Sisters at Work : Career and Community Changes

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This article examines occupational differentiation of American Catholic sisters both prior to and following the Second Vatican Council. The pre- Vatican II era is characterized in terms of mechanical solidarity such that a common group identity and culture based on work is shared. By contrast, apostolic sisters of the post-Vatican II period seem to exemplify the concept of organic solidarity; there is more variation with regard to occupations and life-style. The analysis focuses on the life histories of sisters residing in South Texas. In particular, the analysis relates the diversification in their careers to changes in their ideology and lifestyle, and the changing demographic and financial status of their congregations. We suggest that the diversification of occupational choices among sisters parallels that of working women more generally.

Sisters at Work

CAREER AND COMMUNITY CHANGES

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The changing relationship between occupations and consecrated religious life has received little attention in the social science literature. This article examines the changing occupational identities of American Catholic sisters both prior to and following the Second Vatican Council.[1] As the occupational choices broaden, they are

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accompanied by changes in the ideology, lifestyle, and demographic and financial status of apostolic religious congregations.[2] In short, such congregations are becoming less formal and debureaucratized. The "careers" of apostolic sisters are of particular interest to both women's studies and occupational specialization because of the sisters' lack of attachment to a mate and offspring. Nevertheless, constraints on occupational choices could potentially be imposed by the religious congregations and ecclesiastical authorities. Thus the analysis centers on the ways in which apostolic sisters have adapted to balance career with ideology and lifestyle over time.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Durkheim's concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity (1964) are useful heuristic devices for contrasting the pre- and post-Vatican II periods and the two categories of women religious—contemplative and apostolic. Mechanically solidary societies are unified by maintaining the common beliefs and practices of a particular group through the minimization of differences among individuals. Mechanical solidarity seems best to describe the contemplative life of cloistered nuns both before and after Vatican II, as well as the life of apostolic sisters prior to Vatican II. Whether a nun worked as part of a self-sufficient farming establishment or a sister was one of many grammar school teachers working in a given locale, both functioned as part of an integrated group and performed similar tasks. Within a congregation, the division of labor was determined by age—novices or elderly sisters might perform different tasks—and by rank, with superiors carrying out administrative functions.

The most important division of labor prior to Vatican II occurred among the apostolic congregations, most of which specialized in particular types of work.[3] The Dominicans of Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur of Boston, Massachusetts, and the Sisters of the Holy Ghost of San Antonio, Texas, are examples of congregations that were primarily involved in Catholic grammar school teaching. Other works were undertaken to provide Catholic immigrants with "institutions of social welfare—hospitals, homes for the aged and handicapped, orphanages, etc." (Gottemoeller, 1980: 23). The Religious Sisters of Mercy of the Union of St. Louis, Missouri, and the Servants of Mary of Ladysmith, Wisconsin, were active in nursing and hospital administration. The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were the first to open a school for the care of the mentally

retarded. Individual sisters, however, did not choose their occupations. Their personal "vocation" was to be a member of a religious congregation while the congregation's "mission" was to engage in certain types of work or ministry.

Organic solidarity seems to be a better description of apostolic sisters in the post-Vatican II era, for there is a greater interdependence of roles and a highly complex division of labor. A sister's vocation is defined in more occupationally based terms, much as working laywomen may regard their jobs. Within the congregations there is more variation and diversification of tasks and occupations. Indeed, in many cases there is permanent attachment to the secular, paid labor force. Similarly, the goals of religious congregations are no longer focused on one or two ministries (such as the administration and functioning of schools and hospitals), but, rather, have been broadened to include a wider range of possibilities reflecting the sisters' individual talents and interests.[4]

As sisters' occupations become more diverse, so too do their social and work-related networks. No longer are their social contacts confined to those associated with the local parish, school, or hospital. Instead, their networks expand into areas of work that are not necessarily connected to the Church. Membership in professional and social service oriented organizations tends to be an outgrowth of the sisters' changing careers. Sisters become more mobile, frequently relocating at a distance from their motherhouse or principal convent. Close bonds tend to develop among those members of the sisters' living group, as well as with sisters residing nearby—whether from the same or a different congregation. As such, the new solidarity can be characterized largely as a result of the occupational options available to sisters today.

