Success avoidance: A gender neutral theory

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Abstract
The focus of this dissertation is the development of a non-gender-specific theory of success avoidance. Because success avoidance has traditionally been viewed as a phenomenon associated with female socialization, there is an initial look at the messages given to, and responses of, men and the issue of success.

In order to provide a foundation for a more expansive theory, there is an exploration of mixed-gender groups based on quantitative and qualitative data accumulated prior to the theory’s generation.

Existing motivational constructs that influenced the theory’s development are acknowledged and, to various degrees, assimilated into a new orientation. Ultimately, a theory of success avoidance based on self-esteem, identity, and self-consistency is presented in the form of propositions and a theoretical model. The underlying thesis is that the inclination to preserve identity congruence prevents people from accepting opportunities that will alter their perceived success, success-limited, or failure images.

Up until now, the predominant approach to this phenomenon has been Horner’s gender-role theory of success avoidance. Proposed here is a self-esteem/self-consistency theory that explains success avoidance among males and females at a variety of life stages.

In the final chapter, the recommendations for research are accompanied by implications for social institutions. The theory requires a critical look at the assumptions on which social institutions base their services.

Keywords
Sociology, General, Psychology, Developmental
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Success avoidance: A gender neutral theory

King, Geraldine Lipman, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire, 1990

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SUCCESS AVOIDANCE: 
A GENDER NEUTRAL THEORY

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted To The University of New Hampshire
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the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
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Ron King
Ethan King
Mickey Lipman
The Memory of Ted Lipman
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ABSTRACT

SUCCESS AVOIDANCE:
A GENDER NEUTRAL THEORY

BY

GERALDINE LIPMAN KING
UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, May, 1990

The focus of this dissertation is the development of a non-gender-specific theory of success avoidance. Because success avoidance has traditionally been viewed as a phenomenon associated with female socialization, there is an initial look at the messages given to, and responses of, men and the issue of success.

In order to provide a foundation for a more expansive theory, there is an exploration of mixed-gender groups based on quantitative and qualitative data accumulated prior to the theory's generation.

Existing motivational constructs that influenced the theory's development are acknowledged and, to various degrees, assimilated into a new orientation. Ultimately, a theory of success-avoidance based on self-esteem, identity, and self-consistency is presented in the form of propositions and a theoretical model. The
underlying thesis is that the inclination to preserve identity congruence prevents people from accepting opportunities that will alter their perceived success, success-limited, or failure images.

Up until now, the predominant approach to this phenomenon has been Horner's gender-role theory of success avoidance. Proposed here is a self-esteem/self-consistency theory that explains success avoidance among males and females at a variety of life stages.

In the final chapter, the recommendations for research are accompanied by implications for social institutions. The theory requires a critical look at the assumptions on which social institutions base their services.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Success avoidance is the tendency to knowingly avoid an opportunity to succeed. The subject was brought to focus by the women's movement and has, therefore, concentrated on female gender issues. Success avoidance characteristics, identifying what is sometimes referred to as "the fear of success," have been basically limited to female-linked phenomena. As a result, we have learned a great deal about achievement motivation and avoidance in women, but not very much about factors unconnected to female socialization.

In her 1968 study of the fear of success in women, Matina Horner was the first to identify success avoidance as a women's issue. Characteristics constituting success avoidance were related to women, and the studies that followed focused mainly on achievement motivation and avoidance with regard to female socialization. Although the fear of success can be assumed to impact men, it is still not considered to be important to the male experience.

It is a rare article or book on success avoidance that does not refer to Horner's work. Her classic study of gender differences in achievement and motivation-to-succeed not only affected the women's movement in a variety of ways, but initiated studies and discussion within a number of professional disciplines (Paludi,
Although the study has been found to be problematic (Canavan-Gumpert, et al., 1978; Sadd, et al., 1978; Zuckerman and Wheeler, et al. 1975; Fogel and Paludi, 1984; Wood and Greenfield, 1979; Stake, 1976), according to Chabossol and Ishiyama (1983), "Horner's original work on fear of success has proven to be seminal and few constructs have attracted or engendered more enthusiastic research in the past fifteen years."

There is much to be learned from Horner's work and the studies that followed. The fact that there has been less emphasis on men does not imply that existing research is not applicable. The difficulty is inherent in the fact that the phenomenon, in general, is not an easy one to address.

Success avoidance is a good example of the complexity inherent in human behavior. It has brought into question a concept which was once considered obvious in theories of motivation and social learning, namely that success has universal meaning. Commonplace definitions of success must, therefore, be examined before the notion of success avoidance can even be entertained.

The problem in defining success results from its conflictual interpretation in our society. Tresemer (1977, p.196) states that "...the many uses of the terms 'success' and 'failure' have seldom been accompanied by precise operational definitions, the assumption being that they plainly define themselves. The problem of how 'success' in one area may mean 'failure' in another and the consequent complexity with which such a 'success' must be viewed, has consequently been disregarded. But it is clear that
variability in individual interpretations of 'success' of various sorts compounds the influence of individual, as opposed to group, factors on success avoidance.

By way of preparing for this work, I looked at a number of sources offering definitions of success. Though it is assumed that the term has universal meaning, the meaning appears to vary depending on the context in which it is used and on the person using it. The dictionary definition of success includes such statements as "favorable or satisfactory outcome or result" and "the gaining of wealth, fame, rank, etc". The Thesaurus lists, "favorable or fortunate outcome, prosperity in an undertaking, profit, gain, accomplishment, achievement, victory, winner."

The June, 1981, Radcliffe Quarterly, was devoted to the issue of success, and a number of people were quoted regarding their definition of the term. Matina Horner, Radcliffe's President and the originator of the "fear of success" concept said, "To feel successful as a person means having a well-integrated and balanced life that is personally satisfying, that enables you to pursue freely your interests and aspirations in ways that are commensurate with your talents and training, and are to some extent free of externally imposed or irrelevant kinds of barriers" (p.1). Diane Margolis, University of Connecticut Sociology Professor responded, "If you were to ask most Americans what they think success is, they'd probably say it has to do with economic success and occupational position" (p.3). Organizational consultant Kathleen Lusk stated, "Successful people are not those who never experience failure, but those who use failure well, for failure is a
constant part of life" (p.6). Barbara Snelling, University of Vermont Administrator and the former First Lady of Vermont suggests that, "Success as it relates to one's own accomplishments is an intensely personal matter. Each of us starts with dreams, dreams that are rarely shared with others, but are nevertheless deep motivating forces"(p.27).

During the course of my research, I asked a number of people for their definitions of success and the responses varied widely, especially responses that were not given from a vocational viewpoint. Two distinct definitional approaches emerged, the first of which defined success in terms of occupations identified by society as reflecting successful status. The second centered around philosophical assumptions about the "good life" and the "fulfilled person." Perhaps William James, in the 1900s, had the most interesting perspective when he related success to self-esteem. He presented his perspective in ratio terms:

\[
\text{Self-esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}}
\]

"If one's success in the world be small but the pretensions (goals, expectations) smaller, then the self-esteem may still be great" (Tresemer, 1977, p.200 and Stryker, 1980).

All definitions of success ultimately include favorable or satisfactory outcomes or results. Whether in the area of wealth, fame, status or in having a balanced life or in using failure well, a satisfactory outcome is still the goal. Even within that seemingly narrow description, however, several areas of conflict are evident.
Individuals' definitions of "satisfactory" certainly vary; although goals may be the same, people work to achieve them in different ways.

To complicate matters further, people are often interpersonally conflicted over the issue of their personal success and tend to engage in both approach and avoidance behavior. Those who avoid success are also attracted by it (Ray, 1984; Canavan-Gumpert, et al., 1978). Consequently, the ambivalence becomes a matter requiring energy and concern.

If both the definition of success or the means of achieving it are elusive, how can avoidance of it be measured? Certainly, it would be difficult to study, even if the definition were agreed upon. Avoidance is often not blatant, but manifest in a multitude of subtle ways sometimes not evident even to the avoider. Again, in preparation for this work, I had a number of conversations with people around the issue of avoidance. The majority chose to talk about the avoidance of others, using as examples situations they had noticed where people in their lives avoided a task, problem, or commitment. It didn't appear that they were trying to give the impression that they, themselves, didn't engage in the avoidance behavior, but that it was easier to see and understand in other people. A study asking respondents to reflect upon their own possible avoidance patterns would no doubt be a far more difficult task.

There are other questions that should precede research. Is there really motivation to avoid success? How can the research
remain free of definitional bias? Is success avoidance merely a psychological phenomenon?

My response to the latter is I think not. "...a growing sociological and psychological literature demonstrates rather conclusively that there is no scientific evidence for the existence of 'fear of success' as a personality characteristic in either women or men" (Olsen, et al., 1978, p.65). Attitudes, cultural expectations, environmental considerations and socialization play such strong roles that I see it as clearly a social- psychological phenomenon. This approach logically leads to the use of the term "success avoidance" rather than "fear of success"; a move which suggests a behavioral reaction rather than a purely psychological characteristic or symptom. Of course, social psychologists might take exception to the notion that there is such a phenomenon as a "purely psychological characteristic." It is generally recognized that a personality developing within a culture will reflect that culture. Or, to put it another way, a personality is a product of socialization.

Olsen, et al.(1978) supports the above notion with the following quote.

It may well be that some women (and men) feel ambivalent about occupational success, but the concept "fear of success," by keeping research focused on individual-level variables, obscures rather than contributes to the understanding of this phenomenon that could be achieved by the study of social and cultural patterns (p.69).

Though Horner and others use the cultural argument to support the notion that more women than men avoid success, I
contend that a social-psychological approach, perhaps differently applied, is appropriately applied to men, as well.

I agree with Atkinson (1978, p.68) when he says,

...the motive to avoid success as a theoretical construct is not a sex-linked trait - any more so than the motives to approach success, to avoid failure, to affiliate, or to avoid rejection. Any sex differences found or predicted should be considered as a function of sociocultural conditioning or prior learning, or of the impact of specific situational or contextual factors.

Nonetheless, messages to males regarding success seemingly make success-avoidance a counter-intuitive activity. It is essential, then, that those messages be addressed. Once accomplished, I will explore the issue of success avoidance as it relates to victims of child abuse and other mixed-gender populations. Observations of these groups provide a foundation for a theoretical formulation across genders. Additionally, a strong theoretical rationale for studying groups not comprised exclusively of women is needed (Hong and Caust, 1985).

As is often the case, the impetus for this new approach evolved through a circuitous route. My first interest in male/female success avoidance was in the area of adults who had been abused as children. In developing a theoretical rationale for studying abuse victims, I began to conceive of a research model that encouraged me to explore a theoretical justification for studying success avoidance in males as well as females.

Looking at mixed-gender groups became a pivotal step leading to new considerations, not the least of which is the notion that the tendency toward performance suppression may be
associated with any number of variables not previously acknowledged. For instance, Larkin (1987) found a correlation between "fear of success" and problems of identity formation.

It is a connection I believe to be of great importance in explaining success avoidance and the theoretical model I propose reflects that argument. After describing theories that hold dominant positions in motivational research, I present a model connecting identity and success orientation followed by a theory applicable to both genders and a range of age groups. My approach does not exclude Horner's gender-role theory, but attempts to add to it. Horner also proposes a theory of self-consistency in that she suggests that women avoid success because it does not fit with their notion of femininity. I propose that the tendency toward self-consistency is applicable to a variety of identity images and that self-esteem level is crucial to the process.

The ramifications of employing the proposed approach, the impact on social institutions, and recommendations for future research are addressed in the final chapter.
CHAPTER II

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE RESEARCH

In Horner's (1968) study, college students were asked to write stories in response to projective cues. Males and females responded to the same sex statement, "after first-term finals Anne/John finds herself/himself at the top of his/her medical school class." The thematic apperception test resulted in males completing the story with John continuing to do well and a high proportion of women fantasizing that Anne had to deal with negative consequences as a result of her success and eventually did less well.

Horner reported that 65% of the women showed imagery depicting the fear of success* compared to only 9% of the men. She suggested that individuals feared success if they described success as having negative consequences.

*The term "fear of success," rather than "success avoidance" is used throughout this chapter in keeping with the vocabulary of the studies discussed.
As a result of Horner's pronouncements, research and controversy has proliferated. Hoffman (1974) conducted a nearly exact replication of Horner's study at the same college, with the same cues, and even using the same room. As in Horner's findings, 65% of the women showed fear of success. However, instead of 9% being attributed to men, Hoffman found 77% of the males showed some fear of success. It should be noted that 30% of the men questioned the value of success which may well have reflected attitude changes in society. Levine and Cromini (1975) found no gender difference among college students responding to Horner's cues.

In 1974, Tresemer reviewed 61 post-Horner studies. 36 included men. The percentage of men reported to have fear of success themes ranged from 14%-86%. In 17 of the 36 studies, men reflected more fear of success imagery than women. In a later analysis of 200 studies, Tresemer (1976b) reported that Horner's(1968) fear of success hypothesis was neither supported nor rejected.

In an attempt to strengthen the validity of fear of success research, objective measurements were developed (Cohen, 1975; Good & Good, 1973; Pappo, 1973; Zuckerman & Allison, 1976). Pappo (1972) developed an instrument with 83 items measuring what was deemed five aspects of fear of success: preoccupation with competition, self-doubt, competence questioning, preoccupation with evaluation, and self-sabotage behavior. It is meant to be used in academic settings and claims to have .90 reliability.
Good and Good (1973) constructed a 29-item true-false measurement. The assumption on which it was based was that people who fear success tend to worry about upsetting other people by their superior performances.

Many of the new measures were created, at least in part, as a reaction to the problems Horner's study raised. There were criticisms of the reliability (Alper, 1974; Tresemer, 1974; Zuckerman and Wheeler, 1975) and validity (Morgan & Mausner, 1973; Tresemer, 1976; Zuckerman & Wheeler, 1975) of Horner's measure and, in fact, the proclamation that fear of success is primarily a women's issue was not supported by a number of studies (Griffore, 1977; Hoffman, 1974; Levine & Crumini, 1975; Morgan & Mausner, 1973). However, it cannot be assumed that all the instruments measure the same construct as Horner's (Griffore, 1977). They may vary in their focus on a variety of aspects of success avoidance. Lentz (1982, p.987) adds that "some studies...(attempt) to research a possible success avoidance effect without measuring fear of success as a variable."

Sadd, et al. (1978) performed a factor analysis of five fear of success instruments (Cohen, 1975; Good & Good, 1973; Pappo, 1973; Spence, 1974; Zuckerman & Allison, 1976) and two instruments testing fear of failure (Alpert & Harber, 1960; Sarason, 1972). They concluded that fear of success and fear of failure were related and that four of the factors were related to other dimensions other than general fear of success. One factor, "concern over the negative consequences of success," reflected issues of jealousy, exploitation, criticism, rejection, the burden of
responsibility, sabotage, and post-success pressure. It was the only factor directly related to Horner's (1968) "fear of negative consequences" thesis. Shaver (1976) also suggested that fear of success is simply an aspect of fear of failure. On the other hand, Zuckerman (1976) sees it as an approach/avoidance reaction to success and Horner (1976) insists that the motivation to avoid success is not synonymous with a failure wish.

Horner's study has been criticized on a number of other levels. Zuckerman & Wheeler (1975) identified problems with the use of the medical school vignette suggesting that it may reflect attitudes toward medical school rather than attitudes toward success. I argue that the scenarios also assume that medical school is universally considered a success-oriented endeavor. The method precludes the use of individually chosen success stories.

There is also a question about what actually is being measured. One suggestion is that, rather than reflecting fear of success, the verbal cues may trigger anxiety about sex-role, inappropriate behavior (Alper, 1974; Shapiro, 1979). Two models emanate from that proposition.

Tresemer's (1977) Boundary Maintenance Theory describes the primary concern in the fear of success construct as the fear of deviating from the norm. The person relates to normative gender-role behavior and the limits of acceptable success levels. Stiver's (1976) sex-role prescription model is in agreement with Tresemer when he states that individuals may be reacting to sex-role appropriate behavior. Stiver disagrees with his assigning little importance to success as a variable. Stiver believes that success
avoidance is explained by the power that sex-role appropriate behavior holds. Prescriptions of achievement behavior are culturally defined and success avoidance is a manifest reaction to deviance from that protocol.

One of the major concerns in using Horner's cues surrounds its present day appropriateness. Social norms regarding gender behavior have changed since 1965. Hong and Caust (1985, p.331) state that, "the concomitant changes brought to sex-role orientation and attitudes toward achievement (Tresemmer, 1976) suggest that differential sex-role socialization may not be a determinant of fear of success...It is clear that a more general definition of fear of success excluding loss of femininity as one of the major consequences of success, is appropriate."

