

# The Contributory Role of Intercultural Assimilation and Gender on Coping Behaviour, Gender Role Attitude and Vocational Choice of Bengali College Students

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*The present study intended to determine the impact of intercultural assimilation or acculturation (the effect of exposure to other cultural environment other than their own) and gender on the coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice of Bengali college students. The sample included 160 Bengali College students (80 male and 80 female). 40 male and 40 female students were exposed to a different culture for at least 10 years. A detailed information schedule, Coping checklist, Sex role attitude scale and Vocational choice checklist were administered to all the subjects. Results revealed that acculturated Bengali students showed significantly better coping behaviour, were more modern in their gender role attitude and more flexible in their vocational choice.*

In recent years, generally people are of this opinion that Bengalis are intellectual no doubt, but functionally they are inhibited and restricted. More specifically, they lack the enthusiasm to take up new ventures, usually want to be engaged in gender specific, socially acceptable and less hazardous occupations and try to avoid situations which require risk taking behaviour and novelty in

problem solving. On the contrary, this is not the impression about those Bengali people who have been exposed to a new culture outside Bengal in other states within India. They are commonly perceived as more flexible, modern and less conservative in their behaviour and attitudes. This modern and flexible outlook to life is reflected in their occupational interest and vocational choice as well.

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Thus, precisely the popular notion dictates that exposure to a new culture, other than his/her own has the power to modify the typically Bengali character for the better. Theoretically, this change is the result of the process of acculturation or more specifically intercultural assimilation. Concept of culture and acculturation :

A culture is a configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by members of a particular society. Thus, in order to appreciate and understand the behaviour and reactions of people, the cultural context in which they occur is important. This contextual orientation has been accorded special importance in the cultural traditions of India and other Asian countries. According to Indian wisdom, man's reality is inextricably interwoven with the sociocultural milieu and to understand his conduct, it is essential to place it in the context of *desh* (place), *kala* (time) and *patra* (individual) (Sinha, 1996).

Acculturation is a process whereby individuals learn about the rules for behaviour characteristics of certain groups of people and includes the tools and methods with which they extract livelihood from their environment. It also includes the web of social relation understandings, customs, rules and attitudes about

supernatural and supreme beings. These influences on a person's behaviour determine ways of thinking, choices and life goals. Customs and traditions for solving problems are passed from one generation to the next through the pathways in the family and in the social institutions of the society (Alexander, 1988). Inter-cultural assimilation takes place, when an individual incorporates the customs, traditions, values and attitudes and behaviour pattern of more than one culture and acts accordingly. Regarding the process of intercultural assimilation - Nasdale and Mark (2000) revealed that identification with the host country and proper acculturation is possible when the immigrants possess a positive attitude towards the living standard and values of the host country followed by the acceptance by the host country. Immigrant identification with their ethnic group contributed negatively to the process of acculturation. Cultural ways of believing and acting vary over the world. Because of cultures considerable influence, social scientists have been interested in their effects on human personality and behaviour. By studying and comparing cultures, they gain ideas about which behaviour varies with culture and which behaviour is relatively innate.

Earlier studies in this field of acculturation or cultural assimilation



revealed that the majority of young people, who were exposed to a new culture, learned to be bicultural and bilingual (at a spoken level) and developed a hyphenated identity (Ghuman, 1998). Abramovitch *et al.* (2000) studied the perceived stress and coping of US medical students and found that exposure to a new environment improved their coping behaviour, mental health and satisfaction and reduced dysfunctional defence mechanism and heavy drinking. This finding supported the earlier work of Mehta (1998) and Gdaffarian (1998). Research on Arctic and African groups (Berry *et al.*, 1986) have also revealed that those who were more acculturated (generally those with more contact and experience with other cultures and their institutions) have a more differentiated approach to cognitive and perceptual tasks. In an attempt to investigate the influence of acculturation in predicting prejudicial social attitudes of the Asian-American college students, Liu *et al.* (1999) suggests that students who were more acculturated tended to have less prejudicial attitudes. Results also suggested that women tended to have less prejudicial attitude than men.