An analysis of the differentiation and transformation of sisters' work is of broader interest to social scientists because of the singular role sisters play as working women. From their origin, women's religious congregations provided an alternative institution to the family within which women could work and be nurtured. For many generations, sisters were among the few working women serving as role models for Catholic girls. Their work was legitimized by religious ideology, and closely monitored and tightly controlled by ecclesiastical authorities, and, in the mechanically solidary convents, there was little division of labor (see Ebaugh and Ritterband, 1978: 262; Johann, 1977: 9-25). Nevertheless, sisters were women who earned their own livings independently of husbands, fathers, and brothers. By the same token, the transformation of sisters' work from mechanical to organic solidarity offers some insight into the work choices facing contemporary women in the paid labor force. Although sisters do not balance families and

careers, the debureaucratization of sisters' congregations parallels, in many ways, the changing role of women within the labor force.

DATA AND METHODS

Research for this study was carried out in 1983 in the Catholic Diocese of Brownsville in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. This area of the country, the congregations represented in the sample, and the individual sisters interviewed for the study seem to be broadly representative of U.S. sisters. Recent data indicate that 34 religious congregations of women are active in this diocese. Four congregations are Mexican and no membership data are available for them. The remaining 30 congregations have 36,866 professed members throughout the U.S. (*Official Catholic Directory,* 1987)—or about one-third of all sisters in the United States.

Open-ended interviews lasting on the average 75 minutes were conducted with 30 sisters representing 11 congregations. These congregations have their motherhouses in 10 states, none of which is local to the Diocese of Brownsville. The 11 congregations are among the most numerous in the United States, together accounting for 29,204 professed members (or 26% of all U.S. sisters) (*Official Catholic Directory,* 1987). And, of those sisters currently residing in the Diocese of Brownsville, 79% are members of these 11 congregations (*Official Catholic Directory,* 1987).

Although the sample is not systematic, it does represent a large fraction of the diocese, since 18% of the sisters working in the diocese were interviewed. While the sisters' preferences may have been taken into account in their assignment to South Texas—for example, many of them are bilingual (English-Spanish)—a comparison of data from our sample with data from a national sample (Neal, 1984) suggests that our sample represents U.S. sisters more generally. Comparisons from this national sample are inserted at appropriate points in the discussion that follows. The life histories in our sample furnish data related to employment patterns, opportunities for education and training, and past and current lifestyle.

EXAMPLES OF CASES

Three very different histories give the flavor of the varied work experiences represented in the sample; the names used are fictitious. Sr.

Mary entered the congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame at the age of 18, nearly a decade before Vatican II. For 14 years she taught in Catholic elementary schools. In 1972 she undertook a year of study at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio. Following this training she accepted a job as the coordinator of Hispanic Affairs for the Catholic Conference in a midwestern state. Five years later she became the director of the migrant ministry program in the Diocese of Brownsville and remained in that position through 1983.

As a Sister of Mercy, Sr. Anne's first jobs were also in the teaching field. She was a Catholic elementary school teacher, then a teacher and school administrator, and finally a principal. Beginning in the mid-1970s she was involved in a variety of jobs: administrator and counselor within her congregation and diocesan education supervisor in a northern state. Next, she undertook a year of study in Guatemala and Honduras. From 1981 to 1983 she was employed as a pastoral assistant and, in conjunction with this job, she served as a volunteer coordinator of housing for Latin American refugees entering South Texas from Mexico.

Sr. Joan, a Sister of Charity, entered the convent during the Vatican II years. She worked first at an orphanage and later in social services at a psychiatric hospital. After completing a master's degree in social work, she served as director of Catholic Charities in an eastern coastal state. Later she worked as director of campus services at a Catholic college. During the mid-1970s she was a parish social worker, and thereafter an administrator of the United Farm Workers Union in South Texas.

These three examples illustrate the kinds of occupational changes that have taken place within American apostolic congregations in the last few decades. It is important to ask not only why such career changes have occurred, but how those changes articulate with the goals, ideology, and life-style of the congregations, and the congregations' changing demographic and financial status. In order to examine such issues, it is necessary to discuss the pre-Vatican II culture as described by the sisters and then contrast it with the gradually evolving culture of the post-Vatican II era.