Despite the large amount of criticism of success avoidance research, in particular Horner's work, the extent to which it continues reflects the subject's appeal. The inconclusiveness of findings and questionable generalizability of the populations studied have not seemed to deter the subject's treatment as a "discovered and proven fact" (Wood & Greenfield, 1979, p.290).

Gilber and Winer (1985, p.1009) observe,

...as a result of the intuitive appeal of the fear of success construct, its heuristic explanatory value, and the intriguing, if contradictory, findings in the field, fear of success (does) not disappear from the literature.

It is also true that success avoidance is still considered to be a phenomenon present primarily among women. I argue that it is gender neutral. However, that notion remains counter-intuitive
and it is important to look at the messages men receive about success before proposing a gender inclusive theory.
CHAPTER III

MEN AND THE ISSUE OF SUCCESS

The most serious cost (of the good-provider role) was perhaps the identification of maleness not only with the work site but especially with success in the role. "The American male looks to his breadwinning role to confirm his manliness." To be a man one had to be not only a provider but a good provider. Success in the good-provider role came in time to define masculinity itself. The good provider had to achieve, to win, to dominate. He was a breadwinner. He had to show "strength, cunning, inventiveness, endurance—a whole range of traits hence-forth defined as exclusively 'masculine'". Men were judged as men by the level of living they provided. They were judged by the myth "that endows a moneymaking man with sexiness and virility, and is based on man's dominance, strength, and ability to provide for and care for 'his woman.'" The good provider became a player in the male competitive macho game. What one man provided for his family in the way of luxury and display had to be equaled or topped by what another could provide. Families became display cases for the success of the good provider. (Bernard, 1983, p.169.)

Economic success is a major theme that pervades men's lives (Snell, 1986). It may even be viewed as a mandated goal and, at the least, is assumed to be a worthy pursuit with high value. Often the question implied for men is not "should I succeed?" but "how can I succeed?" Strong male orientation toward achieving has become the norm.

This work may appear as a challenge to that concept as it focuses on men and success avoidance, sometimes referred to as
"the fear of success" or performance suppression¹ (Romberg, et. al., 1985) or an "inhibitory tendency against achievement-directed behavior."

Horner (1968) suggests that women avoid success because of possible negative consequences resulting from high achievement, such as being seen as unfeminine or not fitting the role ascribed to females. This fear of negative consequences arouses anxiety which contributes even more strongly to the avoidance tendency.

Men, on the other hand, get quite a different message and they experience negative consequences when they are not successful. That might lead one to conclude that males do not have the same motivation for avoiding success as females, which might well be true. Does that mean, however, that men do not engage in success-avoidance behavior at all?

There are clues suggesting that a variety of motivations to avoid success exist in addition to identity congruence. For instance, Berger (1977) discusses some other possible negative reactions to success attainment: he attributes feelings of emptiness and depression to the guilt of having achieved more than one's parents; feeling that there is nothing left for which to achieve or strive; or missing the "pursuit" after having achieved the goal. (The contest is more satisfying than the conquest.)

¹ Romberg and Shore (1985) tested two hypotheses of fear of success: Tresemer's (1977) boundary maintenance theory and Stiver's (1976) sex-role prescription model. The measurement used was performance suppression because the researchers believe it is the "most reliable indicator of success avoidance currently available" (p. 177).
In order to make a case for focusing on men and their avoidance of success, an operational definition of success is required. Clarification is difficult. As a prelude to approaching the problem, it is important to explore the messages males are given about success.

Messages To Men: What Is Success?

What follows is a brief review of popular and academic literature. My intent was to discover what men are likely to glean from both casual and serious reading on the subject of success definition. Though some of the material in this section is based on research studies, all of it is part of a collection of readings helping define success for the average reader or for those working in the field. There are always exceptions to the rule, of course. For instance, the well-known column in the N.Y. Times magazine section titled "About Men" receives 75 manuscripts a week from authors such as Isaac Asimov, John Kenneth Galbraith, A. Alvarez, and William F. Buckley, Jr., and they are rarely about the allegedly male obsessions of money and power. (Klein, et al., 1987)

Nevertheless, for the most part, the books still tend to fall into two major categories: the "rah-rah" type that encourages men to pursue success and "be all they can be," and the warning type that cautions about the physical and emotional dangers of having a success orientation and that urge "slowing down."

With new information coming out on stress almost daily, high achievement is brought into question with some frequency, but as Osherson (1986) states, "...a boss...(may be)...the image of the successful, overly driven man that our society secretly..."
worships even as it cautions against" (p.196). However, that has not stopped the numbers of success oriented publications. Indeed, while success for women is still considered a new and exciting venture, success for men is an assumed value. The question merely rises, "how high on the success ladder can they rise?"

Sigmund Freud and others in the field of psychology have written about the value of work as an essential part of human existence. The notion includes women, of course, but acknowledges that the value of their work is not always measured in financial terms. According to Emerson (1985, p.65), "The difference between men and women is only that men are expected to work faithfully all their lives, without interruption or openly wishing otherwise. A job for a man may be a life sentence." And so, as Levinson (1978) implies, work becomes equated with masculinity. If it is an arena for proving masculinity (Fasteau, 1974), it logically follows that the more successful one is at a job, "the more masculine" one is considered.

Once having "arrived" at a level of high achievement, relaxation and enjoyment are not necessarily the reward. Fasteau (1974, p.116) states that in addition to the economic rewards of a career, work provides an opportunity for successful competition. "The individual man proves his worth in this race not by a single victory or achievement...but moment by moment, his value rising and falling depending on the reception accorded his efforts by the market. The emphasis is not on having risen, but on rising." Promotion is also an indicator of where the focus in a company is and who and what are important (Peters et al. 1986).
This is supported in studies like Kanter's (1977) *Men and Women of the Corporation* in which she found that success was essentially meaningless unless it was associated with movement. Mobility provides the incentive and "...movement along the hierarchy implies personal success or failure" (p. 133). Indeed, other alternatives to success don't exist. The message is "be promoted or perish" (p.131). Jobs are evaluated according to advancement prospects and it is in large companies, such as the one studied by Kanter, that the term "fast track" originated, a term that has now become synonymous with "the road to success." In fact, there is even a new area of concern in the management literature having to do with "plateauing". Slocum, et. al. (1987, p.31) relate that "unfortunately, most people regard promotion as the only reward that really counts. Increased responsibilities, status symbols, peer approval and material rewards that go hand-in-hand with promotions carry the message, "I am a winner." When promotions stop, many managers feel like failures."

Fictional characters such as Horatio Alger have historically focused on continual improvement and progress. Jonathan Livingston Seagull's message is that one can always do better. In other words, the job is never done. Success is continual striving for a higher goal. It serves the purpose of reiteration of one's adequacy (Warner, et al, 1963).

Such definitions help explain the phenomenon of the workaholics who, despite obvious success, keep working toward higher goals. Once successful, more opportunities for even higher achievement become available and they remind the achievers that
though a certain amount of success may be theirs, there are still loftier heights and unless they reach them then they are, in essence, failures (Machlowitz, 1977). Motivation books suggest that "nothing succeeds like success." "Mere association with past personal success apparently leads to more persistence, higher motivation, or something that makes us do better" (Peters, et al., 1982, p. 59).

Having mentioned workaholic behavior, it should be noted that, contrary to popular belief, men and women have similar patterns (Machlowitz, 1978). In fact, Doeflerr and Kammer (1986) found no relationship between gender and workaholism. Men and women showed similar proportions of workaholics. It is probably the case that women who do not avoid success at earlier stages act much like men once they are in successful positions. However, that does not mean that women do not experience different emotional reactions while on the job, nor does the research tell us whether they remain in the positions as long as their male counterparts. In fact, Sekaran (1986, p. 264) states

Recent studies have indicated that there are significant differences in the job involvement or ego involvement of women in their jobs as compared to men, even though there are no significant differences for the two groups in the career salience or perceived importance of work in their lives.

Once again, men are associated with having more at stake, both socially and psychologically.

A content analysis I conducted of popular success-oriented magazines shows a traditional view of success. The emphasis is
on the self-made man; women are definitely in the minority. Where there is inherited wealth, there is often discussion surrounding stories of "working hard despite his father owning the company "or "starting at the bottom like everyone else."

With direction from the owner of a reasonably large bookstore, the following publications were chosen for in-depth scrutiny: *Business Week*, Special Bonus Issue on The Corporate Elite (October 23, 1987); *Forbes*, Special Issue 1987; *Money*, Special Anniversary Issue, Fall 1987 and; *Success*, November, 1987.

Included in the Forbes issue is its annual list of the "Forbes 400; the richest people in America" where descriptions appear of the multi-millionaires and billionaires in the United States. In fact, income and financial worth is a theme in all the publications and direct or indirect implications are made that equate wealth and success.

The "rags to riches" story is a favorite, but where fabulously "successful" or wealthy people are undereducated, there seems to be a certain amount of additional pride evident. Where they are educated, special emphasis is placed on the well-known and elite colleges.

*Business Week* reports the schools most often attended by Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) of major corporations.
For the country's most wealthy people, Forbes listed many of the same schools but in a different order. However, Forbes focused more on the number of people who did not excel academically, at one point making reference to the Horatio Alger story. The message is that though success is worthy in and of itself, to have pulled oneself up "by the boot straps" is particularly admirable. The information presented below illustrates the idea.

For 18 "fortune builders" (p. 80) the following student profile is available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF STUDENT</th>
<th>COLLEGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Bachelors 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Dropped out 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Post-Grad. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Forbes listing of CEO's educational achievement is as follows:

- High School Dropout: 10
- High School Graduate only: 32
- Attended College: 304
- College Graduate: 240
- Postgraduate
  - MBA: 47
  - Law: 15
  - Other: 16

Forbes distinguishes between those whose wealth resulted from inheritance (162) from those who built their fortunes without any significant inheritance (214). Of the 55 women on the "most wealthy" list, most had inherited money. Of the CEO's named, there were just a handful of women.

Examples of the descriptions given the top CEO's in the country illustrate the focus, once again, on financial worth and the aggressive, go-getting attitude considered necessary to achieve success. Names have been excluded.

sales have lightened load, and strong operations in key locations could make his dream a reality.

and

Born 2/28/37, Blue Mountain, Miss.; BBA U. of Miss. 1958; MBA, Harvard 1966. Career path - administration finance, marketing; tenure - 6 years, CEO 5 years. Compensation: 1986 salary & bonus, $437,000; ownership, 25,000 shares. Outspoken, independent, plays by own rules in running "biggest small-town bank." With $3 billion in assets, it's last big takeover target in town, and a tender morsel it is. He's already spurned one super-regional suitor...

The above are illustrative of all the descriptions. They depict men who are hard-fighting, assertive, powerful, rich and able to deal with crises. The titles of the articles sport similar messages. The following illustrate the point: "Absence makes the Purse Grow Smaller," "Hungry for Success; Not Eating Helps One To Get Ahead," "The Great American Hard Sell," and "Thriving on Chaos; Action Plans for Managers to Exploit Uncertainty (The Best Leaders are Shameless Thievers...)."

Generally, these publications support the notion that success and achievement reflect the "American way." One could do a fascinating analysis of the advertisements alone, comparing the quality and cost of the merchandise with ads in non-success oriented magazines. They provide another subtle, or maybe not-
so-subtle, message that ability to consume is an indication of success.

**Power and Ambition**

Success implies power. Power, for the purpose of this work, is defined as **the ability to influence**. It is hard to imagine success without power. It also may be that women avoid success because they avoid power (until recently holding a negative, unfeminine connotation.) Men, however, have been encouraged to feel more comfortable with the notion of being powerful, but the responsibility is on them not to abuse it. Levinson (1978) believes that for many men, masculinity is synonymous with power.

Ambition holds a slightly different connotation. It might be said that ambition leads to power or that power is a result of ambition. Blotnick (1987) focused on ambition in studying more than six thousand white and blue-collar men. Over a twenty-five year period he also polled over ten thousand people regarding their views. According to those polled, the ambitious person should have these five characteristics:

1. A desire for more...money, fame, prestige, or power. The public, however, did not consider a desire for more happiness important to the definition of ambition.

2. A belief that quantity, not quality, is important. "How much" is the focus. Ambition turned out to be a quantitatively oriented concept.

3. The motivation to be in a hurry. The more the rush, the more the ambition.
4. Open-endedness. The ambitious person strives an entire lifetime and remains goal-oriented.

5. Ruthlessness. "Out for yourself" describes the ambitious person.

Success differs somewhat from the picture of ambition. However, "someone ...who says that he is happy is viewed as successful only if he has also attained a substantial quantity of one (or perhaps all) of the big four: money, fame, prestige, or power. 'Success' is a performance-oriented word; people who inherit...their wealth, renown, social status, or power are generally not viewed as being successful, since they haven't done anything to get where they are... Interestingly, while quantity matters every bit as much in the minds of an audience assessing 'success' as it does in the case of 'ambition,' speed is no longer important." (p. 4) It can take a long time to become successful as long as progress is continual and upward movement apparent. There is no question that the public sees success in financial and professional accomplishment terms.

**The Male/Female Perspective**

Unlike the praise given successful women that they are exceptional or brilliant, most men who succeed are viewed simply as admirable. A certain amount of success is expected of them (Emerson, 1985). Levinson's (1978) famous developmental study revealed that the masculine/feminine polarity was of great importance to all the men in the study. "As a young man starts making his way in the adult world, he wants to live in accord with the images, motives and values that are most central to his sense
of masculinity..." (p. 230). He further states that one of the meanings of masculinity involves achievement and ambition. With the increasing separation of family and occupation, a man's work has become even more important as his basis for contribution to and description of his self-esteem. "The qualities regarded as masculine involve success in work, getting ahead, earning one's fortune for the sake of self and family" (p. 231).

At the same time, the negative messages about high achievement motivation began in the 1970s when the men's movement sought to expand the definition of masculinity to include what were considered to be traditional female traits; nurturance, supportiveness, caring, sensitivity, and emotional disclosure. It is in the popular literature that the warnings abound about the road to success-orientation. However, such implications appear in the academic literature as well. Reporting on an investigation designed to develop a masculine role inventory, Snell (1986, p. 443) refers to the concept of "success preoccupation"..."defined as a persistent preoccupation with success and career development to the exclusion of interpersonal pursuits and devotion." He connects it to men's tendency to inhibit affection and refers to success preoccupation (a judgmental term in its own right) as obsessively getting in the way of personal growth and involvement.

Goldberg (1979) warns that the secrets to success are counter to the "new male." They include isolation as a result of an
attitude of basic distrust\textsuperscript{2}, the need to control and avoid vulnerability, manipulative behavior in order to achieve goals without the interference of emotions and the constant repression of human needs. ("His life style becomes a triumph over intimacy" [p. 58]). The rewards are for winning, not for caring.

Garfinkel's (1985, p. 110) writings support the above when he talks of the male mentors portrayed in the media that with great consistency give messages about what it is to be successful:

- Winning - whether it is a gun duel or a top corporate position - is everything. Accomplishment is all.
- In order to win, a man must be ready to resort to violent or otherwise aggressive behavior.
- Because the rise to the top can be so brutal emotionally a man must hide his pain behind a wall of silence and inexpressiveness.
- Maintaining that wall of silence requires an independent stance.
- Living up to the model of the Media Man, like living up to expectations of fathers, mentors, and older brothers, is practically impossible - which only reinforces a man's inferiority in the shadow of other men.
- The image of masculinity is ambiguous, out-of-focus,

\textsuperscript{2} Erikson (1959, p. 249) says "mothers create a sense of trust in their children...which, in its quality, combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within the trusted framework of their culture's life styles. This forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity..." In other words, it is not isolation, but attachment, that allows the successful negotiation of what Erikson refers to as the "first psychological crisis."
elusive, and evasive. The outer form is emphasized over the inner.

Aside from the obvious dangers to the person living such a lifestyle, we are now in an era where such behavior is heavily criticized. However, I contend that success-orientation is still valued and the burden has been placed on the man to figure out a way to be successful and caring and self-actualized all at the same time.

Arriving At An Operational Definition Of Success

An operational definition begins to emerge, but not without conflicting concerns. By pursuing alternative descriptions of success, I have tried (and no doubt hoped) to develop an unconventional concept. It appears, however, that the traditional notions cannot be disregarded.

Blotnick, in his study of ambitious men (1987, p.4), showed little ambivalence. "Success...is easier to measure and is more stable (than ambition); for, instead of looking at emotions, which vary from minute to minute, in (the case of success) we examine a person's net worth, annual earnings, lifestyle, the number of people who know him, and the positive or negative opinions of (the audience we polled)."

Shames' (1986) book on the graduates of the Harvard Business School describes the school's "most successful class" as the class of 1949. Business Week claims that these men have not just achieved success, they have defined it. It may just be that simple. At some point in time, the heads of corporations and large concerns, who made enormous amounts of money, became what the
American people associated with success. Thus, the post-war years have had an enormous influence on our definition of achievement. It remains to be seen whether the "new male image" will change that, but I feel strongly that the definition of the last 40 years will continue to have a great deal of influence on the messages men receive about what it is to be successful.