Although studies regarding acculturation are plenty in the west, inadequacy of research work in this field can be noticed in India. Keeping in mind these inadequacies, the

present study intended to investigate the effect of intercultural assimilation on coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice of Bengali college students. It wanted to verify the popular notion about the difference between the acculturated (exposed to a new culture) and non-acculturated (stayed in Kolkata all his/her life) Bengali students regarding their coping behaviour, gender essential to place it in the context of *desh* (place), *kala* (time) and *pairs* (individual) (Sinha, 1996).

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along with intercultural assimilation on the three variables. Defining the variables :

**Coping behaviour:** Coping has been widely and long regarded as having a central role in adaptation. Three approaches to coping can be distinguished. From the first perspective coping consists of acts, such as escape and avoidance that successfully control aversive environmental conditions. The second model of coping is centred on psychoanalytic ego psychology concepts. Coping is understood as a set of ego processes that develop from infancy and are centred on ways of thinking about relationships between the self and the environment. The essential tasks of living are to survive and flourish in the human social environment and this requires that instinctual drives be gratified while socially based dangers and constraints are managed realistically. A third model of coping emphasises the cognitive appraisal processes and a fluid, transactional and process centred approach to coping and its assessment. Coping is viewed as responsive to contextual variables, temporal factors and feedback from the flow of events that affect adaptational outcomes. It is defined as efforts to manage demands that tax or exceeds the person's resources. The word 'manage' in this definition means that coping can include toleration of harm or threat, redefinition of past events,

acceptance and putting a positive light on the situation—a set of ways for managing oneself and one's thoughts and feelings—as well as the mastery of the environment. By referring to the demands that tax or exceed resources, coping is limited to conditions of stress in which one must mobilize to deal with new situations and draw on resources not typically used, and distinguished from automatized adaptation behaviors that draw readily available habits of response involving minimal effort (Lazarus, 1998).

Two major functions of coping are delineated—problem focused and emotion focused.

**Gender role attitude :** Gender role attitudes examine people's idea about roles, which women and men should fulfil in families and career (Barber and Axinn, 1998). It is usually designated as traditional versus modern. Such attitudes are transmitted from the cultural imperatives to the individual's personal cognitive system. Theoretically, this transmission may be viewed either from the cohort perspective (Bengston and Culture, 1976) or from a lineage perspective (Gesas and Self, 1990). The former assumes that individuals belonging to a particular generation will form another group, with respect to specific attitudes or behaviour. The latter view holds that attitudes, formed in the family context, are

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inherited by the younger generation and thus an intergenerational similarity may be observed (Inman-Amos et al., 1994). Integrating these two perspectives, it may be stated that, the ultimate development of traditional and modern attitude is a dynamic process, characterized by intergenerational and intergenerational similarity or dissimilarity depending upon the relative weight age of the primary, secondary and tertiary groups in a person's life history.

**Vocational choice :** Vocational choice is the measure, which reflects the individual's interest and goals of life. It is in part an expression of the individual's method of adjusting to his or her environment. The development of vocational choice not only depends on sex, age and personality factors; of ability, available opportunities and cultural dictations also affect it (Darley, 1998).

As the above mentioned three variables, i.e., coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice all are mostly learned phenomena, the author assumes that an exposure to a different culture would have some effect on these variables. **Method Objectives of the present study :**

1. To determine whether coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice of the Bengali students of Kolkata were

different from the Bengali Students exposed to a different cultured.

2. To determine whether gender played an important role in the difference between regarding coping choice of the Bengali students.
3. To determine whether there is a relation between coping behaviour and vocational choice of the Bengali students, irrespective of their gender and inter-cultural exposure.
4. To determine whether there is a relation between gender role attitude and vocational choice and Intra-cultural exposure.

On the basis of these four objectives eleven Statistical Hypotheses were formulated.

**Hypotheses of the present study :**

1. There is a significant effect of intercultural assimilation on the coping behaviour of Bengali College Students.
2. There is a significant effect of gender on the coping behaviour of Bengali College Students.
3. There is a significant interaction effect of intercultural assimilation and gender on the coping behaviour of Bengali College Students.
4. There is a significant effect of intercultural assimilation on the



gender role attitude of Bengali College Students.