FINDINGS

BACKGROUND OF THE SAMPLE BEFORE VATICAN II

The women in our sample entered into religious congregations while still in their teens, most having completed high school. This finding

corresponds to a 1966 national survey of sisters indicating that 79% of all entrants had a high school diploma, and that only 4% had completed a master's degree (Neal, 1984: 35). Twenty-five of the 30 sisters in our sample entered the convent before 1965, in classes averaging 32 in size. They remained in formation training (that is, the novitiate) for approximately two to three years. During this period, the major academic subjects included theology and topics in religious life; the latter was composed of the history and "charism" (or ideals and goals) of their congregation, the life-style of their congregation, spirituality, and the ideology surrounding what it meant to be a religious.

The formation training occurred at the congregation's motherhouse. Even in the apostolic congregations, the recent entrants (called postulants and novices) were cloistered and had no significant interaction with either the outside world or the "professed" sisters (other than the mistress of postulants or novices).[5] One sister stated, "We were neither in nor of the world." The courses were "structured" and the theology was "dogmatic." According to another sister, "Much of each day was spent in kitchen and cleaning duties since the professed sisters were already teaching. We were allowed only about one and one-half hours a day of free time." Formation encouraged mechanical solidarity in its emphasis on the similarities among sisters. Behavioral and attitudinal differences were more likely to be viewed as "problems" or ignored (San Giovanni, 1978; Hulme, 1957).

The formation training was preparation for the day when the novices would pledge to honor faithfully the three vows of the religious life: poverty, celibacy, and obedience.[6] The vow of poverty stressed a detachment from material possessions that might be an obstruction to one's ministry. It did not necessarily require that sisters refrain from paid employment. Celibacy was defined as the sacrifice of marriage, sexual relations, and childbearing. Obedience was defined within the hierarchical framework of God to mother superior to sister. Direct obedience to the mother superior was necessary because "She represented God's will expressed," stated one sister. "God talked to the superior and so the superior was always right," reported another. It was the duty of the sister to accept her word as final.

The hierarchical nature of the relationship between sister and mother superior, or novice and novice mistress, engendered a form of dependency of the sister on her congregation. From the young postulants to the professed sisters, the congregation took care of and managed their every need from additional educational training to health care and retirement. One sister pointed out that "you never even had to worry

about there being enough food because it was always provided." It was the individual sister's responsibility to "fit the mold" and conform to the preestablished life-style that allowed for little modification or individuality. "We were pegs to be put into holes," stated one sister.

Once trained in the religious teachings of the Church, some sisters received further training in their area of specialization, while others began working immediately thereafter. All of the pre-Vatican II trained sisters worked in some church-related type of employment, often at no pay or at wages that were substantially below the market rate. The majority of these jobs were in teaching—primarily at the grammar school level—or in some nursing capacity. In a 1966 survey, 70% of apostolic sisters were involved in teaching and nursing jobs and/or their administration (Neal, 1984: 24). The work of the sisters was institutionally based and the various congregations owned 20% of the places where the sisters worked; the remainder were owned by the local parish church (Neal, 1984: 28). The convent was conveniently located near their place of work. The school principal or hospital administrator was often the local mother superior (Neal, 1984: 53). All sisters, whether dressed in dark colors (teaching congregations) or white (nursing congregations and some missionary congregations), were committed to the primary occupational goals or mission of their congregations.

LIFE AND WORK AMONG SISTERS IN THE POST-VATICAN II ERA

In the year following the Second Vatican Council, there were 181,421 sisters in the United States (*Official Catholic Directory*, General Summary, 1966: 1). In that year, new entrants composed about 17% of the total membership, a percentage that was approximately equivalent to those over the age of 65 years (Neal, 1984: 19). By 1981, there were 122,653 sisters in the United States (*Official Catholic Directory*, General Summary, 1981: 1). Only 4% of the total membership in a 1981 survey were in the formation stage; by contrast, 38% of the sisters were over 65 years of age (Neal, 1984: 19). Over a 21-year period from 1966 to 1987, the number of professed Catholic sisters in the United States decreased 38%, dropping to 112,489 (*Official Catholic Directory*, General Summary, 1987: 1). These data suggest that women's religious congregations not only are unable to replace their older sisters (due to declining vocations and increasing numbers of sisters leaving the religious life since the Vatican II years,[7] but that they face financial challenges due to the smaller numbers of economically active sisters (a point discussed later).

