Effects of the familial environment on the academic performance of elementary and junior high school males

Janice L. Bonesho

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THE EFFECTS OF THE FAMILIAL ENVIRONMENT
ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
OF ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL MALES

by

Janice L. Bonesho

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Boys and the schools seem locked in a deadly and ancient conflict that may eventually inflict mortal wounds on both. In vastly disproportionate numbers, boys are the maladjusted, the low achievers, the truants, the delinquents, the inattentive, the rebellious. (Sexton, 1965, p. 32)

Why do males demonstrate greater difficulty achieving in schools as Sexton proposes? To answer that question one must look to:

The achieving behaviors of a person [which] are influenced by the interaction of his individual characteristics, including his motives, values, defenses, and cognitive skills, and the social environment in which he functions. (Gold, Feld, & Ruhland, 1975, p. 1)

This study explores, more specifically, the males' familial environments and their effects on academic performance. Research is extensive and on-going. It is vastly segmented in its findings. This paper is unable to cover all males' factors in the environment which influence academic achievement. However, this study, through its compilation of research, attempts to present a composite
picture of the familial factors which may assist or hinder the academic achievement of males.

Due to the extent of the research, it is necessary to limit the population of this study to that of white males of elementary and junior high school ages. All socioeconomic levels are represented. Studies including males with exceptional educational needs are eliminated as their problems may not be generalized to the total male population.

In many studies, the population includes females and racial minority groups. Results of the research incorporating these groups are included when needed to present accurate accounts in relation to white males. Generalizations which include the minority groups are also reported when results warrant it.

The familial environment, for the purpose of this paper, includes the following variables: spacing patterns of children; parental attitude; parent-son interaction; and the socioeconomic status of the family. These factors will be examined in their relation to the males' academic performance. It is also necessary to include the schools' and teachers' influences on the academic achievement of males. The emphasis, however, is not placed on the latter as the available research is far too extensive to do it justice in this paper.

To begin, this study will focus its attention on the individual factors within a male which influence his responses to the environment.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Intelligence
Traditionally, differences among children in academic achievement have been thought of as primarily a product of differences in scholastic aptitude or intelligence. The additional assumption has been made that intelligence is largely "innate" or genetically determined. (Rau, Mlodnosky, & Anastasiow, 1964, p. 2)

However, in keeping with current theory, "we must assume that intelligence, as measured by standard tests, is modifiable by at least some of the same variables that influence achievement" (Rau, et al., 1964, p. 4). In other words "there are no pure or direct measures of 'innate' intelligence. Thus the performances we measure are always the products of the interaction between (probably) genetically determined central processes or structures and experience" (Rau et al., 1964, p. 4).

Since a child's first experiences are within the home environment, it is necessary to study the familial influences on the child's intellectual development.
Home Environment

The family's speech model is seen as the link between social status and intelligence (Jones, Note 1). For it is through verbal language, stimulated by the home environment, that the child first learns about his physical world.

Jones studied the effects of home environment on the development of males' verbal abilities. She found that "mothers of high verbal boys have a higher interaction index than do mothers of low verbal boys . . . indicating that they are more disposed toward encouraging the child to interact with his home environment on a verbal-cognitive level" (Jones, Note 1, p. 4). Based on her study, Jones stressed the need for parents to become aware of the importance of strengthening the "intellectual climate" of the home. She recognized the need to be more prevalent in lower-income homes and warned that deficits such as weak verbal skills may be judged quite wrongly as lack of intellectual potential. This, in turn, might lead to attitudes of defeat and lowered expectations for academic accomplishments.

A study on ten-year old children conducted by Gold and Andres (1978) attempted to determine the effects of working mothers on the development of their children. The results indicated that the cognitive performance of daughters of employed mothers were not affected. However, the sons of employed middle-class mothers performed lower cognitively. Further research appears to be needed to evaluate more extensively the effects of working mothers on males.
Since economic conditions appear to be affecting the family's environment, i.e., more mothers are seeking full-time employment, a study by White and Cherry (1966) attempted to investigate the socioeconomic status of the family and its relation to children's intelligence. They found school performance to be "more related to a pupil's I.Q. than it is to his parents' SES [socioeconomic status]" (p. 78). Results of a study conducted by Dorth (Note 2) also found I.Q. to be highly correlated with academic success among fifth grade boys.

Koch... was one of the first investigators to be interested in the association of spacing patterns and sex of siblings on the cognitive abilities of children. She found a differential sex effect in that distant spacing was favorable on the cognitive development of males, while close spacing was favorable for females. (Ruttall, Note 3, p. 3)

The results of this study by Koch (1954) indicated that first born males excelled the second borns conspicuously in verbal skills. She proposed that these results may be related "to the greater range of experience which boys have because of their natures and social treatment" (Koch, 1954, p. 219). Consequently, she believed this experience tended to increase vocabulary and understanding of word meanings.
There is evidence, too, that first-born boys are shown special devotion by their mothers . . . . This attention expressed in part in much instruction and mature verbal stimulation may result in a relatively large word understanding for the boy. Since, furthermore, the influence of the male sib is about equal at both ordinal positions, we gain support for the hypothesis that the male is a more stimulating creature than is the female. A brother alerts his sib more, either through the jealousy he excites, his challenging or the experience extension he provides, than does a sister and this results in enriching the word understanding of the sib. (Koch, 1954, p. 219)

Contrary to Koch's findings, a study of kindergarten children conducted by Henderson and Long (Note 4) found no significant correlation between the number of siblings in the home and the success of reading readiness skills.

**Sex and Sex Roles**

Studies on personality factors of intellectual performance have found that intellectual development in girls is fostered by their being assertive and active, and having a sense that they can control their immediate environments. While these factors appear less important in the intellectual development in boys. It is further conjectured that
boys are already assertive and have a significant sense of personal control over their environments and that other issues, such as their need to control aggressive impulses, become more important in their means of exploiting their intellectual potential (Cerruti & Stahle, 1977).