5. There is a significant effect of gender on gender role attitude of Bengali College Students.
6. There is a significant interaction not of intercultural indoor on the gender role attitude of Bengali College Students.
7. There is a significant effect of intercultural assimilation on the vocational choice of Bengali College Students.
8. There is a significant effect of gender on the vocational choice of Bengali College Students.
9. There is a significant interaction effect of intercultural assimilation and gender on the vocational choice of Bengali college students.
10. There is a significant relation between coping behaviour and vocational choice of Bengali college students, irrespective of their intercultural assimilation and gender.
11. There is a significant relation between gender role attitude and vocational choice of Bengali college students, irrespective of their intercultural assimilation and gender.

**Sample :**

The sample consisted of 160 Bengali college students (80 males

and 80 females) in which 40 male and 40 female students were acculturated (exposed to a different culture other than Bengali) and 40 male and 40 female students were non-acculturated (stayed in Kolkata throughout their lives). The acculturated subjects stayed in other metropolitan cities in other states for at least 10 years and passed the school final examination while staying in that city. All the subjects came from Bengali speaking Hindu, middle income group, nuclear or semi nuclear, single earner families.

**Measures Used :**

- 1) A Detailed Information Schedule for collecting personal and familial information.
- 2) General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) developed by Goldberg and Miller (1979). It was used to screen out those subjects who were suffering from chronic physical disease and mental disorder. Threshold for case identification was taken as 4/5 that is score 4 signified a non-psychiatric case and 5 signified a psychiatric case. Total score ranges from 0-28.
3. Coping Check List, developed by Rao (1989), to assess the coping style of the students. Total score ranges from 0 to 70. High score indicates more effective and positive coping style in times of stress.

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- 4) Sex Role Attitude Scale (SRAS) developed by Scanzoni (1975) modified for Bengali Cultures by Ray Chaudhuri et al. (1995) was administered to measure the attitude (traditional or modern) toward wife's role, mother's role and father's role as well as attitude towards the total traditional or modern gender role. Total score was taken in (his study). The score ranges from 20 to 100. High score indicates modernity in gender role attitude.
- 5) Vocational Choice Checklist was developed by Dasgupta and Roy (2002) for this present research work. Vocational Choice Checklist was developed for assessing the subject's flexibility to take up a vocation as his/her future career. To develop the checklist, at first, names of different vocations (commonly taken by n grndurito male or fomnlo) were collected from 20 experts from different fields of work, 100 college students (both acculturated and non-acculturated) and from the 'National Industrial Classification' (All Economic Activities) 1998. The initial list consisted of 290 jobs. Again 20 experts were asked to eliminate any repetitions of jobs and to choose those jobs that are commonly taken by people of middle and upper-middle socio-

economic status. Finally a 71-item vocational checklist was prepared. Reliability of the checklist was assessed by following the test-retest method. At first the checklist was administered to 20 male and 20 female post graduate students. After one month the same list was administered on the same sample group. The reliability for boys is 0.997 and girls is 0.995. The total reliability of the checklist is 0.996.

The final checklist consisted of 71 items with a Yes/No response category. The subjects gets 1 for 'yes' response and gets '0' for 'No' response. Score ranges from 0 to 71. High score indicates more flexibility regarding choice of vocation. A copy of the checklist is presented in Appendix-A. Examination, Scoring and Treatment of Data :

After completion of collection of data, the responses were scrutinised and scored. Out of 165, 160 data were utilised and 5 were rejected because they were in completed. Scoring for all the scales were done by hand according to manuals. Then the statistical treatment of the score was attempted. The statistical tools were selected in accordance with the objectives of the study. Two types of statistical techniques were used:

- a) Descriptive Statistics: Means and standard deviation of all the variables were calculated.

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b) Inferential Statistics: Analyses of variances were conducted to determine the effect of intercultural assimilation and gender on coping behaviour and gender role attitude and vocational choice.

Product Moment Correlation was conducted to determine the relation between coping behaviour and vocational choice, and also gender role attitude and vocational choice.