After struggling to discover a useful definition of success, I have concluded that there is a stereotypical description that exists, though personal responses offer some variations on the theme. Success in America most generally refers to the attainment of personal and professional prestige and the acquisition of power, money, and fame with the promise of upward movement toward a goal of acquiring more of the same.

It is possible that some men who avoid success, as defined above, do so because they have redefined success in their own terms; they have genuinely decided that prestige, power, money, fame, and upward mobility are not goals they wish to pursue. Thus, they may actually be striving for success as they define it. In the case of other men, avoidance of success may stem from reactions to other social- psychological variables resulting from fear, low self-esteem, lack of risk-taking ability, failure experiences, and/or identity problems.

Following is an exploration of mixed-gender groups which throws into question the argument that success avoidance is exclusively, or even predominantly, a "women's issue."
CHAPTER IV

CHILD ABUSE AND SUCCESS AVOIDANCE:
EXPLORATION OF A MIXED GENDER POPULATION

Since Horner's (1968) publication, there has been controversy about whether success avoidance is caused by individual traits or external factors. As reported in Lentz (1982), even Horner acknowledged that fear of success is a "stable disposition of personality learned early in life", but that situational factors do have an effect. As was previously mentioned, Horner suggests that women avoid success because of possible negative consequences resulting from high achievement, such as being seen as unfeminine or not fitting the role ascribed to women. This fear of negative consequences arouses anxiety which contributes even more strongly to the tendency to avoid success.

When Lentz (1982) studied the effect of different arousing situations generating fear of success, she found diminished performance behavior in undergraduate college women. Lentz concluded that performance behavior is a situational phenomenon dependent on expectations and reward structures: different interpersonal interactions and different everyday situations affect the relationship of women's roles to behavior. These findings agree with Horner's expectancy-value theory of motivation which, essentially, supports the notion that the expectation of negative consequences affects performance and aspiration levels. It
occurred to me that the notions of negative consequences and role conflict could be generalized and might pertain to a number of groups, and abuse victims in particular.

**Victims of Child Abuse and Success Avoidance**

If the behavioristic view is correct (that reinforcement directs future action) and if Cooley's "looking glass self" concept (self evaluation is mirrored by the gestures of others) is true, then the abused person is not likely to believe that success-identity is within his or her character. The gestures of abusive parents represent negative messages to the child that s/he deserves to be hurt and is unworthy.

Oates, et al. (1985) argues that the self-fulfilling prophecy takes hold when inferiority and inability to do well is confirmed. Even bright students who have been abused may engage in success sabotage to relieve the tension the identity/achievement conflict produces. A major source of tension stems from conflicting self-images relating to self-esteem.

When McMahan (1982) researched expectancy of success on sex-linked tasks she, like Horner, conducted a gender related study. However, her findings were supported by attribution theory. She suggested that persons who have low success expectations go through the following process:

Failure is attributed to low ability or high task difficulty and success expectancy becomes even lower...Success is unexpected and is attributed to high effort or luck and expectancy remains low.
In McMahan's words "...low expectancies tend to be self-maintaining by way of mediating causal attributions" (p.951). Failure is seen as inevitable and success as a fluke.

Oates, et al. (1985) speculate that parents of abused children often have high and unrealistic expectations of their children resulting in excess pressure. Sometimes the pressure of those expectations and resulting negative consequences leads to self-sabotaging behavior just to release the tension. They describe abused children as often "waiting for the other shoe to drop". If the pressure of waiting for the bad outcome is too great, the grown-up abused child may purposely engage in self-defeating behavior just to bring about the negative consequence quickly. Since these children learn that "bad" is likely to follow "good", praise or compliments might also produce success sabotage.

Oates, et al. find similar behaviors showing up in the adult lives of abuse victims in such situations as not completing courses, dropping in and out of college or classes or not following through on activities. If there is a strong enough feeling of inferiority and inability to do well, even repeated success does not erase the belief. Where there are achievements, abuse victims are not likely to take credit for them.

Since the family remains the perceived source of primary reinforcement, and family members have the ability to support or block expectations and behaviors (Sebastion, 1983), then messages from parents are of utmost importance. Crandall, et al. (1960 c.f. Bardwick, 1971) argues that direct social reinforcement from significant adults is necessary for integrating achievement values
in developing children. On the other hand, they point out that if parents insist on premature mastery, the child will feel frustrated and tend to avoid tasks that require mastery. They believe that parents who aggress against their children, even to maximize achievement, produce the opposite effect because high achievement comes from affectionate regard.

Self-esteem and Abuse Victims

If self-esteem is connected to behaving in accord with a salient identity and the identity is defined by the part of society that includes the family, then "conforming behavior is also esteem-producing behavior" (Stryker, 1980, p.64). It is generally agreed that a self-deprecating, low self-esteem image is unpleasant. However, self-images are built over a lifetime and their familiarity makes them difficult to give up. People are understandably loyal to and possessive of their identities. Therefore, the abused child (given messages in a variety of ways that s/he is unworthy of respectable treatment) may harbor a negative self-image. Since abusing parents do not separate the assessment of their children as people from the behavior they manifest, they essentially tell the children they are not "all right". This has a good chance of resulting in low self-esteem (Leehan, 1985). Success may challenge that negative self-image, but rather than deal with a new and unfamiliar description of self, the children may tend to avoid success all together. This notion runs contrary to the belief that all people have esteem needs and seek to be acknowledged as significant and worthy (Samuels, 1984). However, it may be that the need for congruent identity takes precedence over the need for
a positive self-image. The safety and stability found in familiarity (Maslow, 1970) may be a higher priority than an identity change, even though the change be in a positive direction. Order and harmony, important safety needs (Samuels, 1984), may take precedence.

Tolman (1959, c.f. Tresemer, 1977) states that "disconfirmed expectancies are found to be generally unpleasant." In other words, unexpected success can be experienced as unpleasantly as unexpected failure. The new condition is inconsistent and, consequently, threatening. Silverman (1964, c.f. Tresemer, 1977) found that if subjects were certain of their low self-assessment, success was rejected or minimized so as not to threaten their known identity. It is the notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Stryker, 1980).

Maslow (1970) offers a possible social psychological explanation: "...parental outbursts of rage or threats of punishment directed to the child, calling him names, speaking to him harshly, handling him roughly, or actual physical punishment sometimes elicit such total panic and terror that we must assume more is involved than the physical pain alone" (p.40). Further, "...(an)...adult may be said to behave as if he were actually afraid of a spanking, or of his mother's disapproval, or of being abandoned by his parents, or of having his food taken away from him. It is as if his childish attitudes of fear and threat reaction to a dangerous world had gone underground, and untouched by the growing up and learning processes, were now ready to be called out by any stimulus that would make a child feel endangered and
threatened..." (p.42). Change is a threat. Threats affect self-esteem. Most importantly, change is a threat to safety needs.

Thus, the decision to maintain the status quo may, in fact, prevent the lowering of self-esteem. According to Bardwick (1971, p.155), "role conflict, or the frustration of aspects of the self, does not exist unless diverse and conflicting motives have evolved." One can imagine, then, the strength of the temptation to avoid conflictual perceptions.

A number of studies have associated low self-esteem with both abused persons and underachievers. Blackburn and Erickson (1986) cite studies where underachievers are found to differ widely from achievers in the development of traits such as self-confidence and persistence in accomplishment of goals (Gallagher, 1975; Pirozzo, 1981; Terman & Oden, 1947).

Taylor (1964, c.f. Bardwick, 1971) found that underachievers do not have an internalized standard of excellence. They viewed achievements and the self in terms of others' reactions. The abuse victim, whose self-esteem is already likely to be low, may attribute success to outside forces in order to preserve a familiar (albeit negative) low self-esteem level so that an incongruent self-image is not introduced.

In their study of 50 pre-school, abused children, Martin and Beezley (1980) found over half the children showing low self-esteem scores. Of the other 24 children, some of whom did show self-value, it could not be determined whether their self-esteem was genuinely high or whether they adopted defensive behavior to ward off feelings of poor self-esteem. Martin and Beezley (1977)
Oates, et al. (1985) also found 62% of a group of 50 young, abused children had low self-esteem. The study concluded that even at that age, there seemed to be fear of failure. I contend that fear of failure might translate to fear of success later in life.

Oates et al. (1985) studied a group of 37 abused children ranging in age from 4.6 years to 14.4 years. They matched each child with a non-abused child of the same age. The study showed that compared with non-abused children of similar social class, the abused children had fewer friends, lower ambitions and lower self-esteem. Kinard (1980 as c.f. Oates et al. 1985) concluded that abused children are generally depressed, unhappy and have a reduced self concept.

Oates, et al. (1985) presented findings by Lynch and Roberts (p. 159) where 39 abused children were interviewed approximately 4 years after the presenting abusive incident. They reported that the children did not feel they would be able to achieve at jobs in higher socioeconomic groups. "It is likely that the high and unrealistic expectations that abusive parents hold for their children, and which their children cannot meet, play an important part in lowering the child's self-esteem. It is therefore ironic that these high expectations become counterproductive with the children becoming failure-oriented and lacking in ambition and feelings of self worth" (p. 162).

As was pointed out in a previous chapter, it is difficult to be certain, without close scrutiny, that the studies being compared have, in fact, looked at the same variables in the same way. There
is, however, enough of a relationship, from my point-of-view, to declare the research useful.

A Suggested Model

Long term clinical observation of these inconsistencies prompted a look at the possibility that success-avoidance exists among abuse victims. In working with professional women, I heard expressions of fear that success would not be consistent with their images of the preferred female. I also noticed that, although articulated differently, abused teenagers were telling a similar story: their failure identities were challenged when they were perceived as successful, and their fear of not knowing how to change in order to integrate a new self-image caused them to sabotage changes for success. Whether the perceived necessity to change their image is negative or positive is not particularly relevant. It is change, and perhaps the fear of the unknown that change promises, that is the important dynamic (Doyle, 1983, p.173).

As diverse as the study of women and child-abuse victims appears, it is possible that there are similar social psychological variables operating in areas of success avoidance. Specifically, the similarity may be most striking in the need for external support for achievement that women, more than men, have been found to manifest (Bardwick, 1971). The similarity is evident in the following quote.

(Crandall, et al.) place the primary emphasis for the development of strong achievement needs on the rewards, demands and punishments meted out by parents, teachers,
and other adults. They argue that if the child is going to value achievement activities as a potential source of satisfaction and security, direct social reinforcement is necessary. In their view, only later, and only for some children, will approval from others become unnecessary as a goal to good performance and will good feelings of pride and self-approval be sufficient to maintain or increase achievement behaviors (Bardwick, 1971, p.169 from Crandall, et al., 1960).

Since females have shown higher success avoidance in numbers of other studies, it is assumed they will continue to do so in all groups. McMaham (1982) indicated in his suggestions for further study, however, that attributional patterns other than gender, such as self-esteem, should be explored. There is strong evidence that child abuse leads to low self-esteem (Oates, et al, 1985 and Bardwick, 1971) and it has been suggested that low self-esteem may lead to avoidance. Therefore, one may postulate that if child abuse is related to low self-esteem and low self-esteem is related to success avoidance then child abuse is related to success avoidance.

Investigation of the issue is complicated by the fact that we are dealing with what Kortarba (1980, p.57 c.f. Lofland, 1984, p.14) calls an "amorphous social experience" described as

...(a) facet of everyday life that (is) unique to individuals and not (to) specific kinds of settings...(those existential experiences of self, rich in their social forms...

Gender socialization and the effect of a support network are important in this area of study and two separate models emerge. They are not mutually exclusive models, but complimentary, in that both forms of socialization are present.
MODEL 1

SOCIALIZATION

MALE $\rightarrow$ SUCCESS ACHIEVEMENT

FEMALE $\rightarrow$ SUCCESS AVOIDANCE

Figure 4.1 Traditional View of Success Paths

MODEL 2

PARENTAL EMOTIONAL AND/OR PHYSICAL ABUSE

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

IF POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS...

SUCCESS AVOIDANCE

SUCCESS ACHIEVEMENT

HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

Figure 4.2 Possible Success Paths for Abused Populations
Model 1 reflects the common belief that male socialization leads to success achievement and that female socialization leads to success avoidance.

Model 2 proposes that parental abuse leads to low self-esteem which results in success avoidance, which results in even lower self-esteem and the likelihood of continuation of the abuse. However, with the intervention of the positive influence of a significant other, the victim's self-esteem may be higher, thus, resulting in success achievement which leads to higher self-esteem and continued support of significant others.

The existence or non-existence of significant others that support and influence people may balance out the negative messages given by abusers. Because there are so many influential people in a child's life, no two abused children can be considered to share an exact experience. The networking literature holds the most promise for discovering resources to assess the presence of "positive influential significant others" in the abused person's childhood.

The suggestion that there is a relationship between self-esteem level and success avoidance or achievement is not a new concept, but it has not been considered as major a variable in studying success avoidance. Female socialization appeared so connected to the topic that it became the primary explanation for the behavior. On the other hand, the reasons associated with avoiding success are not necessarily gender specific. A look at male/female populations adds new information and depth to the issue.
A Study of Child Abuse and Success Avoidance

In 1987 (King) I conducted a study designed to discover whether a relationship existed between childhood abuse and success avoidance. More specifically, the study looked at childhood abuse as it related to self-esteem and gender, and success avoidance. Its aim was to broaden knowledge of the success avoidance issue that was presumed to affect many different groups, but whose study, to date, had focused primarily on women.

The study was designed to provide:

- information regarding gender-related variables that would either reaffirm what was already known or suggest new relationships.
- examination of yet another possible result of childhood abuse.
- information about success avoidance determinants, other than those that were gender-related.
- progress in the development of measures reflecting individual definitions of success.
- evaluation of the "widespread assumption that everyone...knows what (success) is, and that it is everyone's goal." (Tresemer, 1977, p.178)
- increased knowledge of avoidance and motivation phenomena.
- awareness of the similarities in the descriptive qualities of women and abused children that lend support to theories of oppressed groups.
Method

Sample

132 students from two Introduction to Sociology classes at the University of New Hampshire were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix A). 131 responded. 79.4% (104) were under the age of 20. Only 1.5% (2) respondents were over 28 years old. 63.4% (84) were female and 35.1% (47) were male. 83.2% (109) students were freshmen or sophomores, 13% (17) juniors and the remaining few either upperclassmen or undeclared.

Despite warnings (Smith, 1981, p.268-269) that using college students does not lead easily to generalization, there were advantages to surveying this population. In general, the age-group is young enough to remember abusive incidents and old enough to be at least somewhat emancipated from their families. Their enrollment in college implies ability and some tendency toward success. If relationships between abuse and success avoidance were found in this sample, then it would make even a stronger argument for a relationship in the wider population.

The Survey Instrument

The questionnaire (Appendix) consisted of 57 questions measuring demographics, self-esteem, attitudes toward success or failure, and childhood experience with physical force at home (measured by a modified Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1980)). It was administered to the above sample in one class period.

I introduced and administered the questionnaire so that the students could be certain that it was absolutely voluntary and that
completion had no connection with class performance. To insure confidentiality, no identifying information appeared on the instrument and each questionnaire was covered with a blank sheet to prevent others from seeing answers when it was turned back. The introduction included a brief description of the study explaining that "it was measuring life events and their relationship to attitudes about success." After completion of the questionnaire, follow-up questions were entertained.

As mentioned earlier, the major limitation of the questionnaire is that the definitions of success are as numerous as the individuals defining success. The sophisticated techniques required to arrive at a single, accepted definition remain undeveloped. A goal of this instrument was to make progress toward an understanding of the process necessary to arrive at a definition of success that is individually defined by the respondent so that success avoidance does not reflect merely societal or the researcher's definition. In part, the questions were chosen in keeping with the suggestions of Tec (1979) that there are a variety of forces contributing to making the notion of success a paradox: the fear of failure, the wish to succeed and the fear of success.

**Operational Definitions**

Abuse, the use of physical force by parents of respondents toward the respondents, was measured by a modified Conflict Tactics Scale based on the complete Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1980). The study was, thus, limited to physical abuse. The absence of information regarding psychological and emotional
abuse was seen as a limitation, but the lack of adequate measures and time constraints prevented their inclusion.

The modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale asked how often physical blows such as hitting really hard, kicking, punching, stabbing, throwing someone down, etc. happened to the respondents or were witnessed happening to others in their family when they were around 12 or 13 years of age. The rationale for the 12 to 13 year period was based on the belief that it is within easy recall, but before adolescence when physical abuse often decreases (Straus, 1980). For purposes of the study, only the measurement of either mother or father or both administering physical force to the respondent was used.

