profession." Occupation has gradually replaced traditionally accepted status-assigning attributes such as ancestry, ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation. In addition to being a determinate of status, it is a principal vehicle of status change. Occupation reveals more about a person's social standing than any other single attribute or classification, with the possible exception of race. A person is able to achieve status to the extent that he is able to choose his occupation. Conversely, his status becomes ascribed or fixed to the extent that he is unable to choose his occupation. The choice of an occupation assumes particular importance for individuals living in a country such as the United States, where social advancement is highly valued.

One would expect occupational characteristics to be closely related to status concerns. While occupational membership guarantees an individual certain

privileges and immunities, it also imposes certain restrictions and responsibilities upon him. The status of an occupational group member is based more upon his predictable behavior than upon his immediately observable behavior. Furthermore, a member's position within an occupation determines his status both within that occupation and outside of it. The relationship between an individual's rank within the administrative hierarchy and his own jurisdictional responsibilities also affects his status. For example, a head librarian usually receives a higher status than a reference librarian.

If a practitioner wishes to improve his occupational status, he must adopt one of three strategies: (1) leave his occupation for one of higher status; (2) increase his status within his occupation; or (3) improve the status of his occupation. Because specialization and other factors make it difficult for a practitioner to change professions, one would expect him to opt for occupational or professional enhancement. Moreover, since his occupation is an important status determinant, one would expect it to serve as the focal point for his status concerns. However, other af-

Mr. DeWeese is a graduate student in the Sociology Department, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana.

filiations such as family and church must also be considered. But if these alternative sources of status reward are held relatively constant, one can assume that an individual's status concerns will be directed toward his occupation. The desire of an occupational group to professionalize appears, then, to result in part from status concerns and from the absence of alternative status rewards.

It is equally probable that structural characteristics of developing professions, including long periods of intensive training in specialized areas, function as a "closing system"; by relegating an individual to a specific "slot" and by precluding alternative sources of status reward, the system in effect limits his status improvement options. This leads one to expect that professional and occupational enhancement is inversely related to the openness of a social system —i.e., professional and occupational enhancement is greater in a closing system.

Goode has considered these structural characteristics of professionalization in view of their potential impact on the field of librarianship.[1] He maintains that the status of librarianship is relatively limited, and that this limited status is ascribed to practicing librarians. If this is the case, librarians who want to improve their own status must do so outside of their field (e.g., leaving the profession for "better" work, marrying well, writing a successful novel while remaining a librarian, etc.) or within their field (e.g., increasing their own professional status, or the status of the profession itself, or both).

Since the professional librarian expends much time and effort in developing his skills and expertise, and since his status depends upon his professional affiliation, it is likely that he will endeavor to increase his status within the context of librarianship. He might, for example, elect to emphasize a particular area, subarea, or movement within the field in order to increase its status. More-

over, a librarian with high status aspirations will probably be more professionally oriented and concerned with the professionalization of librarianship than a librarian with low status aspirations.

Librarianship as a profession constitutes a closing system of status. If professional and occupational advancement is in fact higher within a closing system, it is likely to be strongly emphasized within librarianship. This does appear to be the case. Librarians write and talk a great deal about the professional nature of their occupation, their status relative to other groups, and other related concerns. They appear to be very concerned about their "image." Some librarians want to change the title of their profession to something like "media science" in order to make their profession sound more "professional." Nearly all librarians are concerned about being confused with clerks. Academic librarians tend to envy faculty status. In short, librarianship would be an ideal testing-ground for exploratory research undertaken to determine relationships between status concerns and professionalization.

If, in fact, such status concerns do exist among academic librarians, one can expect to encounter conflicts between librarians and faculty centering around the issue of autonomy. Professionals ordinarily have control over their own affairs, and autonomy in their particular area of specialization. If a professional wants to improve the professional nature of his field, he should be especially concerned about his field's autonomy; however, an individual attempting to increase his autonomy tends to usurp a certain measure of autonomy from his clients. The clients may eventually begin to feel that they are losing status in an area previously under their control, and conflicts are likely to result. The individual librarian is apt to perceive these conflicts; in fact, there should be

a direct correlation between the importance of the perceived potential status gain and the amount of conflict perceived. To the extent that faculty members have more status than academic librarians, and are therefore in a position to exercise some control over them (e.g., the faculty's right to order certain books or make decisions autonomously regarding library policies), greater conflict can be anticipated. Due to structural limitations of librarianship, many faculty members view librarians as little more than glorified clerks. Some even feel that they are in a better position to determine how librarians should act and what they should do than the librarians themselves. Similarly, the degree to which an academic librarian is professionally oriented is directly related to his desire for professional recognition and autonomy.

