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# **Do Catholic High Schools Influence Trinity Female Students' Aspirations?**

**By: Ann Mary Lukas**

Educational Studies/Senior Seminar 400  
Senior Research Project Paper  
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**Research question:**

*Do Catholic white female Trinity College freshmen who attended a Catholic high school vs. Catholic white female Trinity College freshmen who attended a non-Catholic high school, have lower or higher occupational aspirations? Lower or higher occupational aspirations are defined in terms of their level of status, respect, and skill involved concerning a type of occupation, whether it is considered a job or career.*

**Case for its Significance:**

Leslie J. Francis, author of “The psychology of gender differences in religion: a review of empirical research” has an interesting article that examines numerous empirical studies concerning gender differences within religion. In the article it states that males of all classes in western society are socialized to believe that aggression and drive are positive orientations, in contrast, females are socialized to emphasize gentleness, submission, and conflict resolution, which are values that the church emphasizes (Francis, pg 82). Within gender roles socialization, parent and child interactions generally place greater emphasis on religious believes and conformity concerning girls rather than with boys. Men and women have different social roles, for instance, men are known to hold economic roles within society and women are seen to be involved in the family atmosphere and expected to be more church oriented. Women are known to be the prime teachers of their children concerning morals (Francis, pg 83). As a result of these different kinds of demands women who are religious are less likely to be a part of the “ongoing secular world,” in terms of out of home employment (Francis, pg 83). There are women that seek comfort from religion due to their little involvement within the work place. As a consequence they do not have any types of social contacts outside of their religion and tend to avoid competitiveness within the work place. There has been interesting data collected

which demonstrates that women who work full time out side of the home are less religious then women who are full time house wives (Francis, pg 84).

Within Francis's article there is statistical evidence, although the significance of it is unknown, that shows women who have full time careers are less likely to attend church, in contrast to women that work part time or do not work at all. Among full-time workers 55% of women attend church on a regular basis, 62% of part-time workers attend church, and 67% of female non-workers attend church (Francis, pg 85). There was a study done by Morgan and Scanzoni (1987) that surveyed three hundred and twenty five female college students and found that through their current religious believe, practice, and strength that it predicted their intentions to pursue a career or not (Francis, pg 85). One can conclude that religion and the practices and believes that relate to it have a direct correlation to whether or not a female will concentrate on her family or her career. Could there be then a correlation between the religious education within Catholic high schools and the female students' occupational aspirations, in contrast to females that have not had the extra religious emphasis throughout high school and their occupational aspirations?

There have been several articles that criticize the Catholic religion because it holds back progress and it oppresses women, such as within the article "Let's stick up for our imperfect Church," by Kevin Doyle. Patrick T. McCormick author of "Who's afraid of women in leading roles?" explains that there are sexist flaws within Catholicism and that women are shaped in the image and likeness of God and that Catholics are reminded this through the church.

There have been studies performed concerning the "hidden curriculum" and how it

results in controlling the children's physical and vocal actions within the school environment. For instance, Karin Martin designed and performed research on the concept of how "bodily differences are constructed." She observed preschool children within the classroom and found that the hidden curriculum creates gender socialization, which appears and feels to be a natural behavior (Martin, p.494). This unknown type of discipline is a means of social control, which separates the physical differences of both the young girls and boys, and which in turn prepares them for the social gender based world (Martin, p.495).

Through her research Martin claims that within the school atmosphere teachers play a significant role in gender socialization. This continues throughout high school and even in college. As a result the girls are not encouraged to be confident or assertive, which results in a lack of positive self-esteem, stated by Whitney Brown, author of *Educating America's Women*. Gender socialization is not only influenced by the school environment, family, and media, every day interactions with peers also influences gender socialization. Could Catholic high schools have a greater affect on female students due to the religious practice within school and the strict believes that are taught? For instance, Catholic high schools and the Catholic religion stress the importance of family and unity, therefore, the subjects would be less concerned with their career aspirations and more concerned with their family. Could this possibly alter a female students future occupational aspirations? These are several questions in which this study intends to question and intends to answer.