Success, as much as possible, assumed the individual respondent's personal definition. The variety of questions making up the index focused on: success levels with which people were satisfied, perceived likelihood of future achievement, achievement motivation, competition and personal style in responding to self-described successful situations.

There were a few open-ended questions such as "what job(s) do you consider reflections of success?" followed later in the questionnaire by "what job(s) would you like to hold in the future?" that were analyzed qualitatively.

Self-esteem measurements focused on feelings of personal worthiness and positive self-image and were measured by questions dealing with self-concept and attitude toward self. For example, there was a section on the person's perception of his or
her equality with others, the extent of positiveness felt about self, and perceptions of intelligence level and ability to succeed.

Success Motivation was viewed as "the motive to be competent in a situation in which there are standards of excellence" (Atkinson, 1964; McCleeland, 1958, as referenced in Bardwick, 1971). It is assumed that success motivation is connected with the need to affiliate and that "the motive to achieve may depend on the expectation of praise, love or rejection from others..." (Bardwick, 1971, p.169). For the purposes of this study the standards were individually defined. For example, the study looked at the congruence between occupations the respondent listed as successful and the occupations s/he plans to pursue.

Success avoidance was defined as the tendency to knowingly avoid an opportunity to succeed. Examples of the questions asked are do you "not run for office of an organization when you have a good chance of winning?" or are you likely to "not apply for a position that you have a good chance of obtaining?" Also included in this index were questions pertaining to letting others know of successes such as are you likely to "keep an achievement a secret from family and friends?" 3

3 Fear of failure still remains a possibility in this instance. If indeed, one loses an election when s/he should have been an easy winner it is especially devastating; or if friends or family are not happy about an achievement, there is a risk of rejection. Separating failure avoidance from success avoidance remains a constant challenge.
Findings

34% (45) of the total number of respondents (131) reported some physical force used toward them by one or both parents: 44% (21) of the 48 males and 29% (24) of the 83 women. N = 131.

Table 4.1 shows the frequency of occurrence of physical force.

Table 4.1. % of frequency of physical force among those reporting receiving such from one or both parents around 12 or 13 years of age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times parents hit the respondent</th>
<th>ONCE</th>
<th>2 OR 3 TIMES</th>
<th>ONCE A MONTH OR LESS</th>
<th>MORE THAN ONCE A MONTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALES</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALES</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to glean some sense of the amount of success avoidance present among the abused and non-abused groups, a success avoidance index was created from the eight questions shown in Table 4.2. For each question the respondent was asked to indicate an "unlikely, sometimes likely or very likely" response.

Table 4.2 shows the answers by groups in the categories by force and no force; and males and females experiencing force and no force.
Table 4.2. Responses to questions of Success Avoidance by physical abuse and gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NO FORCE N=59</td>
<td>FORCE N=24</td>
<td>NO FORCE N=86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a chance to go with someone you want to date but not go.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to a movie with friends when you really need to study for an exam the next day.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not do an extra credit project when you know it will make your grade higher.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep an achievement secret from family or friends.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuse an offer of a job or promotion that would be good for you.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>89.6%</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not run for office of an organization when you have a good chance of winning</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not apply for a position that you have a good chance of obtaining.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid publicity, even for something positive.</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Likely</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed in table 4.3, a 2X2 analysis of variance produced significant main effects for both variables of sex and child abuse. Both men and women scored higher on the success avoidance
index if they were abused as children, and men scored higher than women on average across all categories.

Table 4.3. Analysis of variance of success avoidance responses by gender and abuse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Force</td>
<td>X = 4.56</td>
<td>X = 3.31</td>
<td>X = 3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=27)</td>
<td>(N=59)</td>
<td>(N=86)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
<td>X = 5.19</td>
<td>X = 4.54</td>
<td>X = 4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=21)</td>
<td>(N=24)</td>
<td>(N=45)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F(Gender)=5.973 p = .016  F(Force)=5.430 p = .021  F(Gender by force) = .484 p = .488

It is at this point that we turn to the relationships between physical force and success, achievement, and related responses. It is essential to keep in mind that these students had already achieved in that they were enrolled in college. It was assumed that they had at least the motivation level and self-esteem that allowed them to pursue an education beyond high school. The question, "how much education would you eventually like to complete?" was asked.
Table 4.4. Levels of education respondents would eventually like to complete

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>USE OF FORCE</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ASSOC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALES</td>
<td>NO (2% missing)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YES (4% missing)</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 shows that of the males whose parents did not use physical force against them, nearly half wanted to pursue a bachelors' degree and slightly over half a masters' or doctorate. For the group whose parents did use physical force toward them, almost three-quarters of them intended, at the time, to stop at the bachelors' level. One-fifth wanted to pursue a masters'. One-tenth of the group had aspirations toward a doctorate.

Females whose parents did not use blows (at least against them) show a third wanting a bachelors', over half a masters' and almost one-tenth a doctorate. In the group receiving physical blows, more than a third wanted a bachelors' and the same number a masters', with nearly one-fifth looking toward a doctorate.

The more general question, "how certain are you that you can be whatever you want to be?" was asked in order to provide a different approach to achievement confidence.
Table 4.5. % of people certain that they can be whatever they want to be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USE OF FORCE</th>
<th>VERY UNLIKELY</th>
<th>UNLIKELY</th>
<th>50-50 CHANCE</th>
<th>LIKELY</th>
<th>VERY LIKELY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE NO(N=27)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES(N=21)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALES NO(N=59)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES(N=24)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although females look fairly confident in this area, an analytical comparison of answers to two open-ended questions provided another form of insight into the gender differences pertaining to achievement aspirations. The questions were deliberately spaced five questions apart in the questionnaire:

"What job(s) do you consider reflections of success?"

"What job(s) would you like to hold in the future?"

Here, again, research in this area presents the continual dilemma of understanding how people define success. In this study, 44 of the 131 respondents listed "doctor" in answer to the first question and 38 listed "lawyer". 36 of those listed "doctor and lawyer" together. There were 12 who added "engineer", 19 named "business owner and/or president of a company." Another 15 merely said "professional jobs."

Of more interest to me was the amount of congruence between the answers to the two questions. Did people want to or
feel capable of holding the jobs they themselves listed as measures of success? 76 respondents answered the questions in a manner that allowed analysis. For instance, it was necessary to exclude responses like "doctor" for the first question followed by "medical professional" for the second.

The responses to the open-ended questions reflected the most profound gender differences. Using the N of 76, 73% of the males showed congruent answers where they intended to become what they defined as successful professionals. Only 36% of the women had answers that coincided. Some examples of the answers females gave appear below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT JOB(S) DO YOU CONSIDER REFLECTIONS OF SUCCESS?</th>
<th>WHAT JOB(S) WOULD YOU LIKE TO HOLD IN THE FUTURE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lawyer/Doctor</td>
<td>Health care administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Doctor/Lawyer</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Doctor/Lawyer</td>
<td>Nurse practitioner, wife, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Doctor/Lawyer/Business Owner</td>
<td>Occupational /Music Therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Business/English/Doctor/Nurse</td>
<td>Occupational Therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Doctor/Lawyer/Professor</td>
<td>Counseling Social Worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that many of the incongruent answers for men had a different quality to them. For instance, a man might list "Doctor" as a job reflecting success, but identify "Engineer" as the job he might like to hold. More often, women showed an interest in a similar field, but identified their chosen occupations as one of lower status. For example, number 2 above lists as a successful occupation "Doctor" and the respondent identified her chosen occupation as "Nurse." In other words, she indicated an interest in the field of medicine, named the position she viewed as most
successful and planned to pursue an occupation related, but not identical, to that description.

In this response, the percentage of male and female respondents that were abused fell below the percentage of the total group. The total percentage of abused males is 44%; in this sub-sample the percentage is 38%. In the larger group, 29% of the women were abused as opposed to 17% in the sub sample.

**Discussion**

The gender differences in reports of physical abuse experienced by the respondents were somewhat perplexing. Though a higher percentage of males were the recipients of physical force, only females within the abuse group indicated frequency of once a month or more. This is not compatible with the notion that boys are more likely to be vulnerable (Straus, et al., 1980). Explanation may lie in the fact that these are self reports by victims after the fact. It is possible that because our society holds the value that "hitting girls is not okay," females may be more sensitive to being struck and may, therefore, tend to remember the incident for a longer time period and/or because it had dramatic overtones. On the other hand, the opposite argument can also be made; if society considers physical force toward girls unacceptable, women may tend to repress the experience.

Although I support the use of the 12-13 year time period, there is a problem with it. In the event respondents cannot remember exactly what happened during their 12-13th year, they will rely on memory of a particular era in their growing-up
process. It is my speculation that perhaps that particular year is attached to two separate developmental stages. For some, it may be associated with elementary school and for others, junior high school. Consequently, reporting of physical force may be affected by selective recollection.

The success avoidance response does not support the notion that women avoid success more often than men. If I had more faith in the index, I would find these results very exciting and in support of my gender neutral theory. However, the index is problematic and much more research is required to allow generalization of the findings. In addition to there being too few questions, there are other difficulties. For instance, the questions related to academics may reflect poor study habits and judgement rather than success avoidance. The question about avoiding publicity may simply be related to shyness. A much more inclusive and specific index is required.

Nevertheless, the fact that men exhibited more success avoidance than women is worth noting. It also appears that abuse is a risk factor for success avoidance.

There was an inherent limitation in the attempt to determine the educational aspirations of the respondents. They were asked "how much education would you eventually like to complete?" The question addressed post graduate goals but was asked of students who, for the most part, are in their early college careers. It is likely that the answers might have been different had most of the respondents been juniors and seniors. Nevertheless, fantasies
about the future are indicative of present mind-set and the responses are useful when viewed in that light.

The results show some indication that abused children tend to have lower academic achievement goals than non-abused children. Members of the abused group more often intended to stop with a BA, particularly in the case of males.

The fact that abused females were closer to non-abused females than to abused males in their aspirations for higher education may be a sign of the times and/or a reflection of the historical trends of minority group thinking: the notion that in order to maintain equality with more advantaged groups, minority people (in this case, women) must excel beyond the normal expectation.

When asked the question, "how certain are you that you can be whatever you want to be?" the abused males showed more optimism than the non-abused males. Females of both groups shared close to the same level of optimism; and both female groups showed more optimism than non-abused males. However, if females and abused males set their occupational goals by a different standard and, as a result, have lower career aspirations to begin with, then their faith in being able to achieve those goals makes their responses less meaningful.

The responses to the qualitative questions "what job(s) do you consider reflections of success?" and "what job(s) would you like to hold in the future?" hinted that there was some merit in being concerned about female achievement confidence. Almost three-quarters of the males had congruent answers, while only
just over a third of the females matched their plans for the future with their own descriptions of successful occupations. Without definitively stating that women have more difficulty in imagining themselves achieving a self-defined success level, the results prompted interest in pursuing future research in this area. These students were a full generation younger than the group studied by Horner, yet there are indications that changes in gender reaction have not been quite so dramatic as current thinking assumes.

In asking the question about occupational success, the survey held the assumption that both male and female respondents would personalize their answers. However, it is entirely possible that female responses were connected, not only with their own occupational success, but also with occupational success for males. Consequently, a logical female response could be to answer the first question in a general way reflecting societal views of high status positions, while answering the second reflecting their perceptions of achievable career goals for women.

Only one woman articulated motherhood as an occupation. It is possible that many more included it in their career goals and are planning their work life to accommodate that eventuality. It would help explain the differential responses.

A second look at Table 4.4 reveals another potential contradiction. The jobs that women were apt to list as achievable do not necessarily require graduate level degrees, yet 64% of the non-abused and 57% of the abused females intended to pursue either a masters or doctoral program. One explanation is that educational aspirations are not necessarily connected to job
performance for women. In fact, an increasing number of women find it more compatible to go to school while raising a family than to commit to a job outside of the home. If research in this area were to be pursued, it would be essential to explore the two or more-tiered career path, ie. jobs women have in mind pre-, during and post-childraising. It is quite possible that more than one plan is in place.

In the quest for understanding peoples' views of success, it should be noted that numbers of people responding with "doctor and lawyer" as reflections of successful professions indicates a continuation of a view generally accepted in our society for at least the last two generations (Shames, 1986, p.136). Based on this survey, there is little reason to think the current generation is likely to change the stereotype.

However, like so many discussions of success, this study and the questionnaire on which it was based, imply a static, rather than dynamic, definition of a successful occupation. In reality, particularly in America, successful career paths require upward movement (Kanter, 1977). This implication is not pointed out by way of apology, because simplicity was a necessary requirement for the study. It is mentioned, rather, as a reminder that a more in-depth investigation should focus some on success mobility because it is, no doubt, part of the thinking process of respondents.

Another important consideration for future research in the area of achievement aspiration is the age group studied. Developmental stages may have an important effect on responses. As an example, Levinson (1978, p.71) discusses what he calls
"Early Adult Transition" .... "where a young man is...on the boundary between pre-adulthood and early adulthood. He is creating a basis for adult life without being fully within it." He further characterizes the time period as including the task of questioning one's place in the world so one can emerge into adulthood. The person is also engaging in exploratory behavior by way of testing out various options.

Since the major activity of the first task is to separate from one's nuclear family, it is possible that an abused person might try on a positive self-image that negates negative parental messages. However, the ambivalent nature of this separation may be illustrated in the choice to still view oneself as constrained by and/or tied to an adolescent preconception of one's life course. Discontinuity is not unusual according to Levinson (1978, p.78).

Whatever the degree of discontinuity in a young man's life, the Early Adult Transition is a time of profound change in self and world. He is still modifying or ending his relationships with parents and other family members, with the settings and institutions of adolescence, and with his peer groups and friends. He is trying to make the choices that will form the groundwork for his first adult life structure.

It is also hoped that in measuring the concepts I propose, responses will reflect the respondent's true level. However, it is entirely possible that if a need is high enough, one might answer in a way that expresses a wish fulfillment rather than an actual achievement.

There were many questions raised by this study:
1. If grown-up children who experienced physical force by one or both parents have the self-confidence to attend college, is it due to a genuine feeling of worthiness or a defense against the opposite feelings of poor self-esteem? (Martin, 1980)

2. Do those children make it to college and expect to continue to achieve because, despite their home environment, they managed to develop the confidence to do so, or do they represent a selected group of the recipients of force? Is it an odd sort of rebellion that leads the motivated abused child to "show the world that s/he can be someone despite the lack of parental support?"

3. Is the confidence temporary? Will it last into maturity? A longitudinal study or, at the least, a study of a variety of age groups who were abused as children, is required to address this subject.

4. Does physical force not affect a person's motivation to succeed and how is emotional or psychological abuse accounted for in the equation? I believe, based on observation of clients in therapeutic settings, that psychological abuse and abuse over extended time periods influence tendencies toward success avoidance. Defining those determinants and developing measurement techniques to study the existence of emotional abuse are essential if we are to truly address the complicated social psychological dynamics of the issue.
5. What is the effect of a support network, particularly for abused persons? Not so difficult to measure, but regrettably neglected in this survey, was the existence or non-existence of significant others that supported and influenced the respondents and perhaps balanced out the negative messages given by abusers. Because there are so many influential people in a child's life, no two abused children can be considered to share an exact experience. It seems particularly necessary to find out about those influential people, mentors, and models when discussing the issue of achievement motivation.

6. Have social changes affected the responses? There is some reason to believe that views of success have come to include a fulfilled, personally and socially responsible life-style that may mean giving-up the stereotypical notions of success, to some extent, and pursuing the "good and happy life." Since this attitude development is relatively new, it may be that it underlies the motivations of young people, thought it may not be articulated. Whyte proposes that, "while most people most of the time do things in standard ways, there is enough creativity in the human species so that in any field or activity we can find people who are doing things in new and promising ways. To grasp the nature and significance of these social inventions, we must learn to understand the technical as well as the social problems they are intended to solve" (Whyte, 1984, p.286).
7. Finally, the most pressing question that emerges is, "is there really any way to determine the difference between failure avoidance and success avoidance, or the fear of failure and the fear of success?" We know that common vocabularies don't necessarily imply shared definitions (Smith, 1981) either of particular words or larger concepts.

Methodological and definitional difficulties remain, particularly in the area of instrument design. They are continually complicated by researchers' determination to avoid defining the variable of success for the respondent. However, a major advantage of this study was that further clarification of the problems was reached. Certainly, more questions than answers were raised, but that was not necessarily discouraging.

This study encourages exploration of new theoretical directions. Additional support for that focus is found in the following stories shared by people struggling with their personal achievement levels.
CHAPTER V

FIELD NOTES DEPICTING SUCCESS AVOIDANCE

...most human behavior, no matter how ghastly or ludicrous or glorious or whatever, is innocent (Vonnegut, 1981, p.xviii).

