

PERCEIVED PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT IN A GROUP OF ADOLESCENT BOYS

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The present study is an attempt to determine whether or not, in the Philippines, differences exist between the parents of high achievers and the parents of low achievers, with respect to their child-rearing attitudes and, also, to determine the nature of these differences.

While past studies (Drews & Teahan, 1957; Shaw & Dutton, 1962) have approached this problem by giving the attitude measures to the parents, the present investigation is mainly interested in the phenomenal field of the low and high achievers themselves. In other words, the focus here is on the parents' attitudes, not as ascertained from the parents themselves, but as perceived by the low achievers and high achievers, regardless of how accurate or how subjective this perception may be.

METHOD

The Ss were selected from a group of incoming freshmen in a boys' college in greater Manila. The majority of these boys were from middle- and upper-class families. Their mean age was 16.7 years with a standard deviation of 1.23 years. As part of the placement procedure normally undertaken in this school, these boys were given a battery of tests during the first three days of their orientation week. Other tests suitable for the purpose of the present experiment were included in this series of tests. The tests selected were:

1. Otis Self-Administering Test of Mental Ability, Higher Form A (Otis, 1928). This was used as a measure of intelligence.

2. College Qualification Tests (CQT), Form A (Bennett, Bennett, Wallace & Wesman, 1958). This, rather than the grades in the report cards of the subjects, was used as a

measure of scholastic achievement. The subjects came from different high schools, of varying scholastic standards; thus, the comparability of their grades was open to doubt.

3. Parent Attitude Research Instrument (PARI), devised by Shaefer and Bell (1958). There is a separate form for the mother and another for the father. Each form consists of 115 items stating attitudes toward family life and children in the form of rationalizations. An example is item 2 in the mother's form: "A good mother should shelter her child from life's little difficulties." The subject answers by encircling one of four letters beside the statement. These letters correspond to the four categories of answers possible, namely: strong agreement, mild agreement, mild disagreement, and strong disagreement. As mentioned beforehand, the focus here is on the phenomenal field of the low and high achievers. Thus the instructions given for the PARI were that the subject should predict how his own mother or father would respond to the items and not his own feeling about the item.

Three hundred thirty boys took part in the testing but complete data for our purposes were obtained for only 224 individuals. The mean IQ of this group was 107.41 with a standard deviation of 11.38. It was from this group that the low achievers and the high achievers were finally selected.

The low achiever was operationally defined as belonging to the bottom 27% in his performance on the CQT when compared to others of the same Otis IQ. The high achiever was operationally defined as belonging to the top 27% in his performance on the CQT when compared to others of the same Otis IQ.

The Ss were divided into groups according to IQ as determined by the Otis, permitting a three-point variation of IQ scores in each group. In each IQ group, Ss were ranked according to their performance on the CQT and the lower 27% of the subjects in each of these groups were designated as the low achievers and the upper 27% of the subjects as the high achievers.

The low achievers and the high achievers selected by means of the above procedure each totalled 57 subjects. The characteristics of these two groups with respect to age, IQ, and CQT scores are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF AGE, IQ, AND ACHIEVEMENT (CQT)
SCORES OF THE LOW ACHIEVERS AND THE HIGH ACHIEVERS

Variable	Low achievers		High achievers		Difference between means	z
	M	SD	M	SD		
Age	17.090	1.160	17.360	.980	.270	1.314
IQ (Otis)	108.157	11.209	108.245	11.279	.088	.041
Achievement score (CQT)	91.919	22.073	128.403	11.279	36.474	11.113**

Note. — $N = 57$ for both low achievers and high achievers.

