STUDIES IN THE ORIGINS OF ACHIEVEMENT STRIVINGS

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This study explores facets of maternal attitudes and behaviors considered important in the genesis of achievement strivings of adolescent boys—their motivation to achieve and to avoid failure and their conscious achievement values. Maternal attitudes and behaviors were investigated as: (a) determinants of teenage son's achievement strivings; and (b) consequences of the social class, religious affiliation and strength of achievement motive of the mothers. These two problems were treated in separate studies.

The first study—the determinants of achievement-related characteristics of teenage boys—involved a retest of a group of mothers and their children studied six years earlier. In that earlier study, the n Achievement of the boys and the maternal attitudes concerning their sons' independent accomplishment in early childhood were assessed.

Achievement motive (n Achievement), failure avoidant motive (Test Anxiety) and conscious achievement values of twenty-nine high school boys were assessed in group test sessions. (Fourteen of these boys had also been subjects in the earlier study.) A sample of thirty-three mothers filled out questionnaires about their conscious achievement values and their attitudes concerning independent accomplishment in their sons, both as young children and as teenagers.
The results indicate:

(a) stability in the boys' achievement over a six-year interval;
(b) a negative relationship between maternal attitudes concerning their sons' independent accomplishment in early childhood (measured six years ago) and in adolescence (measured in the present study);
(c) a positive relationship between achievement of teenage boys and maternal attitudes toward independent accomplishment both in early childhood and during adolescence, thereby lending some support to both the importance of early learning (primacy hypothesis) and the ongoing situation (situational hypothesis) as determinants of personality development;
(d) Test Anxiety of teenage boys is negatively related only to the maternal attitudes concerning independent accomplishment in early childhood, thereby tending to support the primacy hypothesis; and
(e) conscious achievement values of teenage boys are positively related to only the conscious achievement values of their mothers.

The second study—the determinants of maternal attitudes concerning independent accomplishment—attempts to replicate, on a national probability sample, previous findings that religious affiliation and indices of social class background are correlates of these maternal attitudes. It further considers for the first time the relationship between strength of achievement motive of the mothers and these child-rearing attitudes.

As part of a larger interview study, 410 mothers, with children sixteen years of age or younger, reported the ages at which they would expect various
independent accomplishments in a son of theirs. The strength of the achievement motive of 185 of these mothers was assessed by a thematic apperceptive technique.

The results of this study indicate that:

(a) The strength of the relationship with expectations for independent accomplishment varies for three indices of social class—education of the respondent, occupation of the head of household, and family income; for all three, higher status is associated with early expectations for independent accomplishment, but only for education is this relationship significant. The interaction among these variables is complex, and is not accounted for by a simple additive or compensatory model for determining social class position.

(b) The hypothesis that Protestants encourage earlier independent accomplishment than Catholics is not confirmed, even when only frequent church attenders are considered.

(c) Mothers with very high n Achievement scores (upper quartile) report earlier expectations for independent accomplishment than do mothers with very low n Achievement scores (lower quartile); this relationship is in the main attributable to the college-educated women.