Over the past ten years I have given workshops, speeches, and specialized in psychotherapy with clients dealing with issues of success avoidance. In addition to sharing with them my expertise on the subject, I learned a great deal from the people involved. Of particular interest were the reasons people gave for sabotaging their success, the most outstanding of which appear on the list below. At first glance, many of the concerns seem like reasons to continue on the road to success. The discussion following will explain why they also encourage success avoidance.

Success May Lead To
• an expectation that it will continue.
• less freedom to make mistakes.
• having employees.
• job loyalty and pressure to conform.
• a "career" vs. a "job".
• more money or higher status.
• increased travel.
• power or perceived power.
- increased stress.
- becoming more visible.
- being viewed as better than average.
- the envy of others.
- more of a focus on work or the perception that that is so.
- less time for other things.
- a change in image.
- the unknown.
- liking it!

Large numbers of people reported the above reasons, both singularly and in combination, for avoiding success. The groups involved were diverse. Among others they included women from around the country who had "climbed the corporate ladder" in a large company; male inmates from a state prison; non-achieving, adolescent students; men and women in middle management; professionals and non-professionals responding to an invitation to a workshop; and a variety of individuals who for one reason or another chose to share their stories with me. Each one deserves explanation.

The expectation that success will continue was a concern in all the groups. Youngsters reported that if they proved their ability to get better grades, their parents and teachers would take no excuses for not continuing to do well. Professional people articulated it in other ways:

Jan was a vice-president of a rather large insurance company and found he was holding himself back from
introducing the many ideas he had for improving sales. Upon further questioning, he disclosed that his real worry was that if his plan was the huge success it promised to be, his superiors would be continually waiting for equal performance in the future. What if he didn't have any more good ideas up his sleeve or if he didn't want to continue to put in the kind of effort this project required?

Having less freedom to make mistakes was frequently mentioned in the context of the stereotype most people held that "those at the top" simply didn't make the kind of mistakes of those at the bottom. "After all, that's why they're at the top" one person said. He and others did not know if they could take that kind of pressure.

Lawrence described his boss as "mistake free." In fact, he was certain that he had always been that way. When it was pointed out in a group session that that was not possible, it became clear that rationality failed in this case. Lawrence absolutely refused to admit that anyone at the top of the ladder or "destined for the top" made the kind of mistakes he, himself, was likely to make. He was so convinced of this fact that he had refused several promotions. It was a constant refrain, "I blow it too often to be in an important position. People like me don't belong there. Only perfect men should be in charge. I mean what if Generals or the President of the United States made mistakes?" He never did have an answer for
the examples people gave him of numerous "known" mistakes made by people in that category.

Having employees was fraught with a variety of concerns including not seeing oneself as a boss, worrying about ability to communicate with people, and being responsible for others.

Carol had been in the steno-pool for four years when she was promoted to supervisor. Her response was so extreme that she had several anxiety attacks a day. She described them as having nothing to do with fear of incompetence. She knew very well that she was more than capable of supervising the staff. Her repeated remarks ran something like this, "Me, a boss? Are you kidding? My dad worked in the coal mines and my mom in the factory. There has never been a boss in our family. Who do I think I am? Who do they think I am? I don't belong bossing other people around. Some people are on this earth to give orders and some to take orders. I take orders. No matter how much I know."

Job loyalty and pressure to conform meant to most people giving up primary loyalty to family, friends, and other activities such as church and community. It also tapped into fears about being absorbed into the system and losing self-identity.

Bob prided himself on his individualism which he described as coming from a fear of being swallowed up by either other people or an organization. He reported that
he purposely dressed in non-conforming ways and had done so since he was a child. If he rose to greater heights at his place of employment, he was convinced he would "become a nobody - just a non-distinguishable parasite on the side of the mighty whale".

**Upward mobility**, with all its attractive features, meant "loss" to many. It was one of many indications that reinforced my notion that whenever we gain something, we also lose something. In this case it usually referred to leaving people behind: friends in a former department, buddies who are not on the honor roll, neighbors in a former neighborhood, and even family.

**Greta** was a student of mine taking her first semester at a university. Because the course was about social problems, she found it both challenging and enlightening. By her own description, she had come from a rather sheltered existence and just never thought of most of the problems we discussed in class. She threw herself into the course and by mid-semester had one of the top grades in the class. Just prior to an exam, she came to me in tears reporting that she was purposely not studying for the test so that she would fail. As the story unfolded, Greta became even more emotional. She had gone home at Thanksgiving bursting with her new perspective on life. Not only had her family not understood much of what she was telling them, she realized her education had already created enormous distance between her and them. She
could only see that gap increasing and didn't know if she could bear the separation. "Why my brother even said pretty soon no one would be able to talk with me. It was so strained. I love them. I don't want to lose them."

Increased competition emerged mostly, but not exclusively, with women. Having been socialized not to compete, it was a serious blow to their identity to all of a sudden be in a contest. Whether it be promotions, salary increases, or dean's list, people with non-competitive tendencies shied away from situations that put them in that position.

When Matina Horner spoke at the Midwestern Psychological Association meetings in 1968 (McClelland & Steele, 1973, p.223), she referred to Mead's suggestion that a possible motive for women to avoid success was "that intense intellectual striving can be viewed as competitively aggressive behavior." Freud has pointed out that the whole essence of the view of femininity lies in repressing aggressiveness. As a result, a woman is threatened by success because unusual excellence in academic intellectual areas or other competitive achievement activity becomes consciously or unconsciously equated with loss of femininity and the possibility of social rejection. I have also seen non-competitive men react similarly, but not for the same reasons since masculinity has been traditionally supportive of competitiveness.

Calling work a career vs. a job seemed directly tied to level of success. Often arbitrary standards were considered the line of demarcation. Beyond a certain point, a job became a career and consequently success at that level implied a commitment to
work that exceeded personal goals. Interestingly, amount of time spent at work or length of time at the job did not necessarily figure into the equation.

*Lila had worked as a bookkeeper for the same company for more than 20 years. When her boss offered her the position of chief financial officer she refused despite the fact that she would not have to put in extra hours, her duties would remain essentially the same, and her pay would increase considerably. Her explanation for the refusal was simple, but surprising. "If I take on that fancy title than it will sound like I have a career. Even though I work full-time, my family and I see it as a necessity to help the family income. That's a job. If I have a career, then it will look like I'm one of those woman libbers who doesn't care about her kids or her husband. My mother would really chew me out and say I was neglecting my family".*

With increased success often comes *more money and/or higher status*. Certainly they seem a plus by most standards. However, according to those who chose not to accept them, they were also seen as a burden and risked changing their life-styles and others' views of them.

*A risk according to Charlie that he was not willing to take. "Sure, it sounds great having more bucks and being a big shot. But my friends will be turned off and think I'm too*
big for my britches. Anyway, what was good for my Dad
is good enough for me."

Charlie was not the only person to express a concern about
surpassing his parents socio-economic status. Some people put in
terms of not wanting their folks to feel like failures and others
manifest guilt in a variety of ways. It is also true, that the
possibility of improving income and status connected with loss for
many; leaving behind people and places that mean a lot or risking
being left by those who were jealous or no longer felt the
relationship to be compatible or comfortable. For women, it was
often a matter of making more money than their husbands and,
thus, putting a strain on the marriage.

Increased travel in some occupations is a result of
stepping up the success ladder. In addition to taking one away
from home, it may mean dealing with public misconceptions. My
own experience applies here.

When my son was young a very frequent reaction to my
traveling was "Who is going to take care of Ethan?"
assuming, of course, that my husband was incapable of
the task. This was often said in a manner that implied I
had not thought about Ethan's welfare. Once on a plane,
an older couple asked why I was going to California.
When I replied that it was business trip, they said "well I
guess you decided not to have a family." My answer to
the contrary produced judgemental stares and the
cessation of the conversation. Usually I was unaffected by
the judgement of others, but on days when I was vulnerable and experienced some of the guilt of not staying at home full-time like my mother, I found myself quickly explaining that, though I traveled some, I was most always home to meet the school bus. Conflict and mixed-emotions are not unusual with women of my generation.

The issue of power is complicated because it also includes the perception of power. The concerns surrounding it vary. For some, power is a fear-provoking condition.

"I'm really afraid I'll abuse power. How do we know we're not all potentially Hitlers. My father was powerful and he continually hurt us. I don't want any part of being put in a powerful position and finding out I'm just like him."

For others it is clearly linked to identity change.

"I have a view of myself that does not include being powerful or the person in charge. I see myself as a follower. Actually, I'd like to try it but I'm too much of a chicken. I mean, how do powerful people dress? Do I have to buy a whole new wardrobe? Do I have to talk and act differently? It's scary."

And for others it is a gender issue.

"I'm a woman. Powerful men are considered attractive and competent. Powerful women are considered bitches."
I don’t want to be called a bitch by every man and woman I meet.

Increased stress may well be the result of success for many of the reasons already mentioned as well as others. However, the real problem seems to surround the stress of not handling the stress. For many, the extra time put into increased success eliminates time to devote to stress-relieving activities such as physical exercise, lunch with a friend, or going to a movie. Over and over I heard remarks indicating that it would be far too selfish to take even more time to unwind. A number of people even implied that they would have to admit to a problem if they admitted they couldn’t handle the stress. It was better to avoid the situation entirely.

Dorine was in a stress reduction workshop of mine. Part way through the day she told me she was going to leave. Her reason was straightforward. “I’m frustrated hearing about all these ways to reduce stress because I’m never going to do them. I feel guilty enough working. I won’t spend another minute exercising or doing something for myself.” She added that she had just refused a promotion for the same reason. “If I’m stressed now and can’t bring myself to take care of me, a new job will put me over the top. My mother never did anything for herself and I’m the same way. I came because my mother had a heart attack at 43. I didn’t want to be like
her. Guess I'm more like her than I thought." Dorine could not be convinced to stay.

Becoming more visible was given as an excuse to remain at the present level of achievement more often than I would have predicted. In a variety of ways, people alluded to the American preoccupation with "not showing off", "not getting a big head," and being embarrassed by compliments. Being the center of attention was often seen as pompous and snobby.

Arthur was from a very wealthy family. "The one thing we were taught to be was understated. Never, never put oneself in a position of being the center of attention. Just live a quiet, advantaged life. It was considered gauche to 'stand out' and vulgar to attract focus. Consequently, I constantly remove myself from situations that show me off. I'm the quietest architect in the firm and I will remain that way."

Being viewed as better than average, or in sociological terms "being outside the norm", was also a common concern. One only needs to stand outside the Junior High School on report card day. There are two groups of students hiding their grades; those that got Fs and those that got As.

Bobby told me in no uncertain terms, "Hey, I don't want my friends to think I'm a brain. No one will hang out with me any more. I even lie. When they ask me how I did, I wait to see how most of them did and I tell them somewhere in the middle."
The envy of others is inherent in many of the above examples. One only needs to remember being a child and having a best friend say s/he didn't want to be your friend any more since you got the lead in the play or accomplished some other coveted role. Kind parents were apt to explain that the friend was just jealous, but that only exacerbated the feeling of being rejected. The friend was still lost and the only way to salvage the relationship was to become less accomplished: a conflict indeed!

More of a focus on work and less time for other things are possible results of increased success. Even when it was not a certainty, the fear of them was strong enough to elicit success avoidance.

Carla focused a great deal on work and the reason she had less time for other things (by her own admission) was that she was unwilling to give up anything no matter how much she added. This was a theme with many people. It never occurred to Carla and the others to reassess what they were doing as they became busier. "To give something up," said Jake, "is to admit failure...even if you give up what you no longer like doing. Even if you give up what you no longer need to do, I guess."

It was particularly true in the area of household chores and family obligations for women. As has been pointed out a lot recently, women are still maintaining at least two full time jobs - homemaking and employment. The
double-standard is quite evident. Other family members are excused far more readily. I often use the example of Johnny coming home from school stressed and tired. He throws his coat on the floor, stomps upstairs, and mumbles something about wanting everyone to leave him alone. No one ever says, "Look at Johnny...he goes to school all day and now he has no time for his mother!

The last three concerns emerged as the most important in that they were inclusive of all the others, yet easily stood on their own. They are distinct, yet connected: change in image, facing the unknown, and liking the new status. Together and separately they best describe the unifying theme underlying all the reasons people have given me over the years to avoid success. We know that positive change can be just as stressful as negative change. It is not always events that provide the stress, but the change that results from those events. Facing the unknown is a major fear for many people. The risk of facing a perceived permanent change in identity erodes the safe foundation on which people structure their lives. In some cases attempts to avoid tampering with a known identity are desperate.

Mark is a very talented artist working as an illustrator for a well-known magazine. I saw him in counseling for three years and witnessed him to be most threatened, depressed, and frightened when he faced professional promotions or accolades.
In particular, I remember the day he came in and asked if he was crazy. He wanted my professional opinion. I assured him that he was not and he immediately showed excessive disappointment and became almost frantic. He said he'd hoped I would diagnose him as "nuts" and perhaps suggest the state hospital. The precipitating even was the suggestion by his boss that he be promoted to head of the art department. He knew he was qualified, but his identity was so tied up with being mediocre that he panicked at the thought of having to change that identity.

Mark was also periodically suicidal when so-called "good" things happened to him. He shared that propensity with Steve.

For years Steve expressed suicidal ideology...usually following some measure of success and/or a positive event. It became predictable that when he would call or come into a session reporting a positive happening, it would be followed by serious suicidal thought. Interestingly, Steve had some very devastating and sad occurrences in his life; death of his much-loved older brother, rejection by his alcoholic mother, a number of failed love relationships, and occasional financial difficulties. When confronted by his seemingly solid and positive attitude toward the unhappy things in his life, he responded that it seemed normal. The happy and potentially successful events he described were outside his own experience and were therefore threatening to the
very essence of who he was. In fact, the only way he could eventually allow himself to succeed was to enter a career that he constantly described as awful. As long as he saw the work as awful, he was able to continue it. According to him, unhappy was the state of mind he was used to and it held a certain kind of comfort because of its familiarity. He called it his "personal identity - the man he saw in the mirror." Steve is considered one of the top physicians in his specialty in a major city.

The examples given in this section are just a few of many. The theme repeats itself. Identity congruence, or self-consistency, is important. It is important enough to sabotage success when it presents itself.

Tresemer (1977, p.79) reviewed various social psychological theories and concluded that the avoidance of success can be logically attributed to the following:

1. A desire to avoid the stress on self-perception entailed by an outcome (or series of outcomes) that is "out of character", that disconfirms expectancies about oneself.

2. A fear of the extremity of the demands inherent in the role of being a "successful person."

3. A fear of the social ostracism resulting from success.
Tresemer aptly describes many of the individuals mentioned here. Combined with other, more traditional concepts (see next chapter), the foundation for a more inclusive theory begins to emerge.
CHAPTER VI

RELEVANT THEORIES OF MOTIVATION

Several theories provide appropriate material for the development of my theory of self-consistency and success avoidance. In addition to existing self-consistency theories, the following are the most relevant.

Learning and Reinforcement Theories

Learning and reinforcement are often used (or at least viewed) interchangeably and are directly connected to behavior. Skinner (1953) who based his notion of reinforcement on empirical data, describes a reinforcer as anything that increases the probability of a response. The idea that past reinforcement is the only criterion for explaining behavior is is admittedly simplistic. Yet, like Freud, Skinner's thesis is durable and has influenced a number of theoretical approaches. While I believe, in this case, that reinforcement theory should not stand alone, the basic tenet has merit. We do, after all, learn from the past. The traditional view states it in terms of conditioning; classical conditioning being the passive learning that two stimuli are connected and operant conditioning referring to the strengthening and weakening of responses depending on their consequences. Prior experience can cause changes in future behavior (a basic definition of learning).
Responses change or remain the same because they are reinforced by consequences.

Kanfer and Goldstein (1980, p.74) give the example of the abused child who learns negative attitudes about him or herself by associating achievement situations (the conditioned stimulus) with abuse and rejection (the unconditioned stimulus). The child responds with anxiety and/or depression and ultimately responds similarly to future achievement situations.

The opposite would happen if the unconditioned stimulus were support, love, and approval causing happiness and security. Achievement situations would then have a positive association.

Such examples can be approached from a drive reduction model or from the more inclusive social learning modality. The theory of drive reduction (Hull, 1943 among others) sees the reinforcement as reducing tension and, thus, dictating certain behavior. In other words, everything a person does is directed at reducing pain or eliminating an unpleasant state of affairs. Pleasure is synonymous with pain relief.

Hull views drive as a "general energizing concept" which is non-specific to particular needs and different from habit. Its function is to reduce tension. Reinforcement, then, provides the connection between motivation and learning.