Crandall, Katkovsky, and Preston's investigation (1962) assessed the relation "between a number of predictor variables and children's intellectual achievement" (p. 643) in the first through third grade levels. They found few significant sex differences. However, it was noted that "girls attached more importance (attainment value) to intellectual competence than did the boys" (p. 652). "The boys' expectation of success were highly 'realistic,' i.e., their stated expectations and their actual intellectual competence were congruent" (p. 656). These investigators explained the results of the boys' realistic expectation as being possibly due to the family and school criticizing the boys' expectations as being too high or too low.

Crandall et al. (1962) proposed that this explanation raises further "research questions for sex-roles and the social reinforcements they experience" (p. 657).

In the following statement, Sucher (Note 5) described one possible reason for poor academic performance of males.

Since boys are more frequent offenders of social behavior standards, they are often misjudged in their
intellectual progress. This misjudgment of intellectual ability is conveyed to the child and he soon begins to believe he can't succeed and acts accordingly. (p. 15)

Zander and Van Egmond (1957) explored behavior and its relation to intelligence. They investigated the relationship between the intelligence of students possessing peer power and their peer's perception of their academic and intellectual performance. Zander and Van Egmond found that "highly intelligent pupils who were high in power were not significantly different in any category of behavior from children who were low in power" (p. 13). Whereas "children with greater social power, among those with low intelligence, were better liked and were seen as more able in schoolwork than children with lower power" (p. 15).

Boys with greater power were seen as more threatening and were well liked but were not accepted expertise. Apparently being liked is an accomplishment of power for both sexes when low in intelligence, but girls and boys differ in that the former may be granted power because of ability in school work whereas boys are attributed power because they are seen as threatening. (p. 19)

Therefore, it appears that social power in relation to the less intelligent, slightly assists how their peers perceive their academic performance. Intelligence is seen as an influential factor in a child's academic performance. However, it is only one
of many elements and cannot be easily isolated from environmental variables to study in isolation as Rau, Kledmosky and Anastasiow (1964) contended. It is therefore necessary to continue to study other factors in order to derive a more composite picture of the academic performance of males.

Motivation

Crandall, Katkovsky, and Preston (1962) found students' high expectations for intellectual success to be "commensurate with their expected performances" (p. 653). In other words, the higher the students' aspirations of success were, the higher were their achievement standards. This leads us to explore the realm of motivation. What encouragement or self-satisfaction is offered to students to perform well academically? What role do the parents play in motivating their children to perform successfully in school?

Answers to these questions were explored by Gordon (1977), Crandall, Katkovsky, and Preston (1962), and Elair (1972). Crandall's et al. (1962) study found that "the higher the children's intellectual attainment values, the more likely they were to believe that they, rather than others, were responsible for the reinforcements which accrued to their everyday achievement efforts" (p. 654).
This implies "internal control" or the belief that "individuals perceive their positive and negative reinforcements... [as] contingent upon their own behavior" (Gordon, 1977, p. 383). Students with internal control, Reimanis (1970) implied, would find education meaningful and establish plans or goals for the future. Therefore, students who have a belief in external control, that is, "that their rewards and punishments occur independently of their own efforts," (Reimanis, 1970, p. 1) would not be prepared to be "motivated in the traditional manner" (Reimanis, 1970, p. 1) in our schools. Blair's (1972) study agreed with Reimanis' observation and found low achievers to have believed in external control. He found tangible reinforcements to be successful in improving the academic performance of these low achieving males. Blair's (1972) results also indicated that there is no difference between the performance of groups of children "when each group receives what is for that reinforcement high in their reward hierarchies" (p. 254). The normal achievers were found to respond "more effectively under person and performance reinforcement" (Blair, 1972, p. 254). This is offered in the traditional school setting where students respond positively to teachers' praises and pleasure received when completing a task successfully. Therefore, reinforcements, whether positive or negative, provide motivation for the student in learning environments. The
belief in internal control, as Blair indicated, is necessary in order for the student to perform successfully in the traditional manner. Then a child comes to school believing in external control, reinforcements must be more tangible to provide incentive for success. However, the need for immediate reinforcement weakens as children get older and enter college, because generalized goals are surpassed by specific goals (Gordon, 1977).

It is clear, therefore, that inner-external control is related to reinforcements which provide the motivation to the student for successful academic performance. However, the factors which assist in developing either inner or external control in a child still must be explored.

Reimanis' (1970) study was based on the assumption that "many students who come to our classrooms are not prepared to be motivated in the traditional manner" (p. 1). He further contended that "the home environments of such students have to provide the belief, feelings, or perceptions that the rewards or punishment that they receive are related to or are contingent on their own behavior efforts" (p. 1).

In relating the results of his study to family environment, Reimanis found that "too much training to control one's feelings may inhibit the child's exploration of his own behavior consequences and thus lead to lower internal reinforcement control" (p. 11). Also influencing
a child's development of internal reinforcement, Reimanis (1970) suggested, would be parents who have very definite goals set for themselves, thereby hindering the opportunity for a child to "have a chance to observe goal-setting and planning behavior at home" (p. 11). A "high degree of residential mobility was found to interfere with the development of internal control in girls, but seemed to aid such development in boys" (Reimanis, 1970, p. 11). Reimanis believed that this result was possibly seen as less damaging to boys because "residential mobility is often connected with father's employment change" (p. 11). Therefore "a boy, identifying with his father, may see such a change as a planned step toward general improvement" (p. 11). A girl identifying with her mother, "might see it as temporary chaos in household duties" (p. 11). In general, Reimanis found "that a stable, supportive home environment related positively to internal control" (p. 11).