The Second Vatican Council engendered a major restructuring and renewal within the Catholic church on issues such as social justice, ecumenism, and the role of the laity in church ministries.[8] Official church documents such as "Gaudium et Spes" (Joy and Hope, 1966), "Populorum Progressio" (On the Development of Peoples, 1967), and "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (On Evangelization in the Modern World, 1975) focus on the notion of work with a specific justice component. Such documents have contributed to a greater awareness within apostolic congregations of the needs of the poor. Changes in occupations or religious community characteristics did not occur immediately, but by the late 1960s and early 1970s, work, attitude, dress, and housing changes were apparent. (See the Appendix for the Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample in 1983.)

Changes in Recruitment and Formation

Five sisters in the sample entered the religious life after Vatican II. They averaged 25 years of age at the time of entry and thus were considerably older than their earlier counterparts when they entered the religious life. Before entering, three had obtained B.A. degrees, one had completed two years of college, and one had finished high school. These results parallel a 1982 survey in which entering candidates holding a master's degree had risen from 4% in 1966 to 41% in 1982, while those holding only a high school diploma had dropped from 79% in 1966 to only 12% in 1982 (Neal, 1984: 35). In addition, a new entry channel for candidates was created. Three of the five became associates prior to entrance; that is, they lived with professed sisters and took part in their daily activities but were still free to date, work, and study.

Formation training lasted about two years but entering class size dropped from a mean of 32 to 5. In addition, the focus and content of the formation courses changed. Greater emphasis was placed on individual freedom in living and expressing the life-style of a religious, on decisions arising from the consensus of the community and personal discernment rather than from the mother superior, and on ministries involving the low income and those identified by the sisters as the "marginalized" of society. Likewise, while pre-Vatican II sisters were not required to carry out a particular ministerial experience during their training, all of the post-Vatican II sisters did so. The ministerial experience accounted for up to one-half of their formation training and the emphasis shifted from practical teaching in general education to areas related to social services and religious education. No longer were the novices isolated from the outside world, but rather they were a significant part of it.

Changes in Ideology

At the termination of the novitiate, the sisters took their initial vows, known as "promises." While the vows remained the same, their definitions had been altered in keeping with the writings of the Second Vatican Council.[9] The stress in the definition of the vow of poverty prior to Vatican II centered on material possessions and the control of money. Following Vatican II, the vow has been defined according to two components: simplicity of life-style and dependency on God. With regard to the former, one sister stated, "We must live simply, not be caught up in commercialism and consumerism, and try to identify with the poor." Another indicated that the vow meant "a non-possessive attitude towards relationships" in which she could "share her time, ideas, thoughts and creativity." Concerning the second component, one sister reported, "It means being dependent on God for your whole life." A second noted, "There is a constant challenge to live with less. One must have faith that God will provide."

Chastity or celibacy prior to Vatican II was defined as the sacrificing of sexual relations, marriage, and childbearing. Since then the vow has come to be defined in a more positive light. One sister remarked, "Celibacy means loving people in a non-exclusive way. You don't want to love one person so much that it would block out any other possible relationships." Another sister suggested that "by not having a family, one can be free to serve and reach out to more people." Finally, a third indicated that to her celibacy signified "putting one's ministry and relationship with God first over any person or thing. This allows us the freedom to risk and move."

The vow that underwent the greatest change in definition was obedience. In contrast to the hierarchical model with control exercised by a mother superior, the model emphasized today is one of personal judgment with the advice of a community of colleagues. Today the focus rests on the individual's ability to communicate with her community (that is, her residential group or other sisters, including the provincial or mother superior) about any personal, spiritual, or work-related problems she may be experiencing. Through prayer and discernment, the sister then makes her own decision. In this way, "You are actively searching with others what God's will is because you are listening to God, yourself and others," stated one sister. Another pointed out, "If the superior suggests that I undertake a particular ministry, I feel that I can say no. I just realize that I am responsible and accountable to everyone else in the congregation."

Despite the fact that several sisters identified themselves as being in a very dependent relationship with God, in actuality they felt much better able to function as individuals and make their own decisions (that is, after a period of discernment with community members). They appeared to be more independent either as a result of the new formation programs that take into account individual needs, goals, and talents, and/or as a result of further training, updating, or work experience. The focus appeared to be centered on the "holistic development of the person and her relationship to the world, rather than on conformity," stated one sister. Another stressed that, "Now you can question and come to your own conclusions."