Social learning theory (Rotter, 1954) is connected to the above-mentioned concepts, but has some important differences. For instance, it is not based on a drive reduction principle so much as an expectancy-reinforcement approach. Behavior is still directional (goal motivated) but reinforcement includes any
situation that affects movement toward a goal. It is a broader view than that of drive reduction in that it takes into account personality unification as a result of many, on-going experiential influences. Goals or needs are acquired as a result of prior satisfaction and connections are made to early associations.

Rotter (1954) suggested that needs are more pertinent when the focus is on the individual, while goals are connected to environmental conditions affecting the individual. He explains that social learning takes place when we acquire goals through the satisfaction or frustration experienced at the hands of other people. Consequently, regularly occurring behavior is previously reinforced behavior.

What Rotter has added to learning theory is a cognitive perspective that helps explain Skinner's theory. He has also more fully addressed the social aspects of the learning process. Thus, behavior can be measured and predicted relative to reinforcement based on the expectancy held by the individual that the particular reinforcement will occur. The person chooses a behavior dependent on a preference for an expected reinforcement.

The study of success avoidance is relevant here because it insists that attention be paid to a variety of possible reinforcements. Success can not always be seen as preferable. It is possible that, for some individuals, the trade-offs connected with success supply enough negative reinforcement to lead to avoidance. Recipients of abuse, for instance, learned of negative consequences early on and guided their behavior away from
success achievement. The fear of success may be a fear of failure elsewhere.

Behavior is dependent not only on prior direct experience, but on developmental stage, response repertoire, skill level, and a myriad of other contingencies. The individual also learns through observation and modeling as well as through direct reinforcement. It is a complex system.

**Achievement Motivation Theories**

J. W. Atkinson (1964, 1974) describes motivation as the tendency to act toward goals based on multiplicative relationships between motive, expectation, and incentive. Motive is defined as early learning that evolves into a stable, if latent, predisposition to action. Expectation* is the probability that a person judges s/he will succeed at a task. The goal's inherent attractiveness** provides the incentive. Thus, the value of a goal is the Incentive times the Motive times Expectation, or $I \times M \times E$.

Achievement behavior has been seen primarily as the tendency to approach success minus the tendency to avoid failure. The assumption here is that success is always preferable. However, I propose that success can be seen as both a goal and a threat. Taking this into account, success avoidance can also be assessed within the achievement motivation model. This has ramifications for modification of the theory, not so much in its construct, but in its areas of assumption.

A new look at the definitions of the variables in the model shows the following:
**Motive** - early learning to avoid success based on negative reinforcement of achievement.

**Expectation** - low probability of either succeeding at the task or succeeding as a person.

**Incentive** - attractiveness level might be very low.

Thus, the value $I \times M \times E = \text{low score}$.

Once again, the concept bows to simplicity and does not seem entirely adequate. Depth is added when considering Atkinson's (1978) two major questions applicable to the study of motivation: (A) what are the components or determinants of a tendency to act in a certain way? and (B) How is competition and conflict among tendencies resolved and expressed in action?

The answers to the above are often seen in terms of ability, i.e. where there is talent, there is motivation, but Atkinson (1978, p.227-228) encourages us to take other factors into account:

To predict cumulative achievement, we need to put all the pieces together; differences in true ability, differences in motivational dispositions (motives, knowledge, beliefs, conceptions), nature of the task, incentives, and opportunities in the immediate environment. And last, but certainly not least, we must include in our calculations all of the factors in the life of an individual that influence the strength of his motivation to engage in other alternative activities.

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*Known as "potency" as used by Kurt Lewin/group dynamicists.

**Known as "valence" as used by Kurt Lewin/group dynamicists.
In other words, on the motivational side, the whole hierarchy of motives within an individual personality and the richness of his environment in the incentives offered and the opportunities for expression and enjoyment of competing, non-achievement-related activities are as important for a full explanatory account of cumulative achievement as those abilities, motives, incentives, and opportunities that refer specifically to the achievement-related endeavor of critical interest (p.227-228).

It is possible that this more inclusive explanation followed Horner's challenge (Atkinson, 1978, p.41-70) that theretofore, achievement motivation theory excluded women's motives to avoid success. He did include a chapter by her in his book and it seems to have provided incentive to broaden the concept. As I have said, I do not see success avoidance as exclusively a women's issue, but I do agree with Horner's critique of achievement motivation theory.

Horner points out that "thus far, a test on achievement-related anxiety has been viewed mainly as a measure of motivation to avoid failure aroused by the expectancy that performing a task may lead to negative consequences, i.e. feelings of shame because of failure" (Horner in Atkinson, 1978, p.47). She argues that the theory neglects the possibility that negative consequences can also be associated with success. Further, she observes that "the theory of achievement motivation as presently formulated cannot readily make differential predictions between the conditions nor between the sexes" (p.49). The theory takes into account tendencies to achieve success and avoid failure, but not the tendency to avoid success. Horner suggests that the motive
to avoid success is a theoretical construct which should be used in conjunction with achievement motivation's expectancy-value theory. Though Horner contends that women avoid success far more than men (1968), she insists that success avoidance is not a sex-linked trait. "Any sex differences found or predicted should be considered as a function of sociocultural conditioning or prior learning, or of the impact of specific situational contextual factors" (Horner in Atkinson, 1978, p.68). This makes allowances for socialization (other than gender-specific) to influence success avoidance behavior. Horner, by the way, adds "motive to avoid success is not synonymous with a WILL TO FAIL" (Horner in Atkinson, 1978, p.69).

**Needs Theories**

As is detailed in future chapters, this particular theoretical orientation plays a major role in supporting my thesis. I will only address here what is not covered later. For instance, Maslow's hierarchy is often alluded to but perhaps deserves specific clarification. Maslow's now famous pyramid remains the most graphic depiction of the hierarchy of needs.
Figure 6.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Maslow argues that people require satisfaction of needs near the bottom of the pyramid before moving up to the more sophisticated levels. I will argue that success avoidance is often employed to meet safety needs, and self-actualization needs may be presently unimportant.

Samuels (1984, p.21-29) offers a way to assess the value of a particular need. He states that there are "five factors which directly determine the influence of any particular need upon an individual's behavior": urgency, survival valence, appeal, risk, and availability of means to satisfy the need.

Motive power to satisfy a need is derived from the first four and in conjunction with number five, behavior results accordingly.

Urgency, as perceived by the individual, will affect a person's behavior.
Survival Valence is determined by the person's perception of how important the need is to his or her survival.

Appeal refers to the extent to which the need is pleasurable, and though long-term considerations are important, momentary concern are most important. Survival valence has a better chance of being considered in the long-range. In fact, pain in the here-and-now may be chosen to insure long-term survival.

Risk refers to "the chance of injury, danger, or loss." I include "loss of self" in this category.

All of the above, according to Samuels, are influenced by the situation at the moment (the particular "lifespace").

Availability refers to the reality of possible satisfaction. "While urgency, survival valence, appeal, and risk are additive, availability is seen in "yes" and "no" terms.

Samuels uses Lewin's vector analysis approach:

Motive power = ± urgency ± survival valence ± appeal ± risk.

Availability may be high or low.

For the failure identity person (addressed in the next chapter), achieving success threatens survival in that it threatens safety and security. The risk to self-concept is high, while appeal may be low. High availability may add to the threat.

Cognitive and Consistency Theories

When Bem (1970 & 1972) proposed "Self-perception theory," he observed that social psychological theories reflect society at the time they are developed.

During the Sixties, it will be recalled, all thinking beings were characterized by chronic drives toward consistency and
uncertainty reduction, vigilant forces which coaxed us all toward cognitive quiescence. Our affects, cognitions, and behaviors were held in homeostatic harmony, and our "evaluative needs" initiated emergency information searches whenever any internal state broke through threshold without clear identification or certified cause. In contrast, we are emerging into the Seventies as less driven, more contemplative creatures, thoughtful men and women whose only motivation is the willingness to answer the question, "How do you feel?" as honestly and as carefully as possible after calmly surveying the available internal and external evidence.

There is, in short, a shift of paradigm taking place within social psychology, a shift from motivational/drive models of cognitions, behaviors, and internal states to information processing/attribution models of such phenomena. Self-perception theory is only one element in that shift, and thus it is appropriate at this juncture to place it within this larger context...(Bem, 1972, p.42-43).

It stands to reason that my use of self-consistency theories may also reflect a shift, once again, in the late 1980s. I have not contemplated the meaning of that concept, but feel that I, at least, need to acknowledge the possibility. I do know that many of the theoretical constructs of the 60s seem relevant to my thesis. The following is an example:

...human growth is not random or segmental but rather a persistent, consistent, coordinated unfolding of a pattern established at conception and somehow inherent in the developing organism itself. Behavior seems to be an extension of this directive, self-regulation toward fulfilling inner potential. The human system tends to resist disintegration of the structural and functional pattern it has already achieved and, if not blocked or seriously threatened, to press on toward a further unfolding of its potentialities (Coleman, 1960, p.113).
The consistency approach borrows the concept of homeostasis from physiological theory because some theorists (not all) believe that psychological processes fit quite nicely with the paradigm. An integrated self-concept requires organized thinking and feeling states. In the same way that trauma to the body interrupts normal functioning, "damage to (the) self-structure...can disable a person (as well)" (Coleman, 1960, p.116).

Coleman states that the response is to engage in "maintenance-direct behavior" as an attempt to bring congruity to the system. Consistency theories point out the need for congruity among attitudes, experiences, and behaviors. Inconsistency produces tension and discomfort. Since people cannot always bring the environment into balance, they attempt to at least bring their psychological states into a consistent pattern.

Theories in many categories allude to the process. Coleman says that among consistency theories, "Heider's (1958) is the most important and Festinger's (1957) the most popular." I use Lecky in the upcoming chapters. Festinger (1958) saw "contradiction" as a motivating condition, not unlike hunger. Both situations present a problem and require satisfaction. If people do not respond to hunger they die. If they allow contradictory world views, they are thrown into a state of confusion which could ultimately render them dysfunctional.

Even Rogers (1970) describes people as directed toward behavior that is integrating and self-regulating in the way that bodies crave a proper nutritional balance. He refers to psychological incongruence or dissociation as resulting from
"incongruence between the self-perceptions held by the individual and his organismic experiences..." (1970, p.384). The distorted perceptions are vulnerable to messages of worthiness delivered by significant others.

The impetus to behave rationally from our own points-of-view results from a need to trust ourselves. Being self-dependable is basic to security and security is basic to safety (Maslow, 1970; Samuels, 1984). Underlying both cognitive dissonance and consistency theories are yet other safety needs: order, consistency, and stability.

Coleman (1960, p.120-121) proposes the following "basic psychological requirements" necessary for normal functioning:

1. An Integral Frame of Reference

People develop frames of reference, accurately or inaccurately, because they are essential to stability.

Human beings do not like ambiguity, lack of structuring, chaos, or any events which seem beyond their understanding and control and which place them at the mercy of alien forces. Our perceptual processes operate in such a way as to help maintain the consistency and stability of our world. When contradictions occur, we try not to notice them; if we cannot avoid it, we are uncomfortable until we can somehow reconcile them (p.119).

2. Feelings of Adequacy and Security

People need to believe that they are competent in dealing with problems. That capability is not only comforting in the present, but holds hope for the future. Increased self-trust and adequacy makes adequacy reinforcement less important. The
more self-esteem is high in areas of self-preservation, the more uncertainty and change can be tolerated.

3. Feelings of Belonging and Approval (also see Maslow & Samuels)

Self-worth and self-esteem are elevated when cultural and group approval are evident. The need for social approval is universal. In the absence or perceived absence of that approval, numbers 1 & 2 above take on even more importance.

4. Feelings of Self-esteem and Worth

The experience of feeling and thinking oneself valuable to the world, self, and others is directly connected to self-esteem and self-worth and, eventually, self-concept. Society's standards loom as the ultimate standard, but when unable to meet those, another set of standards may take their place. People will grab security where they can find it.

5. Experiences of Love and Relatedness (also see Fromm)

Happiness, as a result of self-fulfillment, is directly connected to love in the present or within memory. Relating need not be through romantic love, but does need to be achieved.

All of the requirements are relevant to motivation. According to Coleman, maintenance-directed behavior is action geared toward the restoring of balance and equilibrium to the organism who experiences disturbance in one or more of the above areas.

Energy is mobilized in appropriate or inappropriate ways depending on skill and knowledge level. When hungry, most people understand the need for food. When social psychological
requirements are not met, the best form of action is not always clear.

Nevertheless, goal-directed action is taken in an attempt to meet the need. It is in either the form of approach or avoidance. The choices are limited by the individual's environment and ability, but still, there is usually a wide range of options. Reactions are understandably based on past experience, which explains why the behavior often seems rational to the person, yet irrational to ill-informed others.

Equilibrium is eventually restored when the requirement is met. Once again, it is essential to remember that though tension reduction may be destructive and ineffective in the long-run, it may work very well in the short-run.

Coleman reminds us of the importance of the individual's environment in motivation and choices. Lewin's field theory supports the observation.

According to Madsen (1968) Lewin proposes that predicting another's behavior requires knowledge of the individual's momentary lifespace and the connection between behavior choices and that lifespace.

Put in equation terms

\[ B = F(Lsp) = F(P,E) \]

where behavior (B) of an individual will always be a function (F) of the total situation, the lifespace (Lsp), consisting of both the
condition of the individual (P) and the environment (E), factors which are closely interdependent (P.131).

Since observers are more knowledgeable about the environment than about the person's internal functioning, it is tempting and easy to negatively judge someone's behavior.

Motivation is dependent on meeting requirements from within and outside the self. The external environment provides the available goals and means to reach them, encouragement or discouragement of various paths, and setting of standards and making of demands. The individual juxtaposes the external situation with his or her own frame of reference. This accounts for different avenues taken in meeting similarly defined goals. Again, the functional human being is motivated in ways that will allow him or her to make sense of his or her perceived world.

Bem's (1970, p.50) self-perception theory proposes that "in identifying his own internal states, an individual partially relies on the same external cues that others use when they infer his internal states." In other words, people do not simply glean information about their internal environment from their own interpersonal process. Rather, they also utilize the same outside "clues" that other people use in evaluating their situations. Bem goes onto say, "we have learned to identify many of our internal states only because outside observers first inferred those states from observable external cues and then taught us how to label the internal situation..." (p.50), i.e. they labeled and interpreted injury as pain, tears as sadness, etc.
Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that life's complexities are responsible for singular motivations being rare, if not non-existent. Though one motive may be dominant, it is usually a pattern of motives which instigate and guide behavior. One act may serve many motives and one motive many acts (Coleman, 1960, p. 135).

The most likely and most elusive pattern is one that tries to reconcile inconsistencies, self-concept, and behavior with other people's perceptions. For instance, "...a person may believe that he is absolutely worthless and when others tell him how valuable his behavior has been there will be feelings of inconsistency, imbalance, or dissonance. A feeling of consistency will be achieved by changing one's attitude about oneself (I really am worthwhile) or about one's behavior (I fooled them; they don't realize how worthless my behavior actually was)" (Kanfer and Goldstein, 1980, p.80).

To ask a person to revamp his or her identity is to sometimes ask the impossible, certainly at the pace often expected. Yet, in one way or another, knowingly or unknowingly, that request is made with some regularity.
CHAPTER VII

A DEPICTION OF SUCCESS APPROACH AND SUCCESS AVOIDANCE

The next two chapters describe the theory of self-consistency as it applies to success path. The first graphic example is in the form of a model which I found necessary to begin by assuming an already established self-esteem level. However, I have attempted to properly acknowledge at least some of the influences that affect self-esteem.

In his book The Antecedents of Self-esteem (1967), Coopersmith identifies two factors that are especially important in the development of self-esteem. The first is the treatment significant others accord a person in areas of respect, acceptance, and concern. The second is a person's achievement level, most particularly, her or his history of success or failure. My position is that the latter directly and indirectly emanates from and serves to reinforce the former.

Acknowledging that a variety of factors is responsible for an individual's level of self-esteem and also admitting that those levels fluctuate depending on circumstances, the model I propose assumes that there is a core level of self-esteem around which people hover, and it is strongly influenced by early childhood experiences. I am not suggesting that people with high self-esteem do not experience low periods (memories of adolescence
bear that out for most of us). Nor do I believe that people who measure low on the continuum do not experience times of high self-esteem. Rather, as James (1950, 294) says, "...although the individual's self-esteem may vary from situation to situation...there is a certain average tone of self-feeling which each one of us carries about..."

Additionally, this model begins with the assumption that generalized levels of self-esteem are already established. How that happens is beyond the purview of this dissertation, although the chapter on child abuse alludes to at least one example of that process.

