AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SELECTED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MOTHERS OF HIGH AND LOW ACHIEVING GIFTED BOYS

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By

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We hereby approve the Clinical Research Project

An Exploratory Study of Selected Differences Between Mothers of High and Low Achieving Gifted Boys

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences in attitudes, philosophy, and child-rearing practices of mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys from grades 9 to 12. Two hypotheses were tested. It was expected that the two groups of mothers would differ in both their wishes, fantasies, and expectations about academic achievement, and in their child-rearing practices and behavior. Criteria used for the selection of mothers were grades earned by their gifted sons. High achievers were defined by a 3.9 grade point average or better, low achievers with a 2.0 grade point average or lower. Randomly selected at Beverly Hills High School, in Beverly Hills, California, were eight mothers of low-achieving gifted boys and fourteen mothers of high-achieving gifted boys. Each filled out a questionnaire, was interviewed individually for one hour, and was administered one card from a projective test (Tasks of Emotional Development). Levels of significance for differences in the two groups were found through the statistical use of t-scores, showing a strong trend in support of the hypotheses with some high significance levels. Results showed that mothers of high-achieving gifted boys recall fantasies of achievement more, invest more time in

educational activities, are stronger educational models, and are apt to give up careers in favor of child rearing more than mothers of low-achieving gifted boys. The results of the projective test showed that mothers of high achievers see and find the process of studying as more rewarding.

Conversely, mothers of low-achieving gifted boys were found to gear their child-rearing practices to an emphasis on the development of good values, commitment to others, and self-actualization, rather than grades earned and study habits. Achievement in non-academic areas was in several cases a by-product.

These findings have implications for a deeper psychological understanding for social workers and educators in diagnosing and treating high and low achievers. Further studies with a larger sample size and a greater ethnic and economic representation are warranted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Through recorded history the education and acculturation of children has been of prime importance both to parents and to educators. In recent times, within the past 50 years, great strides have been made by both educators and psychologists in examining those forces within a child and his/her environment which can deter or enhance academic achievement. However, despite these advances, many educational and psychological issues surrounding academic performance remain clouded, poorly perceived, and controversial. As the literature indicates, there seems to be general agreement that an important aspect of achievement lies in the social-psychological makeup of the individual and his environment and that among the multitude of contributing factors to high and low academic achievement are the child's health, nutrition, learning abilities and disabilities, and his educational models, including parents, and teachers.

In this study, a segment of the mother's contribution to her child's academic achievement is explored, specifically her fantasies about academic achievement in general, and her child-rearing practices which enhance or detract from academic achievement. Two groups of mothers are

compared: mothers of high achieving gifted high school boys and mothers of low achieving gifted high school boys.

The works of Hartmann (1951, 1953, 1955, 1959), Jacobson (1956, 1964), Mahler (1974), and Kohut (1977), among others, provide the psychodynamic base from which the data about learning and achievement can be assessed. From these atuhors we learn that children who are "at risk" not only fail to thrive socially, physically, and interpersonally, but their learning processes are retarded or arrested as well. In this regard, Hartmann (1951, 1959) introduced the concept of the adaptive, conflict-free autonomous functions of the ego, placing emphasis on achievement on a vital part of the adaptive side of the ego. Hartmann observed that in normal ego development, certain functions originate in a conflict-free sphere of the ego, such as perception, language, memory, grasping, crawling, and walking. Thus, for Hartmann, the neonate has "inborn apparatuses" (protective and perceptional mechanisms) that function purposively and autonomously in the normally developing child.

Jacobson postulates that in the child's early developing years, there are instinctual, undifferentiated, and aggressive aims which can be channeled by the mother to more focused and appropriate functions of the ego, such as learning. Mahler postulates that in the normally emerging child, the "sociobiological utilization of the

mother and the emotional availability of the love object are the foundation of the separation-individuation process." Throughout this process, the mother's emotional availability and tolerance for separation enables growth, individuation, learning and memory to occur.

In the Kohutian model (1977) the role of the mother of the developing child is crucial. The merger with mother and the child's mirroring of her are stages that occur along the grandiose-exhibitionistic line of ego development that contribute toward learning, coping, creativity, and cohesion. An unempathic mother fails to provide groundwork for the developing of a cohesive self. This early failure on the mother's part may result in serious long-range effects in the child, creating pathology which later manifests in such negative behaviors as inability to finish tasks, insistence on perfection, and failure to trust his/her own ideals. For Kohut, a factor in the eventual development of the mature coehsive self takes place when there is internalization of the functions of the object. But in pathological narcissism, the result of early empathic failures, the parent, particularly the mother, uses the child as a narcissistic extension of herself and sets up unrealistic and impossible high ideals. When a discrepancy exists between the ego ideal (the parent) and self representation, the child can become either immobilized or compulsive and driven.

In light of the mother's profound effect on her child's emerging behavioral patterns, significant reasons exist for studies which examine the mother's role in her child's subsequent academic achievement. Although a mother may only be selectively dysfunctional and hence not necessarily harmful to her child's educational growth, the tie between the mother's fantasies and child-rearing practices and her child's subsequent academic achievement is all too significant to ignore.

Clinical social workers have long been aware of this connection by virtue of their work both inside and outside of school settings with dysfunctional mothers and families whose children perform poorly in school. In that regard, the mother's role in her child's academic performance is particularly interesting as it relates to adolescent boys.

Two studies, one dealing with improvement in academic achievement in adolescent boys (Perkins & Wices, 1956) and the other examining the relationship of the mother's narcissism and her son's low academic achievement (Newman, Dember, & Krug, 1973) underscore the importance of exploring the mother-son dyad as it relates to performance in school.

In the first study, mothers of low achieving high school boys were invited to participate in a school program

of group counseling. Some of the youngsters were counseled simultaneously. Improvement in the child's grades occurred regardless of the underachieving boy's involvement in counseling. Attention, help, and focus on the mother was valuable in aiding the youngster's school performance.

In the second study, attitudes of mothers seemed an important factor in underachieving boys who were deemed gifted, who had great verbal fluency and sufficiency, but whose communication was shallow and school performance poor. The mothers were shown to exploit the child for adult narcissistic or interpersonal needs. Little attention was paid by the mother to the intrinsic qualities of the child's intelligence or his abilities to understand concepts, ideas, or problem solving. A factor enhancing speech at the expense of other qualities of the intellect arose from the mother's own unrealized ambition for scholastic success. These mothers often erotized intellectual functions like speech. In their sons, these mothers sought anew those elements that had been important in their earlier relationship with their fathers.

The study presented in this dissertation examines the importance of this mother-son dyad as it relates specifically to high and low achieving gifted adolescent boys. In this study, mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys were compared to determine similarities and

differences in their fantasies, attitudes, child-rearing practices and philosophy as they pertain to academic achievement.

The two hypotheses tested relate to the mother's attitudes and practices that may promote neutralization and enhance the conflict-free sphere of the ego. The following outcomes were expected from the study:

Hypothesis I--The wishes, fantasies, and expectations about academic achievement differ in mothers of high achieving gifted boys and mothers of low achieving gifted boys in the following ways:

Mothers of high achieving gifted boys will recall fantasies of high academic achievement more than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. (Refer to questions 45 and 46, Appendix D.)

In addition, mothers of high achieving gifted boys will tend to see the process and outcome of studying as more positive and rewarding than do mothers of low achieving gifted boys. (Refer to questions 55, 56, 57, 58, Appendix E.)

The third difference is that mothers of high achieving gifted boys are stronger educational models

than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. (Refer to questions 16, 17, 18, Appendix C.)

Hypothesis II--Child-rearing practices and behavior differ in mothers of high achieving gifted boys and mothers of low achieving gifted boys in the following ways:

Mothers of high achieving gifted boys invest more time in educational activities than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. (Refer to questions 21, 23, 34, 40a, 41, Appendix C.)

In addition, mothers of high achievers gave up careers in favor of child rearing more than mothers of low achievers. (Refer to questions 29a, 29b, 31, Appendix C.)

Still another difference is that mothers of high achievers believe more in structured supervised homes versus democratic homes than mothers of low achievers. (Refer to questions 19, 25, 47, Appendix C.)

And finally, mothers of high achieving gifted boys tend to be more actively attentive to grades than are mothers of low achieving gifted boys. (Refer to questions 24b, 26a, 26b, 26c, 26e, 26f, Appendix C.)

This study was undertaken because of its potential for social workers, educators, and persons in the helping professions who deal with academic adjustment and achievement problems. Its relevance to practitioners of social

work in schools is borne out in the statement from the 1965 Encyclopedia of Social Work:

> School S.W. practice in educational institutions is carried on to help the individual student overcome social or emotional problems that interfere with his functioning and achievement in school. Its purpose is to restore impaired social functioning, to provide resources by mobilizing capacities in the individual and in the community and to prevent social dysfunction. The school social worker's specific function in the educational setting is to add his professional competence to that of teachers, administrators and other specialists in order to help the individual who is not achieving expected educational goals make maximum use of the opportunity to learn and develop.

Significant reasons exist for the study of mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys. Today, despite massive financial expenditures and extensive remediation measures, many students are failing in school. It is imperative that we look beyond the immediate school setting to the possible psychodynamic factors which underlie individual success or failure. Moreover, although clearly the father plays an important role in a child's behavior patterns, households headed solely by women are on the rise and constitute one of the major changes in American life style. Often, the mother is the only parent with whom the child interacts. Therefore, for the clinical social worker guiding and helping that mother in either a clinic or school setting, tools for understanding what she believes and how she implements her goals as a parent is of supreme importance.

Limitations of the Study

There are recognizable limitations to this study. The efforts to demonstrate association between the mother's characteristics and her high or low achieving child are necessarily subjective. Also, because of the small populations studied, generalizations are necessarily limited.

Moreover, significant others in the life and environment of the student who might impinge on that child's behavior, such as fathers, grandparents and siblings, have been excluded. Similarly, environmental issues such as economic, cultural, and sociological factors, are also excluded. While this study looks exclusively at the mother's (or mother surrogate's) child-rearing practices, behaviors and attitudes, it is not inferred that these behaviors alone resulted in high or low achievement, but that these behaviors represent a large component of the complex, multifaceted relationships, attitudes, and environmental influences which impinge on academic achievement.

Further, despite the fact that this study is necessarily limited to the examination of academic achievement, it must be recognized as only one component of the child's overall development. Hence, while academic achievement may have positive implications predictive of a successful future, it must be viewed globally, along with other key factors. For some youngsters, a delay or hybernation in

academic life is necessary for subsequent maturation. For others, success at school may occur solely to please an overly demanding parent, resulting in an arrest of the child's true individuality. For this child, academic success is achieved at the expense of other vital developmental stages, leading to intellectual maturation which is not in harmony with other functions.

Finally, because of specific psychodynamic differences between the sexes, only mothers of boys are included in this study. Findings for mothers of boys might not be applicable to mothers of girls. While only mothers of gifted youngsters are studied, generalizations about other mothers and non-gifted youngsters would need to be evaluated.

Definitions

The following definitions are used throughout this study.

1. Wishes and Fantasies. Conscious longings, yearnings or desires which are imagined. Wishes or fantasies may or may not have been disclosed to others.

2. Academic Investment. The focus and expenditure of mental and physical energy and resources around educational activities and pursuits.

3. Educational Role Models. The part, function, or character whom the child copies, imitates or patterns

himself after in matters pertaining to education.

4. Fusion. The change of the proportions between the libidinal and aggressive drives, resulting in a prevalence of libidinal drive energy. Fusion between these two drives render the destructive drives harmless.

5. Neutralization. Libidinal and aggressive drives which undergo fusion with the result that neutralized energy becomes available for the building up of thought processes and the corresponding ego and superego functions.

6. Structure. A mental apparatus which arose originally in the service of defense against an instinctual drive which in the course of time becomes independent. The independent structure comes to serve other functions such as adaptation and synthesis.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Literature

Introduction

There is no single reason why children do poorly or well in school. The learning process is complex and shaped by many forces including both the child's and the parent's emotional apparatus, parental interaction with the child, genetic endowment, the environment, and a myriad of life processes.

The literature mentions diverse reasons for high and low academic achievement. Attitudes, opinions, conflicts, tensions, and child-rearing practices are seen as crucial. There is literature which also contains ample evidence that the school itself and teachers must also be included as important influences on children's academic success.

Excellent achievement can spring from many sources, not all of them "healthy." Wilbur Bender (cited by Vernon R. Alden, Saturday Review, July 18, 1964), neatly summarized the problem:

> The student who ranks first in his class may be genuinely brilliant or he may be a compulsive, worker or the instrument of a domineering parent's ambition, or a conformist or a self-centered careerist . . . or he may focus on grade-getting as a compensation for his inadequacies in other areas, because he lacks other interests or talents or lacks passion and warmth or normal healthy instincts, or is afraid of life.

There is little agreement in the existing literature concerning the major forces that contribute to academic achievement. For one thing, various researchers use different criteria to define academic success. Some point to students' grades as the appropriate measure for evaluation, others look at long-term learning behavior, and still others use the level of academic degree aspired to.

The student who strives doggedly for good grades may be limited in his intellectual development, focused on short term goals and need the immediate gratifications of reward and recognition. Less successful grade-earners on the other hand may be devoted to long-term learning and intellectual growth and less involved in the tangible but momentary rewards of grades. For the purposes of this study, a student's marks in school are used as the measure of academic success.

To bring together some of the more significant findings regarding the role of maternal influence on their son's academic achievement, Grinsteins' Index to Psychoanalytic Literature Index, Psychological Abstracts (1969-present), and Cumulative Index to Journals in Education, ERIC (Educational Resources Information Clearing House) (1969-present), and Medline (1970-present) were reviewed for relevant literature. In reviewing these sources, it became apparent that, in order to identify the psychological influences on achievement that could be specifically attributed to the mother, literature dealing with learning behavior in general, as well as the effects of paternal and parental behavior and the environment had to be examined.

This bibliography focuses on a small segment of the existing literature concerned with learning behavior and motivation. Sources were selected that would be useful in examining some of the educationally and psychologically relevant emotional components of the mother/son dyad. Concentration was on a small segment of the entire range of maternal influences that may affect a child's motivation to learn and to attain high marks in school. Some of these are the mother's attitude toward education, her ability to serve as a role model for her son, the energy and time she

invests in her son's education, and her fantasies about achievement.

The relationship between these aspects of the mother/son dyad and academic success has been the subject of recent psychological studies. In general, the studies show these characteristics of maternal behavior to be relevant to the child's academic success as measured by grades.

This literature review includes a brief summary of some of the existing literature and a discussion of some of the more significant findings and conclusions. To this end, the literature presented has been categorized under the following themes:

1. Societal and Environmental Factors. Literature dealing with factors outside home which influence children's learning and motivation.

2. Parental Stress on Independence. Literature concerned with behavior arising from conscious or unconscious motivations regarding the ways in which parents interact with the child.

3. Parental Role Model. Literature describing the influence of the parents' own learning, achievement and motivation behavior on the child.

4. Psycho-historical Approach. Biographical sketches of a few famous and influential men which attempt to relate their leadership qualities to their mothers' influence.