Gordon's study (1977) also found that "mothers who praised verbally, attended to, and suggested, had children who were high in self-esteem and or internal control" (p. 385). The results of his study further validated the link between internal control, high self-concept, and academic achievement.

Self-Concept

"Self-concept, variously called self-image or self-esteem, is a personality factor that evolves out of one's
sociocultural milieu" (Anderson & Evans, Note 6). There are two types of self-esteem: (1) "outer self-esteem" which is how others perceive oneself; (2) "inner self-esteem" which is the physical feedback that one receives from exploring the physical environment, i.e. swimming (Franks, Dillon, Grout, Grisby, & Burton, 1976).

One theory holds that self-perceptions develop as a result of behavior rather than as an antecedent to behavior (Jensen & Moore, 1977). A child, through his own experiences and through the feedback from the "significant others" in his environment, learns what his abilities are. "The child learns what he perceives he is able to learn" (Brookover, Paterson & Thomas, 1962, p. 3). Self-perception evolves as a result of the "interaction with significant others who hold expectations of the student as a learner" (Brookover et al., 1962, p. 3). Franks et al. (1976) agreed with this statement and recognized teachers' expectations as a variable in producing self-esteem.

The results of a study by Brookover, Paterson, and Thomas (1962) indicated the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement to be positive. They found that "high achieving students have significantly higher self-concepts . . . than low achieving students with comparable measured intelligence ranges" (p. 37). This
study also found a high correlation to exist between social class group and self-concept. Each of the higher social class groups had "a significantly higher mean score than the next lower social class group among both boys and girls" (p. 34). In agreement with this study, Morse and Fiers (Note 7) indicated that race and socioeconomic levels are factors that affect self-concept when associated with negative social attitudes. They further explained that these variables, when mediated by positive home, peer, and school relationships, may possibly result in a high self-concept.

Sears' (1970) study explored the relationship between family and self-concept. He found self-concept to be significantly correlated with reading and arithmetic achievement, small family size, early ordinal position, and high parental warmth. In this study, high self-concept was associated with low paternal dominance in the husband-wife relations for boys only. In both sexes, poor self-concepts were associated with femininity.

It is believed that limits which are established early in a child's life and consistently enforced in the home produce high self-esteem when enforced in the classroom. These limits define appropriate behaviors and establish expectations (Franks et al., 1976).

Franks et al. (1976) acknowledged that schools are becoming increasingly aware of their role in assisting
students' self-esteem. They noted that one of the goals of open education "is the fostering of self-esteem and self-reliance in the child" (p. 2). This is congruent with researchers who "are more and more coming to the realization that a person's affect and cognition cannot be separated in actuality anyway" (Frank et al., 1976, p. 3). The need for schools to emphasize the fostering of self-perception as part of their goals is important in light of the suggestion that students' self-concepts decline dramatically in the elementary grades (Sucher, Note 5).

Teachers play a significant role in relation to the students' self-concept. Research has found that teachers, through their roles as significant others, can alter the self-concept of their students by making positive comments to them as well as creating an atmosphere of greater psychological security (Brookover et al., 1962, p. 11).

**Socioeconomic Status (SES)**

Research (Turner & Hall, 1974; Resnick, 1968; Henderson & Long, Note 4; Vilscek & Cleland, 1968) has found that low-socioeconomic level children do not perform as well as middle-socioeconomic level children in school. Disagreements exist concerning the nature of the differences between the two socioeconomic levels. Turner and Hall (1974)
warn that "until the nature of these variables associated with SES is established . . . effective intervention training techniques will be difficult to discover" (p. 4).

Poverty provides minimal stimulation and opportunity to manipulate objects or experiment with them in an orderly manner. This results in the restriction of the variety of sensory input which produces a reduction in the ability to perceive relationships or other abstract concepts such as size, shape, and time. This restriction also reduces the opportunity to relate experiences in meaningful integrated ways. Consequently, a deprived child enters a learning situation with abilities which are not conducive to learning (Resnick, 1968).

Resnick's study (1968) found that the deprived child between six and seven years of age cannot adequately profit from experience and training with perceptual material like his 'enriched' counterpart" (Resnick, 1968, p. 52). It is believed that the reward and punishment contingencies in the deprived child's life are such that mastery of novel situations and abstract organization of stimuli are discouraged (Resnick, 1968).

Conversely, the child from an "enriched" cultural environment has been submitted to a broad band of stimulation permeating all the senses. It is in this atmosphere that perceptual integrative abilities are engendered and encouraged. (Resnick, 1968, p. 53)
While Resnick was concerned with the socioeconomic level's effect on perceptual development, Vilscek and Cleland (1964) looked to the influences of intelligence and socioeconomic levels on the academic achievement of first graders. They concluded that mental age and socio-economic environment are separate and independent factors affecting pupils' achievement in... reading" (p. 8).

They further noted:

A mental age of at least seven and one-half years are required before 75 percent of the pupils from lower socioeconomic levels could achieve up to national norms through traditional instruction. Pupils from upper socioeconomic levels made comparable progress in reading at mental ages of six and one-half years when the instructional program was initiated. (Vilscek & Cleland, 1964, p. 8)

This finding appears to correlate with Resnick's results indicating a difference in socioeconomic groups' readiness skills for learning.

Henderson and Long (Note 4) also voiced concern for the academic deficiency among lower-class school children and their failure to learn to read in first grade. They further emphasized that this "early failure all too often predicts later failure and eventual discontinuance of education altogether" (p. 2).
Turner and Hall (1972) conducted a study to determine "whether low- and middle-SJS Ss would demonstrate different roles of processing when confronted with a task" (p. 12). Their findings indicated social-class differences in "rate of acquisition" of knowledge. The first and third grade middle-class males performed more quickly than the lower-class males. However, they reported little evidence of differences between social classes as to the degree of mastery of learned material. Based on these findings, Turner and Hall "question the suggestion that different groups should be trained in different ways" (p. 17). Rather, they contended, the "important individual differences variable for the type of learning required in the present study may be rate of acquisition or degree of mastery" (p. 17).