Results :

The means and standard deviations of coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice for non-acculturated and

acculturated Bengali college students were presented in table 1.

To determine the effect of intercultural assimilation (A) and Gender (B) and their interaction effect (AB) on coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice of Bengali College Students. Analysis of Variance (2x2) has been conducted for each variable.

Table-2 reveals that there was a significant effect of intercultural assimilation on coping behaviour of Bengali College Students beyond 0.01 level. From the total mean It has been seen that students who were exposed to a different culture, were better ( $M = 37.525$ ) in their coping than the students who always stayed in Kolkata ( $M=30.725$ ).

Table - 1

Shows the mean and standard deviations of coping behaviour, gender role attitude and vocational choice for non acculturated (A) and acculturated (B) Bengali College Students

Category	Sex	A		B		Total	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Coping Behaviour	Male	29.45	6.38	38.175	12.774	33.813	19.154
	Female	32.00	5.47	36.875	12.480	34.437	17.950
Gender Role Attitude	Male	60.10	7.27	62.25	7.91	61.175	15.18
	Female	69.83	9.98	75.63	6.80	72.72	16.78
Vocational Choice	Male	18.03	6.36	24.70	10.156	21.36	16.516
	Female	22.00	7.75	26.93	12.49	24.46	20.24

Table - 2

Shows the main effect of intercultural assimilation (A) and gender (B) and their interaction effect (AB) on coping behaviour of Bengali College Students.

Source of variance (coping behaviour)	df	F
A (intercultural assimilation)	1	18.49**
B (gender)	1	0.156
AB (interaction effect)	1	1.382
Within treatment (error)	156	-

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

It also reveals that the effect of gender on coping behaviour was insignificant and the interaction effect of intercultural assimilation and gender on coping behaviour was insignificant of Bengali College Students in 0.01 level.

From the significant F values of Table-2, it can be said that hypothesis no.1 has been retained while hypothesis no.2 and 3 were rejected.

Table-3 indicates that there was a significant effect of intercultural assimilation on gender-role attitude of Bengali College students beyond 0.01 level. From the total mean it has been seen that

acculturated students were more modern in their gender role attitude ( $M=68.94$ ) than non-acculturated students ( $M=64.96$ ).

Table-3 also reveals that there was significant effect of gender on gender-role attitude of Bengali college students. From the total mean it is evident that overall female students were more modern ( $M=72.72$ ) than of male students ( $M=61.175$ ). Table-3 also indicates that the interaction effect of intercultural assimilation and gender on gender role attitude was insignificant. Thus, hypotheses no.4 and 5 were retained and hypothesis no.6 has been rejected.

Table-4 reveals that there was a significant effect of intercultural



Table - 3

Shows the main effect of intercultural assimilation (A) Gender (B) and their interaction effect (AB) on gender-role attitude of Bengali College Students.

Source of variance (Gender Role Attitude)	df	F
A (intercultural assimilation)	1	9.426**
B (gender)	1	79.580**
AB (interaction effect)	1	1.987
Within treatment (error)	156	-

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

assimilation on the vocational choice of Bengali college students beyond 0.01 level. From the total mean it has been seen that acculturated students were more flexible in their vocational choice ( $M=25.81$ ) than the student from Kolkata ( $M=20.01$ ).

Table-4 also reveals that there was significant effect of gender on vocational choice of Bengali college students beyond 0.05 level. From the total mean it is evident that female students were more ( $M=20.24$ ) flexible in their vocational choice than the male students ( $M=16.516$ ). Table-4 also indicates that the interaction effect of intercultural assimilation and gender on vocational choice was

insignificant on Bengali college students in 0.01 level. Thus, hypotheses no.7 and 8 were retained and hypothesis no.9 was rejected.

To find out the relationship between coping behaviour and vocational choice and gender role attitude and vocational choice, product-moment correlation has been conducted. The correlation values are presented in Table-5.

Table-5 reveals that there was significant relation between coping behaviour and vocational choice of Bengali college students irrespective of intercultural assimilation and gender. Here hypothesis no.10 was retained.