The sisters were asked how the Vatican II era had affected their lives personally in terms of restructuring their goals, ideas, and role in society. One sister stated that the renewal in the Church "redirected her ideas of what the Church should be about. We should be with and stand with others, not cloistered away from them." Another pointed out that "the Church is both within the world and in dialogue with the world and not separate from it." Consequently, "I was now responsible for more than my world of school kids." While a post-Vatican II sister stated that the council had opened up the whole area of social justice, two sisters trained before Vatican II responded differently. One reported, "My bent had always been towards ministries related to the poor. Now I could say aloud what I was doing and justify this work." The second stated frankly, "The Church finally caught up with me. My own beliefs that the Church respond to the poor in a more realistic way were confirmed."

Changes in Occupational Options

What kinds of occupational choices are being made by sisters in the post-Vatican II era? Of the 30 sisters in the sample, 13 are active in a parish or diocesan catechetics program, 7 are classified in social service/advocacy jobs, 4 are employed by the diocese in the areas of vocations, pastoral planning, and the media, 3 are involved in health care/administration, and 3 are active in teaching/administration. Perhaps what is most noticeable in these data is the decline in the classroom teaching and nursing professions and a rise in nontraditional careers; a 1982 survey documents this decrease as well (Neal, 1984: 24-27).[10]

A second point relates to the actual employers of these sisters. To the extent that sisters are employed by the Church, many now hold jobs previously held by priests (such as pastoral assistants, for example).

Thus a limited substitution of female for male labor is being tolerated, especially given the perceived shortage of priests.

In much the same way, the entry of women into the secular labor force during World War II was justified by the scarcity of men (Sullivan and Mutchler, 1985: 177-179; Oppenheimer, 1970: 10-19). Moreover, many sisters are no longer employed by the church at all. A little less than one-third of the sample is now employed in the public sector rather than by the Catholic church. These findings suggest occupational diversification as well as a declining reliance on Catholic institutions for jobs and earnings.

Finally, with reference to the new movement toward social justice concerns, the job classifications of this sample may obscure more than they reveal. The Diocese of Brownsville contains some of the poorest counties in Texas with some of the highest proportions of agricultural wage laborers, migrants in particular. Over two-thirds of the sisters in their daily jobs have very frequent contact with low-income Hispanic households. "Our clientele has changed. Now we work more with Hispanics," stated one sister. Another reported, "Our approach has changed. We feel we're returning to our roots of the Sisters of Mercy by being with and for the needs of the people."

Changes in Life-Style

Along with the ideological and work-related changes came a number of life-style changes (see San Giovanni, 1978), two of which are discussed here. First, the sisters' habit was modified and later, in the majority of cases, replaced by street clothes. Only two of the sisters in the sample wear a habit today—a modified version; both are Mexican American and work at the diocesan shrine. Why would such a symbol be lost? The sisters feel that while the habit is a form of identification that they are representatives of the church, it signifies not who they are but rather what they are. When clothed in this fashion, the individual represents the Church, not necessarily herself as a unique person.[11]

The sisters reported that while members of the laity respect the habit, their behavior is inhibited by it. "People act in a certain way towards the sister who is in habit and they do not express themselves openly," pointed out one sister. "In effect, it establishes distance." By not wearing the habit the sisters stated that relationships are established more quickly and communication is facilitated. "We are seen as more ordinary people rather than people set apart and placed on a pedestal,"

added another. "No longer can we hide behind the habit because it does not make us anymore," reported a third.

A second factor with respect to life-style concerns housing arrangements. Prior to Vatican II, sisters lived in convents. In 1966 there were more than 12,000 convents, of which about one-sixth were owned by religious congregations (Neal, 1984: 42). Of the 181,421 sisters in the United States then (*Official Catholic Directory*, General Summary, 1966: 1), about 14-15 sisters on average lived in each of these convents (Neal, 1984: 42). Due in part to the decline in membership and the diversification of employment into new areas distant from these convents, many of today's working sisters tend to live in smaller residential units, some with members of other congregations (Neal, 1984: 43, 48).[12] Of the 30 sisters in the sample, 6 live alone, 11 live with 1 other sister, 6 live with 2 other sisters, and 7 live in groups of 4 sisters. In most cases the sisters live with members of their own congregation. A smaller living group tends to promote a greater amount of individuality and tends to be more adaptive to nontraditional work opportunities that are no longer conveniently located adjacent to the sisters' residences. With regard to the larger sense of community, it is now primarily up to the individual sister to maintain contacts with her motherhouse and coordinate her schedule with that of any particular activities of her congregation.