Lacher's results (Note 8) added yet another dimension to the search on the variables which distinguish the low-socioeconomic student from the middle-socioeconomic student. This researcher investigated the relation of verbal and nonverbal encoding to serial recall. The results indicated no significant difference between socioeconomic status and main effect in recall. Based on these results, Lacher joined Turner and Hall in raising the "important question of the functional variables underlying class differences" (p. 7).
Further research and theory, in the attempt to explain differences between social classes, looks to the family. Wallin and Waldo (1964) examined families' values in relation to educational aspirations or plans for their children. They noted that within our society values vary considerably. These variations are "roughly associated with differences in the occupation (its prestige and income level) and education of their family heads" (p. 6). Social classes differ in their aspirations for their futures. "Children of upper- and middle-class families are likely to want to go to college whereas those of working-class background are less likely to conceive of a college education as desirable either as an end in itself or for the realization of one or another of their goals" (p. 6).

Wallin and Waldo acknowledged that there are exceptions to these aspirations within each social class, thereby opening the door to the realization of other aspirations within the family which may encourage a child to succeed and extend his academic performance beyond social class aspirations.

Some researchers have studied the relationship between parent's education and the child's achievement. Anderson and Evans (Note 6) found that achievement increased significantly with the father's education in Anglo-American families. They also found occupational status to relate to verbal ability. Anderson and Evans noted that boys of low
Verbal ability were from homes having significantly lower occupational level. This finding concurred with the results of the study by Valberg and Harjoribanks (1973), who found higher verbal ability but lower number ability to be "closely associated with high socioeconomic status and high parent-son involvement in academic and nonacademic activity" (p. 363).

The results of Rau's et al. (1964) study appears to contradict, on the surface, those of Anderson and Evans' study. Rau et al. found no significant correlation between achievement and the parents' education. However, they investigated the relation between a child's academic achievement and both parents' education, whereas Anderson and Evans' study investigated the relation between the father's education and achievement. Considering the differences in the variables examined, these two studies may not be validly compared.

It is generally "presumed that the school places a premium on behavior and achievement more compatible with the upbringing and motivation of middle-class children than with that of children from working-class families" (Wallin & Waldo, 1964, p. 12). Working-class children are said to "feel inferior and inadequate, misunderstood and discriminated against by their teachers and constrained by a discipline and demands which are at variance with those imposed upon them by their families" (Wallin & Waldo, 1964, p. 12). This theory was supported by Wallin and
Waldo's study. They found that "there are pervasive social class-linked differences in school adjustment" (p. 149). Children of higher, more than those of lower social class, found school a more congenial and rewarding experience.

Parental Attitudes

Early studies of the relation of parental variables to school achievement . . . tend to suggest that competent school achievement is associated with more positive parent attitudes. However these studies were often faulty in method and based largely upon situations where there were extremes of either parent or child behavior; therefore their results may not be generalized to more typical situations. (Chance, 1968, p. 2)

Although skeptical of the results of earlier researchers, Chance expressed more confidence in the results of the research conducted by Katkovsky, Preston and Crandall (1964) to name but a few. Chance contended that "it is only possible to conclude from the existing evidence that factors of socialization, however, selected, defined, and measured, do not relate to the development of achievement behaviors and attitudes on the part of children in any simple fashion" (Chance, 1968, p. 4).

It is generally assumed that parents' evaluations, aspirations and attitudes concerning their children are based, to some extent, on their feelings and attitudes about themselves. Little research on this topic has been reported, however. (Katkovsky, Preston, & Crandall, 1964, p. 67)
Katchovsky et al. (1964) explained that "there are many ways in which parents' thinking about themselves may affect their perceptions and evaluations of their children" (p. 67). They conjectured that parents who excel in a particular skill may project their superiority when evaluating their offspring or may tend to underestimate their child and compare the child in relation to their own abilities. Other parents may see in their child the same inadequacies that they feel about themselves, while parents with inferiority feelings may instill positive attitudes in the child to compensate for their own weaknesses. "Consequently, the exact nature of relations between parents' self-attitudes and their perceptions and evaluations of their children is likely to be quite complex" (Katchovsky, Preston, & Crandall, 1964, p. 67).

Based on previous research, trends of thought exist as to the influence parental attitude may have on the child. It seems probable that a parent with a positive self-concept will tend to describe his child in a more favorable manner than a parent who is critical of himself. The parent may reason that his own competence and positive attributes will result in the development of a "good" child or that hereditary or identification factors will lead to his child's being a "chip off the old block." The parent with a negative self-concept,
on the other hand, may think his own difficulties and inadequacies will cause problems for his child, or he may view his child as an extension of his own personality. (Kathovsky, Preston, & Crandall, 1964, p. 67)

Kathovsky et al. (1964) continued to conjecture that relatively content parents are apt to evaluate their child more positively than dissatisfied parents. Satisfied parents are less likely to stress a child's deficiencies than parents who are dissatisfied with their lives.