As a psychotherapist, I obviously believe people can work at changing their self-images and increasing their levels of self-esteem. I've also seen the resistance to doing so even by those who proclaim it as a goal. Once established, self-esteem is an integral part of one's identity, and keeping identity congruent (however positive or negative) is an integral part of basic security. Rather than threaten that security, people will often opt for sameness, stability, and predictability. The following model depicts the phenomenon of success avoidance based on a theory of self-consistency (Lecky, 1961).
Success Approach

Success Identity

If High

Self-esteem

If Low

Failure Identity

Success Avoidance

Toward Safety Needs Fulfillment

Figure 7.1 Self-esteem/Self-consistency Model of Success Path
The person with high self-esteem holds a success identity which naturally leads to the inclination to approach success-oriented activity. Experiencing success at any level reinforces the success identity and the loop is completed.

The person with low self-esteem forms a failure identity which encourages success avoidance. Constantly reminded of the successes not pursued, the failure identity is reinforced, the behavior continues, and the loop is repeatedly re-played.

The person with modulating self-esteem, hovering around the mid-point of the continuum, has success-limited identity. Each success opportunity is perceived according to the limitations congruent with the individual's picture of him or herself, and success is approached or avoided accordingly. It is essential to note that opportunities not taken or missed are considered avoidance according to the well-known philosophy: "not to make a decision is a decision."

If, in fact, a person holding a failure identity were to pursue success, it could be so threatening to a consistent self-image that safety needs would be in dire jeopardy. The same is true for the individual with success-limited identity when s/he is beckoned beyond the boundaries of the familiar self.

Though self-consistency assures safety, and security is, therefore, appealing, every person indulges in a certain amount of risk-taking behavior where identity boundaries are challenged and expanded. Maslow (1970) suggests it may be at times where the order of needs is reversed for some reason. Perhaps it is best explained by situational changes in the level of self-esteem which
creates higher levels of safety and allows for new behavior to emerge. The loop can then be reformed and the best hope is that the reformation has a positive impact. This description is a basis for many psychotherapeutic approaches and, of course, is not outside the realm of possibility. Realistically, a fluid process is probably the more usual experience. The model I have presented focuses on behavior naturally connected to specific identity and does not take into account change interventions. As will be seen later in the text, it does have ramifications for individuals looking to change and for change-agents.

Below is a closer look at the model's components.

**Self-esteem**

... it is reasonable to assume that persons will generally seek confirmation or validation of their identities - at least their highly salient identities - by behaving in ways that elicit validating responses from others...self-esteem becomes tied to behaving in accord with salient identities (Stryker, 1980, p.64).

It is generally assumed that most people would not only prefer to incorporate high self-esteem into their self-images, but actively pursue that goal. This assumption is based on the notion that "positive is always better than negative". What it doesn't take into account is that a negative direction may be preferred for the sake of security based on familiarity, comfort, predictability, and habit. This was skillfully pointed out by Arthur Cohen (1968, in Gordon, p.383) when he said "self-esteem may be defined as the degree of correspondence between an individual's ideal and actual concepts of himself".
There is also the issue of locus of control. Coopersmith (1967) suggests that an individual's self-esteem partially relies on the belief that s/he has the power and ability to control life events. I contend that these events need not be necessarily positive. What is important here is that one has control over the outcome of the events. Thus, though failure is painful, it may be less threatening than finding oneself in an unfamiliar arena that is inconsistent with one's self-image.

As one youngster said when I spoke with him on his third visit to the state reform school,

"These bozos (counselors) keep telling me they want to help me raise my self-esteem. No way. It may be low but it's mine and ain't no one taking that away from me. They've taken everything else away. All I got left is what I think of myself. If I wanna think I'm shit, then I'm gonna think I'm shit. They can't make me nothin' I'm not."

Conversely, it is plausible that "since people with high self-esteem may protect themselves from negative self-evaluation and be less vulnerable to the impact of outside events, they may also be expected to be less affected by the communication of failure experiences and more responsive to success experiences than persons of low self-esteem" (Cohen, 1968 in Gordon, p.384).

Josie, whom I was called into the police station to help, had quite a different response from the previous young
man to a similar situation. "Look, I screwed up. I went along with those kids and stole all that stuff off the truck. But no way am I a delinquent. Yeah, I did it. But somebody with my grades and life just isn't a criminal. I'm still going to Dartmouth because that's where I belong."

Self-esteem, however it is derived, is in many ways synonymous with self-image. One aspect of that self-image is the part of identity that is related to success and failure.

Identity

Though I use the terms "self" and "identity" interchangeably, I do so with caution. It may be noted that I don't employ "ego" at all. I tend to agree with Erikson's (1950) notion that both "self" and "ego" employ only the internal aspect of personality. "Identity" is more inviting of social factors. Indeed, social factors do become internalized, and it is based on that that I utilize "self" as a concept at all.

Identity is defined as "the condition or fact of being the same...sameness; oneness...unity and persistence of personality". This condition is viewed both from within and by others. Its relationship to the word "identical" cannot be ignored. Certainly identities change as people grow and learn, but the tendency toward unity and congruity are undeniable.

As people develop, they increasingly integrate newly discovered aspects of the self. However, in order for there to be successful integration, there has to be enough similarity and compatibility to allow inclusion. As more of a past develops and
the concept of present and future are increasingly understood, a holistic sense emerges. I believe both time and commitment play roles in an individual's attachment to his or her identity. Along with increased sophistication comes better understanding which leads to, among other things, possessiveness and protectiveness of a holistic self-view. In addition, messages abound to support identity cohesion. Children and adults are constantly being reminded to "be yourself" and "act like you'.

Unity, consistency, and congruence do not imply simplicity. The symbolic interactionist view suggests that "...a complex, differentiated society requires a parallel view of self on theoretical grounds". Identity congruence and complexity are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, it is the complex nature that requires an organized system. Organization requires self-knowledge and self-knowledge helps one fit into society. The numbers of choices to be made daily are so vast that sense-of-self becomes the only reliable guide, particularly as age leads to independence and autonomy. There is a constant struggle for equilibrium which results from satisfactory integration.

The quest for integration is not as rigid as it sounds. There are many experiences that remain ancillary to the core identity. However, when experiential activity is essential to maintaining a unified personality, then that experience must be closely scrutinized for acceptance or rejection (Laarkin, 1987, p.42).

Success, Success-Limited, and Failure Identity

Self-identity is not re-established moment-by-moment. Despite changes, there is an underlying continuity over time.
Today I remember some of my thoughts of yesterday; and tomorrow I shall remember some of my thoughts of both yesterday and today; and I am subjectively certain that they are the thoughts of the same person (Allport, 1955, p.38).

(The self-image) helps us bring our view of the present into line with our view of the future (Allport, 1955, p.29).

The sense of ego identity...is the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for other (Erikson, 1968, p.197).

...'identity'...designates the pattern-maintenance code-system of the individual personality (Parsons, 1968 in Gordon, p. 20).

The above quotes all make a case for continuity and consistency in the area of identity. That notion is increasingly important as we become firmly committed to what Glasser (1975) calls an Identity Society. He suggests that we have moved from a society whose primary responsibility was to provide the basic securities of life to a new "role-dominated society". Personal fulfillment is now a part of daily struggle. Previously only a few people had the luxury to be concerned about their identities and worry about becoming identity failures. "Most people settled for security and hoped for limited fulfillment. The large numbers on the bottom (were just trying to survive)" (Glasser, 1975, p.38). Because we no longer need to be so anxious about focusing on survival, we now are more concerned with our independent roles, ie. identities. The goals we now strive for are vocational, avocational, and self-actualization which serve to reinforce our concepts of ourselves.
...if a person cannot develop an identity through the two pathways of love and self-worth, he attempts to do so through two other pathways, delinquency and withdrawal. Delinquency and withdrawal do lead to an identity, a failure identity. the more they are used, the more solid the failure identity becomes (Glasser, 1969, p.18).

My teachers in the area of failure identity have come from varied backgrounds. Many more than might be expected reside in the so-called "respectable positions" assigned to the middle-class. However, the crash courses on the subject were taken on the streets of south Philadelphia, in the drab dormitory rooms of reform schools, and behind bars at the state prison. Never were Glasser's notions more dramatically played out than in the following examples.

The leaders of a black gang decided they wanted to talk with me because they thought I could deliver a message to the city officials for whom they thought I worked (and I suppose ultimately I did, but the Welfare Department rarely acknowledged a direct connection). These guys didn't particularly see me as an important link but their families were in my caseload and I was "the only show in town". Their message is not the point here. It was their self-descriptions that remain a very clear memory.

Lamont, the Warlord, told me I needed to understand that they knew they were considered part of the "scum" of the city. They had decided that as long as they were seen as scum, they would act as scum. In fact, if it were not a
breach of confidentiality, I would disclose the gang's name which is a synonym for their description. Their actions did, indeed, fit the name. One of the boys articulated it something like this, "Hey, man - I had to drop out of school you know. This jacket don't go with carrying books around. Look, I was a good, church-goin' kid when I was little. But I was always bein' picked up by the cops for things I didn't do. So, hell, as long as I was gonna get in trouble I figured I might as well do them things. Hey - I break the law every day. Just livin' up to my reputation."

In society's terms stealing, fighting, and drugging are failure-acts. What this young man and many others told me was that failure identity was as sacred to them as success identity might be to others.

Kerry acquired her failure identity in a slightly different way. It happened that she looked very much like her mother who deserted the family shortly after Kerry's birth. Her father and paternal grandmother continually compared her to Mom who was graphically described as a "whore and a no-good tramp". I met Kerry when she was 14 and she had by then been sexually active for four years - the last two with paying customers. When asked if she was satisfied with her life-style, she answered with surprise, "I'm my mother. I have no choice. Being happy has nothing to do with it."
There are, of course, as many stories of youngsters being told they are wonderful and can accomplish anything they wish. Their success identities are no-doubt as solid as the failure identities just portrayed.

Success-limited identity is, however, where most people would place themselves; that is the area between success and failure identity. Depending where they are on the continuum, there are certain areas in which individuals put a cap on their abilities to succeed. Sometimes the limit is a realistic reflection of minimal talent, but often it is based on perception rather than a fact of competence. Society's messages help form those perceptions (Bem, 1970), for example when women are told that their level of achievement is expected to be below that of their male counterparts. Whatever the reason for the identity formation, I believe that those areas in which people experience success-limited identity are the areas in which they are most likely to avoid success if given the opportunity to achieve. Success-limited identity refers to the fact that there are levels of success above which people do not see themselves. As a result, they behave in accordance with their limited self-images.

It is tempting to view the middle area of any continuum as a catch-all for those that do not truly fit the model. This is not that ambiguous netherland. In describing personality traits, Allport (1931) made the point that actions inconsistent with a trait do not prove that the trait is non-existent. It only means that, under certain conditions, it is not manifest. Allport uses the example of
the neat person having certain areas of his or her life that appear quite messy. One can still characterize that individual as neat.

So it is true with the success-limited person. Depending on the circumstances, the inclination to limit one's success is more or less evident.

Additionally, success limitation may be as dichotomous a position as success approach or success failure. Identity may well be formed around areas of unlimited potential while holding areas of limited potential as equally important and viable. The youngster who is told that he or she is excellent at sports and destined to excel but will never achieve academically is in this category. S/he is likely to be strongly committed to approaching success in athletics while seeing him or herself as a permanent failure in school.

Fluctuation on the continuum would be the rule rather than the exception.

The "Imposter Phenomenon" is tied into the above concept.

The Imposter Phenomenon is...based on intense, secret feelings of fraudulence in the face of success and achievement. If you suffer from the Imposter Phenomenon, you believe that you don't deserve your success; you're a phony who has somehow 'gotten away with it'. You aren't the person you appear to be to the rest of the world (Harvey, 1984, p.2).

According to Harvey who coined the phrase "imposter phenomenon", "it is now believed that as many as 70 percent of all successful people have experienced feelings of being impostors or fakes at some point in relation to their work" (p.3). More studies
are required if that statement is to be scientifically credible, but it does remain a common theme often discussed among clinicians.

Interestingly, in 1981 Harvey also reported to the American Psychological Association that she did not consider the Imposter Phenomenon a female trait but that it was discovered in women first because they were more willing to admit to such feelings than men (my sentiments exactly about the larger issue of success avoidance). Harvey also states that though "often people who feel like impostors are afraid of failure...paradoxically, many of them can also unconsciously be afraid of success" (1984, p.159).

**Success Avoidance and Success Approach**

Whether we talk in terms of fear, suppression, or avoidance, we refer to not taking advantage of opportunities to succeed. Rather than pursuing success, the person avoids it. The process may be conscious or pre-conscious but, at some level, it is determined.

Success approach, in my opinion, is also determined. I'm reminded of attribution theory (McMahon, 1982; Harvey, 1984) which describes individuals attributing their success to luck or to something other than their own talent. Since I believe in the notion that luck is often the result of taking advantage of opportunity, I don't refer to success achievement. "Approach" implies a more intently chosen direction.

Approaching, or embracing, success is a commonly accepted state and seemingly within the norm. Avoiding success is somewhat more difficult to accept (Harvey & Katz, 1984). Consequently, we tend to refer to all the avoidance behavior as the
far more palatable "fear of failure" or "failure avoidance". Krueger says "the fear of failure (can be) a rationalized fear of success made consciously understandable" (1984 in Harvey, 1984, p.163). As both Krueger and Harvey point out, success avoidance is not necessarily synonymous with a "will to fail".

My proposed model requires that success approach and success avoidance be viewed at face value - as a behavior descriptor. I mean it to describe purposeful approach/avoidance activity.

Explanation of the Loop: Self As Model

I am of the opinion that the social environment provides a frame of reference that affects aspiration level. In other words, standards of success and failure are gleaned from the cultures and sub-cultures influencing individuals and those "at the top" are the role models for "those coming up". So-called failures also serve as models of "how-not-to-be" or negative role models. Levels of aspiration are often measured against the possibility of achieving or failing according to the standards of famous people, personal associations and/or arbitrary standards developed for motivational purposes.

The loop referred to in the above model indicates the use of "self-as-model". It is a concept that has fascinated me for some time and for which I cannot take credit. I heard about it first at a conference in Washington some fifteen years ago and have long forgotten the creator's name. It is, nevertheless, pertinent.

Example:

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Failure Identity  ---    Success Avoidance
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Every time a person acts in accord with her or his identity, s/he reinforces behavior upon which future action can be modeled. It probably explains why using other people as models works less often than it seemingly should. A teacher told me

"I keep telling Brian that there are lots of people who used to fail in school and who are now very successful. I even introduced him to a lawyer and policeman friend of mine who were just like him and now doing great. It doesn't seem to have an impact."

Brian, in fact, could not identify with the men because no one was as much like him as he was. In effect, he was his own best model. All he could see were the differences in others, which is not possible when using oneself for comparison. One's own actions and predispositions are often a better fit into perceived personality style than those of others. "Following one's own lead" is not only easier, it is understandable, familiar, and safe. The "loop" is the key to continuity.

**Safety Needs**

A need of an individual is something which is essential to his or her well being...(Samuels, 1984, p.17).

Maslow's (1937, 1970; Samuels, 1984) hierarchy of needs puts safety just above physiological needs as requiring satisfaction before the more sophisticated levels of belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization and cognitive/aesthetic/expressive needs are pursued. The safety needs include security; stability;
dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos; need for structure, order, law, and limits. Maslow believes that safety needs are so dominant that "they may serve as the almost exclusive organizers of behavior...we may...fairly describe the whole organism as a safety-seeking mechanism...(in fact)...practically everything looks less important than safety and protection" (Maslow, 1970, p.39).

We only need to observe children who are far more expressive of their need for safety (Maslow, 1970) to be reminded of how important security is to human existence. My entire model is predicated on the assumption that safety is paramount for people and an intact identity is essential to maintaining a secure foundation.

The needs approach is addressed in greater depth in the following chapter where the theory is explained. Suffice it to say, at this point, that I fully agree with Samuels when he states

There is no concept currently covered in social psychology texts which cannot be advantageously incorporated into the needs approach (1984, p.214).
CHAPTER VIII

THE PRINCIPLES OF SELF-CONSISTENCY THEORY APPLIED TO SUCCESS AVOIDANCE

To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
(Shakespeare)

If I were required to reduce my thesis to one statement it would be this:

Incorporated into identity is a level of success above which people do not imagine themselves: rather than threaten that identity, individuals limit their success and do not risk the internal consistency that is the basis of their security.4

In other words, familiarity meets the need for safety whereas change in image poses a threat. It follows that "need" helps explain motivation.

