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Parental Involvement as a Predictor of School Success: Examining the Mediating Role of Achievement

Goals

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Senior Thesis

Fall/Winter 2009-2010

Abstract

It has been argued that when parents are involved in their children's academic lives, children tend to perform better academically than when their parents are not involved. However, it is possible that parental involvement does not have a direct effect in a child's academics. Achievement goals, such as mastery and performance goals, also influence success in academics. There is also a relationship between parental involvement and achievement goal orientations, thus it is worthwhile to study both variables, which can attribute to academic success. This study was designed to examine whether types of achievement goals mediate the relationship between types of parental involvement and children's academic success. Fourth-grade students completed a survey on perceived parental involvement and a survey on achievement goals. Children's grades were obtained from their teachers and averaged across all subjects. Results indicate that supportive mothers influence their daughters' mastery goal orientations, which influences their academic success. Boys, on the other hand, did not have significant relationships between parental involvement and academic success for either parent. These results suggest that parents should attempt to be more supportive, rather than monitoring, of their child's academics.

Parental Involvement as a Predictor of School Success: Examining the Mediating Role of Achievement Goals

When parents are involved in their children's academic lives, children tend to perform better academically than when their parents are not involved. Parents involvement in their child's academics can take a number of different forms, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, helping a child with homework, going to school activities, such as school fairs, and knowing what the child is doing in class, as well as how they are doing in class (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005). Parental involvement can also have different qualities, such as monitor and support. A parent can monitor the child's academics in such a way that it is perceived as controlling (e.g., when a parent hovers over a child attempting to complete a homework assignment). On the other hand, a parent can be supportive of the child's academics in a way that gives autonomy to the child (e.g., when a parent checks over a child's homework assignment after the child asks for assistance) (Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009). Research suggests that it is the supportive type of involvement, rather than the monitoring type of involvement, that contributes to better academic outcomes (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). One reason may be that supportive involvement is part of an authoritative style of parenting that is characterized by high levels of warmth and moderate levels of control. In contrast, monitoring involvement may be part of an authoritarian style of parenting that is characterized by high levels of control and low levels of warmth. In general, children tend to fare better when parents use an authoritative (rather than an authoritarian) parenting style (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

Although there is little doubt that parental involvement (particularly, supportive parental involvement) can positively affect academic success, there is still room to examine *why* parental involvement predicts positive outcomes. In other words, what mediates the relationship between academic parental involvement and academic success? Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Doan Holbein

(2005) suggest that parental involvement may be predictive of children's school engagement, intrinsic motivation, sense of autonomy, and self-regulation – all of which have been shown to predict positive academic outcomes. Achievement goal orientation is another variable that can relate to academic success (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999). For one thing, it is the product of the child, such that the child chooses what goal to focus on, rather than be influenced by achievement goals. Also, achievement goals are more directly related to how children achieve academic success. The present study is extended to examine the degree to which parental involvement might predict children's achievement goal orientations which, in turn, might predict school success.

My decision to focus on achievement goals is based on the fact that there is a large – and growing – literature suggesting that these goals are predictive of student success. Two types of achievement goals are typically discussed. Students who hold mastery goals are those who focus on the process of learning and competence. They want to learn as many topics as they can and seek out challenges (Gonzalez, Doan Holbein, & Quilter, 2002). Mastery goals are typically associated with positive outcomes, such as deep processing, intrinsic motivation, increased persistence, and better exam performance (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999). In contrast, students who hold performance goals focus on the outcome of learning. They attempt to avoid negative judgments about their ability or prove their competence (Gonzalez, Doan Holbein, & Quilter, 2002). Two types of performance goals are typically discussed: performance-approach and performance-avoidance. Performance-approach goals are characteristic of children who focus on attaining positive achievement outcomes, such as getting an A on a test, while performance-avoidance goals are characteristic of children who focus on avoiding negative outcomes, such as failing a test. Performance-avoidance goals are often associated with negative outcomes, such as lack of effort. Research on the effects of performance-approach goals is more mixed. Early research linked these goals to negative outcomes; however more recent research suggests that these goals (especially when they occur in combination with mastery

goals) may be associated with positive outcomes, because there is still persistence and effort to get an A on an exam, for instance (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999). The current study will assess linkages among parental involvement and all three types of achievement goals.