5. Psychodynamic School. Emotional factors that relate to the inhibition of learning faculties.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. There are several areas of overlap between these themes.

Societal and Environmental Factors

Anna Freud, in her lectures to the Hort School in Vienna in 1935, talked about the beginning of education:

> A little while ago, a German court of law had to pronounce judgment on a divorce case. In the course of the lawsuit, the question arose which of the parents of the 2-year old should be assigned. The lawyer appearing for the husband proved that the wife was not properly qualified to educate the child. The wife's lawyer objected it was not a question of education for a child only 2 years of age, but just looking after the child. To decide the point, experts of the psychoanalytic school were called . . . they unanimously agreed that the education of the child begins with his first day. (p. 39)

Where Anna Freud referred to the child's total environment as well as his relationship with the parents to describe learning behavior, some educators feel children's best opportunities to learn are through exploration of the environment, discovery and inventiveness (Dewey, 1972). Piaget (Ginsberg, 1979) was concerned with how the mind works. He saw human intelligence as a form of adaptation to the environment. Piaget's interest in the social environment sprang from this recognition. According to Piaget (Ginsberg, 1979), the stages of development of human intelligence are the same for all individuals. However, the child's cultural and social environment can

affect the speed with which development occurs. As each maturational stage builds on the one before it, the parental influences can act to speed, enhance, or retard advancement and intellectual progression.

E. J. Anthony (1970) writes about the many variables that affect a mother's capacity to influence her children, including her health, the state of her marriage, and her ability to change with the child's changing needs.

Pederson, Faucher and Eaton (1978) studied the impact of the classroom teacher on the children's adult status. They found that one remarkable first grade teacher had a significant effect on children's chances for success in later life. The teacher affected the child's subsequent social mobility and academic self-concept.

While environmental factors do not focus on any single explanation, they are an important influence on the child's motivation and learning.

To summarize, the cultural and social environment offer the child opportunities for learning. The social milieu, physical and cultural environment as well as nurturing provided by the parent all have important and profound influences as determinants for academic achievement.

Parental Stress on Independence

In a study of the effect of the mother/child relationship on academic achievement, Hilliard and Roth (1969) found that mothers of high achievers were more accepting of their children's independent strivings than mothers of underachievers.

Consistent with Hilliard and Roth's findings, the study by Hellman (1954) notes that mothers of children with learning impairments have a great need to keep their children as infants and are quite disturbed by their individuation and independence. Hellman found that these mothers often withhold information from their children that might encourage their growth as separate beings. They permit their children to know reality only within constricted limits. To keep their mother's tranquility high and their own anxiety low, children of these mothers learn to block their ability to see and learn for themselves, thus inhibiting their own learning.

Similar findings are included in McClelland's (1953) study where it was observed that the total number of demands made by mothers of high achieving sons is greatest in the area of independence in early life. High achieving sons have mothers who require them to master twice as many skills before the age of eight as were required by mothers of low achieving sons. These skills including mastering

problems and getting along by himself. Mothers who stress independence are likely also to stress self-reliance and individual achievement.

Crandall (1960) studied mothers of 3-5 year old children in regard to the child's motor development, independence and achievement and found that mothers may react to their child's search for approval as a sign of emotional dependency. To these children, the information they gather about the world and learning they achieve may not be as significant as information for which they are rewarded. Such an attitude would discourage intellectual pleasure in learning and hamper independence.

In observing mothers' reactions to high school males' achievement, V. J. Crandall, in 1960, found no clear cut evidence to associate maternal affection, either negatively or positively, with children's achievement behavior. This study, however, was limited to maternal reaction to children's dependent overtures and did not assess maternal responses to children's efforts at independence.

The actual impact of parental affection and love as children's motivation to learn is difficult to assess. One study of underachieving boys in minority families noted that they see their mothers and fathers as unloving and demanding. Kanmeyer (1972), the author of this study, speculates that the boys may be less achievement-oriented

because of the particular combination of relationships they have with their families where there is conditional affection from both parents.

Parental attention and support for academic endeavors has been shown to have a positive influence on academic achievement. For example, a study of families on public assistance revealed that academic performance was affected by the amount of shared activity between child and parent, as well as the amount of help parents gave their children with school work (Allan, 1969).

Permissive and restrictive attitudes reflected in child-rearing practices were also shown to affect children's achievement behavior. Drew and Teaham (1957) found that parents of high achievers will be less permissive and less accepting in their treatment of their children than parents of low academic achievers. They also found that the mothers of gifted high achievers are quite authoritarian in their treatment of their children and also more restrictive. This study did not attempt to analyze the dependency relationships between the childre and their parents. The children's achievement behavior can be attributed to the desire to avoid objections and to satisfy maternal demands.

Shaw and Grubb (1958), on the other hand, suggest that underachievement satisfies an unconscious hostility motive which is directed toward the family member who most

demands success of the underachiever. The underachiever is unable to express the hostility directly, and instead uses indirect routes such as underachievement to communicate his feelings.

Gowan (1957) found parental attitudes toward achievement to be a significant factor on their children's motivation to learn. Gowan found parents of underachievers to be either too autocratic, too dominant, too protective, or too laissez-faire. They arrest the child's development into and through latency. As children, these parents did not regard academic accomplishment as worthwhile but as "queer" and "different." Thus the parents' own negative attitude toward academic achievement may block this form of accomplishment as an avenue of reward. This reinforces the child's own over-critical appraisal of himself in relation to his goals and achievements, may stifle his creativity, and lead to withdrawal to insulate his ego from hurt. Among these children, academic achievement would not be viewed as a means toward independence or self-expression. In fact, they might view academic achievement as somewhat risky and threatening.

To summarize, the literature suggests that child-rearing practices that promote independence may be an important factor in stimulating or creating motivation for high academic achievement. Parental practices that

reward independence and self-expression may also encourage motivation to learn rather than motivation for the rewards associated with high achievement.

Parental Role Model

It is difficult to separate the parents' function as a role model from child-rearing practices. As the Gowan study at the end of the previous section illustrates, parents' child-rearing practices reinforce their behavior as role models and vice versa.

Perkins and Wicas (1956) investigated the use of counseling with small groups of underachieving 9th grade boys and/or their mothers. The total sample included 120 boys and 60 mothers. Underachievers had significantly higher grade point averages after treatment than students in a control group who received no counseling. Additionally, when the mothers were also counseled, either alone or in joint sessions with their sons, the effect on underachievers was equal to or greater than when counselors worked only with the boys.

In analyzing the impact of parental role models on children's academic behavior, father absence was shown to affect both boys and girls. A 1969 cross-sectional sample of black and caucasian adolescent males investigated the effect of paternal absence on educational ambition.

Because of the greater proportion of female heads of families among blacks, father absence proved to be a more important influence on black adolescents than on their white counterparts. There was evidence that father absence depressed ambition to a greater extent among blacks than whites (Parrow, 1977). Among black and white single parent families where mother and daughter lived together, Shaw (1979) found the mother's low income to be the most significant factor in determining the probability of the daughter dropping out of high school.

Shaw and White (1965) studied the relationship between child-parent identification and academic underachievement. They found that high achieving 10th and 11th grade males identified with their fathers but underachieving boys did not. In contrast to the underachieving boys, high achieving boys and their fathers had highly similar self-perceptions.

The power structure in the home is an important factor in examining the effect of child-parent identification or academic performance. In a three-case exploratory study, Thiel and Thiel (1977) found that among underachieving boys, the fathers tend to have higher self-esteem and self-perceptions than either the mothers or the boys. The results of this study indicate that, among the families studied, the father would be the dominant personality within the family structure.

Shodtbeck (1958) studied the relationship between the power structure in the family and the achievement motivation of boys, aged 14-16. He found that the higher the power of the father in the family decisionmaking situation, the lower the son's value on academic achievement. The high achieving adequate father may undercut his son's efforts to achieve. At the same time, if the child is pushed a bit ahead of his own competence, he develops a persistence. If the mother is supportive, the son comes to hope for success more than to fear failure. At the same time, he may come to believe his relations with his parents are contingent upon his performance. Therefore, later in life when he must make a choice between direct interpersonal gratification and the impersonal rewards of achievement, the son tends to choose the latter. As a youngster, the boy conceives of the environment as being responsive to his own efforts to achieve and becomes an "achiever."

This study indicates that the mother's efforts to support the son's search for achievement in a father-dominated family may have positive results on achievement, but does not really foster independence in the son. The "achiever" is not so much motivated by self-assertion, creativity or curiosity, as by the need for reward or some form of response to each of his endeavors.

The parents' function as a role model can also be used to predict academic success or failure. Two studies point to the mother's educational level as a predictor of academic success (Shaw, 1960; Baral, 1977). This was corroborated in a study of high school sophomores in a large metropolitan area where the mother's educational achievement was shown to have a significant and direct effect on academic achievement (Keeves, 1974). Another study focused on the extent to which the academic achievement of one generation is repeated by the next one, the extent to which academic values are transmitted through circumstances in the child's home. The results of the study showed that both mothers and fathers tend to pass onto their children their own likelihood to be truant and drop out of school (Robbins, 1977). However, another study of dropouts found that mothers' and fathers' education were of borderline significance (Rice, 1969).

In summary, parental role models appear to have a profound effect on children's achievement behavior. Father absence resulted in depressed ambition among boys, and a greater school drop-out probability among girls. The relationship between child-parent identification and academic success was demonstrated in several of the studies reviewed. Perhaps the most striking example of the effect of the parental role on achievement behavior occurred in

Perkins and Wicas' study in which therapeutic counseling of the mother was demonstrated to have a positive effect on their son's grades.

Psycho-historical Approach

The psycho-historical approach to literature contains some relevant accounts of child-rearing practices, fantasies, child conflicts, ambivalence, compliance, and deep devotion between achieving men and their mothers. A few are included here as an illustration of the strength of attachment that often occurs in the dyad. The nature of the attachment may be polarized from negative to doting. While men accounted for here are adult achievers, one may question whether high school academic achievers continue to achieve after leaving the academic arena. The inclusion of these accounts is to learn something about the achievers' mothers and their practices.

In his book, American Caesar (1978, p. 19), William Manchester states, "McArthur would recall late in life, his mother began tutoring him in the three Rs, at the same time instilling in him 'sense of obligation.'" He remembers, "We were to do what was right no matter what the personal sacrifice might be. Our country was always to come first. Two things we must never do: never lie, never tattle." She also guided his reading, and she saw to it that her

sons never lacked books about martial heroes. In her lap they learned the virtue of physical courage and the disgrace of cowardice. Once she told Doug that men do not cry. He protested that his father's eyes were often moist at the retreat ceremony. That was different, she quickly explained, that was from love of country; that was allowed. But tears of fear were forbidden. Under her mannered, pretty exterior she was cool, practical, and absolutely determined that her children would not only match but surpass the achievements of her father-in-law and her husband.

Mothers who were loving, attentive, and inspirational or self-serving were reported in abundance in a compilation entitled, Mothers (1976).

Pauline Koch, the mother of Albert Einstein, was ambitious for her son and predicted he would be great but had no ambition for herself beyond the role of wife and mother. Alberta Williams King, the mother of Martin Luther King, was the "soul and backbone" of the family and an inspiration behind her son's doctrine of non-violence. "God bless my mother. All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her." These words were spoken by Abraham Lincoln to William Herndon, his biographer.

Other mothers were less selfless, loving, but nevertheless powerful influences on the achievements and position attained by the son. The ambitious mother who

manipulates, connives and plots for her son is also represented in history and literature. Agrippina the Younger, the mother of Nero, was described as possessing beauty, a majestic air, noble manners, and a lively intellect. Upon marrying Claudius, she so completely dominated him that he set aside his own son and made her son heir to the throne. After killing Claudius, Agrippina settled down to enjoy the rewards of her position as the Emperor's mother, but her son hatched a plot to rid himself of her. Years before, when she was told by a soothsayer that her son would reign but would have her put to death, she had cried, "Oh, let my son kill me provided he reigns." Her wish had become true.

Psychodynamic School

While the subsequent chapter deals in greater depth with the contribution of psychoanalytic theorists such as Winnicott, Kohut, Hartmann and Jacobson regarding learning, and the personal, social and interactional elements that contribute and detract from learning and academic achievement, two relevant papers are included here. Both deal with problems in the use of intellectual capacities, one addressing the inhibition of learning as a function of the ego, and the other, a study which speculates on causes of an inhibition of learning related to discrepancies in parental attitudes toward the ego function of speech.

According to Pearson (1952), the most common disorder of the use of learning is an inhibition of function. Inhibition of the learning function is evidenced in poor execution of tasks, diminished pleasure in learning, or reactive manifestations such as physical symptoms if the person forces himself to go on working. This inhibition of a function of the ego can occur for several reasons:

1. In order not to have to undertake a fresh effort of repression to avoid conflict with the id.

2. To avoid conflict with the superego. Here the inhibition subserves a desire for self-punishment.

3. Because the ego is so impoverished in energy that it is driven to restrict its expenditure.

Problems in focal ego functions are contained in an article by Newman, Dember, and Krug which appeared in Psychoanalytic Study of the Child in 1973, entitled, "He Can but He Won't." The authors studied 15 academically underachieving boys with I.Q.s of at least 130, ages of 7-13, who had been referred to Children's Psychiatric Center in Cincinnatti. After taking a detailed history of the child, administering psychological tests to the child, administering questionnaires to both parents, and interviewing parents and child, the authors concluded that the child who is lazy or willfully "won't" has a true

disability. The child who "can but won't" truly "can't."

The boys studied came from ambitious families who made major geographical moves in search of economic betterment. Work instability was frequent for the fathers. The mothers often viewed marriage or the birth of their first child as an interruption of their own educational careers.

The boys spoke easily, rapidly, and with good facility and derived exhibitionistic pleasure from their own verbalizations. Yet they lacked organization of knowledge, a capacity for abstraction, and information. They had difficulty with concentration, long term projects, or lengthy attention. They used speech for defensive, exhibitionistic and narcissistic needs rather than for communicative purposes. Their glib speech covered their lack of knowledge. In the playground, they gravitated to immature activities, and relied on adult leadership.

The mothers saw their boys as wonderful conversational companions and had great verbal rapport with them. The mothers were more loquacious and verbally productive than fathers. The child, according to the authors, was exploited for adult narcissistic needs. One mother said, "He was a beautiful talker at age 2; he said things I couldn't. At 3, he corrected our English; it floored me. He could talk so intelligently even before he was toilet trained." The mothers valued the child's early speech as

an end in itself. The child "talked early" rather than "thought clearly." The mothers were satisfied with superficial appearances of intelligence.

While the boys were verbally fluent, they were physically clumsy and inept. Verbal fluency was the only outstanding ego ability the boys demonstrated, and it became an isolated function, detached from action and rational thinking.

The mother's enhancement of her child's speech might be considered a hypercathexis of a particular ego function which might be described as a "focal symbiosis." Here, the intensely strong interdependence is limited to a special circumscribed relationship with the mother.