Anne Machung, author of "Talking Career, Thinking Job: Gender differences in Career and Family Expectations of Berkeley Seniors", studies Berkeley seniors to find out whether men and women share the ideas of equality in the home (house cleaning, taking care of the children,

etc.). Which spouse's career has greater importance? Is family of equal importance? Are career choices and attributes of the career or job the same? What she found was women felt that money was secondary to personal satisfaction concerning their jobs. They tend to define the success at work in less terms of advancement, high salaries, and prestige, and more so in terms of helping others and enjoying their work. The senior Berkeley women also already considered to leave their jobs to have children and support their husbands (Machung, pg 41).

Does religious education play a role in how females are influenced within education concerning their career aspirations? I would like to further build on such existing studies. I will narrow my study to two groups of women. The first group would consist of Catholic white Trinity College freshman females who attended Catholic High School and the second group would consist of Catholic white Trinity College freshman female students who did not attend a Catholic High School. The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not these two groups of women would have different occupational aspirations or not.

The topic of whether or not religious education within high schools effect women's occupational aspirations has a direct correlation with the concept of whether they have lower, more family oriented goals in contrast to the women who did not attend a Catholic school. If the out come is that the women who graduated from a Catholic high school have lower occupational aspirations, which could relate to the values and practices of the Catholic religion within religious education, then those women are being restricted educationally. They are also being socialized with greater gender restrictions due to the religious beliefs.

**Working Thesis:**

The Catholic white female Trinity College freshman who have attended a Catholic high

school will have lower career aspirations and the Catholic religion will influence their daily lives. In contrast, the Catholic white female Trinity College freshman who have attended a non-Catholic high school will have higher career aspirations and not have the Catholic religion play as large a role in their everyday lives.

### **Methodology:**

The primary sources for this research project consist of eight-selected Catholic white female Trinity College freshmen who attended a non-Catholic high school, eight selected Catholic white female Trinity College freshmen who attended a Catholic high school, and eight female Trinity College freshmen to serve as a control group. These students were selected by the following attributes: being Catholic, female, white in race, attending a four-year Catholic or non-Catholic High School, and being a freshman at Trinity College. For this study it did not matter if the non-Catholic high school students came from a public or private school, it was not a variable that I was looking at. I received a list of female freshman at Trinity College that identified as being Catholic, this information was produced by Reverend Raymond Smialowski at the on campus church. Reverend Raymond obtained these freshmen's names in several ways, first, he sent out post cards in June and July to the up and coming freshmen at their homes the post card asked them to identify their religion and if they would like to be on the mailing list (concerning religious activities and events, etc.). During the first and second weeks in September he sent out additional post cards to students asking the same questions. Finally, Reverend Raymond looked in the student handbook for students that had not yet filled out the card that came from a Catholic high school and sent them another post card to fill out. Out of all the students that responded to the post cards and that attended church the first several weeks of the fall semester a list was

created of identified Catholic female freshmen.

To determine what type of high school these students attended I reviewed the 2001-2002 Trinity College Student Handbook, where I found what type of high school the graduated from. As a result there were ten students that graduated from a Catholic high school and twenty-nine that graduated from a non-Catholic high school. Eight out of the ten students that graduated from a Catholic high school were randomly picked and interviewed and eight students out of the twenty-nine were picked at random as well. I also went through the student handbook to randomly pick eight female freshmen students for the control group. To randomly select eight students within each of the three groups, I wrote all of their names on a piece of paper, that were then placed into a bowl, the first eight names pulled out were the students that I would interview that were from a non-Catholic high school, Catholic high school, and general female freshmen. I also referred to the Trinity College Student Handbook to see from where these students came from to see if possibly the reason for there responses might be due the attitude of where they came from. For instance, students that come from the west coast might have liberal responses, unlike the students that come from the east coast their responses might be more conservative. Their location of where they live might possibly play a role in their values and aspirations.

The students were all contacted by phone and asked to participate within a research project concerning occupational aspirations. I asked the same exact question to all the students, as follows, “Hello, my I please speak to \_\_\_\_\_. Hi, My name is Ann; I’m a senior at Trinity College and I’m doing a senior research project on occupational aspirations here at Trinity College. Would you be able to answer several questions? It only takes ten minutes! I’ll be in Mather by the Cave sitting at one of the tables (agreed on a time). Great, see you then.” Since



only 50% of the participants met me at the agreed upon time I choose to be more direct with my interviews. I choose to go directly to the interviewee's rooms. I said the exact same introduction as I did on the phone, although I did not ask what time would be good for them to do the interview because that is what I was there to do. I had greater success by going to the individuals dorms then by telephoning them and making appointment times to meet.