Chance (1978) conducted a study of 104 middle-class elementary students to explore mother-child relations with children's academic achievement. The results indicated that "children who at first adjust slowly to school, but who show significant improvements later, in contrast to children starting at the same achievement level but now showing later improvement, have mothers who are more inclined to express dissatisfaction with their maternal role" (p. 28). It was further found that boys "showing an ascending pattern of achievement have mothers inclined more toward earlier training" (p. 28). Mothers who chose a conventional role and values had children who were consistent in performance while mothers who were critical of the conventional role had children who were less consistent in performance.
Walde and Wallin's study (1964) found I.Q., grades, attitudes and parental aspirations to be strongly related to the level of aspiration in a child. However, they contend that, considering the magnitude of the other variables, parental influence must be considered a secondary factor. They further found that "children with good grades are more likely to have high aspirations for themselves, regardless of what aspirations their parents hold for them" (p. 123). Walde and Wallin admit that parents of a child with better grades are also more likely to have high aspirations for their child. They warn that:

Parents should strive toward a realistic assessment of their sons and daughters' abilities, attitudes, and interests. Many fathers and mothers seem to be inculcating youngsters of average and below-average ability with unrealistic educational and vocational goals. (pp. 8-9)

Winder and Rau (1962) investigated the relationship between parent attitudes and social deviance of preadolescent boys. Their population consisted of males in fourth through sixth grades. The results of this study indicated that "children who experience relatively intense frustration in their interactions with their parents will come to exhibit with considerable intensity a diverse set of maladaptive behaviors" (p. 422). The maladaptive behaviors "will include aspects of hostile aggression, over-demanding,
inappropriate bids for attention, withdrawal from friendly interaction with peers, and such manifestations of sadness and distress as frequent crying" (p. 422). Low maternal self-esteem was also found to be associated with deviance. The parents of popular children tended "not to be aggressive or punitive and had low demands for aggression" (p. 423). The mothers were apparently satisfied with themselves and the fathers expressed high regard for their sons.

It would seem that a combination of restrictiveness, punitiveness, and paternal rejection results in a pattern of hostile and demanding behavior, as reported by peers. (Hinder & Rau, 1962, p. 422)

For the purpose of Hinder and Rau's study, the assumption was made that parent attitudes were the antecedent of deviant behavior. However, research has been unable to answer the question whether parental attitudes, self-esteem and rejection may be products rather than antecedents of the child's deviant behavior (Hinder & Rau, 1962).

**Parental Behavior**

Intelligence, motivation, self-concept, socioeconomic status, and parental attitude are influential factors which affect a student's academic achievement. Yet, another variable is added to the composite picture, that of parental behavior or interaction with the child.
Research has indicated that "after birth a difference appears in the physical contact and interaction pattern between parents and children" (Sucher, Note 5, p. 5). More specifically, differences exist between the parental interaction with sons versus the parental interaction with daughters. Studies have found that (1) more girls than boys are breastfed; (2) there are more physical contacts between mothers and daughters; (3) girls are more attached to mothers; and (4) mothers verbalize significantly more to girls than to boys (Sucher, Note 5).

Sucher (Note 5) explained that "boys from early ages are given more independent, unsupervised time" (p. 6). The unsupervised time is especially true of out-door play. Consequently, the young male is left to discover and explore his environment independently.

Boys identify with their fathers, but the father is seldom present. Their behaviors are more independent and stress aggressiveness, action and movement. Courage, daring, and speaking-out are honored among boys, whereas timidity and questions are considered feminine. (Sucher, Note 5, p. 6)

There also exists a relationship between the differences in children's play activities and underachievement. (Sucher, Note 5). "Girls' play activities of sewing, weaving, coloring, and simple games which require sequenced procedures facilitate development of both skill and
attention span" (p. 6); whereas, "the free, non-structured
play of boys, often more physical and less structured,
encourages creativity and discovery, but does not always
contribute to listening or motor skill development related
to success in school" (p. 6).

Limited language interaction between boys and adults
is also seen as detrimental to readiness skills. "More home
opportunities for the development and use of language are
minimal, children may be expected to be lacking certain
verbal skills which have proven so effective in predicting
future educability" (Jones, Note 1, p. 8).

The speech model and interactor for children is
primarily the mother. Because of more common interests
and experiences, the girl not only has more language
interaction, but more pleasant and satisfying inter-
action. On the other hand, a boy's interaction is less
frequent and tends to be more negative and disciplinary.
(Sucher, Note 5, pp. 6-7)

As a result of these conditions, Sucher (Note 5)
contended that "boys often arrive at school with learning
styles, behavior patterns, and interests that are not
compatible with practices of the school" (p. 7). Therefore,
according to these contentions, boys are entering school not
as prepared to cope with its demands and structures as girls.
These differences and the prognosis for academic success
of males become strongly influenced by the family and
school environment in which the child lives during his elementary and junior high school years. Therefore, it is necessary to study the research available which outlines parental behavior and school interactions which influence the male's academic performance during elementary and junior high grades.

Wiseman (1965) concluded "that factors in the home and neighborhood, and particularly those associated with maternal care and material needs, are much more powerful determinants of educational achievement than are factors within the walls of the school itself" (p. 76)

There are two contradictory viewpoints regarding the type of familial atmosphere which is most conducive to achievement motivation, namely the free permissive type of environment and the more authoritarian or restrictive type of home setting. (Drews & Teahan, 1957, p. 328)

Drews and Teahan's study (1957) found that "mothers of high academic achievers were more authoritarian and restrictive in the treatment of their children than the mothers of low academic achievers" (p. 331). Rau et al. (1964) found parental demands for mastery related to high achievement; while parental rejection was inversely related to academic achievement. However, Rau et al. (1964) noted that these findings taken together would suggest:

That parents who discourage independent exploration of the environment and hold restrictive attitudes with
respect to impulse expression are likely to inhibit their son's intellectual development, especially in verbal areas. Conversely, parents who encourage self-reliance and are relatively open in their attitudes towards sexuality and other aspects of impulse life, are likely to facilitate intellectual development. (p. 231)

Anderson and Evans (Note 6) related achievement orientation in students to two family socialization practices:

[1] Achievement training which occurs in the home when parents set high goals for their children and communicate to them expectations for high achievement; [2] Independence training which occurs when parents encourage self-reliance by granting their children enough autonomy to make their own decisions and to accept responsibility for success or failure. (p. 1)

Consequently, as a result of achievement orientation practices in the family, students develop different degrees of self-motivation to achieve academically. This internal motivational force is one of many variables attributed to academic achievement. It may be used as an explanation for the performance of over-achieving students (students performing beyond their identified abilities on standardized tests) and under-achieving students (students performing below their abilities).
Brookover and Paterson (1962) found that parents of under-achievers reward their children for good grades and punish them more often for poor grades than parents of over-achievers. The under-achievers "reported that their parents expected them to have difficulty in a particular subject" (p. 58). However, the over-achievers were more hesitant in giving an all-out endorsement of parents than the under-achievers.