Let us return briefly to the three sisters introduced earlier in this article to see how they are attempting to balance their career with ideology and life-style. Sr. Mary, a 45-year-old sister, leaves her three-room apartment each day at about 8:00 a.m. Her job as director of the migrant ministry program in the diocese is administrative to a large degree, yet she spends each morning making home visits to migrant households, both in her town and in outlying rural settlements. She usually wears a skirt and blouse. The only identifying symbol of the religious life is a pin in the form of a cross attached to her lapel. In the mornings she drives her car (which is owned by the diocese) to four or five homes, spending about 45 minutes with each family. Because she has been involved in this type of work for five years, most of the local families are accustomed to seeing her and welcome her unhesitatingly. She spends the time talking with them (in Spanish) about any family problems, and often acts as a referral for these families to various government and nonprofit agencies which are better equipped to deal with their problems. She describes her work as "outreach."

Sr. Anne became a pastoral assistant in 1981 at the age of 59. For the last two years she has kept busy with teaching in a parish religious

education program, home visits, and refugee work. She shares these tasks with another sister who lives with her in the original convent of the parish. Sr. Anne dresses in street clothes and wears a cross around her neck. Because her Spanish-speaking ability is limited, she is usually accompanied by a Mexican-American laywoman when doing home visitations. In her words the intention of such visits is "to get in touch with the periphery of the parish and to let them know that we care about them." In addition, she and her living companion spend much time arranging for the food and housing needs of El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran refugees who have not yet been apprehended or who are awaiting trial. She is also involved in what she terms "jail ministry," whereby she visits the local county jail weekly and spends time talking with the inmates.

Sr. Joan often has been described as one of the most atypical sisters. She wears pants, drives an old Chevy, smokes, and is one of the most well-known individuals in South Texas among townspeople, politicians, and the Church alike. At the age of 42 she came to work at the United Farm Workers Union as a social worker and administrator. There she plays a major role in planning and carrying out a wide variety of union activities with the intention of raising political consciousness. During each session of the Texas legislature she lobbies in Austin for changes in the laws affecting wages and working conditions for agricultural laborers. In the evenings when there are no pressing engagements or meetings to attend, she spends time with the other sisters from her living group or with other sisters and laypersons that she knows.

Financial Changes

While these three examples are intended to illustrate the relationship between life and work among some Catholic sisters, they also are suggestive of a growing financial problem among religious congregations. Without realizing it, most congregations developed a financial system that assumed large entry cohorts every year and a relatively young age structure. However, as mentioned earlier, the number of new members declined precipitously beginning in the early 1960s. The age structure of the congregations is getting older such that the average age of American sisters in 1986 was 62-63 years (McClory, 1987b: 26). Although fewer sisters are working directly for Catholic church-related institutions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to finance the growing health care and retirement needs of the older sisters. Blake's (1986) work and recent articles in the *National Catholic Reporter* (McClory, 1987a:

8; 1987b: 1, 26-28) comment on the strain placed on American congregations of women religious due to their aging populations.

Several sisters commented that economically active sisters should try to seek employment in higher-paying jobs, when possible, to offset the increasing number of sisters not in the labor force. One sister earning about $30,000 per year stated, "Some don't feel that they are responsible for the aged sisters. Instead they do volunteer work or are on a diocesan stipend.[13] We need more money earners." Another sister earning a good salary also voiced the necessity of the greater income needs of religious communities today. If financial conditions in the congregations worsen, such pressure may force a decision to be more selective (in terms of monetary remuneration) with regard to occupational choices. If so, it will be interesting to see how those sisters dedicated to social service and other types of jobs working with the low income will respond to such constraints.