I made sure that the area that I was conducting the interviews in was not noisy place and that there weren't a lot of people around so that there weren't any distractions. Once the participants arrived (at different times, separately) at the meeting place I introduced myself and then handed the participants a consent form to fill out. This consent form must be filled out by all participants due to The Institutional Review Board at Trinity College and their guidelines that the experimenter must follow. After the participants filled out the form I asked if they had any questions and then proceeded with the interview. I then told them that the following index cards with professions written on them would be used for one of the following questions. The index cards were laid out in the same order for all participants. The cards were laid out in two rows of five, the top row (from left to right) consisted of the professions: Nurse, Doctor, House Wife, Lawyer, and Archaeological Assistant. The second row consisted of (from left to right): Paralegal, Vice President, Teacher, Owner of a Business, and Secretary. I also asked if they wouldn't mind having the interview tape-recorded, then I turned the recorder on and performed the interviews. Afterwards, I thanked them for their participation and proceeded with the next participant. After the second interview with two participants that had graduated from a Catholic high school it was brought to my attention that Archaeological Assistant was spelled wrong, so that card was redone with the correct spelling. Once the interviews were completed they were put into transcripts and then the information was then transferred onto a spreadsheet. I coded the

participants by capital letters so as to not disclose their names.

In order for myself to evaluate the information provided by the students, especially questions concerning question number two (If you had to pick one of the following laid out occupations, which would you choose to be and why?), with as little bias as possible I chose to hand out questionnaires. I went to Mather and handed out twenty questionnaires to random students. Within the questionnaire I asked the students to rate the ten occupations, which I used within my second question of my interview. They had to rate them in terms of their generally perceived status, respect, and skill. They also rated them on a scale from one to four (one: low occupational status, two: fair occupational status, three: moderate occupational status, four: high occupational status). Once I gathered all of the information I evaluated them by what type of score that each occupation received. For instance, the occupation of a doctor nobody rated it as a number one, ten students rated it as two, one student rated it as being three, and eighteen students rated it as being a number four. I took how many students chose each rating and multiplied that number by the number rating they gave. For example, since eighteen students chose a four rating for a doctor, I multiplied eighteen by four, which equaled seventy-two. I did this four all of the occupations and then added all of the ratings to conclude in which occupations were seen as high status occupations and which were considered low status occupations. The top four occupations that ranked as high status were doctor, lawyer, vice president, and owner of a business. The six other occupations ranked lower on the scale were paralegal, archeological assistant, nurse, teacher housewife, and secretary.

I chose seventeen questions to ask the students, which related to religion and their possible future occupation. I asked the questions in a specific order to obtain as much direct

information about the two main concepts: religion and occupational aspirations. Within the second and most important question of which of the occupations they would choose out of the ten, I chose those occupations because I wanted to have several occupations that were in the same field, but with different titles, respect levels, skill, and status to choose from. For instance, I chose doctor and nurse to be two of the cards, they are both in the same field (medicine), although they have different titles, respect levels, skill, and status levels as well. By choosing those types of careers it was easier to identify a career as being higher or lower in comparison to each other. I did choose a career due to its level of interest, which was an archeological assistant because I felt that the other occupations that I chose might be seen as ordinary.

When all of the interviews were conducted each interview was listened to and only parts of the student's responses were then transcribed and put into spreadsheet format. Only parts of the responses were transcribed due to the specific information that I was looking for. For instance, within the first question (Do you see your self in a future career or job and why?), the importance of the questions was whether or not they chose to have a future career or job and the reasons for why were not that important. For other questions though the reasons were important, although I did not record when students reiterated their reasons.

The spreadsheet consists of all of the questions that were asked and the responses given by the students and an evaluation of the responses. There are three different comparisons to be made between the three groups. The first comparison is between the Catholic students that graduated from a non-Catholic high school and the control group, the second comparison is between Catholic students that graduated from a Catholic high school and the control group, the

third comparison is between Catholic students that graduated from a non-Catholic high school and Catholic students that graduated from a Catholic high school.