** $p < .01$

The responses of these two groups on each of the 115 items of the PARI were tabulated combining the two degrees of agreement into simply "agree", and doing likewise for the two degrees of disagreement. Separate tabulations were made for the predicted responses of the mothers and fathers. The items were then ranked from the one receiving the highest number of "agree" responses to the one receiving the lowest number of such responses. The rank discrepancy for each item between the low achievers and the high achievers was then computed, separately, for the mothers and the fathers. The chi-square was then used to test the significance of the difference between the pattern of "agree" and "disagree" responses for the low achievers on the one hand and the high achievers on the

other. This test was applied to each item, for the mothers and for the fathers, beginning in each case with the item computed to have the biggest rank discrepancy.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the items in the Mother's Form of the PARI on which significant differences were found between the low achievers and the high achievers. Out of the 115 items stating the possible attitudes that their mothers could have, the low achievers and the

TABLE 2
ITEMS IN THE MOTHER'S FORM OF THE PARI ON WHICH SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES
APPEARED BETWEEN THE LOW ACHIEVERS AND THE
HIGH ACHIEVERS

I. Items that received a significantly greater number of predicted "agree" responses from the low achievers.	from the bottle as soon as possible. *
18. A young child should be protected from hearing about sex. *	70. A child's ideas should be seriously considered in making family decisions. *
35. A child should be taught to always come to his parents or teachers rather than fight when he is in trouble. *	86. If mothers could get their wishes they would most often ask that their husbands be more understanding. *
66. An alert parent should try to learn all her child's thoughts. *	II. Items that received a significantly greater number of predicted "agree" responses from the high achievers.
112. It is a mother's duty to make sure that she knows her child's innermost thoughts. **	30. Sometimes it's necessary for a wife to tell off her husband in order to get her rights.
73. Children need some of the natural meanness taken out of them *	84. A child who is "on the go" all the time will most likely be happy.
114. A child should be weaned away	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

high achievers perceived their mothers differently (on a statistically significant level) on 10 items alone. The probability of obtaining this number of significant differences was computed and found to be beyond the .01 chance level ($z = 8.77$, z^2 being approximately equal to the chi-square). On eight of these 10 items, the low achievers gave a significantly greater number of "agree" responses than the high achievers.

Table 3 presents the items in the Father's Form of the PARI on which significant differences were found between the low achievers and the high achievers. This table shows that out of the 115 items stating the possible atti-

tudes that their fathers could have, the low achievers and high achievers perceived their father's attitudes differently (at a statistically significant level) on 17 items alone. This number of differences was found to be significant beyond the .01 level. In 13 of these 17 items, the number of predicted "agree" responses was greater for the low achievers than the high achievers.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing results do not cut a definite line of discrepancy between the way the low achievers and the high achievers perceive their mother's and father's attitude with respect to parent-child relationships.

TABLE 3
ITEMS IN THE FATHER'S FORM OF THE PARI ON WHICH SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES APPEARED BETWEEN THE LOW ACHIEVERS AND THE HIGH ACHIEVERS

I. Items that received a significantly greater number of predicted "agree" responses from the low achievers.	36. You have to give children sexual freedom or they will not develop properly. *
48. Parents should know better than to allow their children to be exposed to difficult situations. *	106. Parents have to respect the wishes of children even more than the child respects their wishes. *
94. Parents should try to prevent all difficulties which make a child unhappy. **	16. Few wives realize that husbands are part of the family and need some looking after. *
113. Children should be taught to be content with just what they happen to have and not expect to get much more. *	29. The main thing wrong with today's homes is the wife tries too much to run everything. **
23. It's best to trick a child into doing something he doesn't want to do instead of having to argue with him. **	II. Items that received a significantly greater number of predicted "agree" responses from the high achievers.
27. Many children, like horses, must be broken in order to be trained. *	6. Parents who allow their children to grow up with the idea that other people will always help them just encourage them to become failures. **
33. A child soon learns that there is no greater wisdom than that of his parents. *	60. Grown-ups should treat their children the same way they treat other grown-ups. *
34. It's best for the child if he never gets started wondering whether his father's views are right. **	99. A man can't do a father's job and have an active social life too. **
56. Loyalty to parents comes before anything else. *	104. It's natural for a father to "blow his top" when the wife or children are selfish and demanding. *
102. A child should grow up convinced his parents always know what is the right thing to do. *	