Adaptation of Career to Community Life

How easy is it for sisters to change from one occupational type to another or to be involved in nontraditional careers? The answers to these questions lie in how well career and community life complement one another. Generally speaking, sisters have engaged in occupations that are people-oriented, occupations that are often identified as the "helping" careers. This is not to say that a trained physicist would not be considered as a candidate for the religious life because that type of work did not fit a particular congregation's charism or goals. However, if this individual focused on her research to the exclusion of activities among the sisters in her living group, or limited her contact with the motherhouse, the congregation would probably question her vocation and/or desire to live in a community of religious. Unlike the monastic or contemplative life where "the particular job is of relatively little concern" and "the attitude of detachment [from work] is one of the major values" (Hillery, 1983: 196, 208), the apostolic life of a woman religious is now more than ever closely intertwined with occupations based on individual talents.

DISCUSSION

Our interviews appear to point to a convergence within the work of laboring women in the United States more generally. Some of the

convergence has occurred because more women, like sisters, are working; the rest of the convergence has occurred as sisters have come to resemble other working women. For generations, sisters were set aside in Catholic communities as the only counterexamples to the usual "vocation" of a woman to be a wife and mother. They were limited counterexamples, however, because their only real choice was their congregation. The congregation would choose the sisters' occupations and the sisters were obliged by the vow of obedience to pursue whatever was chosen for them. Even so, sisters could be seen as leaders in the growing movement of women away from the home and into economic activity. Marriage and fertility were seen as the major barriers for work among other women (Sweet, 1973).

As with much of women's work, sisters' work was largely invisible and undervalued. In a market- and capital-based economy, their contributions were often regarded as relatively unimportant and compensated accordingly (Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1984: 5). Indeed, in a society where the two motivations for work are supposed to be "love or money," sisters' work, even in the market economy, was assumed to be motivated by love and not gain. The devaluation of housewives and of volunteer work among other women is parallel.

The recent movement of sisters into a wider range of occupations parallels that of the female labor force more generally. Some of the sisters' new occupations, such as pastoral assistant, are available because of a shortage of men to fill these positions. Long (1958) noted that one function of women's labor force participation was filling jobs formerly occupied by younger or older men. Other new occupations including the social service occupations reflect new labor demands. Oppenheimer (1970) traced much of the growth of women's labor force participation to increased demand in the traditional female occupations. Still other occupations truly represent "pioneering" by sisters into jobs still in demand among men.

Sisters may also come to resemble other working women in their increasing concern for the extrinsic rewards of work. Because of their lack of attachment to family and their explicit commitment to intrinsic, ideological motivators for work, sisters were historically underpaid. Even after their occupational choices were widened, those who took the jobs traditionally held by females often received low wages. As our data indicate, the economic welfare of religious communities may now be taking on a significance parallel to that of the family for working mothers. The difference is that among the sisters, economic support is needed for elderly members rather than for dependent children. At least

some sisters indicate that a new hierarchy of work values is needed, with the economic returns of work—because they support elderly sisters—taking priority over the ideological or intrinsic value of work.

The convergence between the sisters' work and the work of women more generally is a potentially fruitful area for further study. In different ways, the sisters and other working women confront labor markets in which gender remains an important correlate of occupation. How sisters deal with their new choices may provide an important comparison for the choices facing all women.

APPENDIX
Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample in 1983

Ethnicity		
	Anglos	21
	Mexican Americans	8
	Other	1
Age		
	25-34	4
	35-44	9
	45-54	11
	55-64	6
	Mean	45
Education		
	Less Than High School	1
	High School	0
	Less Than College	2
	College	9
	Advanced Degree	18
Occupation		
	Catechetics	13
	Director Relgious Education	
	Coordinator Lay Ministry Program	
	Evangelization Team	
	Shrine Ministry	
	Social Service	7
	Migrant Ministry Program	
	Social Worker/Advocate	
	Attorney	
	Other Diocesan Employment	4
	Media Director	
	Vocations Director	
	Pastoral Planner	
	Health Care	3
	Hospital Chaplain	
	Public Health Nurse	
	Nursing Administrator	
	Education	3
	Public School Teacher	
	Public School Librarian	
	Catholic School Principal	
Mean Salary		
	Less Than $5,000	23
	$5,000-9,999	2
	$10,000-14,999	1
	$15,000-19,999	0
	Greater Than $20,000	4
	Mean	$7,819

(continued)