Table - 4

Shows the main effect of Intercultural assimilation (A), Gender (B) and their interaction effect (AB) on vocational choice of Bengali College Students.

Source of variance (Vocational Choice)	df	F
A (intercultural assimilation)	1	14,577**
B (gender)	1	4.164*
AB (interaction effect)	1	0.332
Within treatment (error)	156	-

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table - 5

Shows the correlation co-efficient values of coping behaviour and vocational choice and gender role attitude and vocational choice.

	Vocational Choice	Df
Coping behaviour	0.749*	158
Gender role attitude	0.184*	158

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .



Table-5 also indicates that there was significant relation between gender role attitude and vocational choice of Bengali College Students irrespective of intercultural assimilation and gender. Here hypothesis no.11 was retained.

- Summary of results
1. Coping behaviour of acculturated Bengali students was better than that of the non-acculturated Bengali students.
  2. Acculturated Bengali students were more modern in their gender role attitude than non-acculturated Bengali students.
  3. Acculturated Bengali students were more flexible in their vocational choice than non-acculturated Bengali students
  4. Female students were more modern in their gender role attitude than male students.
  5. Female students were more flexible in their vocational choice than male students.
  6. Better coping promotes flexibility in vocational choice.
  7. Modern gender role attitude promotes flexibility in vocational choice.

#### Discussion

Results revealed that acculturated Bengali college students or students who were exposed to a

different culture showed better coping behaviour, possessed less traditional gender role attitude and were more flexible in their vocational choice than non-acculturated Bengali students or students who lived in Kolkata throughout their lives. Previous studies by Mehta (1998), Gdaffarian (1998) and Abramovitch (2000) indicated that exposure to a new environment improved coping behaviour and mental health. The reason might be that when a person is exposed to a new culture, he/she has to adopt certain new skills to cope with the new situation (Sinha, 1996) and modifies his/her coping strategies according to the demands of the new environment. This modification in coping might have eventually changed the stereotyped gender role attitude of the acculturated students and increased their flexibility in vocational choice as well.

Moreover, another finding also revealed that female students were less traditional in their gender role attitude and more flexible in their choice of vocations than male students irrespective of acculturation. Earlier findings also supported that females have more liberal attitudes toward gender roles (wife, mother and father role) than males (Scanzoni, 1976, 1978; Rao & Rao, 1983). Consideration of the changes occurring in Indian culture such as urbanization, technological

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development, employment of women, increase in female enrolment in educational institutions and western influence on social attitudes toward the acceptance of women's employment should be taken into account in examining the differences in sex role attitudes between males and females. The less traditional attitudes of the females toward sex roles can be explained in terms of perceived changes in status, power and prestige of employed women (Rao and Rao, 1996). For the last two decades, outside employment is seen as a sign of independence and equality between sexes. It is considered the means to escape the traditional 'status trap'. Additionally the central government has been advocating equality of women as a basic condition for the social economic and political development of the nation, and has given high priority to the development of women from their dependent and unequal status (Indian Council Social Science Research, 1975). Perhaps this sociopolitical supports motivated the women of today to take up challenging and less sex-typed jobs, by negating Horner's (1974) concept of fear of success in women due to fear of social rejection and denial or escape from success in male competitive situation. By attending colleges and universities, entering the occupational world and moving into the political arena, women are contributing to the development of

Indian society. Although women are taking up cross-sex-typed jobs as well, fighting against their gender role conflicts (Sharma et al., 1984), the present study revealed that occupational sex typing was still stronger among males than females as supported by earlier studies (Clarke, 1989). This indirectly implies that males are more concerned about maintaining their masculine image and identity than females about their femininity. This in turn determines their less flexible approach toward vocational choice. They naturally are opting for sex-typed jobs, thus reducing their choice.

Last but not the least, the present study revealed that better coping and modern gender role attitude promoted flexibility in vocational choice of Bengali college students, irrespective of their intercultural assimilation. As mentioned earlier, coping has been regarded as having a central role in adaptation. It is also defined as efforts to manage demands that tax or exceeds the person's resources. It is (the ability to deal with new situation and draw on resources not typically used (Lazarus, 1998). Thus having a better coping strategy might be a source of confidence for the individual and contribute positively to his/her flexibility regarding job choice.