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

However, there still appear to be definite suggestions of the areas where differences may lie and which certainly deserve further investigation. From the results of the present experiment it is apparent that:

1. The low achievers to a greater extent than high achievers perceived in both their mothers and fathers a protective attitude. As perceived by low achievers, their mothers and fathers approve highly a child's coming to his parents or teachers when he is in trouble, a child's being shielded against hearing about sex, a child's being protected from difficult situations and a child's being content with just what he happens to have instead of expecting to get much more. Apparently, the parents of low achievers to a greater degree than parents of high achievers foster a dependency, a passivity, and an approach that does not demand too much initiative, self-sufficiency, or effort from the individual himself.

2. The low achievers to a higher degree than high achievers perceived in both their mothers and fathers a controlling and authority-centered attitude towards children. This authoritarian element seems to be stronger in the father's than in the mother's attitude. While the mother is perceived to be mainly intrusive into her child's thoughts, the father is felt to particularly stress his authority, his superiority, his right to direct and control his child. The father is seen as emphasizing the child's loyalty and unquestioning belief in his parent's wisdom.

3. There is a slight element of ambivalence in the perceived parental attitudes which is greater in the low achievers than among the high achievers. Thus, while perceived by low achievers as controlling, authority-centered and protective, the parents are also felt to

have some equalitarian beliefs like considering a child's opinion in making family decisions and respecting the wishes of children. This indication of ambivalence is so slight however as to preclude much speculation on the matter.

4. The way the high achievers differ from the low achievers in their perception of their parents' attitude can be easily inferred from the foregoing discussion. The items which they do ascribe to their parents to a greater extent than the low achievers are so few as to make interpretation more than difficult. It appears to be valid to conclude, nonetheless, that no element is revealed which is clearly identifiable as authority-centered or protective. On the contrary the high achievers to a greater degree than the low achievers perceived their fathers as approving of self-sufficiency, equality and initiative in their children.

In summary, there is a strong perception on the part of the low achievers, of a controlling authority-centered and protective attitude in both their fathers and mothers. Is this perception an antecedent or a consequent factor in their low scholastic achievement? It seems easier to build a tenable explanation in favor of the former than of the latter suggestion.

In an experiment by Walsh (1956) on self-concept and school achievement, it was found that low achievers more markedly than high achievers perceived themselves as "being restricted or not free to pursue his own interest and feelings and as acting defensively." McCandless (1961, p. 186), theorizing on the implications of this result for education, suggests that "children who have come to feel that their freedom is so restricted that they cannot cope with their environment... may express the

conflicts so engendered by 'rebellion' against the educational process—that is, by achieving far less than they are able to accomplish."

Shaw and Dutton (1962) in their own investigation on attitudes of the parents of bright academic under-achievers, using also the PARI, found them to be more dominating, restrictive and protective in their child-rearing attitudes than the parents of the achievers.

Admitting the limitation of the present study with respect to the representativeness of its sample and the generality of its results, it still seems not far-fetched to make the following hypothesis: a certain sense of individuality and of self-direction and the capacity for independent thought and action constitute to a great degree the motivation and effective translation of capacity into real accomplishment in scholastic activity. Where thought and problem-solving is the main emphasis, there must be some awareness of one's right "to pursue his own interests and feelings" as an individual. Where such awareness is not possible because of an authority figure's stress in his own superiority and capacity for right thinking, the initiative to develop one's faculties is greatly diminished. The low achiever, as it were, fails to see the value in accomplishing something on his

own since there is an ever-present, all-knowing, all-powerful, and benevolent person who will always "take care" of him.

Future studies on the low achiever should perhaps be in the direction of exploring further his phenomenal field, particularly, his self-concept.

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