An exploratory study of the thirty-nine professional librarians working in a large midwestern land-grant university library was conducted in order to determine the intensity of their status concerns, the extent of their professionalization, and other relevant factors. Interviews using a focused interview approach questioned the librarians intensively in order to identify their concerns, perceptions, problems, and conflicts.[2] A focused interview approach means that an interview guide, based upon a provisional analysis of the area of overall concern, is used to bring the central topics of inquiry into focus for the interviewer. This approach elicits a broad range of response in addition to a high degree of specificity of response. The approach was used to gain as much perceptual information as possible from each respondent about his professional environment as he personally perceives it. An investigator trained in sociology acted as interviewer. Great effort was exerted to control bias and to assure the anonymity of each respondent. The length of interviews ranged from one session lasting one hour and twenty minutes with one librarian to three sessions totaling six hours with another. The average interview lasted slightly over two hours.

The data obtained were coded and analyzed. Individuals were classified according to explicit criteria into high, mixed, and low status concern types. The same procedure was used to classify other data into relevant categories. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and to the limited size of the sample, measures of statistical significance were not used. Since the direction and strength of associations were predicted, and since all the variables used were assumed to be ordinal, a very powerful nonparametric measure of association called "gamma" was computed to assess the direction and strength of relationships.[3] It should be emphasized that a "shot-gun" approach was not used to identify meaningful relationships in the data. The data confirmed the predicted directions of all of the relationships studied.

It was predicted, for example, that younger, less-experienced librarians would assign greater importance to occupationally related status concerns than would older, more-experienced librarians. The status concerns of older librarians should diminish at the same rate that their career opportunities diminish and other concerns assume greater importance for them. This trend was identified in the data. Table 1, where the entire sample of librarians is represented, reveals a moderately low degree of association with a gamma at −.2332 level of association. In Table 2, which uses only ideal typical cells to clarify relationships, the measure of association is at a relatively high −.7142 degree of association.

Librarianship is stereotyped as a woman's profession. What effect this image has had upon the status concerns of males and females within the profes-

TABLE 1

AGE AND STATUS CONCERN LEVEL

| Age | Data Status Concern Level | | | |
	High	Mixed	Low	Total
24–34	6	4	1	11
35–45	5	2	3	10
46–54	3	4	2	9
55–65	4	1	4	9
Total	18	11	10	39

$\gamma = -.2332$

TABLE 2

IDEAL TYPE AGE AND STATUS CONCERN LEVEL

| Age | Data Status Concern Level | | |
	High	Low	Total
24–34	6	1	7
55–65	4	4	8
Total	10	5	15

$\gamma = -.7142$

TABLE 3

SEX AND STATUS CONCERN LEVEL

| Sex | Data Status Concern Level | | | |
	High	Mixed	Low	Total
Male	10	6	6	22
Female	8	5	4	17
Total	18	11	10	39

$\gamma = .0500$

sion was not predicted in advance. As can be seen in Table 3, virtually no difference in status concern levels was found between males and females in the sample. The level of association is so low as to be insignificant.

Although sex does not seem to account for differences in status concerns, marital status does. Since marriage constitutes a major alternative for status satisfaction and reward, one would expect married males and females to show less status concern toward librarianship than single males and females. Differences in status concern levels would also be expected between married males and females. The identity of a married man, playing the role of "breadwin-

ner," is reinforced primarily by his career, whereas the identity of a married woman playing the role of "housewife and mother" is reinforced primarily in the home. Thus, the status concern level of married men should not vary significantly from that of single men, whereas married women should show lower professional status concern than single women. These predictions are borne out in the sample.

Tables 4 and 5 reveal that single men and women in the sample were more concerned about the status of their profession than were married men and women. As Table 4 confirms, there is a relatively low association in the predicted direction between married and single males and their status concerns. Table 5 reveals a moderate degree of association in the predicted direction, by indicating that single females are more concerned about their occupational status than are married females. It should be emphasized, however, that in terms of both Table 4 and Table 5 and of the variables used, the measures of status concern associated with marriage status and occupation are quite strong.