Henderson and Long's (Note 4) study found first grade students who were performing successfully in reading to be more confident and to be less dependent on parents while the promoted non-readers were more dependent on their parents and lower in self-concept. These results would appear to partially support Anderson and Evans' contention that achievement orientation is related to achievement and independence training.

Nelson and Maccoby (1966) found that close and intense relationships with parents in some way interfere with relationships with peers. They further noted "that males who report having been 'mamma's boy' or 'daddy's boy' are more likely to report having had only a few close friends or many friends who were not close" (p. 281). They concluded that high verbal abilities and lower mathematical abilities appear to be associated with social withdrawal and dependency upon parents.
Kaceely and Nelson have reported the importance of dependency on parents as affecting a child's academic performance. It is therefore necessary to look at yet another variable which is influential in a child's self-identity. Since this paper is more acutely concerned with the male's academic performance, the emphasis will be placed on the male's sex-role identity.

Since child rearing is primarily the function of women, the process of sex-role socialization differs for girls and boys... Girls acquire their sex identity primarily by imitating their mothers, whereas boys must solve the problem of defining their identity by differentiating themselves from their mothers... Difficulties in the development of adequate sex identity have been linked to cognitive and emotional adjustment problems in males. (Gold & Andres, 1978, p. 75)

Although "studies of father-child relationships are not numerous," (Nash, 1965, p. 267), Nussen, Young, and Gaddini (1963) studied the influence of the father-son relationship of adolescent boys in four localities: Rome; Florence; Palermo; and Boston. Their results presented more global generalization and supported previous research and theories. Nussen et al. found boys of fathers who were sufficiently affectionate to be more sociably oriented, more concerned about their relationship with their peers, and more adjusted socially.
These data may also be construed as supporting the hypothesis that lack of paternal affection inhibits the development of the boy's identification with his father. That is, if it is assumed that, in general, these fathers are adequate representatives of their cultural norm, it would be expected that the boy who is highly identified with his father would acquire the social and personality characteristics typical of his group. The failure of the "insufficient paternal affection group" to acquire at least the culturally typical quality of interest in social interactions and adequate motivation to establish friendly relationships may therefore be regarded as evidence of inadequate identification with the father. (Hussen, et al., 1963, p. 8)

Hussen and Rutherford (1963) supported the above hypothesis. They concluded that "young boys are more likely to identify strongly with their fathers . . . if they perceive their fathers as highly nurturant and rewarding" (p. 595).

Hussen, Young, and Gaddini (1963) contended that "boys who do not receive sufficient affection from their fathers generally feel more unhappy, less calm, and less relaxed" (p. 8). Further results of their study indicated that the boys who received sufficient affection from their fathers scored high in need achievement. Hussen et al. concluded:
A relatively high degree of achievement motivation may therefore be indicative of strong masculine identification (and a low degree of the motivation may indicate weak masculine identification), presumably based on strong identification with the father. (p. 10)

Boys who were rejected by their fathers in Boston and Rome had "strong feelings of domination by environmental forces" (p. 10). This result may be related to Neiman's (1970) study which indicated that students believing in external control may not be motivated in the traditional way in schools and, consequently, may demonstrate difficulty academically.

Nussen et al. (1963) further found that:

Boys who experience adequate affection from their fathers identify strongly with them and hence acquire substantial masculine interests, including relatively strong heterosexual interests; (2) these boys are generally more mature than their peers and hence more likely to have a great deal of interest in the opposite sex; and (3) having experienced more affection from their families, these boys are more able than others to be affectionate and to extend this affection to members of the opposite sex. (pp. 11-12)

Rau et al. (1964) also stressed the importance of the father-son relationship. They noted:

Fathers seem to influence their sons' achievement largely through their availability, appropriacy and
reward-value as models of sex-typing. One possible interpretation of the influence of fathers' sex-typed behavior (e.g., interest in sports) is that they stimulate assertiveness and competitiveness in their sons, and that this in turn affects achievement-motivation.

(p. 250)

The link between male sex-role identity and academic achievement has been supported by the results of the study by Rau et al. (1964). They found masculine boys to score significantly higher on reading achievement scores than boys with inconsistent sex-role patterns" (p. 15). Troop (1972) also confirmed that "more studies have found a positive relationship between appropriate sex role identity and academic achievement than have found no relationship or a negative one" (p. 38).

As a result of the research data, it has become an accepted fact that the father's presence is extremely important to the social adjustment of the male. This led some theorists to criticize the American family system for not making the father or other male figures readily available as role models for male children. While the father is working, the male child spends most of his waking hours with his mother. The child is deprived of his male model. Consequently, the male child feels ambiguous about his masculine identity (Mitchell & Wilson, 1967). This ambiguity "in extreme cases may result in compulsive masculinity" (Mitchell & Wilson, 1967, p. 1173). Compulsive
Masculinity is defined as "reaction formation which is expressed by violent, destructive, and aggressive acts" (p. 1173).