To date, only one study of which I am aware has examined linkages between parental involvement and children's achievement goals. Specifically, Régner (2009) and her colleagues found that, as expected, parental support was related to mastery goals for junior high school students. The results for parental monitoring did not support the authors' hypothesis. That is, parental monitoring did not predict performance-avoidance goals. Instead, monitoring predicted mastery goals and performance-approach goals. The authors noted surprise at these findings and suggested that future research should attempt to replicate these results.

The current study uses findings from Régner et al. (2009) and Elliot et al. (1999) by examining the degree to which achievement goals mediate the relationship between academic parental involvement and school success. These types of mediational relationships were not assessed in the previous study by Régner (2009) and her colleagues. Consistent with the findings hypothesized by Régner et al. (2009), I believe that parental support will predict mastery goals which will, in turn, predict school success (as assessed by report card grades). In contrast, I believe that parental monitoring will predict performance-avoidance goals which will, in turn, predict negative academic outcomes. This hypothesis is based on the findings that parental monitoring and a performance-avoidance goal orientation have been found to lead to negative outcomes (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Thus, it is under speculation that a mediational analysis with those two variables would lead to negative outcomes as well. Given the mixed findings in the achievement motivation literature on the implications of performance-approach goals, I offer no specific hypothesis linking parental involvement to these goals. To test my hypotheses, fourth grade students will complete two questionnaires. One questionnaire assesses parental involvement focusing on supportive

versus monitoring. The other questionnaire assesses achievement goals focusing on mastery, performance-avoidance, and performance-approach goal orientations. Current report card grades will then be obtained from the teachers.

Methods

Participants

There were 77 participants in this study from twelve 4th grade classrooms at three Indiana public elementary schools. Of these participants, 39% were male and 61% were female. However, due to not receiving grades, one participant had to be excluded leaving 76 participants for data analysis. Parental figures also played an indirect role in my study. From the data the participants provided, there were 66 mothers, 53 fathers, and 33 other parental figures, such as stepparents and grandparents. There were 49 participants who had both a mom and a dad together.

Materials

Parental Involvement. Children's perceptions of their parents' involvement in their academic lives were assessed with a modified version of a scale used by Régner et al. (2009). In the Régner et al. (2009), the two subscales, supportive and monitoring, were rated for both parents combined. In the present study, the subscales were modified to be rated twice, once for mothers or motherly figures and once for fathers or fatherly figures. The survey consisted of thirty-two items; sixteen items tapped children's perceptions of the involvement of their mothers (or a motherly figure) and sixteen items tapped children's perceptions of the involvement of their father (or a fatherly figure). Items tapped, for example, the degree to which children perceived parents as supportive, such as talking to them about their academic problems, and the degree to which children perceived parents as monitoring, for example, checking their grades. Participants indicated their responses for each item on a scale from one (Never) to five (Always) (see Appendix). Régner et al. (2009) found their subscales with both

parents to be reliable with a Cronbach alpha for the supportive scale of $\alpha = .75$, while the monitoring scale for both parents was $\alpha = .73$.

Achievement Goals. Achievement goals were assessed with the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) (Midgley et al., 2000). There were a total of fourteen items on the questionnaire assessing mastery goals (e.g., it's important to me to learn a lot of new concepts this year), performance-approach goals (e.g., it's important to me that other students in my class think I am good at my class work) and performance-avoidance goals (e.g., it's important to me that I don't look stupid in class). Students responded to each statement using a scale that ranged from one (Never) to five (Always) (see Appendix). Midgley et al., (2000) found their subscales to be reliable with a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = .85$ for mastery, $\alpha = .89$ for performance-approach, and $\alpha = .74$ for performance-avoidance goal orientations.

Procedure

An informed consent was given to students to have their parents sign before they could participate in the study. Each student who returned the consent form was given an assent form to sign for themselves. Those who signed were given a packet of all the surveys to be completed. The first survey was on perceived parental involvement. One page inquired about the mother or motherly figure that takes care of the participant on a regular basis. The second page inquired about the father or fatherly figure that takes care of the participant on a regular basis. I gave some explicit instruction on how to fill out the survey and encouraged participants to answer honestly by letting them know I was the only person who would see their results. Once this survey was complete, they completed the survey about achievement goals. Upon collecting the surveys, I asked the teachers for the participants' current report card grades. At the end of the study, participants were thanked for their participation. This entire procedure took about twenty to thirty minutes.

