

## COMMENT ON V. K. OPPENHEIMER'S "THE LIFE-CYCLE SQUEEZE: THE INTERACTION OF MEN'S OCCUPATIONAL AND FAMILY LIFE CYCLES"

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Valerie Oppenheimer in the "Life-Cycle Squeeze: The Interaction of Men's Occupational and Family Life Cycles" (*Demography*, vol. 11, May 1974, pp. 227-245) fails to grasp adequately the idea of "life-cycle patterns in occupational earnings" (p. 233). Substitution of cross-section earnings by age (i.e., age differentials at one moment of time) is a misleading substitute for longitudinal measurements. In reality, median earnings for men continue to increase to retirement age as is seen by following age cohorts over time (Consider the following table [Table 1] for men in the U.S.). A fuller discussion of this point appears in my monograph, *The Middle*

*Years*, published as a special issue of *Industrial Gerontology* in September 1971.

The figures in Table 1 are approximations if for no other reason than that the Census Bureau made changes in occupational classification between 1960 and 1970, so that the occupational groups are not 100 percent identical. Nevertheless, even if a more detailed occupational classification system were used, as Oppenheimer attempts to do, the lifetime patterns would remain unchanged: earnings increase most rapidly up the middle years (about ages 35 to 50) and then, although they increase more slowly, they nevertheless continue to grow. On the average each man, as he becomes

TABLE 1.—Median Earnings for Men, by Major Occupation and Age: U. S. 1960 and 1970

Occupation	Male Cohort			Male Cohort		
	Aged 25-44 1960	Aged 35-54 1970	Percent Change	Aged 45-54 1960	Aged 55-64 1970	Percent Change
Professionals, etc.	\$6,720	\$13,060	94	\$8,060	\$12,460	55
Managers, etc.	6,780	12,680	87	7,230	11,500	59
Clerical workers	5,240	8,630	65	5,500	8,120	48
Sales, etc.	5,940	10,630	79	5,970	8,930	50
Craftsmen, etc.	5,580	9,020	62	5,500	8,280	50
Operatives (including trans.)	4,640	7,800	68	4,660	7,000	50
Laborers	3,560	6,270	76	3,500	5,650	61
Protective service	5,370	9,080	69	5,080	6,520	28
Other service	3,400	5,870	73	3,450	5,400	57

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1963, Table 9; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973, Table 1.

older, earns more. An average, being an average, means that unfortunately some men fall behind because of sickness, loss of job, etc., whereas other luckier ones are able to increase their earnings more rapidly. To explore this, however, requires lifetime data for individuals.

Analysis of earnings data in the manner I suggest leads to the simple conclusion that most families feel that they do not have enough money—whatever the basis of this feeling may be—and therefore other members, especially the wife,

attempt to earn additional income. There is nothing new in this finding.

#### REFERENCES

- Jaffe, A. J. 1971. *The Middle Years*. Special edition of *Industrial Gerontology*. September.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census. 1963. *U. S. Census of Population: 1960. Educational Attainment*. Subject Report PC(2)-5B. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- . 1973. *U. S. Census of Population: 1970. Earnings by Occupation and Education*. Subject Report PC(2)-8B. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.