APPENDIX Continued

Living Arrangements	
Alone	6
With 1 Other	11
With 2 Others	6
With 3 Others	7
Congregations	
Order of St. Francis	
School Sisters of Notre Dame	
Religious Sisters of Mercy of the Union	
Sisters of Charity	
Cordi Marian	
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet	
Order of St. Dominic	
Sisters of the Holy Ghost	
Order of St. Benedict	
Sisters of the Living Word	
Missionary Catechetics of the Divine Providence	

NOTES

1. The Second Vatican Council was a legislative meeting of all Catholic bishops in Rome between 1962 and 1965. It was the catalyst with regard to changes in ideology, structure, roles, and practices within the Roman Catholic church. Vatican II was selected as the pivotal point in this comparative analysis although some of the ideological and life-style changes in the religious life preceded Vatican II. The Sister Formation Conference and the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious Women are examples of early trends toward change (Neal, 1985: 144; Ebaugh and Ritterband, 1978: 258).

2. A congregation is an ecclesiastically authorized community or society of women religious who have common purposes, goals, and elected leaders, follow a specific rule, and take the three vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. Congregations may be either apostolic or contemplative; Hillery's (1969: 149-150) article elaborates the distinction in the goals and characteristics of these congregations. Among the apostolic sisters, the principal forms of work or ministry involve much contact with people (similar to that of the Apostles). Contemplative religious are cloistered and spend much of their day in prayer and silence, having little or no contact with the outside world. Members of apostolic congregations are called "sisters"; technically, only cloistered women religious may be called "nuns." Women's congregations are economically self-sufficient. The church hierarchy does not routinely provide subsidies or other economic benefits to them.

3. Kennelly (1984: 79) suggests a periodization of religious life in the United States focusing attention on "such specifics of membership, community life, prayer, ministry, governance, and finance." From 1830 to 1900, for example, the growth in religious congregations occurred in conjunction with the rise in European immigration and the development of an ecclesiastical bureaucracy in the United States. The role that religious congregations played has been documented by Maynard (1945), Thomas (1948), Burton (1957), and Gunning (1971), among others.

4. Our study does not address differences by congregation in occupational opportunities. However, we suspect that differences exist based on such factors as the historical development of the congregations' principal works, their mission, and the educational level of the sisters. The *Official Catholic Directory* continues to list the principal areas of work among U.S. congregations. Larger congregations typically list more areas. Examples include involvement with alcohol and drug dependency treatment, care for the homeless, therapy for the handicapped, coordinating retreats, and conducting parish censuses.

5. An entering candidate for the religious life is referred to as a postulant. The probationary period lasts approximately six months to one year. For the remainder of the period prior to taking initial vows, the candidate is identified as a novice. Simple professed sisters are those who have taken their vows but who renew them every few years. Professed sisters are those who have taken their lifetime vows.

6. Prior to Vatican II, celibacy was referred to as chastity. Additionally, among the Benedictines, poverty and celibacy are subsumed under obedience. Benedictines also take a vow of stability that encourages them to work out any problems in their lives in order to develop a more stable life-style, and a vow of reformation of one's life that implies a constant awareness of one's own shortcomings.

7. For further references on this topic, see Neal (1984), Fee et al. (1981), San Giovanni (1978), and Ebaugh (1977).

8. Women religious are classified by the Catholic church as one group within the laity, except when they run for public office, in which case they are classified as clergy.

9. The pre-Vatican II entrants in the sample appeared to have embraced the new meanings of the three vows of the religious life.

10. This survey attributes the decrease in teaching sisters to a reduction in the need for Catholic grammar and high school education; the latter is due in part to the lower fertility rates of affluent Catholics (Neal, 1984: 28). In general, the interview data used here do not lend themselves to an analysis of the declining number of Catholic sisters. Interviewing the sisters who remained in the religious life does not adequately allow us to speculate on the ones who left.

11. Other studies document the effects of clothing, uniforms, and other symbols of occupational membership as occupational roles are performed (see Joseph, 1986, Kornblith, 1975, and Joseph and Alex, 1972, for a general discussion; Van Maanen, 1982, and Tenzel et al., 1976, on the police; Applebaum, 1981, on construction workers).

12. For religious congregations today, it is probably cheaper to have the sisters live in smaller residential establishments.

13. The diocesan stipend in 1983 for the 21 sisters working in diocesan-related institutions was $4,700 for the year.

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