Results

Reliability of Measures

Using Cronbach's alpha to make sure items on the measures hung together, I found my measures to be fairly reliable. Since I used the supportive and monitoring scales separately for mother and father figures, I had two alphas for each type of scale. For parental support, mothers was $\alpha=.53$, while fathers was $\alpha=.80$. For parental monitoring, mothers was $\alpha=.83$, while fathers was $\alpha=.92$. With the exception of supportive mothers, the other items were reliable. As for my achievement goal orientations, I found reliabilities very similar to the researcher's reliabilities. Mastery goals was $\alpha=.85$, performance-approach goals was $\alpha=.87$, and performance-avoidance goals was $\alpha=.77$.

Mediational Analysis

My two central hypotheses are that 1) parental support will predict higher report card grades via development of mastery goal orientation and 2) parental monitoring will predict lower report card grades via development of performance-avoidance goal orientation. I assessed these hypotheses using procedures for testing mediation as developed by Baron and Kenney (1986). To compute parental support and parental monitoring, I took a maximum score of the mom and dad questions for each form of parental involvement. It is possible that one parent is more influential than both parents combined, and if I took an average score, it would be brought down by an uninvolved parent. Therefore, a maximum score was used, and this conveys that one parent is at work in the child's life, but it does not reveal which one. The mediational analysis consists of three regressions, but the main focus is on the first and fourth relationships. In order for my hypotheses to be correct, I need to find a significant relationship between parental involvement and school success. I also need to find a relationship between parental involvement and school success, while controlling for goal orientations. I expect this relationship to be reduced from the first one and also be non-significant (see Figure 1).

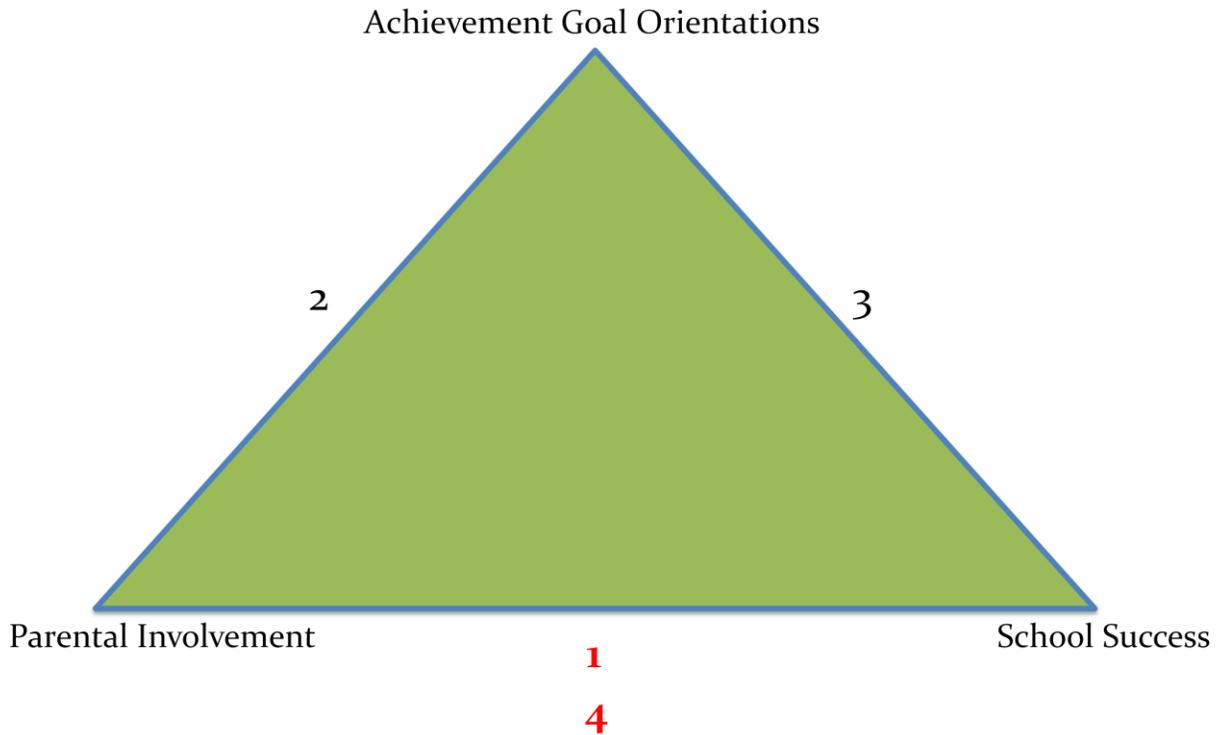


Figure 1. Mediational analysis with three sets of regressions on four relationships.