The parade of normality in these boys obscured the subtle underlying pathogenic process. Thus the parent makes no attempt to increase the child's active strivings by stimulation or education. Maternal compliance occurs with an ultimately maladaptive tract in the child. It is only when the maladaptive tract becomes socially visible in school that the neurotic conflict gets belated attention. The authors of this study conclude that the particular ego function whose development has been inhibited in this manner has a high degree of resistance to later remedial efforts. The dynamics are similar to "superego lacunae," but in this case it is an "ego lacunae" unwittingly fostered by the parents.

In summary, the literature which would compare fantasies and child-rearing practices of mothers of high and low achieving boys was extrapolated from studies which relate to the field. Absent are specific studies which compare the differences. Learning-related parameters can be studied from a variety of models including the environmental school, behavioristic school, psychohistorical studies, and psychoanalytic and psychodynamic schools. All are relevant; however, for the purpose of this study, a selection of psychodynamic theory was made to elucidate issues and conflicts in learning.

Theories Related to the Study

Psychodynamic literature on the subject of academic achievement speculates on those influences which promote or interfere with the child's ability to learn such as environment, genetic constitutionality, cultural milieu, peers, socio-economic factors, parental and familial spheres. Only one of these influences, the mother's fantasies and child-rearing practices, will be examined in this study.

The ability to learn and engage in academic achievement is a complicated issue and can be studied from an educational, psychoanalytic, behavioristic, sociological, or genetic point of view. This study will focus on the psychoanalytic approach, specificially theories which

interlock conflicts, adaptation, neturalization, sublimation and achievement. Concentration will be on the theories of Hartmann (1953, 1955, 1958, 1962), Jacobson (1956, 1964), Kris (1955), Winnicott (1964), Anna Freud (1935, 1946, 1970), Kohut (1977), and Blos (1974).

Since learning can be viewed as a function of the ego, problems in learning relate to influences which affect the ego, influences which may arise from the ego itself or from factors in the external world.

In Gerald H. J. Pearson's 1952 survey of the causes of learning difficulties in children, he outlines a series of reasons for diminished capacity for learning.

1. Organic defects and the effects of physical defects and illnesses.

2. Improper and unpleasant conditioning experiences during the process of learning.

3. Current disturbances in object relationship.

4. Emotional reactions such as apprehension of dangers to the child's security, feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment, feelings of horror and fear, engrossment in instinctual desires, and the focusing of attention on daydreams. These produce a deflection of attention from the subject to be learned.

5. The learning process itself has become involved in the neurotic conflict. In these cases, the diminished capacity to learn may result from an inhibition in the use

of learning, from the ability to ingest the data to be learned, or from disturbances in the ability to digest and assimilate the learned material.

6. Disturbances in the relation to reality.

7. The fact that the child has not learned to replace the pleasure-pain principle by the reality principle and so has never been compelled by reality to tolerate anxiety.

To these may be added factors of pedagogy such as poor teaching methods and inadequate books.

Early Mothering

Freud (1905) pointed out that the function of the ego in the psychic sphere has its prototype in the functions of the ego in the physical sphere. For the infant, the prototype of learning for the body ego is that of the digestive activity. Included in this digestive activity are the taking in of food, digestion and assimilation, and the results of that digestive process, including the transformation of material into energy and the elimination of waste materials of that process, etc. The parallel to learning for the child, adolescent, and adult is the taking in of information, correlating it with previous information, and putting out an end product such as writing or reading.

In Childhood and Society, Erickson corroborates in describing the importance of the infant's orality, and its

incorporative nature. Through the maturational process, the "taking" function of incorporation includes visual, auditory, and tactile intake and the ingestion of the information, like the ingestion of food which may be handled with tension and ambivalence, may be spit back and rejected, or may be taken in with pleasure and savored.

The mother's importance in this early phase of ego development is immense. In his 1964 book, The Child, The Family, and The Outside World, Winnicott describes the enormous contribution to learning which the ordinary good mother makes in the first few weeks of life simply by being devoted to her infant. He postulates here that perhaps the mother's contribution is unrecognized, even by her, precisely because it is so immense. Winnicott states that, "If this contribution is accepted, it follows that everyone who is sane, everyone who feels himself to be a person in the world and for whom the world means something, every happy person, is in infinite debt to a woman" (Winnecott, 1964, p. 10).

Hence, from the very start of the baby's life, the mother's role is critical to her baby's learning. An essential part of the infant's earliest education is successful feeding. Here, the mother is solely responsible for introducing the child to its most crucial aspect of external reality, a learning process begins almost

immediately after birth. When the child is first placed at the breast, the baby has no previous experience of what to expect and hence must "create" what there is to be found. Instantly, the illusion is fostered that the real breast is exactly the thing that was created out of need. A thousand times before weaning, the mother must give the baby this particular introduction to external reality, and a thousand times, the feeling must be reinforced that what was wanted and created by the baby is to be found there. From this develops a belief that the world can contain what is wanted and needed with the result that the baby now has the rudimentary expectation of a relationship between inner need and external gratification, which now becomes the basis for all future learning.

At this stage, the mother does not try to prevent the child from having ideas of destruction, but enables appropriate guilt to develop in its own way. Thus, the mother's activities with the child, her attention and tolerance are all essential in enabling a sense of responsibility to develop, which is an important component of the learning and achieving process.

The ability or inability to promote learning tools and faculties such as patientce, responsibility, guilt and restitution to a sense of well-being can often be found in the mother's own attitudes and approaches to mothering

and child rearing. Inability to promote learning may be rooted in her own ambivalence or frustrations vis-a-vis the mothering role, resulting in overpermissive, confused or overly rigid parenting behaviors. Conversely, when mothers are comfortable with their roles, and attendantly more sensitive to the child's unique behavioral style, the child grows in an environment in which his/her vulnerability to non-functional arenas is diminished and hence rendered manageable (Chess, 1970).

The Mother's Fantasies

An important determinant of the mother's attitudes toward achievement are rooted in her fantasies about the child. Throughout her pregnancy, a new and unconscious network of fantasies tend to develop, and older fantasies become reactivated and refocused. The fantasy mechanism of revival of the past is operated in the mother during pregnancy and the tendency to identify negatively or positively with one's own mother is paramount. After the baby's birth, this identification may manifest itself in behavior ranging from compliance with the parental model to a state of protestation against it. The pregnant woman's reaction to her fantasies may range from complete unawareness to full consciousness. While outwardly, the prospective mother might appear to take her models from contemporaries, inwardly she is flooded with memories

and impressions of her mother. During this period, she may idealize her mother as the prototype she would like to embody, or she may struggle against an identification with her, vowing at all costs to avoid her own mother's mistakes. In either case, the most relevant person to the pregnant woman is her mother.

Along with thoughts of the pregnant woman's own mother come other fantasies such as the contents of the womb. S. Freud (1977) assumed the most important fantasy was the incorporated penis of the father. Other fantasies, according to Benedek (1970), regard the fetus as a part of the woman's body which may represent the "bad" devouring self, engendering fear of carrying a monster and creating panic or depression. The fetus may also represent the envied pregnancy of the pregnant woman's mother, or can symbolize the contents of the bowels. Closer to consciousness are fantasies which identify the fetus with its begetter.

Although fantasies may occur in abundance, mothers do not talk about the aggressive hostile fantasies unless they are driven to it by feelings of panic or anxiety. More often they may disclose happy fantasies and wishes about the child and the desire to create a child in an atmosphere free from the traumas, conflicts, and the irrationality. In fact, the healthy mother is probably never entirely free of the denial and replacement of

some reality by fantasy formation.

Once the baby is born, and the mother gives up many of her fantasies, she may behave in ambivalent ways. Some who give up the fantasies may be devoted to the helpless baby but withdraw affection after the baby becomes active. Others are rejecting in the early stages and accepting when the child becomes teachable. In many cases, the mother who has given up her fantasies now reacts to the child in ways that may reflect her own conflicts. The mother with the fewest conflicts may be those whose child's behavior meets with her fantasies (A. Freud, 1935). Conversely, the mother may be least accepting when her child fails to meet her conscious and unconscious secret wishes.

The Role of Neutralization in Learning

Two ego psychologists discussing early learning postulate that learning and progression depend on neutralization of sexual and aggressive aims (Jacobson, 1964), and enhancement of the conflict free sphere (Hartmann, 1959). The mother (or mother surrogate's) role, attitude and behavior are essential in enhancing, delaying, or reducing these areas. Crucial in the learning process during the first two years of life is what Winnicott refers to as the "job of disillusioning" (p. 91), which follows early infancy. When she has given her baby the illusion that the world can be created out of his/her imagination, when

she has helped him/her establish the belief in things and people, she must then take the child through the process of disillusionment, a wider aspect of learning. At this stage in learning, the mother enables the child to perceive that although the world can provide something that is needed, neither the world nor the mother will provide that thing necessarily automatically or at the very moment that the wish is felt.

Winnicott describes this as a stage when the mother's role is to enable the gradual build-up in the child of a sense of responsiblity. Without this early, dawning sense of responsibility, no subsequent sustained achievement and educational effort is possible.

The environment essential for learning during these first two years of life is the continued presence of the mother or the mother figure during the period when the child is accommodating the destructiveness in his/her makeup. At this stage the child is locked in a conflict over the idea of destroying objects in the outside world or of loving them. This involves the child in a special kind of anxiety which Winnicott (1964) identifies as a sense of guilt. Through the mother's care, attentiveness, and involvement in this conflict, the idea of destroying or loving the object become gradually fused, enabling the child to tolerate guilt about his/her own destructiveness because through the mother

there will be an opportunity for rebuilding and repair.

During the child's early and latency years, many of the mother's functions relevant to later achievement center around those activities which promote sublimation. Hartmann, in Notes on The Theory of Sublimation (1955), points to learning as partly a function of sublimation. In sublimation, there is a deflection from instinctual to more culturally valued aims. The mother's role in promoting the delay of instinctual discharge by fostering neutralization of sexual and aggressive aims is of prime importance in the mastery of reality and learning.

Ego psychologists hold that primitive libidinal and aggressive instinctual forces press for immediate discharge and must be channeled to appropriate outlets. As the ego-functions associated with these energies develop, there is a gradual change in which the original libidinal and/or aggressive forces lose both their original nature and their pressure for immediate discharge, which results in neutralization. Anna Freud states that neutralization of drive energy changes the balance between the instinctual and non-instinctual forces and decreases the urgency of the instinctual forces, thus promoting learning.

Kris (1955) examines the causal relationship between the mother's ministrations and the child's capacity for neutralization. He feels that early, defective maternal care, either in the form of extreme deprivation or of

extreme indulgence, diminishes the incentive in the child for mental activity and the initiative for independence.

However, when the mother's caring, constancy, and attentiveness are present in an appropriate degree, there is not a preponderance of libidinal overaggressive forces. Instead, there builds within the child a reservoir of neutralized energy, eventually fostering aims and functions that will tap this energy, such as adaptation, organization, independent thinking, independent actions, and intentionality.

The degree to which instinctual energy has been neutralized and transformed may coincide with the degree to which primary process has been replaced by secondary process. When the mother fails to promote neutralization of aggression and sexual aims, the child develops difficulty in the control of the instinctual energy, which can eventually impair learning. School failure may be the direct result of that early impairment, an impairment which now manifests itself in destructive unneutralized energy that is unleashed against the self and upon others.

The Reality Principle in Learning

There are two basic and conflicting principles of psychic-functioning which are related to learning: the pleasure principle in which one turns to pleasure and away from pain, and the reality principle in which one subordinates pleasure and avoids pain. The reality principle develops slowly during childhood.

Hartmann (1959) describes three layers of reality testing. In the basic layer is the capacity to distinguish between perceptions and ideas. In the next is the capacity to eliminate subjective elements; in the third there is the capacity to be objective.

In this dissertation it is speculated that the mother of the achieving child may consciously or unconsciously understand how important it is that the child learn to subordinate the pleasure-pain principle to the reality principle; further, it is speculated that she may have special abilities and approaches to child rearing which promote or enhance that process.

According to Pearson (1952), the pleasure principle can be used to encourage the child to learn academic subjects in which he has little or no interest. This is achieved through the medium of "bribes" or reinforcement which enhance the learning potential by holding out the promise of a pleasurable reward at the end of the learning task. Consistent with this approach, the child might also learn to avoid pain if punishment is held out as a logical outcome for avoidance of the learning task. However, these methods related to the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain can eventually miscarry; the child, lacking inner resources for control of instinctive urges, may soon tire of the promised reward and revert to

previous destructive behaviors inimical to learning. Similarly, the child threatened with sanctions may soon learn to associate the punishing mother or teacher with pain and hence come to hate and avoid her, and not want to continue the learning process.

According to Pearson, when parents are too permissive and too eager for the child to be gratified for every task, the child fails to learn to tolerate anxiety, particularly that anxiety which arises when immediate gratification of an instinctual desire is denied.

From nursery school through adolescence, that child's inability to tolerate the delay of discharge in instinctual drives may result in a spiralling incapacity to learn.

For that child, all labor associated with the acquisition of knowledge is rejected as intolerable. Reading is boring; mathematics is a torture. Always protected from pain, denied the kind of mothering that promotes the ability to tolerate frustration inherent in the slow learning process, that child flounders in a sea of intense inner urges and drives which must and will seek gratification.

In sharp contrast to this troubled and troublesome child is the one whose mother-son relationship has been successful. For this child, the mothering process

has functioned in such a way as to foster good ego development and a mindset in which academic achievement is both a positive and realizable goal. For this kind of child, the optimal conditions which have promoted academic success are those in which the mother was able to allow him to develop in the basic physiological functions at his own rate, while at the same time imposing those restrictions which are necessary for the development of socialization.

Although there are bright and creative geniuses who had negative, pessimistic parents, these are historical exceptions. Bernice Eiduson, in the book, Scientists: Their Psychological World, asserts that many creative people reported miserable early years and unhappy lives. She believes they had a need to think they had unhappy childhoods. But unhappy parents are true exceptions. She believes that good achievers are not fostered in negative conditions but have positive, forward-looking, optimistic mothers.

Oedipal Issues in Learning

While this study does not purport to study the father-son dyad as it impacts on learning, the oedipal component in academic achievement and underachievement must be addressed. The number of girl underachievers is low compared to the large number of their male counterparts. A variety of reasons can be put forth to explain this

phenomenon. The most obvious and observable is that boys may associate learning with femininity. At an age when most young boys are struggling to assert their masculine identities with all the aggressiveness and physicality that that implies, they are asked to submit to a process, mostly taught by females, which requires a great deal of physical passivity (although learning is decidedly not passive psychologically [Bricklin, 1967, p. 79]).

Moreover, since school is an arena which offers many opportunities for attention through success, many boys behave in ways to avoid this success through fear of oedipal victory. Adolescence is an age when the original competitive situation between father and son struggling for exclusive possession of the mother can reach great intensity. The boy is just approaching the power of his young manhood at a time when the father may just be sensing the eventual decline of his own. Though seldom conscious, many fathers at this stage do harbor jealousy and competitive hostility towards their sons and communicate to those boys most clearly that any excelling behavior will be viewed as a severe blow to father-son amicability. Thus, to retain the tenuous friendship with his father, the son feels that he must make a pact with himself never to excel, because any personal success will earn him a powerful enemy.