Mitchell and Wilson (1967) suggested that "compulsive masculine identification should be related to various forms of delinquent behavior" (p. 1173). They further hypothesized that "masculine identification would be especially exaggerated in delinquent boys whose real father was absent from the home" (p. 1173). Mitchell and Wilson's study was conducted on thirty-four boys from the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility. The results did not support their hypotheses.

Research has also studied the effects father's absence has on the development of his son. Blanchard and Liller's study (1971) supported previous research indicating that a father's absence or unavailability can interfere with academic performance.

Thomas' (1968) study examined the role of the father in socializing children of low-socioeconomic status. He compared the effects of father absence on nine-to-eleven year old boys and girls with those children whose fathers were present in the home. The fathers were absent in the homes due to divorce or separation. The results of this study found few differences between these two groups. Thomas (1968) indicated that the following must be considered when analyzing the data: (1) the children were at an age of
relative "quietness" in personality development; (2) fathers had been absent for at least two years, so it is possible to rule out emotional trauma; (3) "impressionistic" data suggest that the fathers who were present in the homes did not have a close relationship with their children. Thomes hypothesized that these results might be different if the study was conducted on a middle-class population.

The father-son relationship is certainly complex. However, its influence on the child's academic achievement and social adjustment is unquestionable.

**Academic Environment**

In recent years a decline in achievement test scores at pre-college level has been observed in the United States . . . This decline was real and not an artifact due to changes in test composition, norms, or tested samples. The decline began in the mid-sixties after a continuous upward trend. It involved grades five through twelve and almost all tested achievement areas. (Harnquist & Stahlen, 1977, p. 1)

One explanation for the changes in academic performance is the influence of external forces. Harnquist and Stahlen's study (1977) might lend some insight as to the variables which may have influenced the decline of test scores in the United States. They studied all Swedish students
who were born on the 5th, 15th and 25th of any month in 1948 and in 1953. Each group was tested at age thirteen. An overall increase existed in test scores between national samples in 1961 and 1966.

During the same interval several changes in the environment took place. School curriculum was revised. Television reached a broader audience. Families with teenagers moved upwards along the educational and occupational ladders. Occupational activity increased among mothers. Agricultural occupation became less frequent. (pp. 15-16)

The results of this study indicated that population density and curriculum changes influenced the test scores whereas television was not significantly influential.

The correlation for boys supports the interpretation that the changes registered in the ecological variables to some extent have been instrumental in improving the conditions for intellectual growth. Whether it is on the family level or the area level remains inconclusive and so does the question whether they are "truly environmental" or not. (Garquist & Steble, 1977, p. 19)

This study, although not conclusive, acknowledges the influence of society's trends on the academic performance of students. It is a pioneer study. The need for further research in this area is evident.

Theorists and researchers have postulated several other reasons for academic failure. Ramirez and Taylor (1967)
placed the blame on the school system. They stated:

The school system itself is geared to the needs, objectives and values of the middle class in American society. Teachers, like the majority of college educated people, come from this class and see others through its particular cultural "classes." Life situation in readers, texts and instruction reflect the middle class way of life. The public school expects children to behave according to middle class values and norms--indeed, being a good child means exactly that. (p. 10)

Therefore, children of low socioeconomic status find schools stress values and instruct in a manner slightly foreign from the environments in which they live. It is no wonder that students of low socioeconomic status comprise a greater percentage of the dropouts and underachievers in schools today. They face greater difficulty adjusting to this environment and the schools' values may not necessarily provide meaning for them or act as a motivating force to achieve.

Lorth (Note 3) also attacked schools as an institution which oppresses the students. He contended that "being a student, like being female, being black, or being poor is a repressed state against which role incumbents must fight in order to achieve scholastically, academically or socially" (p. 9).
If one agrees with North that students, in general, are repressed, then one must look closer at the oppression of males. Research (Vroegh, 1972; White & Cherry, 1966) has proven Jones' (1974) statement to be true: "Boys account for most academic failures, and emotional and disciplinary problems" (p. 319). Vroegh (1972) cited two reasons for these problems:

One, boys develop physically and mentally more slowly than girls. The result is an inability to perform as well as girls in the early grades. Not being able to perform as expected in these early years seems to get boys off to a bad start and as the years go by, their problems seem to multiply rather than diminish.

[Second] it is often asserted that the elementary school program meets the needs of girls, but not boys. Several investigators have reported that the classroom is perceived as feminine by students and that girls are perceived to be favored. (p. 1)

Sexton (1965) elaborated on Vroegh's second point: The masculine virtues are usually diametrically opposite to the school's female ones. The masculine stress is on aggressiveness in all things, rather than passivity. It is on action and movement rather than sitting still, independence rather than obedience, speaking out rather than keeping quiet, strong group loyalty and group competition rather than individual competition. It is on
fearlessness, courage, and daring rather than timidity and surrender. It is on conflict, struggle, and good fight rather than perpetual peace. The female code is to make as much effort as possible in studies, the male to make the least. (p. 32)

This environment is contrary to boys' needs. Sexton (1965) stated that "though the boy must learn to be his own authority, the school insists that he obeys its authority, however arbitrary and irrational it may be" (p. 33).

Vroegh (1972) added another dimension to the males' difficulties in a feminine school environment. He noted that female teachers "have been accused of neglecting mathematics and science subjects in which boys excel" (p. 2). Instead they stress verbal and language subjects in which boys generally do more poorly (Brookover, et al., 1962). This evidence implies that the schools are not meeting the needs of males nor are they capitalizing on the males' strengths. This environment, as described by Sexton and Vroegh, would appear uninteresting and defeating for the male students. Sucher (Note 5) cited "under-achievement, lack of interest, and relationship with the teacher" (p. 4) as factors which may cause "boys to skip school more often than girls" (p. 4).