It has been assumed heretofore that the more a person identifies with his occupation, the more status concerned he will be about career and occupational matters. If this assumption is correct, single men and women should be more conscious of the importance of work in their lives than married males and females. This assumption was substantiated by the answers to: "What do you consider to be your chief satisfactions in life?" Tables 6 and 7 show the results. It can be seen that four out of fifteen, or 26.7 percent of the married men failed to mention their work as a chief satisfaction, while none of the single men failed to mention the importance of work in their lives. Four out of five, or 80 percent of the married females failed to mention work as a chief satisfaction, whereas only five out of 12,

TABLE 4

MARRIAGE STATUS AND STATUS CONCERN
LEVEL: MALES

Males	Data Status Concern Level High	Mixed	Low	Total
Married	6	5	4	15
Single	4	1	2	7
Total	10	6	6	22

$\gamma = .1764$ ideal case $\gamma = .1429$

TABLE 5

MARRIAGE STATUS AND STATUS CONCERN
LEVEL: FEMALES

Females	Data Status Concern Level High	Mixed	Low	Total
Married	1	3	1	5
Single	7	2	3	12
Total	8	5	4	17

$\gamma = .3333$ ideal case $\gamma = .4000$

TABLE 6

MALES AND PLACE OF WORK IN LIFE

Males	Place of Work in Life First	Second	Third	Fourth	Not Mentioned	Tot.
Married	2	8	0	1	4	15
Single	3	1	3	0	0	7
Total	5	9	3	1	4	22

TABLE 7

FEMALES AND PLACE OF WORK IN LIFE

Females	Place of Work in Life First	Second	Third	Fourth	Not Mentioned	Tot.
Married	0	0	1	0	4	5
Single	4	2	0	1	5	12
Total	4	2	1	1	9	17

TABLE 8

WORK ALTERNATIVES AND STATUS CONCERN
LEVEL

Work Alternatives	Data Status Concern Level High	Mixed	Low	Total
Could leave	3	3	4	10
Mixed	3	4	3	10
Couldn't leave	11	5	3	19
Total	17	12	10	39

$\gamma = .3250$ ideal case $\gamma = .5714$

or 41.7 percent of the single women failed to mention it.

Although not presented here, a separate analysis revealed that the more status concerned librarians are, the more likely they are to mention work as a chief satisfaction in life. This finding tends to support the assumption that the more important an alternative behavior is for an individual, the more status concerned he will be concerning that status satisfaction alternative. In short, this means that a librarian who perceives his work as important will be status concerned about it.

Some librarians feel they could, if they wanted to, leave the profession via either lateral or upward mobility. Others feel that it would be extremely difficult to leave librarianship for some other occupation or profession, or feel they simply would not want to leave librarianship. Since a person's occupation constitutes a major source of status satisfaction, he can be expected to place even greater emphasis upon it if he feels that other occupational alternatives are unavailable to him. If this is the case, he will experience closure and his status concerns should increase. The data presented in Table 8 support this assumption, and indicate a relatively moderate association in the predicted direction. The ideal type analysis reveals a relatively strong association with a gamma of .5714 in the predicted direction. When a librarian wishes to leave the profession, but sees few status reward alternatives open to him, his status concerns with reference to librarianship increase.

The most highly status concerned librarian, then, will tend to be a young, single male or female librarian who perceives few available career alternatives. The least status concerned librarian, according to the data collected, will tend to be an older married woman who sees many equal or preferable work alternatives available to her. Other categories

of librarians will tend to fall somewhere in between these status concern extremes.

A variety of factors affects the amount of status concern an individual has with regard to his occupation or career. But the question remains as to the effect a person's status concerns has upon the professionalization of his occupation. Earlier in this paper it was confirmed that the higher the status concerns of an individual, the more concerned he will be with the professionalization of his occupation. One indication of a person's professional concern is reflected in his view of the importance of professional associations, and his relation to it. There is a direct relationship between how much control a person exercises over his own professional affairs and the way he views himself, or is viewed by his peers, as a professional.

In the interview, the librarians were asked, "How important are professional associations for the library profession?" Table 9 shows that the librarians were expressing themselves in the expected direction with a strongly moderate association reflected by a gamma of −.4639. The ideal type case analysis gamma is a somewhat strong association, and lends additional support to the anticipated trend. High status concerned librarians are more likely to regard library associations as important than low status concerned librarians.

The librarians were also asked, "Should professional associations be more important for the library profession?" Table 10 reveals the expected association between the status concern level of a librarian and the probability of his feeling that professional associations should be more important.

The answers to the preceding two questions indicate a substantial correlation between status concerns and the degree to which an individual emphasizes his professional associations.

The second and perhaps more important indicator of an individual's professional concern is predicated upon the issue of autonomy. The librarians were asked, "Should librarians have more control over their own affairs?" Table 11 indicates the responses. A high degree of association is found, with relatively high −.6996 gamma level of association and with an extremely high −.9047 ideal type case gamma level of association. It does appear to be true that a high status concerned librarian is more likely to value autonomy than a low status concerned librarian.

Although only limited measures are used to judge an individual's professional emphasis, status does seem to be a very important factor in the professionalization of one's occupation. High status concerned librarians tend to be more professionalized than low status concerned librarians.