This dilemma is compounded where the family demands accomplishment while at the same time the father requires submission, a situation which can cause the child to suffer simultaneously from fear of both success and failure.

Where learning is concerned, both positive and negative oedipus complexes can come to play during the terminal phase of a boy's adolescence. Peter Blos in the Psychoanalytic Study of the Child (1974) describes the dilemma of the underachieving boy:

> As a success, he was offering himself as a love object to the father, or he was annihilating him by usurping his position; on the other hand, as a failure, he was renouncing his ambitions and thereby induced the father to treat him like a contemptible woman; yet in failure he also established his autonomy, even if a negative one by repulsing the father's seductiveness and by not becoming his first love, ideal son. (p. 45)

Thus, while the dramatic events of her son's adolescence are unfolding, the mother's role is complex. During this period, the mother, the boy's first love object, while permitting the boy's identification with the father, must retain a non-seductive, loving tie to her son, and must support his growing separation from her. If she can adopt these positions and attitudes, she can enable her son's oedipal issues to reach resolution without contamination of the learning sphere.

Pathology in the Ego Ideal

In adolescence, many learning problems are traceable to pathology in the ego ideal. At this stage, when there is pathology of the ego ideal, the fantasies of infantile omnipotence and grandeur have not been sufficiently restrained and mitigated by the reality principle. Because the mother has failed to enhance sublimation by introducing neutralization, the only available enhancers to self-esteem seem to be in imaginary wish fulfillment or fantasy. Often poor students express grandiose fantasies of wealth and fame. The boy wishes to be like the powerful parent, a process ordinarily mastered through identification. However, instead of identifying with the father, the boy develops a magic or megalomanic conviction that he is his own ideal object. A merger thus occurs between the self and the idealized object, creating a primitive sense of self-completeness.

Another form of pathology in the area of ego ideal is the concept of a "negative ego ideal" as the introjected negative standards of the parents. In this phenomenon, the underachieving student has identified with a mother and father who are at odds with the value of education, the ideals of the school, or of schools and institutions in general, and the collective common beliefs and mores of prevailing culture. His identification with

angry, helpless, or disturbed parents will have similar results (Blos, 1974).

Conflict Free Area

Hartmann explains that the mental processes are not simply the outcomes of struggles with instinctual drives, but that some development occurs autonomously and without conflict, such as perception, intention, object comprehension, thinking, language, recall phenomenon, motor development, walking and crawling. He calls this the "conflict-free sphere." In the first two years of life, the mother's ability to enhance this area is crucial; her inability can seriously impede the mental apparatuses.

In Hartmann's 1958 book, Ego Psychology and Problems of Adaptation, he observes that the ego develops partly out of conflict with instinctual drives and reality demand, and partly out of autonomous, conflict-free growth. Certain functions that develop out of conflict can later attain a secondary autonomy in the mature ego.

In the development of learning, the ego can be described in terms of its separate functions, each of which goes through a progressive process of maturation. Each of the functions of the ego may also manifest regressive developments which may be either normal or pathological.

Viewing learning as one of the ego functions, Hartmannidentifies the following faculties as components of the learning process: object relationships, thought processes, the sense of time, distance judging, body image, self-representation, perception and reality testing, aesthetic contemplation, anticipatory function, and representational function.

Learning is related to the resiliency of the ego to adapt or erect defenses without regression. Regression occurs when the ego cannot handle an anxiety-provoking situation. The anxiety may begin with a condition simulating an id wish, either libidinal or aggressive, or a superego command. The regression is then manifested in such defensive functions as denial, distortion of reality, primitive thinking in symbolization, fantasies or wishes, or the discharge of unconscious urges of a libidinal or aggressive nature.

What the mother does to minimize regression, to promote reality testing, to curb libidinal or aggressive striving, and to enhance resiliency so that adaptation occurs during stressful situations is of prime importance. Her early role in language is perhaps the most critical area. Language expresses the speaker's inner state (such as emotionality), represents facts or the relationship of facts, and provides signals for the understanding and

the response to messages. Therefore, how the mother handles communication, and how she relates to symbolic messages during her interaction with the child profoundly influences that child's linguistic development.

The Role of Identification

A child's identification with parents or adult models is a short cut to mastering adult patterns of behavior. Anna Freud, in 1935, wrote in Psychoanalysis for Teachers and Parents that the universal aim of education is always to make out of a child a grown-up person who shall not be very different from the grown-up world around him. She adds that the child must detach himself from his parents and also incorporate them into his own personality. The success of this incorporation is the measure of the permanent success of education.

The need to learn often arises from a need to identify with the adult. The child envies the power, self-sufficiency, and apparent freedom from fear of the adult, and desires to be like him so as not to be tormented with feelings of fear, inadequacy, and incapability.

Since the adult is also the source of pleasure, the child becomes apprehensive should he have needs, desires, or wishes but be unable to gratify them. The child believes that if he could become the source of

pleasures, i.e., the adult, he would no longer be apprehensive. Thus, an identification with the adult occurs, and is one of the most important psychological mechanisms in education.

In the process of identification with teacher and parents, the ability to read, work mathematical problems, and problem solve become a part of the child's ego. His ego tries to make itself like the loved and admired parent or teacher; it incorporates him and when it has accomplished any part of the task successfully, the child feels a glow of pride. This represents an expression of love from the part of the ego which represents the incorporated mother or teacher to the part of the ego which represents the child (Pearson, 1952).

The mother is the first object with whom the child identifies, because she is his initial social contact. With her he learns his basic roles of how to be in the world; through her are transmitted basic values and acceptable or unacceptable means of achieving them. This identification develops without ambivalence or conflicts where there is close intimacy between mother and son (Jacobson, 1956).

Some identifications originate in the child's competitive strivings in relation to his pre-oedipal and oedipal rivals. As the child's forbidden fantasies

are repressed, there is the building of superego and aim-inhibited pursuits which are in line with the parent's interests and standards. White, in the Ego and Reality in Psychoanalytic Theory (1977), states that by identifying with a stable whole parent image, the ego acquires the ability to respond to reality. For some, identification can be viewed as a particular form of imitation. However, slight differences between the terms exist.

Imitation involves an attempt to behave as the model does. Identification involves admiring the model, and wanting to be like the model, and trying to gain the competency possessed by the model. It is, then, more a state of intentionality than of direct action. It will not occur until a certain level of ego development has been attained. To identify with others, the child must have a unified sense of self and must possess general feelings of competence.

The type of parent with whom a child can identify is one defined by Kohut (1977, p. 112) as the optimal parent, "optimal parents . . . are parents who, despite their stimulation by competition with the rising generation, are also sufficiently in touch with the pulse of life, accept themselves sufficiently as transient participants

in the ongoing stream of life to be able to experience the growth of the next generation with unforced undefensive joy." The parents react to the sexual desires by becoming sexually stimulated and counteraggressive, but at the same time, take pride and joy in the child's development, vigor, and assertiveness.

Kohut, in Restoration of the Self (1977) says that developmental problems arise with a mother who is an unempathic self object, having an unmirroring face. The child's healthy exhibitionism is replaced by isolated sexualized exhibitionistic preoccupations of status and greatness. The child's search for idealized omnipotent self object with whose power he wants to merge fails, and the child's admiration ceases. Identification with the parents is diminished or marred.

Negative Modeling

A child may identify with behaviors and attitudes that are vital to his overall sense of well-being but deleterious to his success in school. For example, the child may identify with someone he hates because it enables him to attain a desired libidinal goal. This commonly happens with the boy's identification with the hated, feared, yet loved father in order to possess the libidinally desired mother. Thus a child introjects some characteristics of an anxiety object, thereby assimilating an

anxiety experience. In other words, by impersonating the aggressor, and assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat (Freud, 1946a).

The "Self" of the Adolescent

The sense of self starts in primitive ways early in life, and is an ongoing process throughout life. However, in adolescence, the boy struggles to free himself from pre-oedipal and oedipal ties, and searches for his own ideals, goals and objects. During adolescence, there is a psychic restructuring, regression and a forward integrative move. These developmental tasks may be aided and promoted by the mother in her efforts of neutralizing aggression.

Jacobson (1964, p. 187) states, "In fact, the final stages (adolescence) in the development of the ego demonstrate beautifully the hierarchical reorganization and final integration of different--earlier and later--value concepts arising from both systems (ego and superego) into a new coherent structure and functional unit."

The mother has a crucial role in the promotion of the development in the adolescent child of the self. At this stage the adolescent must grapple with the monumental task of self-differentiation. Through her influence, if

negative, that task can be postponed or permanently impaired.

Jacobson (1964) points out that a necessary process in the development of self in adolescence is one of mourning, which occurs in the struggle to disengage from parents and to embark on a search for new objects. The mother must permit this regressive mourning so that healthy progression can recur. She must permit her adolescent to free himself from attachment to persons who were all-important in childhood, and permit him to renounce former pursuits and reach out for adult love, responsibility, and social relationships. For the adolescent as well as for the parents, this requires a drastic restructuring of the entire psychic organization. S. Freud, according to Jacobson, regarded the detachment from parental authority as one of the most significant, but as also one of the most painful of life's psychic achievements.

At this time, the adolescent's erratic emotions may explode in learning situations, as well as in other relationships, indicative of a profound temporary disorganization in drive neutralization mechanisms. No matter how much this process might negatively influence the modality of learning and the achievement orientation of the disrupted adolescent, the mother must stand by, supportively, permitting the detachment, regression, and disorganization which occurs.

In summary, the psychoanalytic literature included in this review describes the relationship between the mother's internal world, her conflicts, her conscious and unconscious fantasies, and the learning capacity and achievement of her son. As learning is a parallel to ingesting, digesting, and utilizing information, it is clear that the mother's role in learning starts from the first feeding of her infant. From the boy's infancy through his adolescence, the mother's practices and attitudes interface with her fantasies, reality testing, and her ability to influence his tolerance for anxiety, pain and discomfort. Failures by the mother which impede the successful resolution of oedipal issues, and sexualization of information, can be deleterious to his learning. On the other hand, neutralization of sexual and aggressive aims, promoted by the mother, enhances the learning function, as does her contribution in promoting the conflict-free sphere of the ego.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Selection of Subjects

Two hypotheses were tested to illuminate whether selected differences would exist between mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys. It was expected differences would occur in their fantasies about academic achievement and their child-rearing practices.

The method of selection of mothers involved several steps. Since all subjects studied were mothers of gifted boys at Beverly Hills High School, the first step was to identify all BHHS boys who were gifted. There are 120 boys on the list of gifted students at BHHS. The boys screened ranged from ninth through twelfth grades. Their average age was 16-1/2.

Gifted children are identified by the school district in a variety of ways. In the Beverly Hills Unified School District, a minimum IQ of 132 is required to be classified as gifted, but some students who are two to three points below qualify if they have special skills or talents such as high mathematics ability. The school district permits 5% of its talented students to be included as gifted. The talented and gifted have an opportunity to participate in an educational enrichment program especially designed

for them from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Ordinarily, students are identified as gifted in the primary grades, although some are identified in high school.

These gifted and talented boys and girls represent about 10% of the total school. This study pooled only from the 120 gifted boys. Girls were not included in the study. The second step of the selection process was to identify both high and low achieving gifted boys. The grade point average was computed for each boy on the gifted-talented list and was used as the determining criterion. To be included as a high achieving boy, the student needed all A's with no more than one B, excluding physical education. Low achieving boys had grade point averages of C or below.

The design called for a total of 30 mothers of gifted boys, 15 high achievers and 15 low achievers. After the grades had been screened, there was a total of 50 high achieving boys but only 15 low achieving gifted boys.

Twenty letters were sent to a randomized group of mothers of high achieving boys. Letters were sent to all 15 mothers of low achieving boys.

Procedure

A letter, previously approved by the high school principal, was sent on April 9, 1981 to each mother chosen. The letter (see Appendix) was an invitation to participate in the doctoral study conducted by a member of the Beverly

Hills High School faculty, the Home School Coordinator. The objective of the study was to learn about the characteristics of mothers in relation to their child's academic achievement. The letter pointed out that their names were randomly selected from the files of gifted students at Beverly Hills High School. The study hoped to make a contribution to the relationship between parenting and student achievement among gifted children, and it was hoped the findings would be useful to the staff in counseling parents and students.

The letter explained that the study would include a questionnaire and interview which would be completely confidential. Respondents would be interviewed at school or in their home. Participants who wished to know the findings of the study would be sent a copy of the conclusions. Parents were requested to call the school or the interviewer's home if they wished to participate.

Mothers of high achieving gifted boys responded more rapidly than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. It was necessary to phone mothers in both groups to complete the sample size required, although from the outset it was apparent there would be a smaller number of mothers of low achieving gifted boys because the total number of possible respondents was the number needed for the sample.

Within three weeks, 15 mothers of high achieving gifted boys had agreed to be respondents and were scheduled to participate. One mother who was initially eager to be a participant later postponed and cancelled her meetings for the interview because of family commitments, and consequently, the total number of high achieving gifted mothers came to 14.

For several weeks following the letters, efforts were made to enlist the response of as many mothers of low achieving gifted boys as possible. In follow-up calls to those who had not responded to the letter, it was learned that two families had moved; one mother could not participate because of a recent death in her family; two were stepmothers who had married the child's father within the last two to three years, and two others mothers declined because of lack of time and interest. This left the mothers of low achieving gifted boys' group with a total of eight respondents. Included in these eight was a grandmother who had raised the boy since the age of two.

Following the mother's agreement to participate, a questionnaire (see Appendix, Schedule #1) was sent to her requesting she have it completed at the time of the interview, which would be within the following one to four weeks. An appointment was arranged to interview the

mother. She was given a choice of being interviewed in her home, in the interviewer's home, or at the high school.

Of the entire group, none wished to be interviewed at Beverly Hills High School. Two low achieving and two high achieving mothers requested interviews in their own homes. All the others, six of the low group and 12 of the high group, requested interviews in the interviewer's home. All of the interviews, both in their homes and in the interviewer's home, were during the day, and at no time were there disruptions or distractions.

When the interview began, each mother was asked to sign an informed consent. It explained that the procedure in the study would include a questionnaire and interview, that mothers could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and that if the study were published, the anonymity of the respondent would be protected unless written consent was given.

Apparatus

The information-gathering apparatus consisted of four parts:

Part #1 - Schedule #1 (Appendix C), mailed to the mother after she agreed to be a participant, was filled out by mother prior to the interview. This schedule included 44 questions.

Part #2 - The interview with the mother. There was a review of the questions in Schedule #1 with the mother in order to clarify cloudy issues or obscure questions and to add depth and elaboration to the questions on the schedule. Her responses were written down.

Part #3 - In the interview with the mother, another schedule was used. Schedule #2 (Appendix D), consisted of nine questions which were more open-ended and were read to the mother. These questions differed from Schedule #1, although some overlapping existed. Her responses were written down as she spoke.

Part #4 - A projective test (Appendix D) was the last item in the interview with the mother. To Card #4 from Tests of Emotional Development,* mothers were asked to give a variety of responses and free associations to questions. Their responses were also written down as they spoke.

