

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A MOTHER'S EGO  
STRENGTH, SOPHISTICATION OF BODY CONCEPT, AND  
THE ACCURACY OF HER PERCEPTION OF HER CHILD'S  
DEVELOPMENTAL BEHAVIOR

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New York University, 1973

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between a mother's Ego Strength, the Sophistication of her Body Concept and the Accuracy of her Perception of her child's developmental behavior. The theory being tested specifies that one of the functions of the ego is to allow a person to pull back from his needs and wants and view reality as it is rather than as he would like it to be.

Bowen has theorized that family relationships and especially maternal-child relationships frequently evidence little recognition of individuality. Families are often involved in an undifferentiated ego mass in which it is difficult for family members to accept each other as they really are. Witkin's concept of differentiation states that among relatively undifferentiated persons in whom boundaries between subsystems, as well as between inside and outside, are weak, impairment is prone to take the form of dissolution of boundaries. Mothers and infants are originally in a symbiotic relationship which gives way as the child separates and individuates from his mother to become a separate self.

The sample was composed of sixty-eight mothers of pre-school or kindergarten children, aged thirty to sixty months who lived in Stuyvesant Town in New York City.

The scales used in the study included Baron's Ego Strength Scale, the Sophistication of Body Concept Scale, and the Gesell Developmental Schedule which was further subdivided into motor, adaptive, language and personal-social behaviors.

The Ego Strength Scale and the Sophistication of Body Concept test were administered to the mother. She was then given a copy of the Gesell Developmental Schedule and asked to rate her child as she thought he would score. A tester then actually scored the child. Mother's subjective score was then subtracted from the tester's objective score to give an absolute score for the accuracy of perception. The data resulting from scoring of the tests were subjected to statistical analysis.

It was hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between Ego Strength, Sophistication of Body Concept and the accuracy with which a mother perceives her child's developmental behavior. That is, the more the mother is a self in her own right, the more she can accept her child as he is and perceive his behavior as it is rather than as she wants or needs it to be.

Analysis of data relating to Ego Strength with accuracy of perception did not demonstrate any significant relationship. A minimal tendency in the opposite direction on all areas ex-

cept personal-social, raises the question as to whether Baron's Ego Strength Scale is measuring the quality of Ego Strength which underlies this theory. There are some indications in the literature that it may be measuring a quality related to social approval or social desirability.

Sophistication of Body Concept was found to be a statistically significant predictor of accuracy of perception. In looking at the subdivision of the Gesell Developmental Schedule, Sophistication of Body Concept was found to be a statistically significant predictor of all the subscales and an especially strong predictor of accuracy of perception in motor development.

Multiple correlations of the independent variables, Ego Strength and Sophistication of Body Concept, and the dependent variable, accuracy of perception, were computed. In all cases, the increment in the multiple correlation was not significant when Ego Strength was added to the regression equation.

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