All participants

The relationships between parental support/monitor and school success were examined to see if they were positive and negative respectively. The regression revealed that parental support and success was significantly positively correlated, $\beta(75)=.28, p<.01$. Also, there was an insignificant relationship between parental support and school success, while controlling for mastery goals with $\beta(75)=.26, p=n.s.$, but the reduction was very small to conclude anything from this analysis (see Figure 2). On the other hand, parental monitoring and success was not significantly related, $\beta(75)=.09, p=n.s.$, and it was positively, rather than negatively correlated. It is possible that parental monitoring would produce a positive relationship with school success, because the parent is still involved in the child's academics; however it was weaker than the relationship between parental support and school success, which would be expected. Since there was not a significant relationship between parental monitoring

and school success, it can be concluded that performance-avoidance goal orientation is not a mediator because there is no relationship to mediate.



Figure 2. Mediation analysis of parental support, mastery goal orientation, and school success.

Boys and Girls Separately

The data was split into gender of participants to look at girls and boys separately. Using the maximum parental scores, there were no relationships between parental monitor and success for boys, $\beta(28)=-.18, p=n.s.$, or for girls, $\beta(46)=.23, p=n.s.$ Thus there is no meditational analysis to be considered, because there is no relationship to mediate. There was, however, a significant relationship between parental support and success for girls, $\beta(46)=.30, p<.01$ but not for boys, $\beta(28)=.26, p=n.s.$ Also, with the girls there was an insignificant relationship between parental support and success, while controlling for mastery goals with $\beta(46)=.23, p=n.s.$ (see Figure 3). What this all means is that mastery goals are not a mediator for boys, because there is no relationship between parental support and school success, however, it is a mediator for girls. Yet, the maximum score for parental support, in respect to

girl participants, only tells me that one parent is sufficient for academic success, but it does not tell me which parent it is for the girls.

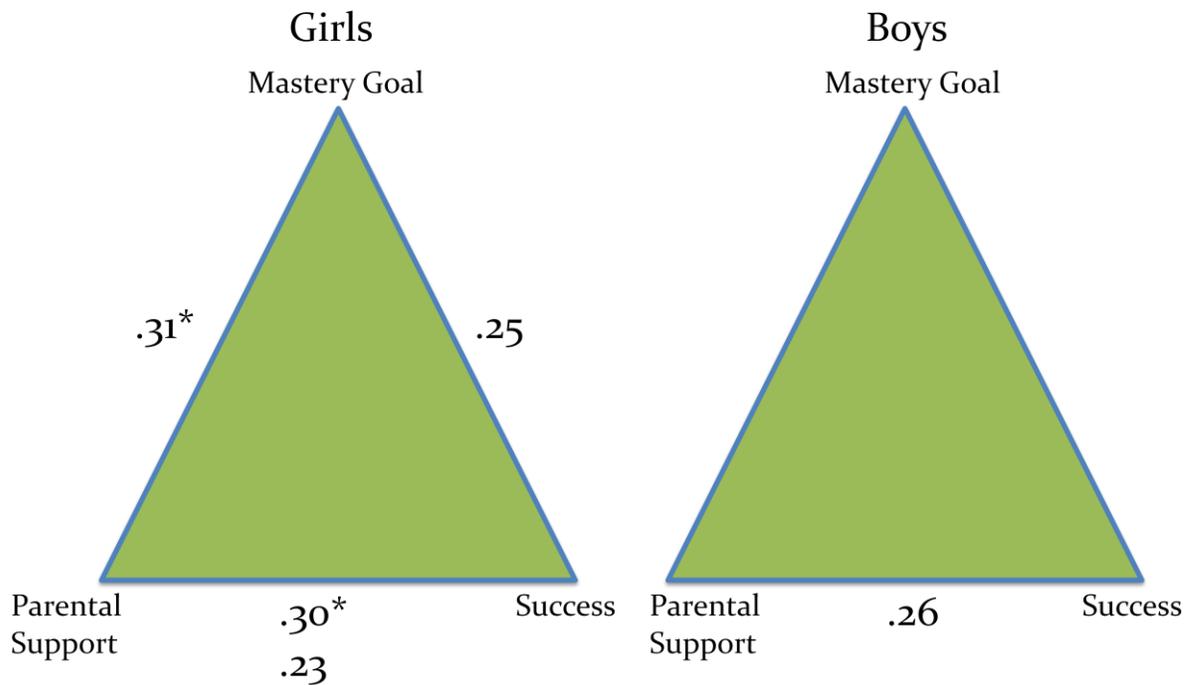


Figure 3. Mediation analysis for parental support, mastery goal orientation, and school success with the splitting of gender.