Schedule #1 (see Appendix C) consisted of demographic data, such as the family structure, ages and ordinal placement of siblings, ordinal placement of mother, age of mother at marriage, work history of mother before and after the

*Cohen & Weil's Test of Emotional Development (T.E.D.) (1975) is a projective test used to evaluate children's emotional problem areas and psychodynamics of the child's unconscious. The focus is on developmental tasks met and mastered at various age levels. Based on an elaboration of Erickson's eight major stages of development, the test is divided into "tasks" met and mastered such as establishment of trust, and identification with same sex parent.

child's birth, and other relevant data such as major economic, geographical, or medical events. A total of 15 questions were demographic in nature.

The remaining questions asked for the highest educational level of mother; the type of student she was; her philosophy of child rearing; her time spent with the child in reading, going to the library, and watching T.V. Another section dealt with home practices involved in grades such as rewards or punishments and helping with homework. An attempt was made to gauge whether the mother felt she gave up her own goals and career and her feelings in this regard. Ascertaining what the mother modeled as values for the child and the amount of time spent at home in the evenings with the child were all attempts to learn a variety of facets of the mother in relation to her child's academic achievement.

Schedule #2 (see Appendix), in which questions were read to mothers and open-ended, free associations were invited, began with an inquiry about the mother's fantasies during the pregnancy and early months of the child's life. It followed with a question related specifically to fantasies she might have had about what course or profession she wanted for him. Other questions included the mother's philosophy of child rearing, her values about education, and generalized questions about the mother's likes and dislikes regarding child rearing, and areas of greatest agreement and disagreement about child rearing between her husband and herself.

Because of the openness in these questions, elaborative answers were frequent.

In the final part of the interview, one card from a projective test, Tasks of Emotional Development, was administered.

The Tasks of Emotional Development (T.E.D.) is a projective test for children and adults which is based on Erickson's Stage - theory of ego development. The test recognizes that ego development is not verbal brightness but in large part cognitive adequacy in perception of the self, the world, and interpersonal relations and values. The test is an instrument to assess ego development, and is similar to other projective tests which can be used to assess ego development such as the Rorschalk, TAT, and Draw a Person. Thirteen cards are included to which the subject is asked to free associate:

Task 1: Socialization within the Peer Group.

Task 2: Establishment of Trust in People.

Task 3: Acceptance and Control of Aggressive Feelings Toward Peers.

Task 4: Establishment of Positive Attitudes Toward Academic Learning.

Task 5: Establishment of Conscience with Respect to Property.

Task 6: Separation from Mother Figure.

Task 7: Identification with the Same Sex Parent.

Task 8: Acceptance of Siblings.

Task 9: Acceptance of Limits from Adults.

Task 10: Acceptance of Affection Between Parents.

Task 11: Establishment of Positive Attitudes Toward Orderliness and Cleanliness.

Task 12: Establishment of a Positive Self Concept.

Task 13: Establishment of Positive Heterosexual Socialization.

For the purpose of this study, Card #4 was used. This card aims to elicit information which would assess the establishment of positive attitudes toward academic learning, and when used by mothers, provided an index to their feelings about their sons' academic activities.

Mothers were handed Card #4, which shows a boy sitting in front of a desk in a dimly lit room. An open book and pencil are on the desk. The boy is modestly dressed. The mother is asked:

1. What do you see?

2. What are the boy's feeling about his work or study?

3. Why is he engaging in this activity, such as study?

4. What will the outcome of his work, reading or study be?

The purpose of these questions is to gauge, insofar as possible, unconscious feelings the mother might have about academic achievement. Several measures are brought up.

1. Perception: The mother's ability to see the task of academic learning.

2. Affect: The mother's thoughts about the boy's feelings as they relate to the solution of the task.

3. Motivation: The mother's reason given for the boy's studying or not studying.

4. Outcome: The mother's view of the maturity of the solution to the task. Successful and unsuccessful outcomes are sought.

Coding

A coding system (see Appendix) was devised on questions which appeared to elicit information relevant to the two hypotheses. Some questions were not coded, for in the course of the interview, they were not clear or seemed to be irrelevant to the issues under study.

Forty-three questions were coded in such a way that where three or four alternatives existed, an answer of one was closer to the hypothesis than an answer of three or four. For example, Hypothesis I, Question C, predicts that mothers of high achievers are stronger educational models than mothers of low achievers. Therefore, in Question 16, which asks for mother's highest educational level, a #1 response is for a doctorate or master's degree, and a #4 response indicates that the respondent didn't finish high school. Thus, in Table 1, showing the

comparison of the mean responses in the mothers of high achieving gifted boys and mothers of low achieving gifted boys, low numbers correlate with high achievement.

Description of Mothers

There was a significantly higher number of divorces in the mothers of low achievers. In the high achieving group, 93% were married, of whom 14% were divorced and remarried. In the low group, 50% were married or had remarried (12.5%). Divorced mothers accounted for 37.5% of the low achieving mothers. Widowhood also occurred more frequently to low achieving mothers (12.5%) as compared with high achieving mothers (7%).

The average of the mothers of low achieving students was 25 at the time of the child's birth. Ages of mothers of high achievers averaged 28 years. Included in high achievers were two mothers whose ages were 38 and 39 at the time of the child's birth.

The majority of mothers in both high and low groups were married between the ages of 20 and 25. Approximately 30% of the high achievers' mothers married under the age of 20, and approximately 30% of the mothers of low achievers married between the ages of 25-29.

High achieving mothers tended to be the oldest child in their family (64%). None were the youngest. Low achieving mothers tended to be middle children (62.5%).

Mothers of both high and low achieving students tended to be professional. The study's definition of professional may account for the high figure. Professional for the purpose of this study included not only doctor, lawyer, nurse, etc., but travel agent, writer (whether employed or not), film executive, and accountant. Included in the category of professionals were mothers who had professions which they did not pursue. Some did related volunteer, non-professional, or secretarial work. Non-professional mothers occurred with greater frequency in the low achieving group than high achieving group, although two mothers of low achieving boys were lawyers. However, one mother of a high achiever said she never wanted to work. "If I was going to be a mother, I'd do it right."

While there was no question regarding religion, it was assumed that most of the mothers were of Jewish background as the school population is preponderantly Jewish. The school district closes for major Jewish holidays such as Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. It was for this reason that Question #56 asks if mother car pools "to school, lessons, or temple."

Table 1

Demographic Data on Mothers

1. Marital Status

	Married 1	Divorced 2	Remarried 3	Widowed 4
High	79.0%		14.0%	7.0%
Low	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%

4. Age of Mother at Child's Birth

	Under 20 1	20-25 2	25-29 3	30-34 4	Over 35 5
High		57.0%	14.0%	14.0%	14.0%
Low		50.0%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%

5. Mother's Age at Marriage

	Under 20 1	20-25 2	25-29 3	30-34 4	Over 35 5
High	29.0%	57.0%	14.0%		
Low		67.0%	33.0%		

7. Mother's Rank

	Only 1	Oldest 2	Middle 3	Youngest 4
High	14.0%	64.0%	21.0%	
Low	12.5%	12.5%	62.5%	12.5%

10. Mother's Occupation

	Housewife 1	Professional 2	Volunteer 3	Non-Prof. 4
High	7.0%	96.0%	7.0%	
Low	12.5%	75.0%		12.5%

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Eight mothers of low achieving gifted boys were compared with 14 mothers of low achieving gifted boys. The boys ranged in age from 15 to 18-1/2 years of age in the high achieving gifted group, and from 15-1/2 to 18 in the low achieving gifted group, with a mean age of 16 for both high and low achieving group.

The average age of mothers at the time of the child's birth was 25 for the low achieving group and 28 for the high achieving group.

Eighty percent of the mothers of high achievers had earned a BA degree compared with 50% of the mothers of low achievers. To test the differences in mothers of high and low achievers, two hypotheses were utilized. In the first, it was expected that the wishes, fantasies and expectations about academic achievement would differ in mothers of high achieving gifted boys and mothers of low achieving gifted boys. In the second, it was expected that child-rearing practices and behavior would differ in mothers of high achieving gifted boys and mothers of low achieving gifted boys. Each hypothesis included several questions which were designed to test the hypothesis. Each question was

coded. For example, to learn about the child-rearing practice regarding TV watching, mothers were asked how much TV was watched by the child in elementary school. The coding included four options ranging from less than one hour to four or more hours per day. Students' t-scores* were computed on each question and the more closely the mean approximates one (1), the more confirmatory the result of the hypothesis (see section on coding).

The first hypothesis was examined through the use of a series of questions to ascertain the differences in the wishes, fantasies and expectations about academic achievement between the mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys. Questions for the first hypothesis were grouped in three sections: the mother's fantasies about her son's future, the mother's perception of studying as a positive or negative activity, and the mother's influence as an educational model.

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*The distribution of $t = \frac{\bar{Y} - \mu}{s/\sqrt{}}$ for samples drawn from a normally distributed population was discovered by W. S. Gosset and published (1908) under the pen name of Student. He referred to the quantity under study as "t" and it has ever since been known as Student's t.

The Student's t, tests hypotheses concerning the difference between two means and a comparison of two population variances.

The statistical test for the difference between two means is the Test Statistic.

The first section of this hypothesis pertained to the mother's fantasies. Two questions were utilized, one asking about the vocation mother fantasized for her son, and the other related to her fantasies during her pregnancy.

Table 2

Fantasies: Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
45	1.43	1.71
46	1.29	1.62
Total Means	1.36	1.66

The results indicated that mothers of high achievers recalled fantasies of high achievement more than mothers of low achieving boys. Using the described coding, the total means of the mothers of the high achieving group was 1.36, as compared with 1.66 in the low achieving group. The t-score was to a statistical significance level of .10 for Questions 45 and 46 (see Appendix).

Typical responses of non-intellectual or achievement expectations by mothers of low achieving boys were as follows: One mother of a low achieving boy said her infant son was so fast moving that she fantasized he would be a football player or race car driver. Another

mother of a low achiever wanted a compassionate child, another "an evolved human being."

Typical comments from mothers of high achievers were: "He was so bright, we thought he should be a doctor or lawyer." One said, "As a baby, he played so well with tools, we thought he'd be an orthopedic surgeon." Another mother said, "I thought he should be a lawyer because he had such a big mouth." Still another said, "My son could be a senator, even president. This is the thing I'm giving the world." Less typical of the high achieving mothers was, "I live in the present and never project my thinking onto the children."

Four questions were asked to gain an understanding of the differences in the mother's perception about studying and intellectual activity.

Table 3

Studying: Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
55	1.64	1.75
56	1.36	1.62
57	1.36	1.38
58	1.57	1.50
Total Means	1.48	1.56

Mothers of high achieving boys tended to see the outcome of studying as more positive and rewarding than did mothers of low achieving boys. Here the trend was noted strongly in Questions #55, #56, #57 (see Appendix). These were all responses to projective testing. Mothers of high achieving gifted boys tended to see the child's homework process as positive, saw the child working willingly, saw him interested in his studies, and projected a more satisfying and rewarding outcome as compared with mothers of low achieving gifted boys. The total means for the high group was 1.48 and 1.56 for the low group, confirming the hypothesis.

In the projective test, a picture of a young man sitting at a desk is shown. The mother is asked the following questions:

1. What do you see?

2. Why is the man participating in the task? (For example, if the mother states he is studying, the examiner asks why?)

3. How is the young man feeling?

4. What will be the outcome of his study?

Mothers of low achieving gifted boys gave more negative comments than mothers of high achieving gifted boys. In the low group, four mothers respectively said the boy was in emotional turmoil, not sure of himself,

in limited touch with humanity, and under too much pressure. Two mothers in this group felt the boys were dishonest. One felt certain the boy was "cheating" on his work and another said "plagiarism" was involved!

Most mothers of high achieving gifted boys saw a successful outcome of studying stating he should do well and be successful, although a few mothers also saw negative features of studying such as loneliness.

Three questions sought to illuminate the differences between the two groups of mothers as educational models.

Table 4

Educational Models: Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
16	1.86	2.25
17	1.50	2.50
18	1.93	1.75
Total Means	1.76	2.17

Mothers of high achievers were stronger educational models than mothers of low achievers. In Question #16, mothers of high achieving gifted boys attained higher educational degrees than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. Mothers of high achieving gifted boys,

according to Question #17, were better students academically than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. Here the t-test showed a singificance level of .005. A comparison of the means of high (1.76) and low (2.17) achieving mothers confirmed the hypothesis. This too was a statistical significance level of .005.

Mothers of high achievers had higher educational degrees than mothers of low achievers. In both groups were mothers who had returned to school to earn additional degrees, three among the high achieving group and two among the low achieving group.

In summary, a strong trend is evident in support of Hypothesis I, that wishes, fantasies and expectations about mothers of high and low achievers differ. Examination of individual questions shows a trend often statistically significant, as in Questions 45, 46, 16, and 17 (See Tables 1 and 3). Comparing the total means for questions pertaining to Hypothesis I for the mothers of high and low achievers, 1.55 and 1.79, respectively, a t-score of 1.71 was obtained. This t-score is to signi ficance level of α (alpha) = .1.

Table 5

Means of High and Low Achieving Responses of Questions of Hypothesis I

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
45	1.43	1.71
46	1.29	1.62
55	1.64	1.75
56	13.6	1.62
57	1.36	1.38
58	1.57	1.50
16	1.86	2.25
17	1.50	2.50
18	1.93	1.75
Total Means	1.55	1.79

The second hypothesis postulates that the mother's child-rearing practices and behaviors differ in mothers of high achieving and low achieving gifted boys.

To test this hypothesis, questions were divided in three sections, the first dealing with the mother's attitudes and pursuit of her own career, the second having to do with the mother's philosophy about a structured versus democratic home, and the third related to the mother's practices and attitudes with regard to the child's grades.

From the four questions regard mother's careers, it was found that mothers of high achieving gifted boys gave up careers in favor of child rearing more than mothers of low achievers. Question #31, which was

Table 6

Careers: Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
8a	6.00	6.71
29a	1.64	1.12
29b	1.62	1.86
31	1.21	2.00
Total Means	2.62	2.90

statistically significant to the .05 α (alpha) level, affirmed that mothers of gifted high achievers tended to feel that they gave up nothing by mothering rather than pursuing careers outside the home as compared with mothers of low achievers. The mean scores of the two groups confirmed the hypothesis, the high achieving group having a mean of 2.62, and the low group 2.90.

Fifty percent of the mothers of low achievers answered that mothering deprived them of a career or emotional growth. In contrast, only 25% of the mothers of high achieving boys expressed this regret. Mothers of both high and low achievers who missed opportunities for self-growth said that rearing children had been satisfying and rewarding, but other options were closed off to them. One mother, elaborating about her ambivalence, described her aspiration to be a painter. As a mother

who was busy with her children from morning till night, there was no time for her painting. Yet, she noted that Sylvia Plath, the writer, would awaken and write at 4 a.m., while she was perhaps less ambitious and unable to fulfill her own aspirations and talents while simultaneously raising a family. While she enjoyed child rearing, she also regrets a failure in own development.