### **Interpretation and Analysis of Primary Source Evidence:**

There are several issues that need to be noted concerning the evidence. The evidence has a lack of statistical significance due to the limited amount of evidence. Since, I was only able to interview eight students within each group, a total of twenty-four students, statistically I needed to interview a greater number of students to be able to imply any type of casualties if any. Within the evaluation I will be identifying trends that I noticed and any correlations as well.

There are several questions that were significantly important to this study, therefore I will primarily focus on the following five questions: If you had to be one of the following occupations, which would you be and why? What would it mean for you to be a successful person and why? On a scale to one through five (one being the weakest and five being the strongest) how does your religious beliefs influence your decision-making or daily life? Do you attend church and how often? Do you consider yourself: very religious, moderately religious, somewhat religious, or not religious and why?

Within the first group, I compared Catholic students that graduated from a non-Catholic high school and the control group, I noticed numerous similarities and differences. For instance, six out of eight students (75%) chose a career of high occupational status, respect, and skill; in comparison, to five out of eight students (62%) that chose a career of high occupational status, respect, and skill. Although, there is a difference of one person it is still important due to the small number of students interviewed. Four out of eight (50%) of the non-Catholic high

school graduates chose careers that involved helping others and only one out of eight (12%) students in the control group chose a career to help others. Two out of eight (25%) students in the non-Catholic high school group mentioned having a family as part of being successful, in contrast to one out of eight (12%) students in the control group mentioning family as part of being successful. Five out of eight (62%) non-Catholic graduates stated that religion plays a medium to strong role in their everyday lives. In the control group one out of eight (12%) of students stated that religion plays a medium to strong role in their every day lives. Five out of eight (62%) non-Catholic students consider them selves as moderately to very religious; in contrast, two out of eight (25%) students in the control group consider them selves moderately to very religious. Two out of eight (25%) students from both groups attend church at least once a month.

The following evidence did not lend a great deal of significant evidence as the prior evidence. All eight students from both groups envision them selves as being successful in the future and they predict on majoring in a field that will lead them into their desired occupation. The amount of children that both groups predicted on having in the future were similar, six out of eight (75%) of the non-Catholic graduates said that they would consider on having three or more children, where five out of eight (62%) students in the control group would consider having three or more children. The students in both groups said that they would have children after they graduated college and started their occupations and that they would take some time off from work, but would return to their occupations after some time. The control group said that their school advisors did not aid them with any type of career assistance, direction, or persuasion. The non-Catholic graduates also did not feel that their school provided them with any career direction or persuasion. The schools that all sixteen students attended varied in their school or class

themes, from academics, sports, stressing the importance of attending college, to not having any types of themes emphasized. Another similarity that was noticed is that none of the schools that the two groups attended were religious in any manner. Although, five out of eight students within the control group said that they had negative experiences within high school and the students that were non-Catholic graduates had positive experiences, except for one student. This is an interesting difference, but I am unable to draw any type of correlation or conclusion from this evidence. The students in the control group varied in religious affiliation from being Jewish to Episcopalian, in contrast to the other group which were all Catholic. Their ages between the two groups were similar they varied from mainly eighteen to nineteen years of age. Geographically the two groups were similar in that seven out of eight students in the non-Catholic high school graduates group were from the northeast region and six out of eight students in the control group were from the northeast region, as well. Where the students were from did not contribute any type of correlation with any of the other evidence.

By looking at the evidence between the Catholics that graduated from a non-Catholic high school and the control group one can identify several similarities and differences of importance. For instance, the non-Catholic graduates have more students that have higher career aspirations, in contrast to the control group. The non-Catholic high school graduates have a stronger belief in their religion and the students in the control group do not. Although, both groups do have the same number of students attending church, which does not have any type of significant importance. By evaluating this evidence one can find a correlation between the students level of religious belief to their choice in a career of higher occupational status or not.