It is worth asking which parent is predominately making a difference in the child's life. Thus, another set of regressions for parental support between dads and moms is needed but only for the female participants. From this, there was no relationship between parental support and success for dads, $\beta(42)=.23, p=n.s.$ There was, on the other hand, a significant relationship between parental support and school success for the moms, $\beta(45)=.36, p<.01.$ Also, there was an insignificant relationship between parental support and success, while controlling for mastery goals, $\beta(45)=.25, p=n.s.$ (see Figure 4). This finding means that mastery goal orientation is a mediator between parental support and school success with the moms as the parental figure. In other words, what this means is that mothers, who are supportive, influence girls' mastery goal orientations, which impacts girls' academic success.

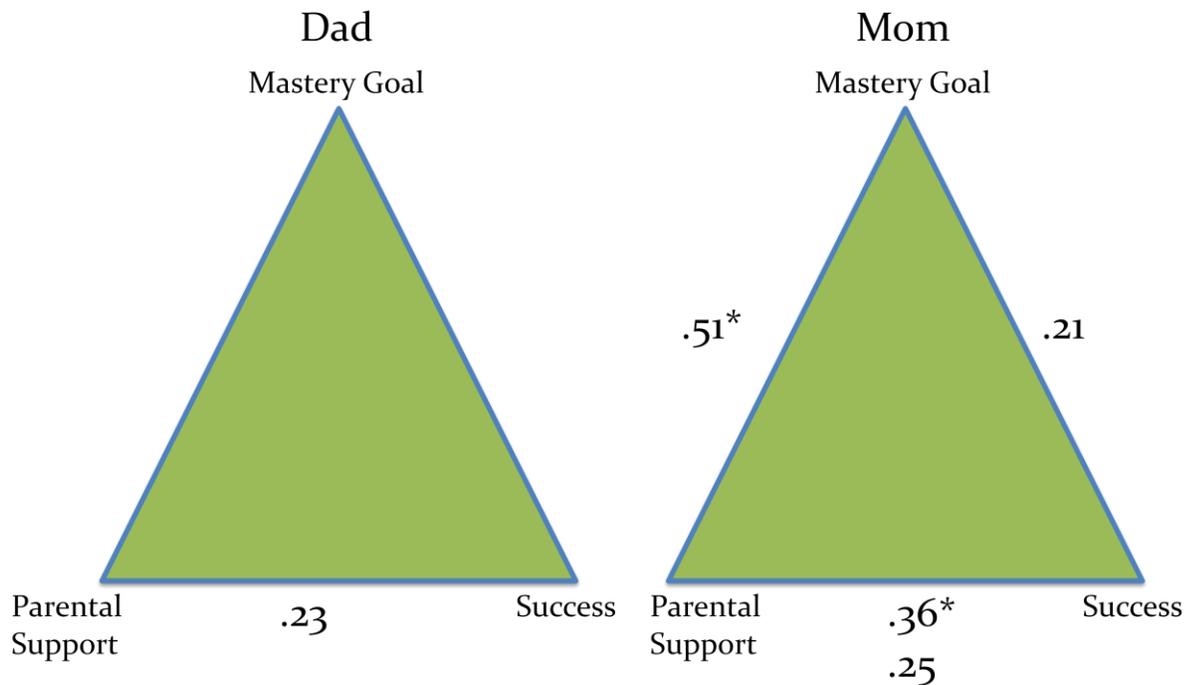


Figure 4. Mediation analysis for parental support, mastery goal orientation, and school success for girls with the splitting of parents.