The part of the hypothesis relating to the mother's belief about a structured home utilized three questions.

Table 7

Structured Homes: Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
19	1.21	2.00
25	1.21	1.50
47	1.62	1.88
Total Means	1.35	1.79

Mothers of high achievers also believed more in structured supervised homes than mothers of low achievers. Question #19 affirms this and is statistically significant to the .025 α (alpha) level. The results of this question were that mothers of high achievers believed more in structured than egalitarian homes. An illustration of this structure is evident in Question #25, which

was significant to the .10 level, in which it was found that mothers of high achievers checked the child's homework in elementary school more than mothers of low achievers. A comparison of the means of high (1.35) and low (1.79) achieving mothers also confirmed the hypothesis.

In Question #19, which relates to authority in the home, a mother of a low achieving boy who believed in an egalitarian home while raising her son states, "I now have a clearer idea of how to set reasonable limits and understand the necessity for it." Another mother of a low achiever who strongly wanted a structured home with clear authority figures was undermined by her husband. Her comment revealed the conflict caused by this rift, stating, "When there is a division between parents, don't underestimate the child's ability to understand and manipulate it."

Other comments from mothers of low achieving boys were related to the importance in child rearing of children voicing their feelings. One said feelings get "top priority," another wanted the child to be listened to. In one family where the democratic ideal was strong, the chidren were included on almost all decisions, and family conferences were a frequent event. Still another was unable to impose structure because her son "had a mind of his own." In families where children are given

opportunities to voice their feelings, there is a more egalitarian structure.

In contrast to egalitarian homes, mothers of high achieving boys talked about the value of structure in the home. One believes even more now than before of making demands on the child. One mother described the implementation of structure. Although her son found it tortuous to sit still, he was required to do it. She quizzed him on "long and short sounds" in primary years and he eventually learned to sit still even becoming an avid reader. On trips, free time was not available as the mother had games, quizzes, and activity books to fill the time and structure the day. In restaurants, the parents and children played word games. She believed this structure would enhance his learning and overall development.

Another example of a mother who believed in structure was one whose comment is reflective of several others in the group of mothers of high achieving boys. She said, "I feel too many children have too much to say and push their parents around."

However, some parents in each group have changed their belief about structure. Two mothers of low achievers who believed in unstructured homes now believe more firmness, limits, and directives would have been advantageous. Three mothers of high achievers who

advocated and promoted clearly delineated lines of authority now speculate more input from the children would have been valuable to the child's development.

Eight questions pertained to child-rearing practices around grades. These questions probed attitudes about rewards, punishments, and privileges afforded or deprived the child for grades.

Table 8

Grades: Means of High & Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
24b	3.75	3.83
26a	1.90	2.38
26b	2.54	2.57
26c	1.07	1.14
26d	2.54	2.71
26e	1.77	2.57
26f	1.25	1.57
38	1.62	2.12
Total Means	2.16	2.51

The results showed that mothers of high achievers were more actively attentive to test grades and end of the semester grades than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. In Question #26a, in which there was a statistical significance level of .10, α (alpha), mothers of high

achievers specified the grades they expected of the student more than mothers of low achievers. More mothers of high achievers discussed test grades than mothers of low achievers (Question #26e), and in this t-score there was a significance level of .025. They also discussed very openly their dissatisfaction when the grades were not to their liking (Question #26f), with a significance level of .10 α (alpha). The means of high (2.16) and low (2.51) achieving mothers also confirmed the hypothesis.

One mother of a high achieving gifted boy explained her attitude as follows: "I expected decent grades or an explanation. Children learn to live with pressure. That's our world. We live in a goal-oriented culture and we can't be afraid of it. What job doesn't have pressure?"

Another mother observed her child in school at the beginning of each semester until the 5th grade. She was interested in the child-teacher interaction. She asked the teacher if the child could earn an "A" in specific subjects, and if the answer was affirmative, the child was required to get "A's." When her son got all "A's," there was a family celebration.

Mothers used positive and negative reinforcements for grades. One mother of a high achieving boy who deprived her son of privileges for failure to earn "A's,"

also helped him on homework assignments by typing his work. It would appear that she was willing to devote time and energy to the pursuit of her son's academic achievement, and that if the results were inadequate, she reinforced her conviction by depriving him of pleasures.

In the hypothesis related to child-rearing practices, six questions pertaining to the mother's investment of time and energy in educational activities were included.

Table 9

Educational Activities: Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
21	1.50	1.38
23	1.57	1.62
34	1.07	1.00
40a	1.57	1.57
40b	1.92	2.00
41	2.07	2.12
Total Means	1.62	1.62

Included were questions on the amount of time mother read to the pre-kindergarten child (#21), the frequency of library visits (#23), how the mother promoted education such as direct teaching (#34), how much time mother remained home in the evenings to be with the child in elementary school and in high school (#40b), and

mother's values of academic skills as compared with social skills (#41).

It was expected that mothers of high achieving gifted boys would invest more time in educational activities than mothers of low achieving gifted boys. However, the total means in the high and low groups were identical--for this portion of the hypothesis, both 1.62.

While the means were identical for the six questions, a trend toward greater investment in educational activities by mothers of high achievers as compared with mothers of low achievers was born out in Questions #23, #40b, and #41. The trend was toward validation of the hypothesis, but failed to reveal a reportable level of significance (see table).

A frequent response from mothers of low and high achievers was their own love for books. One mother of a high achiever always reads two books at a time, a novel and a technical book in her field. One mother described her child's jealousy over books declaring mother liked books more than him. Another mother of a high achiever had a brilliant brother whom she loved and admired. He told her everything you'll ever want to know is in a book. She agrees.

Although no statistical significance was shown for the difference in educational activities, a trend

supporting the hypothesis is clearly shown in four out of the six questions.

In summary, two hypotheses were tested to ascertain the differences in mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys.

In the first hypothesis, it was expected that wishes, fantasies, and expectations about academic achievement would differ in the groups. In the second hypothesis, differences were expected in the mother's child-rearing practices and behavior regarding academic achievement.

Both hypotheses were substantiated with a greater statistical significance in support of the first hypothesis. The lack of statistical significance for the second hypothesis is explained by confounding of the variables by the section related to educational activities due to poorly worded questioning and methodology in this section.

Table 10 summarizes the means for high and low achieving responses. The lower mean for the high group is confirmatory of the two hypotheses.

Table 10

Totalled Means of High and Low Achieving Responses

Question	High Ach. Mean	Low Ach. Mean
21	1.50	1.38
23	1.57	1.62
34	1.07	1.00
40a	1.57	1.57
40b	1.92	2.00
41	2.07	2.12
29a	1.64	1.12
29b	1.62	1.86
31	1.21	2.00
19	1.21	2.00
25	1.21	1.50
47	1.62	1.88
24b	3.75	3.83
26a	1.90	2.38
26b	2.54	2.57
26c	1.07	1.14
26d	2.54	2.71
26e	1.77	2.57
26f	1.25	1.57
38	1.62	2.12
Total Means	1.74	1.94

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings in this study validated both hypotheses I and II, namely that in a comparison of fantasies and child-rearing practices between mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys, differences would be found.

One of the major differences was the higher number of recollections of fantasies dealing with academic achievement among mothers of high achieving gifted boys. These mothers reported wishes of achievement during pregnancy in both the early and later years of the child's development. Winnecott's work in the new network of unconscious fantasies that the mother develops during pregnancy is of interest because these new fantasies may serve to heighten the mother's awareness, and serve as an unconscious preparation for the child-rearing tasks ahead, even signaling the form and style of her role as a mother. This finds collaboration in Hartman's theory that fantasy connects needs and goals with possible ways of realizing them, the fantasy being a preparation for reality.

The contents of the fantasies differed between mothers of high achieving gifted boys and mothers of low achieving gifted boys. After the child's birth, mothers

of high achievers were found to be more focused on concrete goals and vocational achievements. For example, one mother of a high achiever said her child played so well with tools, she confidently expected he had the talent to become an orthopedic surgeon. Another mother of a high achiever, whose child showed high verbal capacity fantasized a career for him in law and public speaking. Conversely, mothers of low achieving gifted boys fantasized less about tangible career goals or academic achievement, placing their focus on the child's values, inherent goodness, and commitment to others. They used terms such as "actualized," "fully developed," "evolved," and "unimpeded" to describe the person they hoped their son would become. These mothers of low achieving gifted boys had a tendency to spare their sons from those frustrations and traumas which might impair or restrain the attainment of self-actualization. They believed that an upbringing which abounds in an abundance of gratification would fulfill their ambition for self-fulfillment. On the other hand, mothers of high achieving gifted boys who were more academically ambitious and achievement and goal-oriented seemed less involved in providing gratification and spoke less about protecting their sons from frustrations arising from learning. This raises the speculation that the child's gratification without appropriate frustrations may have impeded the learning

process among those boys whose mothers guarded their boys from frustration.

Mothers of high achieving gifted boys saw the outcome of studying as more positive and rewarding than did mothers of low achieving boys. As measured in the Projective Test of Emotional Development Card #4, mothers of high achievers gave positive, hopeful and optimistic associations to the picture of a young man at a desk. Concern or worry was not voiced concerning the boy's frustrations. Instead their interest was goal-directed and rooted in future aspirations. One mother interested in long term goals was typical of the mothers of high achievers. She said, "the boy in the picture looks interested and because of his diligence will do well and be successful." On the other hand, mothers of low achiving gifted boys associating to the same picture, were critical of the bleakness and inadequate lighting in the room and noted a "sadness" of expression on the boy's face. Other negative features mentioned by them included the notion that the boy was "cheating," "copying not learning," and even "plagiarizing," "irritable," "lazy," "uninterested," "bored," and "unintelligent"! Thus, high academic performance appeared to be associated to the mother's positive attitude about study, while low academic achievement appeared to be associated with a negative attitude about study.

Peter Blos (1974), writing about the importance of the mother's positive attitude with regard to education, notes that the mother is the boy's first love; while permitting his identification with the father, the mother helps to promote his development by retaining a positive non-seductive tie to him, enabling the boy to resolve oedipal issues without disrupting the learning faculty.

There exists a corroboration in the literature of these findings, namely that the childhood history of creative and scientific persons would suggest that achievement is best fostered in positive, optimistic surroundings where achievement has been emphasized, and that the childhoods of unhappy, negative, pessimistic identifications are historical exceptions among bright, creative geniuses. Pauline Koch, the mother of Albert Einstein predicted optimistically he would be great. Martin Luther King said "God bless my mother. All I am or ever hope to be I owe to my mother." Their mothers' positive attitudes contributed to the sons' ambition and diligence.

The reason that achievement may be fostered by mothers who are optimistic and positive may spring from their ability and child-rearing practices which permit the boys' inborn curiosity and assertiveness to emerge. This assertiveness may spring from the mother's own ambitions and even grandiosity. Illustrative of this grandiosity was the mother in this study who said of her toddler, "my

son could be a Senator, even President. This is the thing I'm giving the world." The child and mother were linked together in a common assertive, ambitious purpose, and academic achievement was a by-product of this concerted effort.

The fact that these optimistic mothers were also stronger educational models as measured by higher academic degrees helped to foster the boy's identification with his mother's academic goals. Compared with low achieving boys, high achieving boys identified more completely with the achieving mother. Ironically, through this identification, his striving for independence and individuation may have helped effect a separation from the parent. Instead of searching for the parent to gratify him, the boy turns instead to learning and independence as sources of pleasure. Anna Freud (1935), commenting on the importance of identification in learning, wrote that the universal aid of education is to make of a child a grownup person who shall not be very different from the grownup world around him, and Kohut in 1977 proposed that what enhances identification is "optimal parents" who permit "optimum frustration" and react with "unforced undefensive joy" to the vigor, assertiveness and growth of the next generation.

In contrast to the boys who identify with the achieving parent are those who internalize the parent's

conviction that diligent study is undesirable. One mother of an underachieving boy associated to the projective test by scornfully announcing that all that hard work would lead to his becoming an "engineering type," implying an unempathic, dull, uninteresting and unfulfilled person. Another mother of an underachiever declared he was a "ne'er do well like his father and me." With a touch of pride, she admitted never doing homework as a student and succeeding through "charm and fakery." She confidently expected her son to follow this example. These two underachieving boys may have internalized maternal behaviors and attitudes that were deleterious to their academic achievement.

Mothers of high achievers were heavily invested in their children's education and achievement. Their fostering of education took varied, creative, and concerted efforts, including the amassing of whole libraries, drilling the children in phonics, sitting in the child's classroom for the first few days of each semester to assess the teacher-student relationship, typing reports for children, and traveling to places of educational interest. While mothers of low achievers were equally interested in books, having as one mother put it, "a love affair with books," most of them were less focused on academic achievement per se. For one thing, in the small sample of eight mothers of underachievers, several had experienced personal severe traumas which required their energies for personal recovery

and restabilization. Among the traumas of these mothers were divorce, the suicide of the mother's siblings, and the birth of a retarded child. A trauma of great magnitude had occurred to one "mother" studied who was the boy's grandmother, given custody by the court at age 2 because of the natural mother's incompetence, irresponsibility, and child neglect. This grandmother's early years with the boy and his brother were spent trying not only to raise them but in a futile battle to help the boys' mother rehabilitate her life.

One might easily expect that mothers of low achieving boys who were in personal crises must have failed because of time, energy, personal regression, rage or other factors to promote neutralization of sexual and aggressive aims, which is, according to Jacobson (1964), necessary for learning. Kris (1955) adds that the mother's defective care fails to stimulate the child's earliest mental processes. Mothers of low achieving boys in this study may have had an inability or unavailability for constancy and attentiveness which resulted in a preponderance of libidinal, aggressive, unneutralized forces in their son's academic failure.

From the study it would appear that not only were mothers of low achieving boys less able to promote neutralization of sexual and aggressive aims, their efforts toward sublimation of instinctual energy were less effective. The child may therefore have experienced

difficulty in the control of instincts, and mastery of his primary energies, leading to an inhibition of learning.

Both groups contained mothers who had returned to school and were continuing their own educational development. That this did not serve as a spur to the underachieving boys may be accounted for in various ways. For one thing, the families of underachieving boys were generally in greater stress, containing more divorces, separations, deaths and mental illness. To enable the child to cope with these stresses, the mother's presence was more critical. In the mother's absence, both physical and emotional, there was a failure to promote developmental tasks or soothing the child shaken by familial tensions.

Many of the mothers' functions relevant to achievement involve those activities which she performs in conjunction with the child's early years. Hartmann (1955) sees learning as a function of sublimation; the mother's presence, both physically and emotionally, is necessary for her to engage in activities which promote sublimation, delay instinctual discharge and are conducive to mastery.

With the mother's absence or availability diminished, regression may have resulted, leading to uncontrolled, unneutralized aggression or libido. Perhaps the mother's unavailabity or preoccupation may have resulted in anger, resentment and eventual rejection of the educational values. Anger about needing the parent and experiencing the maternal

absence and deprivation may have fostered characteristics in opposition to the parental model of academic achievement.