Within the second group, I compared Catholic students that graduated from a Catholic

high school and the control group. I noticed an even greater difference between the Catholic high school graduates and the control group, then in between Catholic students that graduated from a non-Catholic high school and the control group. For instance, four out of eight (50%) students from a Catholic high school chose a career of high occupational status, respect, and skill; in comparison, to five out of eight students (62%) that chose a career of high occupational status, respect, and skill. Although, there is a difference of one person it is still important due to the small number of students interviewed. Six out of eight (75%) of the Catholic high school graduates chose careers that involved helping others and only one out of eight (12%) students in the control group chose a career to help others. Four out of eight (50%) students in the Catholic high school group mentioned having a family as part of being successful, in contrast to one out of eight (12%) students in the control group mentioning family as part of being successful. Six out of eight (75%) Catholic graduates stated that religion plays a medium to strong role in their everyday lives. In the control group one out of eight (12%) of students stated that religion plays a medium to strong role in their every day lives. Six out of eight (75%) Catholic students consider them selves as moderately to very religious; in contrast, two out of eight (25%) students in the control group considers them selves moderately to very religious. Six out of eight (75%) Catholic high school graduates said that they attended church on a monthly basis and two out of eight (25%) students within the control group said that they attended church on a monthly basis. Students that graduated from a Catholic high school had to go to church and pray within high school on a daily basis, unlike the students within the control group that did not.

The following evidence did not lend a great deal of significant evidence as the prior evidence. All eight students from both groups envision themselves as being successful in the

future and they predict on majoring in a field that will lead them into their desired occupation. The amount of children that both groups predicted on having in the future were similar, six out of eight (75%) of the Catholic graduates said that they would consider on having three or more children, where five out of eight (62%) students in the control group would consider having three or more children; this was similar to the first group comparison. The students in both groups said that they would have children after they graduated college and started their occupations and that they would take some time off from work, but would return to their occupations after some time. The control group said that their school advisors did not aid them with any type of career assistance, direction, or persuasion. The Catholic graduates also did not feel that their school provided them with any career direction or persuasion. The schools that all the Catholic students graduated from were Catholic, four out of eight (50%) students said that unity, honesty, helping others, and team work (all attributes of the Catholic religion) were themes that were emphasized. Within the control group students attended varied in their school or class themes, from academics, sports, stressing the importance of attending college, to not having any types of themes emphasized. Although, five out of eight students within the control group said that they had negative experiences within high school and the students that were from Catholic high school had positive experiences. This is an interesting difference, but I am unable to draw any type of correlation or conclusion from this evidence. The students in the control group varied in religious affiliation from being Jewish to Episcopalian, in contrast to the other group which were all Catholic. Their ages between the two groups were similar they varied from mainly eighteen to nineteen years of age. Geographically the two groups varied. Three out of eight students were from the northeast region in contrast to six out of eight students in the control group that were from the northeast region. Where the students were from did not contribute any type of



correlation with any of the other evidence.

By looking at of the evidence between the Catholics that graduated from a Catholic high school and the control group one can identify numerous differences. For instance, the Catholic graduates have fewer students that have higher career aspirations, in contrast to the control group. The Catholic high school graduates have a stronger belief in their religion and the students in the control group do not have as strong of beliefs. By evaluating this evidence the question arises, why are the high career aspirations lower in the students that have graduated from a Catholic high school when compared to the control group? There is a correlation between the student's level of religious belief and their choice in an occupation. If students have a stronger belief and practice in the Catholic religion, due to the extra influence within high school concerning the Catholic high school graduates, the lower occupation they will have. Also, if students have a weak belief and practice towards a religion then they will choose an occupation higher in status, skill, and respect.

Within the third group, I compared Catholic students that graduated from a Catholic high school and Catholic students that graduated from a non-Catholic high school. I noticed an interesting difference between both of the groups. For instance, four out of eight (50%) students from a Catholic high school chose a career of high occupational status, respect, and skill; in comparison, to six out of eight students (75%) that chose a career of high occupational status, respect, and skill. Although, there is a difference of only two people it is still important due to the small number of students interviewed. Six out of eight (75%) of the Catholic high school graduates chose careers that involved helping others and four out of eight (50%) non-Catholic high school graduate students chose a career to help others. Four out of eight (50%) students in

the Catholic high school group mentioned having a family as part of being successful, in contrast to two out of eight (25%) students from a non-Catholic high school mentioning family as part of being successful. Six out of eight (75%) Catholic graduates stated that religion plays a medium to strong role in their everyday lives. In the non-Catholic high school graduates group five out of eight (62%) of students stated that religion plays a medium to strong role in their every day lives. Six out of eight (75%) Catholic students consider them selves as moderately to very religious; in contrast, five out of eight (62%) non-Catholic high school graduates consider them selves moderately to very religious. Six out of eight (75%) Catholic high school graduates said that they attended church on a monthly basis and two out of eight (25%) students within the non-Catholic high school graduates group said that they attended church on a monthly basis.