To evaluate my data, an independent *t*-test was used to compare the means of grades between boys and girls. Boys had slightly higher grade point averages ($M=3.11$) than girls ($M=3.10$), but this difference was not significant, $t(74)=.04, p=.971$. Also, an independent *t*-test was used to compare the parental involvement between boys and girls for both supportive and monitoring parental involvement. Girls had slightly more supportive parental involvement ($M=4.30$) than boys ($M=4.21$), but this difference was not significant, $t(75)=.54, p=.59$. On the other hand, boys had slightly more monitoring parental involvement ($M=4.47$) than girls ($M=4.30$), and this difference was also not significant, $t(75)=-1.09, p=.28$. Lastly, an independent *t*-test was used to compare the achievement goal orientations between boys and girls for both mastery and performance-avoidance goal orientations. Girls had more mastery goals ($M=4.66$) than boys ($M=4.39$), but this difference was not significant, $t(75)=1.63, p=.11$. Girls also had more performance-avoidance goals ($M=4.05$) than boys ($M=3.91$), and this difference was also not significant, $t(75)=5.77, p=.57$.

Discussion

To review, I was looking at the mediating role of achievement goals between the relationship of parental involvement and school success. More specifically, I hypothesized that parental support would aid in the development of mastery goal orientations for students, which then would influence academic success in the way of high report card grades. Also, parental monitoring would aid in the development of performance-avoidance goal orientations for students, which then would influence academic success in the way of lower report card grades. Based off my analyses, I did not support my original hypotheses; however, I did find that supportive mothers influence mastery goal orientations for girls, which, in turn, impacts their academic success with high report card grades.

It is worthwhile to consider why mothers influenced their daughters in such ways. According to research on mothers' influence on their daughter's gender role attitudes, the researchers found mothers with nontraditional attitudes to be more authoritative, and this authoritative parenting style tends to influence the daughters' attitudes to be more nontraditional as well (Carine & Jan, 1998). Nontraditional attitudes represent an egalitarian style of living for both men and women, such that they are sharing responsibilities for housework, child care, and paid work (Scanzoni & Fox, 1980). To apply these hypotheses to my current research, since girls tend to be influenced by their supportive mothers, which has been related to an authoritative parenting style (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992), it is possible that these girls have adopted a more nontraditional attitude like their mother. What is unknown is if nontraditional attitudes are related to mastery goal orientations, and future research should look into that relationship. However, these girls, who may be holding nontraditional attitudes, may be trying to learn all they can through a mastery goal orientation, so that they can reach their full potential and become more independent and self-reliable, instead of relying on the husband to do the paid work.

It is quite possible that these girls, who have supportive mothers and mastery goal orientations, have more of a secure relationship with their mothers, which is said to have positive outcomes. For instance, Jacobsen and Hofmann (1997) found that children who are securely attached are more likely to earn higher grades and be more involved at school than children who are not securely attached. Furthermore, perhaps secure relationships allow the girls to look past the grades and look more at the learning aspect, which would be a mastery goal orientation.

Now that the girls have been examined, what is still unknown is what is going on with the boys. It appears that there is no parental influence on a boy's academic life. It has been hard to find issues in the data that suggest that the data quality limits the ability to find significant relationships. There was good reliability in the measure when done for boys and a good range of values for both boys and girls. Also, there were no significant differences between the boys and girls on achievement goal orientations, school success, and parental involvement. One thought is that parents are not involved with the boys' academics but rather their athletics. In research by Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper (2008), they found that parents and children do not agree on the perception of parents' supportiveness or pressure in athletics. Parents feel that they are being supportive of the child in the sport, but with high demands from the parents, this is perceived as pressure rather than support. Boys seem to be more involved in athletics than girls, so if parental involvement in a boy's athletics portrays a negative pressure with high demands, it is possible that this negative pressure could impact the boy's academics or the parental relationship regarding academics. Also, it may be more important to the boys for their parents to be involved in their athletics, rather than their academics. This speculation may explain why I did not see a significant relationship between academic parental involvement and school success.

Another theory is that boys are simply not achievement oriented and resist parental involvement. Baumrind (1971) found gender differences in her study on parenting styles, such that boys of nursery school age showed opposition to parental authority and focused less on achievement.

Although the boys in the current study seem to be doing well in school, such that they have average grades or higher, it is quite possible that they are still resisting parental authority, which could explain why there is no relationship between parental involvement and school success for the boys.

Some limitations need to be considered which suggest future directions of research. First, a rural population as opposed to an urban population was studied. There is little research on the different qualities of parental involvement regarding these two population settings. It would be worthwhile to investigate if there is a difference in parental involvement between the two diverse populations and what results may come of it regarding a mediational analysis. Second, academic parental involvement was the only type of involvement examined. It is quite possible that there are different forms of parental involvement that would impact academic success, such as athletic, social, and religious involvement.