In addition, some mothers of underachieving boys who returned to school were more attentive to their son's development of individuality, uniqueness and creativity, rather than the pursuit of curriculum requirements, credits and college standards. They saw school as "narrow and restrictive." Although they themselves had returned to school, they wished their children to be autonomous and self-directed. School was not more highly valued than other avenues of modalities of growth. For example, one mother of an underachieving boy was delighted that at the age of 15 her son had been "ranked" in tennis, and was fast gaining acclaim and recognition. Taking pride in his athletic achievements, she was not overly perturbed by his failure to succeed academically but instead valued his performance and encouraged him in his pursuit of his own individuality. Another mother delighted in her son's talent as a comedian while simultaneously deploring his lax academic attitudes which prevented him from attaining good parts in school plays.

Another mother, highly educated at the time of her children's birth, later returned to school for an advanced degree but was not overly invested in promoting her children's academic goals. Her interest was in the emergence of their uniqueness and individuality. Her several gifted children, all poor performers in school, did become

achievers but in creative, non-academic areas such as music and writing. In high school, her gifted son was giving piano recitals and piloting an airplane, while earning failing grades.

On the other hand, mothers of high achievers who returned to school seemed to promote a positive identification with reference to academic achievement. A crucial difference may rest on the ability of the boy to make a relatively conflict-free identification with his achievement-oriented parent(s). The underachiever may fear a positive identification would be equivalent to the annihilation of his own personality; or he may rebel and later punish himself for the rebellion by becoming an underachiever. For the underachiever, a parental identification seems to hold more conflict and fear than for the achiever.

It was speculated that, through activities such as reading, library visits, and direct teaching, coupled with the mother's conviction of the importance of academic values, the mother's ministration led to neutralization of the child's instinctual aims.

Through the skills that the mother promotes such as reading, listening, conversing, the child's ability to tolerate delay in discharge of instinctual drives increases. Without the ability to delay discharge, there is a diminished capacity to learn. While Question #23 proved not to be statistically relevant, the responses in the

interview were nevertheless supportive of the hypothesis.

Undoubtedly a contributing factor to the statistical findings resulted from the too narrowly constructed Question #23, asking for the amount of time mothers spent with the child at the library. In the interviewing process of each individual mother, mother-son activities were disclosed that would lead one to believe that mothers of high achievers did invest more time, although not necessarily in the library.

In fact, several mothers of high achievers rarely went to the library with their children but bought books in abundance, sometimes resulting in their own individual libraries. Some mothers supplemented books with tapes of others and themselves telling stories or reciting poetry. One mother encouraged her imaginative son to tape his own stories. Journal keeping and creative writing were also fostered by mothers of high achieving youngsters.

Thus, the responses which came from the interview rather than the questionnaire were highly supportive of the hypothesis although these responses were not subjected to a statistical measure.

The findings in this study also confirmed that mothers of high-achieving gifted boys deferred full-time career activity in favor of child rearing more than the mothers of low-achieving gifted boys. Yet many mothers of high-achieving gifted boys did volunteer work, worked

part-time, or pursued their own further education. However, they saw their primary commitment as mothering and for the most part identified themselves as non-working mothers.

Winnicott (1964) points out that the environment for learning is the continued presence of the mother or the mother-figure during the early stages of development. The mother's care, attention and involvement enable a gradual fusion of the idea of loving and destroying the object at the same time. The mother's presence enables an accommodation for fusion to the disparate parts of the mother. The mothers in the group of high-achieving mothers made their presence available to their sons. We can speculate that their presence enabled the processes of illusionment, disillusionment, responsibility, guilt, and restitution to occur, thus promoting learning.

In the absence of the mother, the capacity for appropriate fusion of illusion and disillusion is diminished. This may have been the case with one low-achieving gifted boy who spent the first two years of his life with a mother whose maternal deficits were striking. His mother, an alcoholic, in and out of mental hospitals, and grossly neglectful when with the child, failing to feed him or change his diapers for hours, was unable to provide him with adequate mothering experiences.

Another low-achieving gifted boy suffered from emotional deprivation which occurred when he was age three

because his mother sank into a deep depression following the suicide of her two siblings. The mother's apathy, withdrawal, and self-absorption diminished the quality of her ministrations and mothering functions, which she felt had been a factor in his low academic achievement.

Still another mother of a gifted low-achieving boy suffered profoundly following the birth of her severely retarded child. While physically present, she experienced such a severe struggle about placement of this defective child that she may have withdrawn emotionally from her healthy older son. These findings were highly supportive of the hypothesis that mothers of high achievers were more likely to be with the children than mothers of low-achieving boys.

Mothers of high achievers valued and promoted structure as a frame for their child-rearing practices more than mothers of low achievers who believed in democratic or egalitarian practices as the best modality of child rearing. Questions #19 and #47 of this hypothesis can be seen in conjuntion with each other. In #19, the mother is asked her belief about structured versus an egaliarian home, and in #47, she is questioned about her idea or philosophy in raising her child; an internal consistency surfaced.

Mothers of low achievers seemed to be occupied with the dangers in structure and expressed the belief

that structuring of the environment would result in a diminution of the child's spontaneity. One mother, who herself struggled with self limits, feared pressure or structure would make the boy think he was "dumb." Another mother didn't want structure because it would be too hard on her. She said that restricting her son would do no good because she was too "lazy" to enforce it, and structure would deprive her of her time and activities. Another mother wanted her child to be "his own person," and didn't stress goals because it would deprive the child of "feeling good." Similarly, another mother wanted her son to have "a mind of his own," which would be minimized by limits.

Yet, some of the mothers of low achievers would be firmer and set more limits if they could repeat the formative years again. One mother said, "I now have a clearer idea of how to set reasonable limits and understand the necessity for it."

In contrast, a large number of mothers of high achievers continue to be committed to structure, although some would be slightly more flexible.

The process of structure may enhance achievement because learning involves organization, orderliness and control--in a word, structure. There is pain in having to restrain certain instinctual forces and impulses or to delaying their discharge for pleasure later on, but this is precisely what is involved in learning where the

child must learn to tolerate frustration such as uninteresting subjects to earn the reward of love (Pierson, 1952). When parents are too permissive, and are overly involved in gratifying the child, the child fails to develop in ways that tolerate the frustration and stress that training and structure early seems to promote and is consistent with the findings of Bricklin (1967), whose study shows that the age of beginning training is positively correlated to high achievement.

The structured home may help to promote academic achievement by enhancing the reality testing potential in the child. Hartmann (1969) describes the three layers of reality testing as: the capacity to distinguish between perceptions and ideas, the capacity to eliminate subjective elements, and finally, the capacity to be objective. All of the above three elements are enhanced by structure.

A strong trend in the study confirmed the more active involvement in grades by mothers of high-achieving gifted boys as compared with mothers of low-achieving gifted boys. They specified the grades they expected and were openly dissatisfied if grades were disappointing. They were interested in interim progress reports and test scores, rewarding good grades with money or gifts, and punishing or denying privileges for poor grades.

These mothers were clear, vocal, unambivalent, and direct about their expectations. Whether the acquisition

of excellent grades was earned at the expense of the arrest of other faculties or skills is not the issue. The results indicate that outspoken, clear-cut, open expectations of good grades are associated with high academic achievement. Various reasons for the importance of grades were given, such as the reality of college admission, and the goal-orientation of our culture. In a few cases, continuation of a family tradition to carry on a dynasty of scholarly members was the reason for high grades.

Mothers of low-achieving gifted boys reacted negatively to the concept of imposing specific predetermined goals and expectations upon their sons. Those mothers spoke of wanting their youngster to have options open, and felt emphasis on grades narrowed the child's options. Yet, by the time the child was in high school, some railed against themselves for not doing more to promote grades, while others spoke of more important qualities that their youngster might never have acquired, such as humor, wit, originality, openness, assertiveness, and athletic excellence, had their attention been focused on grades, college admissions, and a predetermined career or profession.

To summarize, in an exploration and comparison of the child-rearing practices between mothers of 8 high and 14 low achieving gifted boys, major differences were found. Mothers of high-achieving boys had greater fantasies about goals for their boys, and from an early age

promoted those activities which would produce these results, and through the structured family setting they carried out learning strategies conducive to high academic achievement.

In contrast, mothers of low-achieving boys, as a group, were in greater personal distress, even trauma, while raising their sons. From the outset, they were not able to be as available and attentive to their youngsters. This aspect cannot be underestimated. However, their child-rearing practices, their philosophy, and attitudes were in sharp contrast to mothers of high-achieving boys. They were less interested in grades, and shrank from the controlling structures that are associated with achievement. In some cases, their children's achievement in aesthetic and creative fields reflected a positive identification with these parental goals.

The small number of mothers of low-achieving gifted boys constitutes a limitation of the results. Yet, the significance levels and trends were of sufficient weight to suggest the instrument was useful and the differences in mother's philosophy and child rearing may be a contributive, though not causative, factor in academic achievement.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

In this study, an exploration of the differences in attitudes, philosophies, and child-rearing practices of mothers of high and low achieving gifted boys from grades 9 to 12 was undertaken through the application of two hypotheses about academic achievement: (1) It was expected that the wishes, fantasies, and expectations would differ in mothers of high-achieving gifted boys and mothers of low-achieving gifted boys, and (2) child-rearing practices and behavior would differ in mothers of high-achieving gifted boys and mothers of low-achieving gifted boys. Criteria used for the selection of mothers were grades earned for the semester ending February 1981 by their gifted sons. High achievers were defined by a 3.9 grade point average or better, low achievers with a 2.0 grade point average or lower. Randomly selected were 8 mothers of low-achieving gifted boys and 14 mothers of high-achieving gifted boys from Beverly Hills High School in Beverly Hills, California. The information-gathering process consisted of:

1. A questionnaire sent to the mother with 44 questions about the mother, including demographica data, such as her marital history, work history, level of academic attainment, child-rearing practices, educational investment, and attitudes towards grades.

2. A follow-up interview with the mother reviewing and clarifying the written questions. At the time of the follow-up interview, nine open-ended questions were posed to the mother, which encouraged free associations about the mother's fantasies during pregnancy about the unborn child.

3. In the interview, there was also a projective test administered in which Card #4 from Tasks of Emotional Development, a card showing a lone boy seated at a desk studying, was shown to the mother for the purpose of eliciting her response. Levels of significance for differences in the two groups were found through the statistical use of t-scores, showing a strong trend in support of the hypotheses with some high significance levels.

Results showed that mothers of high achieving boys, from the outset of those children's lives, were interested in high academic achievement. They recalled more fantasies of achievement for their children both during and after pregnancy, invested more time in

educational activities, were themselves stronger educational models, tended to have more time for child rearing during the child's early years, and favored more structured, goal-oriented and less egalitarian child-rearing practices than mothers of low-achieving gifted boys.

Conversely, mothers of low-achieving gifted boys were not as committed to stringent academic achievement, as they were to more subjective goals, such as commitment to others, high ideals and self-actualization. They tended to devalue structuring of the child-rearing approach, fearing it would result in a dimunition of the child's spontaneity. They tended to view the phsyical act of studying less positively than did the mothers of high achievers. Concerning grades, though they were perturbed about their son's poor performance in the classroom, they could see other talents, characteristics, and achievements in non-academic areas of which they were equally proud.

Further, mothers of low-achieving gifted boys seemed to have less stable marital and family histories than did mothers of high-achieving gifted boys, and were more subjected to emotional traumas and vicissitudes, corroborating Newman, Dember and Krug's 1973 study in which they suggest that mothers who themselves are in

turmoil are less able to foster academic achievement in their children.

Although future examinations of the relationship between the mother and her child's academic achievement should expand beyond the scope of this study, including larger samplings from other ethnic and economic groups, and mothers of non-gifted students, it seems clear that the findings of this study could be of significance to educators, social workers, and other persons in the helping professions.

Limited in scope though they may be, this study's findings can alert school counselors working with high and low achieving students to the practices in the home which might be worth exploring regarding academic performance. In this regard, it is important to assist school counselors not only to identify those students who are underachieving in relation to their intellectual capacity, but those who are high achieving in an nonauthentic way, i.e., in a way in which achievement may stem from domestic pressures, motivations, and unconscious sources detrimental to overall development.

Since schools are increasingly utilizing clinical social workers as consultants to assist teachers and administrators to understand human behavior as it

relates to academic achievement, some of the questions raised in this study might also be useful to the social worker in his/her exploration of school-related failures.

According to social worker Costen (1975),

> Traditional practice in the schools focuses on the individual pupil and the individual case. The social and emotional characteristics of the pupil and his family are seen as playing a leading part in the pupil's difficulties at school. Even when group methods are used, close attention is paid to the individual's problem both at home and at school.

Further, social workers, both within schools, in agencies, and in private practice, who already understand the complexity of the relationship of the mother to her son, may gain deeper knowledge and derive heightened awareness about this dyad in respect to school performance through a knowledge of the findings of the study. Acting out in the academic arena is a symptom frequently found in adolescents; it is often, though not always, accompanied by anti-social delinquent or destructive behavior. While academic failure cannot be viewed in isolation, what the mother does, how she behaves, and what the home practices include, can be valuable indices for the social worker in the focus, diagnosis, and eventual treatment of the troubled

adolescent boys. Though it is not inferred in this study that the several behaviors and attitudes of the mothers studied actually caused the academic achievement or failure of their sons, it is recognized that their maternal influence in the home contributes the tone and atmosphere in which the child is raised and out of which he functions.

With respect to future studies on this subject, there is a good case made here that because her role is crucial, the mother should be included in any assessment where academic problems exist, whether the problem is in the direction of underachievement or high achievement motivated from destructive, neurotic, or defeating sources. The findings in this study support and corroborate, in fact, those of Perkins and Wicas (1956) who invited mothers of low achievers to be involved in therapeutic counseling sessions.

Moreover, the instrument utilized in this study could be used in follow-up studies on the influence that other family members make on the child's academic achievement, as well as how the mother interfaces with the family on academic issues. One approach which would be a logical extension of this study might examine whether the father's view of the mother-son dyad

corroborates the mother described. In future, related studies, other family constellations could be examined.

Further studies should attempt to correct limitations of this study by using larger samplings, other ethnic and economic groups, and mothers of non-gifted students.

In summary, then, this study attempted to ascertain what differences exist in philosophy, fantasies, attitude, and child-rearing practices between mothers of high-achieving gifted boys and mothers of low-achieving gifted boys; it has shown that significant differences do exist. The implications and ramifications of this study could be useful and practical for those professionals who would understand what influence the mother has in the academic achievement of her gifted son.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IDELL NATTERSON, M. S. W.
Liscenced Clinical Social Worker
Credentialed School Psychologist
300 South McCarty Drive
Beverly Hills, California 90212
(213) 277-1087

April 9, 1981

Mrs. John Doe
100 Main Street
Beverly Hills, California 90212

Dear Mrs. Doe:

You are invited to participate in a doctoral study conducted by a member of the Beverly Hills High School faculty, Mrs. Idell Natterson, the Home School Coordinator. The objective of the study is to learn about the characteristics of mothers in relation to their child's academic achievement. Your name was randomly selected from the files of gifted students at Beverly Hills High School.