A status concerned individual is not only likely to perceive conflict regarding

TABLE 9

STATUS CONCERN LEVEL AND
IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

| Status Concerns | Data Library Associations | | Total |
	Important	Unimportant	
High	17	1	18
Mixed	10	1	11
Low	8	2	10
Total	35	4	39

$\gamma = -.4639$ ideal case $\gamma = -.6190$

TABLE 10

STATUS CONCERN LEVEL AND "SHOULD
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS BE MORE
IMPORTANT?"

| Status Concerns | Data Should Professional Associations Be More Important? | | Total |
	Yes	No	
High	13	5	18
Mixed	8	3	11
Low	5	5	10
Total	26	13	39

$\gamma = -.2857$ ideal case $\gamma = -.4444$

the issue of autonomy, but also to be concerned about a conflict situation. This is particularly likely if he perceives himself as meriting higher status. At the university studied, a host of factors evidenced that, with regard to status, university administrators explicitly and implicitly considered librarians to be second-class citizens in comparison to the faculty. When the study was conducted, several strong implicit differences in status did appear to exist among many librarians and faculty members. If an individual librarian is to improve his status, he must gain fac-

TABLE 11

STATUS CONCERN LEVEL AND
WANT MORE AUTONOMY

Status Concerns	Data Want More Autonomy		
	Yes	No	Total
High	15	3	18
Mixed	10	1	11
Low	2	8	10
Total	27	12	39

$\gamma = -.6996$ ideal case $\gamma = -.9047$

TABLE 12

STATUS CONCERN LEVEL AND
CONFLICT WITH FACULTY

Status Concerns	Data Conflict with Faculty		
	High	Low	Total
High	14	4	18
Low	4	6	10
Total	18	10	28

$\gamma = -.6800$

TABLE 13

STATUS CONCERN LEVEL AND
MENTIONED FACULTY STATUS DIFFERENTIAL

Status Concerns	Data Mentioned Faculty Status Differential		
	Yes	No	Total
High	8	10	18
Low	1	9	10
Total	9	19	28

$\gamma = -.7560$

ulty status at both an explicit and implicit level.

The librarians in the study were asked, "What are some of the persistent sources of difficulty that librarians feel in relationship to the faculty?" Since there is a need for distinctiveness only the answers of the high and low status concerned librarians will be considered. It was found that the low status concerned librarians reported relatively little difficulty with the faculty. Among them, two mentioned no conflict, one remembered only one instance of conflict, three indicated minor complaints, and one librarian indicated concern about not "being accepted as equal members of the faculty." The low status concerned librarians' answers to this question ranged in length from twenty to eighty-six words, with an average length of forty-five words.

In response to the same question, the high status concerned librarians answers were longer, more detailed, and expressed more status concern than those of the low status concerned librarians. All the high status concerned librarians mentioned conflict with faculty; quite a few answers were very strong, eight answers were distinctly longer than the low status concerned librarians' mean answer, and only four were relatively moderate. The range in length was from twenty-five to 230 words, with an average length of seventy-eight words.

High status concerned librarians reported more conflicts with faculty than low status concerned librarians. Table 12 classifies their responses in quantitative form. A very high association is indicated by a gamma of –.6800.

Responses are classified in Table 13 in terms of those which clearly referred to the relationship between the conflict problem and the status differentials between librarians and faculty. An extremely strong association with a –.7560 gamma level of association is revealed in the predicted direction. Status con-

cerns do appear to have an important bearing on explaining the presence of reported conflict between librarians and faculty, and conflict does seem to be engendered, or at least perceived, to the extent that librarians try to improve their status.

Status concerns, then, do seem to be an important social-psychological determinant of professionalization. The trend toward professionalization does relate to status concerns and to the absence of alternative status rewards, just as professional and occupational enhancement is inversely related to the openness of a social system as perceived by an individual.

Additional research and closer analysis should be devoted to this topic. Larger samples need to be gathered and stud-

ied so that stronger experimental controls can be exerted. Questions relating to the relationship between the location of an individual within an organization and the effect this has upon status concerns need to be examined. A large-scale organizational environment tends to hamper the working professional's personal autonomy. High status concerns and personal conflicts are probably characteristic of any professional-centered, large-scale organization, but this assumption cannot be substantiated without hard facts. Collecting these data would be a challenging undertaking, and one well worth our effort.

REFERENCES

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2. See Robert K. Merton, M. Fiske, and P. L. Kendall, *The Focused Interview* (New York: The Free Press, 1956).
3. For an explanation, see Leo A. Goodman and William Kruskal, "Measures of Association for Cross Classification, I," *Journal of American Statistical Association* 49:732–64 (Dec. 1954).