Sucher (Note 5) further noted that:
While it has never been the overt intention of parents to train a boy to have difficulty in school, they do interact with boys in ways which establish behavior patterns
that contribute to teachers perceiving them as mis-
behavior. (p. 5)

The males' learning has been more physical and
visual in their preschool years. "Traditionally, males have
not been good listeners" (Sucher, Note 5, p. 9). Sucher
(Note 5) conjectured that "the amount of negative oral
directions they have received prior to entering school and,
unfortunately, often after entering the classroom, causes
many to 'turn-off' the teacher during oral instruction" (p. 9).

Boys frequently become behavior problems because they
already know what the teacher is presenting. Perhaps
even more frequently they lose interest and create
problems because they do not understand what is
being presented or have not had the background to move
to new levels. (Sucher, Note 5, p. 10)

The teacher-pupil relationship has been proven an in-
fluential variable in the students' academic performance
(Brookover et al., 1962; Sucher, Note 5; McCandless, Roberts,
& Starnes, 1972). Sucher (Note 5) has recognized the teacher
as the "most influential factor affecting behavior and under-
achievement of boys" (p. 11). Research has identified
"teacher attitudes, expectations, and consequent judgments
of pupil performance and ability" (Pugh, Note 9, p. 1) as
affecting the learning process. Carwood's study (1976)
suggested that first name preferences of teachers correlate
with higher self-concept and achievement measures with
sixth-grade children. McCandless, Roberts and Starnes' study (1972) found "teachers' marks when judged against achievement test results [to] be more accurate for girls than for boys, for middle-class than for disadvantaged children, and perhaps least accurate of all for disadvantaged black boys" (p. 159).

Teachers perceive boys as giving them the most trouble. They also perceive boys more negatively than girls. Research has shown that teachers treat boys unfairly, although probably not intentionally (Sucher, Note 5).

Teachers tend to ignore or reject boys' responses and contributions at twice the rate they do girls' responses. When boys are unable to respond, teachers frequently re-direct the question to girls . . . . Trakley suggests that at all levels when grades are administered, girls are typically given better grades without having earned them. (Sucher, Note 5, pp. 11-12)

Sucher also stated that "many teachers are swayed in their grading practices by social behavior and physical appearance" (p. 13). Both male and female teachers tend to reject language more frequently used by boys "such as gut" (Sucher, Note 5, p. 13).

The environment described by these research studies emphasizes a feminine environment in which the male student is expected to succeed. One solution frequently mentioned is the need for more male teachers. Vrogh (1972) responded to this proposal in the following statement:
Although there is little direct research evidence that suggests that boys would improve in academic achievement if they had male teachers in the classroom, there are several related lines of research which could be construed to support the general opinion that more males in the elementary classroom would be beneficial. (p. 18)

The description presented of the academic environment appears dismal for the males' success. However, Jones (1974) acknowledged the current feminist movement as possibly benefiting both male and female students.

This women's liberation movement, with its unisex philosophy, demands that all treatment be identical—no more all-girl home economics or all-male athletic activities. Time will tell whether the males, who have rebelled against our feminized school system, can be better accommodated as that system responds to feminist pressures. (Jones, 1974, p. 319)
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, intelligence, self-concept, motivation, parental attitude, and socioeconomic status are interrelated and affect the academic performance of all students. Students from the low-socioeconomic level demonstrate greater difficulty learning than do middle-class students due to lack of stimulation and verbal training in their family environment, but also due to the school's environment being more conducive to the middle-socioeconomic level student. Male students demonstrate greater difficulty than females in the academic environment partially because of the parents' and society's differential treatment which stresses independence and aggressiveness in males. These traits are seen as contradictory to the feminine environment of the classroom.

Male students comprise the majority of those referred for services in remedial reading classes and learning disability rooms (Sucher, Note 5). Yet, if a male's learning problems are due partly to self-concept, motivation, and the family's environment, which are all cultural factors, then Multidisciplinary Teams need to examine these factors more closely when considering enrolling a student in exceptional education classes, in particular, learning disabilities classes.
According to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, as stated in the Federal Register, 1977, the following are not to be included when defining learning disabilities:

The term [specific learning disabilities] does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages. (p. 65083)

In agreement with the Federal regulation, the state of Wisconsin stated in Chapter II 11 (1975) that "SEN excludes conditions described as special educational needs (SEN) resulting primarily from poverty, neglect, delinquency or cultural or linguistic isolation from the community at large" (p. 62).

A learning disability entails a deficit in one of the essential processes: "perception, integration, and expression, either verbal or nonverbal" (Lerner, 1971, p. 299).

However, much difficulty exists in accurately measuring perceptual functions. There are many clinical instruments which purport to measure perceptual abilities but most of these tests have not been standardized and few have been validated. (O'Connor, Note 10, p. 2)

Therefore, due to inaccurate measures and familial environments, it is possible to incorrectly place students in the learning disabilities program. It is imperative
that diagnostician be acutely aware of these problems, in order to identify more clearly the student's problems and consequently recommend the appropriate placement.

The need for a social worker to screen the familial environment of students referred as learning disabled is imperative. Yet, social workers are not always assigned to the Multidisciplinary Team, nor are all referred students' family environments adequately screened. This leads too frequently to students who may be incorrectly enrolled in a program and consequently "labeled."

Multidisciplinary Team members attempt to avoid incorrect placements. However, considering the standardized tests available, many questions concerning the student's needs go unanswered. It is necessary that research devote more attention to developing reliable and more extensive standardized tests.

Considering the strong influence one's family environment has on a student's achievement, it may be necessary for schools, high schools in particular, to require courses which emphasize the effects of parents' behavior on children, male and female alike, in an attempt to alter the early behavioral patterns and role expectations which have been found to deter learning in males. Perhaps this awareness and the changing women's role may, in the future, alleviate the male students' difficulty in adjusting to the school environment.
REFERENCE NOTES


REFERENCES


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