There is already research regarding other mediators between parental involvement and school success, but one other mediator that comes to mind are cognitively stimulating activities. One assumption is that highly involved parents are more likely than less involved parents to provide their children with stimulating activities (e.g., trips to the museum) and toys (e.g., Leap Frog products) that may, in turn, promote academic success, but this avenue would need to be explored.

Another avenue to explore would be parent goal orientations. Perhaps it is not parental involvement that leads to goal orientations, which then leads to academic success. Rather, it is possible that parents have goal orientations, which influences their child's goal orientations, which then, in turn, influence academic success. Gonida, Kiosseoglou, & Voulala (2007) found similar results, such that when students perceived their parents' goals as mastery or performance, the students then adopted goal orientations similar to their parents. More specifically, students who held performance goals perceived their parents to also hold performance goals, and the same goes for mastery goals.

In conclusion, supportive mothers influence their daughters' academic success through the obtainment of mastery goal orientations. Mothers seem to be important because of the strong and secure relationship they have with their daughters. As for the boys, there is some speculation as to what is going on with them, but nothing is known for sure. Based off the results and interpretations, it would be wise to look into other possible variables in a meditational analysis.

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Appendix

Informed Parental Consent

My name is Katie Read, and I am a senior psychology major at Hanover College. I am interested in learning more about how parental involvement predicts school success for my senior thesis. If your child agrees to participate in my study, he/she will be asked to fill out two questionnaires and I will ask the teacher for his/her report card grades. This will take about thirty minutes of your child's time. Participation is voluntary. In addition, your child does not have to answer any question that he/she does not want to answer and may stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

The study will be done in private. Your child's name will not be on any notes. Instead, I will mark the questionnaires and report card grades with an identification number. Upon completion of the project, all questionnaires and report card grades will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Katie Read at readk10@hanover.edu or 260-515-2576 or Ellen Altermatt at altermattel@hanover.edu or 812-866-7317.

Your signature below indicates that you agree to allow your child to voluntarily participate in this study.

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Child's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Informed Child Assent

I am interested in learning more about how parental involvement predicts school success. If you agree to participate in my study, you will be asked to fill out two questionnaires and I will ask your teachers for your report card grades. This will take about thirty minutes of your time. Participation is voluntary. In addition, you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer and you may stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

The study will be done in private. Your name will not be on any notes. Instead, I will mark your questionnaires and report card grades with an identification number. Upon completion of the project, all questionnaires and report card grades will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Katie Read at readk10@hanover.edu or 260-515-2576 or Ellen Altermatt at altermattel@hanover.edu or 812-866-7317.

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Student's Name: _____

Student's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parental Involvement Survey

Teacher: _____ Boy or Girl (circle one)
 Mother or Motherly Figure _____ (if not mother, please state who the person is)

1. She checks to see that I have done my homework.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
2. She supports me when I have school difficulties.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
3. She checks to make sure I am doing my best in school.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
4. She encourages me when I get good grades.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
5. She checks my grades.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
6. She talks to me about my school problems.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
7. She checks to see if I have made progress.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
8. She gives me advice to do my homework.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
9. She goes to parent-teacher conferences.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
10. She checks to see that I have done my homework when I don't ask her to.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
11. She knows how I am doing in school.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
12. She checks to make sure I am doing my best in school when I don't ask her to.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
13. She goes to school activities or functions.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
14. She checks my grades when I don't ask her to.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
15. She knows what I am doing in school.
 1 2 3 4 5
 Never Sometimes Always
16. She checks to see if I have made progress when I don't ask her to.
 1 2 3 4 5

Never

Sometimes

Always

What's Important to Me?

1. It's important to me that I learn a lot of new concepts this year.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
2. It's important to me that other students in my class think I am good at my class work.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
3. It's important to me that I don't look stupid in class.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
4. One of my goals in class is to learn as much as I can.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
5. One of my goals is to show others that I'm good at my class work.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
6. One of my goals is to keep others from thinking I'm not smart in class.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
7. One of my goals is to master a lot of new skills this year.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
8. One of my goals is to show others that class work is easy for me.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
9. It's important to me that my teacher doesn't think that I know less than others in class.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
10. It's important to me that I thoroughly understand my class work.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
11. One of my goals is to look smart in comparison to the other students in my class.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
12. One of my goals in class is to avoid looking like I have trouble doing the work.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
13. It's important to me that I improve my skills this year.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always
14. It's important to me that I look smart compared to others in my class.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always