The study hopes to make a contribution to our understanding of the relationship between parenting and student achievement among gifted students. We believe that the findings will be useful to our staff in counseling parents and students.

The study will include a questionnaire and an interview which will be kept completely confidential for all respondents. In addition, respondents will be interviewed in person either at the high school or in their homes. The interview syould take no more than one hour. Participants who wish to know the findings of the study will be sent a copy of the conclusions.

I hope you will be willing to participate and trust that this participation will also be stimulating to you in looking at yourself as a parent. I would appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Idell Natterson
277-1087
277-5900, Ext. 227

IN:nw

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____ (participant), hereby willingly consent to participate in An Exploratory Study of Selected Differences Between Mothers of High and Low Achieving Gifted Boys, a research project of Idell Natterson of the Institute for Clinical Social Work being conducted at Beverly Hills High School.

I understand the procedures will include a questionnaire filled out in advance and an interview.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I understand that this study may be published and my anonymity will be protected unless I give my written consent to such disclosures.

Date _____

Signature _____

Witness _____

APPENDIX C

SCHEDULE #1
To Be Filled Out By Mother Prior to Interview

1. Who are included in your family:

   Spouse ____ Unmd. ____ Div. ____

   Children: Number ____ Ages ____ Sexes ____

   Other relatives ____

   Unrelated persons ____

2. What is this child's ordinal placement in family (oldest, youngest, middle) ____

3. Number of children from this marriage ____
   Number of children from other marriages ____

4. Your age at the time of child's birth ____

5. Your age when you married your present husband ____

6. Number of years married to your husband ____

7. Where do you rank in your family? Oldest ___
   2nd oldest ____ 3rd oldest ____ 4th oldest ____
   5th oldest ____

8. How many years did you work before having this child?

   Are you currently working? Fulltime ___ Part-time ___

9. Occupation of child's father _____

10. Occupation of child's mother _____

11. Have caretakers of the child had a major responsibility in raising the child? Please explain _____

    _____

12. Have there been any major health problems of the child? _____

13. Were there any major health problems of the mother? ___

14. Were there any major health problems of the father? ___

15. Have there been any significant changes in your life?

    1. Economically _____

    2. Geographically _____

    3. Socially _____

16. Education (check highest level)

    a. High School Graduate ____
    b. College Graduate ____
    c. Master's Degree ____
    d. Doctorate ____

17. What kind of student were you in high school?

    a. Excellent student ____
    b. Above average ____
    c. Average ____
    d. Below average ____
    e. Poor student ____

18. What kind of student were you in college?

    a. Excellent student ____
    b. Above average ____
    c. Average ____
    d. Below average ____
    e. Poor student ____

19. Of the three choices, which then would you say you believed in most strongly during infancy and elementary school?

    a. A structured home with the parents having clearly defined authority and making most of the decisions.

    b. A democratically run home where the children had input in decision making.

    c. A combination of the above. Please explain.

_____

20. Has your child-rearing philosophy changed?

Yes ____ No ____

Please explain _____

_____

21. During the pre-kindergarten stage, how many minutes did you read directly to your child each day?

30 minutes or less ____ Over 30 minutes ____

22. If you didn't read, who if anyone did?

_____

23. When your child was in elementary school, how regularly did you go to the library with him?

a. ( ) once per week
b. ( ) once every 2-3 weeks
c. ( ) less than once a month

24. How much time per week does your child watch TV?

	4 or more hrs	2-3 hrs	1-2 hrs	less than 1 hr
a. Elementary school	( )	( )	( )	( )
b. Jr. high school	( )	( )	( )	( )
c. High school	( )	( )	( )	( )

25. In elementary school, did you check to see if your child did his homework each night?

a. Always ( )
b. Never ( )
c. Sometimes ( )

26. I'm interested in how you feel about grades. Which of the following practices did you follow:

	(always)	(sometimes)	(never)
a. Specify to the child the grades expected	( )	( )	( )
b. Reward good grades with money or gifts	( )	( )	( )

	(always)	(sometimes)	(never)
c. Reward good grades by a positive pleased attitude	( )	( )	( )
d. Punish or deny privileges because of poor grades	( )	( )	( )
e. Discuss grades on tests and papers of student several times per week	( )	( )	( )
f. Openly discuss dissatisfaction	( )	( )	( )
g. Quietly brood about child's fate	( )	( )	( )
h. Others	( )	( )	( )

27. Which of the following activities describes your interaction with the child?

	(always)	(sometimes)	(never)
a. not helping the child with homework	( )	( )	( )
b. helping the child with his homework	( )	( )	( )

28. What were your own educational goals when you completed school?

a. Return at some later time ____
b. Glad to be finished ____
c. Other ____

29. What did you parents hope you would do upon finishing school?

	(Father)	(Mother)
a. Get married and not work	____	____
b. Get married and perhaps work	____	____
c. Work and perhaps get married	____	____
d. Work and not marry	____	____

30. Did you comply with your parent's aspirations for an education?

Yes ____ No ____

Please explain _____

31. Looking back, what, if anything, did you give up in raising children?

Nothing ____ Career ____ Fun ____ Other ____

32. Most people have some difficulties in raising their children. Which period was most difficult for you in raising your children?

a. Infancy (ages 1-2) ____
b. Toddler (ages 3-5) ____
c. Latency (ages 6-10) ____
d. Pubescence (ages 10-12) ____
e. Adolescence (ages 13-18) ____

Please describe the problem briefly _____

---

33. Which was most satisfying for you?

a. Infancy (ages 1-2) ____
b. Toddler (ages 3-5) ____
c. Latency (ages 6-10) ____
d. Pubescence (ages 10-12) ____
e. Adolescence (ages 13-18) ____

Please describe _____

---

34. From ages 3-5, what did you do to promote education?

a. Direct teaching ____
b. Playing with child ____
c. Special trips ____
d. Other ____

35. Did you consciously try to be a model or example to your child?

Yes ____ No ____

36. From ages 6-11, what were your primary activities with the child after school?

a. Car pooling to school, lessons or temple ____
b. Encouraging free play ____
c. Promoting reading ____
d. Direct teaching ____
e. Watching TV ____
f. Discussions ____

37. From ages 12-16, what were your primary activities with the child?

a. Car pooling to school, lessons or temple ____
b. Encouraging free play ____
c. Promoting reading ____
d. Direct teaching ____
e. Watching TV ____
f. Discussions ____

38. How did you go about getting your child to mind?

a. Praise for achievement ____
b. Threats ____
c. Other ____

40. On the average, how many evenings during school nights did you go out?

a. Elementary school: 0 ___ 1-2 ___ 3 or more ___
b. High school: 0 ___ 1-2 ___ 3 or more ___

41. Do you feel it is more important for your child to have:

a. Outstanding social skills ____
b. Outstanding academic skills ____
c. Combination academic and social skills ____
d. Other _____

42. What do you regard as the family's recreation or "fun" activities?

	Lots of Fun	Moderate Fun	Not Fun
a. TV, movies	____	____	____
b. Unstructured time	____	____	____
c. Outings	____	____	____
d. Other _____			

_____

43. Were you concerned about your child being under academic stress?

Yes ____ No ____

44. If so, how did you handle it?

a. Recreational outlets ____
b. Discussions ____
c. Other _____

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

SCHEDULE #2
To Be Filled Out by Interviewer

45. When pregnant and during the child's development, most mothers wish first and foremost for a healthy, happy child. Some mothers fantasize what they would like their child to be like. I realize it may be hard to recall, but if you can recall, what did you want your child to be like as an adult -- and has your fantasy changed over the years? _____

_____

_____

46. What course or vocation did you want him to follow?

a. A performer, such as an actor, athlete _____
b. A professional person, such as a doctor, lawyer, etc. _____
c. Other _____

_____

_____

47. Did you have an idea or philosophy of how you wanted to raise the child? Could you describe it?

48. How did the child react to your academic goals?

49. What I like most about child rearing is:

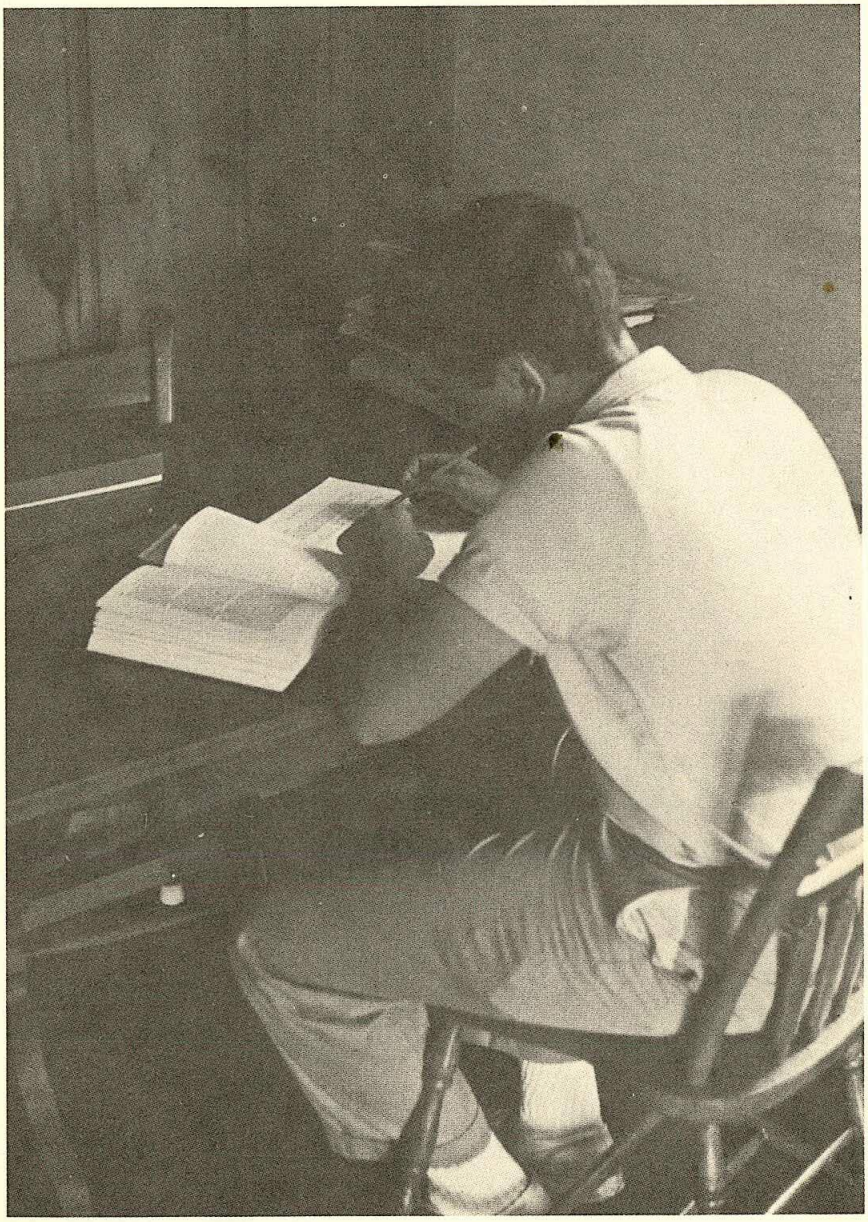
50. What I like least about child rearing is:

51. Why do you think your child's education was so important to you?

52. During child's school years, were there some outstanding events that affected you and had bearing on your academic expectations of the child?

53. Parents rarely agree on all points regarding child rearing. What areas have you been in most agreement about?

54. What areas have caused conflict between you and your husband regarding the child (for example - discipline, curfew, T.V., vacations)?



AB–4

APPENDIX E

CODE

8a. # years worked before having child
8b. # = actual mother's current employment

1. not working
2. part-time
3. full-time

---

11. Caretakers - response

1. no
2. yes

---

16. Mother's highest level education

1. Doctorate or MA
2. BA
3. High School
4. Didn't finish High School

---

17. Type of student in High School

1. Excellent
2. Above average
3. Average
4. Poor

---

18. Type of student in college

1. Excellent
2. Above average
3. Average
4. Poor

---

19. Structured or unstructured home

1. Strict
2. Combination
3. Democratic

---

20. Change in philosophy

1. No
2. Yes

---

21. Pre-kindergarten reading to child

1. Over 30 minutes
2. 30 minutes or less

---

22. Others read to child

1. Yes
2. No

---

23. Library and involvement with books

1. Very involved - book purchase + library
2. Moderately
3. Not too involved

24a. TV in Elementary School

1. Less than 1 hour
2. 1-2 hours
3. 2-3 hours
4. 4 or more

24b. TV in Junior High School

1. Less than 1 hour
2. 1-2 hours
3. 2-3 hours
4. 4 or more

24c. TV in High School

1. Less than 1 hour
2. 1-2 hours
3. 2-3 hours
4. 4 or more

---

25. Mother checking homework in Elementary School

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

26a. Mother specify grades

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

26b. Reward grades with gifts or money

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

26c. Reward grades positive attitude

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

26d. Grades: Punish or deny privileges because of poor grades

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

26e. Discuss test grades during week

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

26f. Openly discuss dissatisfaction about grades

1. Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never

---

28. Mother's educational goals when completed school

1. Returned
2. Glad to be finished

29a. What did father hope for you

1. Work
2. Marry

29b. What did mother hope for you

1. Work
2. Marry

---

31. What did you give up raising children

1. Nothing
2. Career
3. Fun
4. Growth, personal development

---

34. Promoting education 3-5 years

1. Direct one-to-one involvement such as reading, direct teaching
2. Reliance primarily on instruction for learning - nursery school, kindergarten

---

35. Did you consciously try to be a model

1. Yes
2. No

---

38. Discipline used

1. Praise
2. Combination Praise and Threats
3. Threats
4. Reasoning

40a. Evenings mother gone Elementary & Junior High School

1. 0
2. 1-2
3. 3 or more

40b. Evenings mother gone High School

1. 0
2. 1-2
3. 3 or more

---

41. What mother values most

1. Academic skills
2. Combined academic and social
3. Social

---

45. Mother's fantasies while pregnant - fantasy with achievement

1. Yes
2. No

---

46. Mother's vocational fantasies: field requiring high academic achievement

1. Yes
2. No

---

47. Philosophy child-rearing

1. Structured
2. Permissive
3. Undecided

---

48. Child's reaction to mother's academic goals

1. Cooperative
2. Rebellious

---

49. What mother likes most in child rearing

1. Companionship
2. Child's development

---

50. What mother likes least in child rearing

1. Discipline: child's resistance
2. Mundane tasks
3. Responsibility
4. Children's hurts

51. Why child's education important to mother

1. Tools for life
2. Vicarious satisfaction
3. Not as important as child's character

---

54. What parents disagree most about

1. Educational goal
2. Discipline
3. Sound/adaptational responses

---

55. Mother's responses to major test - "child does work"

1. Willingly
2. Unwillingly

---

56. Child's process of study

1. Positive process
2. Negative process

---

57. Child's involvement

1. Interested
2. Uninterested

---

58. Outcome of child's study

1. Satisfying and rewarding
2. Mediocre
3. I don't know

Idell Freed Natterson Ph.D. 1982