The following evidence did not lend a great deal of significant evidence as the prior evidence. All eight students from both groups envision themselves as being successful in the future and they predict on majoring in a field that will lead them into their desired occupation. The amount of children that both groups predicted on having in the future were similar, six out of eight (75%) of the Catholic graduates said that they would consider on having three or more children and six out of eight (75%) students that were non-Catholic graduates would consider having three or more children, as well. The students in both groups said that they would have children after they graduated college and started their occupations and that they would take some time off from work, but would return to their occupations after some time. The Catholic high school graduates and non-Catholic high school graduates said that their school advisors did not aid them with any type of career assistance, direction, or persuasion. Four out of eight (50%) Catholic high school graduate students said that unity, honesty, helping others, and team work (all attributes of the Catholic religion) were themes that were emphasized within their school.

The non-Catholic graduate students schools varied in their school themes, from academics, sports, stressing the importance of attending college, to not having any types of themes emphasized. Both groups had positive experiences at their high schools. Students that graduated from a Catholic high school had to go to church and pray within high school on a daily basis, unlike the non-Catholic graduates that did not. Their ages between the two groups were similar they varied from mainly eighteen to nineteen years of age. Geographically the two groups varied three out of eight (37%) Catholic high school graduate students were from the northeast region. In comparison, seven out of eight (87%) non-Catholic students were from the northeast region.

By looking at of the evidence between the Catholics that graduated from a Catholic high school and the Catholic students that graduated from a non-Catholic high school there are several correlations to be made. When looking at the level of religious practice and belief the Catholic high school graduates have a higher percent of practice and belief, such as, more students go to church at least once a month. In contrast, the non-Catholic high school graduates have a lower level of practice and belief, for instance, fewer students think of them selves as moderately to very religious and do not think that religion plays a medium to strong role in their lives. Since there is a greater influence and practice of the Catholic religion within a Catholic high school there is a relation between the level and amount of practice and influence of the religion to how one embraces the Catholic religion, whether it be strongly or loosely. The Catholic high school graduates have a lower percent of students that chose careers of high status, respect, and skill, in contrast to the non-Catholic graduates. A correlation can be made in that the students from a Catholic high school have lower career aspirations due to the extra religious education emphasized throughout the Catholic high schools. In terms of the non-Catholic high

school graduate students they have higher career aspirations in correlation to their lower level of religious education, which in turn results in the lower levels of practice and belief.

### **Conclusion:**

Given the narrow scope of this preliminary research study, I cannot definitively conclude that my thesis has been proven. However, the evidence does begin to show a correlation affirming my thesis in that, Catholic white female Trinity College freshmen who have attended a Catholic high school have lower career aspirations and that the Catholic religion does have an influence in their daily lives. In contrast, the Catholic white female Trinity College freshmen who have attended a non-Catholic high school have higher career aspirations and do not have the Catholic religion plays as large a role in their everyday lives.

### **Furthering the Research:**

Through this study I have identified several correlations between religious education and students' aspirations. Knowing that I could only identify the correlations noticed due to the lack of a greater sampling of students and not any type of causalities noticed, this is where the study could be furthered. By interviewing a greater number of students within all three groups, significant statistical data could then be recorded and noted as such. In order to conclude in what variable actually could cause Catholic students to have lower career aspirations one would have to look at the larger picture beyond education. For instance, possibly a student's family, peers, teachers, media, or economic background could have an influence. There are many variables concerning this research and topic that there would not be one way of furthering the research, there would be many.

Within my research there could have been improvements made to my study in order to make it more convincing. For example, an outside person could have performed the interviews without knowing what the research was about. This would have reduced the amount of bias within my study.

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