Regarding the relationship between gender role attitude and



flexibility in vocational choice, previous findings indicated that usually males and females possessing traditional gender role attitude go for gender appropriate vocations (Shinar, 1975; Dasgupta & Basu, 1998). Thus it can be logically deduced that in the present study, students with modern gender role attitude were ready to take up sex - atypical vocations as well which eventually promoted their flexibility in vocational choice.

### Conclusion

The present study led to the conclusion that acculturation had a significant impact on the coping behaviour, gender role attitude and flexibility of vocational choice of Bengali College Students. Acculturated Bengali students had better coping, modern gender role attitude and more flexibility in case of vocational choice than non-acculturated Bengali students.

Secondly, males showed more traditional gender role attitude and less flexibility in vocational choice than females and lastly there was a significant and positive relationship between gender role attitude and vocational choice as well as coping behaviour and vocational choice irrespective of the impact of acculturation.

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## APPENDIX-A VOCATIONAL CHOICE CHECK-LIST

Developed by

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Piyali Roy

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Name: Age: Sex: M/F Address:

Instructions:

A list of different vocations is given to you for research purpose. There is no right or wrong answer. Please read the list carefully and put a tick (V) mark in 'Yes' if you prefer to take up that vocation as your future career and put a tick (V) mark in 'No', if you do not prefer that vocation. You can choose as many vocations you like considering your ability, Interest and mood.

VOCATIONS	YES	NO		YES	NO
1. Teacher	Yes	No	17. Accountant	Yes	No
2. Administrative Officer	Yes	No	18. Police	Yes	No
3. Doctor	Yes	No	19. Pilot	Yes	No
4. Engineer	Yes	No	20. Secretary	Yes	No
5. Air-hostess	Yes	No	21. Medical Representative	Yes	No
6. Singer	Yes	No	22. Business Person	Yes	No
7. Dancer	Yes	No	23. Lawyer	Yes	No
8. Choreographer	Yes	No	24. Architect	Yes	No
9. Actor / Actress	Yes	No	25. Politician	Yes	No
10. Beautician	Yes	No	26. Sports Person	Yes	No
11. Musician	Yes	No	27. Defence Personnel	Yes	No
12. News Reader	Yes	No	28. Social Worker	Yes	No
13. Computer-Professional	Yes	No	29. Manager	Yes	No
14. Fashion Designer	Yes	No	30. Officers (Govt / Private)	Yes	No
15. Journalist	Yes	No	31. Globe Trotter	Yes	No
16. Scientist	Yes	No	32. Interpreter	Yes	No
			33. Interior-Designer	Yes	No

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34. Painter	Yes	No	53. Psychologist	Yes	No
35. Photographer	Yes	No	54. Receptionist	Yes	No
36. Archaeologist	Yes	No	55. Critique/Analyst	Yes	No
37. Statistician	Yes	No	56. Anthropologist	Yes	No
38. Anchor	Yes	No	57. Physiotherapist	Yes	No
39. Geologist	Yes	No	58. Tourism Manager	Yes	No
40. Economist	Yes	No	59. Private Detective	Yes	No
41. Film-Director	Yes	No	60. Advertisement Maker	Yes	No
42. Librarian	Yes	No	61. Writer	Yes	No
43. Nurse	Yes	No	62. Race Jockey	Yes	No
44. Typist & stenographer	Yes	No	63. Dietician	Yes	No
45. Cashier	Yes	No	64. Therapist	Yes	No
46. Sales person	Yes	No	65. Philosopher	Yes	No
47. Food Technologist	Yes	No	66. Postal Service Person	Yes	No
48. Botanist	Yes	No	67. Chief	Yes	No
49. Weather Report Specialist	Yes	No	68. Astrologer	Yes	No
50. Bio Technologist	Yes	No	69. Model	Yes	No
51. Chemist	Yes	No	70. Soldier	Yes	No
52. Telephone Operator	Yes	No	71. Designer	Yes	No