Maslow (1970) declares that to study motivation, we essentially must study human goals or desires or needs. He sees needs priority (the hierarchy) as "the chief principle of organization in human motivational life" (1970, p.59). Other theorists view motivation as a vehicle for reducing tension by

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4 In its simplicity, this statement neglects to qualify the causal links. In reality, the relationships are probably more a matter of degree and probability than the directness implies.
seeking equilibrium and homoeostasis (Allport, 1955; Cofer & Appley, 1964). Lecky (1961) saw motivation as synonymous with a striving for unity. However stated, needs theory emerges as an essential component of the issue focused on here: the motivation for reacting to success potential based on maintaining a congruent self-image. Samuels (1984, p.1) states that "...'need' is potentially one of the most useful concepts for explaining and predicting human behavior". As Maslow (1970) points out, higher needs, such as self-actualization, are far enough removed from sheer survival that their gratification can be postponed. The need for safety, however, is closer to the survival level and, therefore, requires gratification as soon as possible. If in engaging in that gratification, "people ... interfere with their own growth path and human potential" (Maslow, 1970, p.114), then so-be-it. He further states, what I have long believed, that one way to insure safety and stability is to seek the familiar rather than the unfamiliar and/or the known rather than the unknown (Maslow, 1970, 1937).

The quest for familiarity and fear of the unknown are, by far, the most common themes I have seen emerge in twenty-five years of working with people. The solutions of choice almost always emerge according to Festigner's (1957) notions of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance theory in essence claims that should there be conflicting cognitive elements - thoughts, perceptions, attitudes - in a person's mind, there will be a tendency toward resolving that conflict and thus returning the mind to a state of harmony (Samuels, 1984, p.215).
Balance and predictability are so important to people that they are apt to sacrifice seemingly rewarding experiences rather than risking the loss of comfort that familiarity provides. Tresemer (1977) suggests that when an individual transgresses his or her reference boundary, s/he attempts to return to a state of role congruence. "This is done to maintain consistency of one's image to oneself" (p. 48).

The Role of Threat and Loss

Early in his career Maslow (1941) put forth a "theory of threat" that though seldom alluded to in his later writings, aptly describes a number of situations including the focus of my work. He views threat to the personality as threat to the individual's goals, system of defense, self-esteem, and/or security.

The term "threat" is dramatic. I mean it to be so. In the same way people will justifiably defend themselves against material, personal, and physical loss - it makes sense that they will defend themselves against "loss of self".

Security emanates from certainty and certainty from the assurance that that which we need to function is intact. No one would question the desperate attempt of a person to save a limb, his or her eyesight, or liver. It is assumed that most every part of the body performs a necessary function. So it is with the parts of the personality. An outside observer may view some aspects of a person's personality as highly dysfunctional, but I firmly believe that all things people do and that all ways that they act are working for them or they wouldn't be doing it. When the balance shifts and they are convinced that alternative ways work better,
they are willing to shed what will then, and only then, seem dysfunctional. Put another way, behavior changes when the advantages of the new behavior outweigh the disadvantages of the old.

It is no wonder that there is such strong reaction to the loss of some aspect of identity, despite the convincing arguments of those that insist "life will be much better as a result". Alas, one's own arguments with self may be more convincing.

Loss is rarely easy, nor easily invited. One fear is that, once gone, whatever it is will be irretrievable. And like an old Teddy Bear, even that which is passé, overused, and out-of-date is difficult to give up.

Festinger, et al.(1956, 1958) suggest five conditions under which persons hold onto their beliefs despite evidence disputing them. Though their discussions revolve more around philosophical beliefs, it is highly pertinent to the topic of self-perception and identity belief systems.

To more easily understand Festinger, et al.'s proposal, I will use case studies to exemplify the relevance to success avoidance.

Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to this belief and that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it; finally suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? (Given the following conditions) the individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his belief than ever before...
Conditions:
1. A belief must be held with deep conviction and it must have some relevance to action, that is, to what the believer does or how he behaves.

  Katherine was so attached to her failure identity that almost her every action reflected that persona. She did poorly in school to the extent that she even attended; took drugs and alcohol daily; stole on a consistent basis; and where she succeeded (despite herself), engaged in immediate sabotage with such deliberation that it almost seemed as though she was obsessed with erasing anything positive from her record. One of the most dramatic examples was when a teacher told her she was smarter than she took credit for and Katherine hit her. That was the day I met Katherine. She was introduced to me by the police.

2. The person holding the belief must have committed himself to it, he must have taken some important action that is difficult to undo...the more important the action, the more difficult it is to undo, the greater the individual's commitment to the belief.

  Katherine's records, both in school and in the courts, were so thick that she would proudly say "they need file drawers of their own". Her attachment to the written records was legendary. She called them her "proof that I'm a bastard". When complimented, she was heard to
utter "just look at my record. That'll change your mind". Documentation was her security that her actions couldn't be denied or refuted. When positive happenings occurred, she would carefully choose an infraction whose importance matched the extent to which "good things loomed".

3. The belief must be sufficiently specific and sufficiently concerned with the real world so that events may unequivocally refute the belief.

Katherine named her failure identity - sometimes with profanity and always with undeniable specificity. The events that might have served to refute the belief were often equally undeniable: her helping a handicapped child up the stairs; scoring fairly high on achievement tests; attracting some adults (including me) who genuinely liked her despite her unlikable behavior.

4. Such undeniable disconformatory evidence must occur and must be recognized by the individuals holding the belief.

The evidence challenging Katherine's belief that failure was her reality and her destiny came at a consistent enough rate to be unsettling to her. Successes seeped in despite her best efforts to avoid them, and those of us committed to her stood firm.
(Numbers 1 and 2) give examples of conditions that will make the believer resistant to change. The second two would exert pressure to discard the belief unless then fifth condition exists.

5. The individual believer must have social support...

In addition to documented evidence, Katherine's parents and grandparents, and eventually her siblings, viewed her as a failure. They had scapegoated her from the time she was very little. Katherine was the only one of four children who was severely beaten, both physically and verbally. Social support for a belief system is never so strong as when it emanates from family. Of course, school, the justice system and acquaintances steadily joined in the negative perception. Those of us challenging her belief system stood little chance against the strong social support present in her community. There was no better example of the workings of Labeling Theory (Lemert, 1972) than in this case.

**Congruence and Self-Consistency**

We cannot completely understand what constitutes congruence for someone else (Allport, 1937). It explains why we are so often baffled by the behavior of others. Teachers and parents may be utterly frustrated and confused by a youngster's willful performance suppression because of their perception that s/he is of high ability. However, not even those closest to him or her may be privy to the constraints self-image and identity boundaries put on a particular behavior. To push through those
boundaries may mean risking the congruence necessary to that person's functioning. As Samuels (1984, p.19) points out, "(a) particular means toward satisfying a need may have a negative survival value, even though it may contribute to the well-being of an individual in a certain sense." What is necessary for a person's survival is often judged by outsiders based on "part of the picture". School officials look at educational goals while the physician focuses on the physical and parents on the behavioral. The expert (as misguided as s/he sometimes seems) on the whole person is the person himself or herself. It is the individual's perception of a situation (Lewin, 1935; Samuels, 1984), not the situation itself that is important.

Even as criticism abounds regarding how a person attempts to address the "whole" of his or her existence, unification (or the well-integrated personality) is equated with psychological health (Allport, 1937; Cofer & Appley, 1964; Gergen, 1968). It is for that reason, or possibly because of it, that western culture reinforces consistent behavior (Gergen, 1968). It is less taxing on the social environment if people are vigilant about protecting themselves from surprises. We depend on others to act in a consistent, predictable manner. Predictability helps insure interpersonal safety.

William James (1958) put it well when he differentiated between healthy people who maintained balanced and harmonious "inner constitutions", and "sick souls" whom he described as impulsive and internally incompatible.
Lecky (1961) describes the one overpowering motivation in life as maintaining the system or maintaining a personality whose ideas are organized and consistent with one another. He believed that an idea formed as a result of a new experience had to be consistent with the ideas already present; and when it is not, it is necessarily rejected. The rejection may take many forms. For instance, the person suffering from the afore-mentioned Impostor Phenomenon (Harvey, 1984) processes inconsistencies between his or her inner feelings and outer behavior by "equating the public image with falseness and the private image with truth" (p.105), i.e. by considering him or herself a fraud. From the sociological point of view, support is found in the work of George Herbert Mead II (Turner, 1981) in his suggestion that stable self-conception includes a perceptual field in which the self is viewed as a particular kind of object with stable attributes. Although situations may seem quite divergent, behaviors reflect responses that are consistent with one another. Some call it "habit" or predictable behavior or the formation of reaction patterns (Lecky, 1961). Whatever one calls it, it helps in assuring the organization of self and, thus, consistency. All this actually fits very well into a predominant American parenting style which encourages teaching youngsters to anticipate consequences in order to prevent the necessity of sudden adjustment due to unpredictability. There are, of course, problems when maintaining inner harmony conflicts with maintaining harmony within the environment (Lecky, 1961). This may be the basis for most of the disturbances within relationships.
Suffice it to say that people will go to great lengths to maintain self-consistency and as Lecky (1961, p.169) says, "...will seek those experiences which support (their) values and avoid, resist, or if necessary forcibly reject, those which are inconsistent with them".

Relationship To Success Avoidance

Avoidance and approach express nothing more than a change of spatial relations. It is not true that avoidance is the name for one mode of behavior and approach the name for another. Far from being mutually exclusive, either term applies to any line of movement. One observer may think of the subject as running away from danger, but another may see the same behavior as running toward security (Lecky, 1961, p.102).

Many would find it difficult to believe that a person would stop him or herself from realizing what, at least at the outset, looks like a positive outcome. But since identity diffusion or confusion is of grave consequence, something like success avoidance begins to make sense (Atkinson, 1978; Lecky, 1961; Gergen, 1968). Put another way, it is not really the fear of success, but the fear of change: the impetus for avoiding success is avoiding change.

The Principles of Self-Consistency As They Apply To Success Avoidance and Approach: Basic Propositions

• The higher a person's self-esteem, the higher the individual's chances of developing a success identity.
• The lower a person's self-esteem, the higher the individual's chances of developing a failure identity.
• The higher a person's self-esteem, the less the individual
perceives limitations on his or her success attainment. • The lower a person’s self-esteem, the more the individual perceives limitations on his or her success attainment. The self-esteem continuum is reflected in the positions chosen on the identity and success/failure continuum. Levels are chosen so that all three are compatible and reinforcing. • Self-esteem is inexorably connected to messages received during the socialization process. • Identity in areas of success and failure are formed, to a great extent, as a result of self-esteem levels. • To the extent those identities are solidified, they become familiar and integral parts of individual functioning and self-perception.

Of all the variables associated with self-esteem, early socialization plays a major role. Depending on messages received and perceived during the development of personality, identities are formed. The aspect of identity that is connected to success and failure form self-images that become close and dear to both heart and functioning. Even negative identities are coveted as they are the person’s own, unique self-descriptors and serve to develop a map for traveling through life.

• The familiarity of the identity dictates and reinforces behavior as well as self-perception.
• Self-perception is based on self-knowledge, and self-knowledge supports predictability of behavior.
• Self-knowledge is the funnel through which individuals make sense of the world, particularly responses of others to
self.

- Predictability and consistency provide gratification of safety needs.
- Safety needs are the foundation on which security is built. Safety is a paramount need for human beings; just above physiological needs if using Maslow's (1970) hierarchy. Because all facets of an individual's identity are integral parts of his or her self-image, security is developed and reinforced by consistency and a congruent identity.
- In order to insure ongoing security and safety, individuals behave in accord with their self-images.
- Self-image is identity and identity dictates behavior.
- Persons with a success identity approach success as it is the logical avenue of congruency which insures safety.
- Success approach reinforces success identity which encourages continuation of the loop.
- Persons with a failure identity avoid success as it is the logical avenue of congruence which will insure their safety.
- Success avoidance reinforces failure-identity which detracts from self-esteem, which encourages continuation of the loop.
- Persons with success-limited identity limit their success to varying degrees and at various times in accord with identity congruence, which insures their safety.
- Success-limitation reinforces success-limited identity which
enhances or detracts from self-esteem (depending on the circumstances), which encourages continuation of the loop.

From a place of security and safety, people are able to proceed with their lives, enjoying a certain degree of comfort.

In accordance with the theory, the following chart diagrams the process by which the person with low self-esteem experiences success avoidance. A similar diagram could be made for persons with fluctuating and high self-esteem.
Low self-esteem results from the socialization process

A high chance evolves of developing a perception that there are limitations on his or her ability to succeed.

Development of a failure identity takes place.

To the degree the failure identity is solidified, it becomes an integral part of the individual's functioning and self-image.

Behavior becomes predictably congruent with that self-perception.

Sense of the world depends on the congruence between the individual's behavior and internal self-image.

Familiarity with a consistent identity meets the safety needs of comfort and predictability and is reinforced.

Security results from internal/external congruence.

Behavior consistent with the self-image continues in order to reinforce security.

Success avoidance is the logical path of the person with failure identity.

Success avoidance reinforces the failure identity which reinforces low self-esteem which makes the loop complete and continuous.

Figure 8.1 Hypothesized Causal Sequence For People With Success Avoidance
Conclusion

Self-consistency theory does not negate that self-concept is also dynamic. The development process is continuous, new material is integrated all the time, and change is a fact of most people's lives. However, it is also true that to achieve harmony, assimilation is accomplished through a sense of orderliness. Purkey (1989, p.7) describes the quality of organization that is present in a way that supports my thesis:

*Self-concept requires consistency, stability and tends to resist change. If self-concept changed readily, the individual would lack a consistent and dependable personality.

*The more central a particular belief is to one's self-concept, the more resistant one is to changing that belief.

*At the heart of self-concept is the self-as doer, the 'I' which is distinct from the self-as-object, the various 'me's' This allow the person to reflect on past events, analyze present perceptions, and shape future experiences.

*Basic perceptions of oneself are quite stable, so change takes time. Rome was not built in a day, and neither is self-concept.

*Perceived success and failure impact on self-concept. Failure in a highly regarded area lowers evaluations in all other areas as well. Success in a prized area raises evaluations in other seemingly unrelated areas.
CHAPTER IX

IMPLICATIONS

At the outset I observed that success has been looked at in our culture as uniformly coveted and appealing. I have since made the point that not all people expect or want success as an outcome, particularly if it negates and throws into question their self-concepts.

The ramifications of the self-consistency theory are numerous. If, indeed, success sabotage is frequent among certain populations, and/or most people some of the time, then the approach of institutions and sub-institutions needs to be evaluated.

Education

Traditional education in America is set up on a reward/punishment system (punishment often being the absence of reward). Grades are the primary example. "As" and "Bs" and the honor roll or dean's list are offered as the ultimate reward. For a good many students, it works, though "the jury is still out" on whether there are better forms of encouragement. There are, however, a large number of students for whom the system is ineffective. The present common name for them is "at-risk students", those who do not comply with, try, or commit to the learning process. The most frequent response by educators to
these youngsters has been to increase both the rewards and the punishments. Still, so-called "failures" prevail.

I recently taught a series of one-credit courses for teachers and administrators in a masters' program at a mid-western college. The title of the class was "Success Avoidance: A New Way To Look At At-Risk Students." Nearly 100 people attended and they were frank in disclosing their frustrations around dealing with this population. They also reported the solutions attempted in their school districts. Without fail, the enticements were increased rewards or a long list of punishments including detention and suspension.

The "enticements" are not working. What they offer as the "carrot" is the chance of increased success. For those youngsters unable or unwilling to incorporate success into their self-descriptions, the solution becomes the problem. I heard repeated stories of the great lengths to which students go to engage in self-sabotage.

"As soon as Ricky gets a good grade he sets out to fail the next exam."

"The more I tell my low-functioning class they'll get better jobs if they graduate, the worse they do."

'Linda is lovely to be around when she's failing and perfectly awful when she's doing well."
Story after story had the same theme. The promise of or chance at success served as a deterrent to doing well.

The workable alternative is difficult to implement in a system where time and energy are at a premium. The ideal is to discover the parameters within which each student sees him or herself, let him or her know that those boundaries are understood, and help the youngster to fulfill his or her true potential without ignoring his or her need for safety. Identity and goal must be compatible to be acceptable. I don’t mean to infer that a person cannot move beyond that point, but the pace needs to reflect the rate at which identity can reform.

In deference to fairness, educational institutions have sought to treat all students the same. All students, like all adults, are not the same. If incentives are to work, they must be designed appropriately. Like designer clothes, designer incentives that fit the individual will have more appeal and will tend to be worn more often.

Counseling

There are few honest psychotherapists that would dispute the notion that one of the most perplexing times in the counseling process is when clients resist change. I had a professor in graduate school who believed that though clients come in saying they want to change, what they really want is reinforcement for staying the same.

Interestingly, one of the definitions of counselor or therapist is "change agent" meaning the catalyst for change. And, indeed, clients do usually enter the process by indicating that they want to
make one or more major changes in their approach to life. What, then, would prompt people to expend energy and a great deal of money to fight to stay the same? The answer lies in the discovery that we can't simply change one aspect of our behavior or thinking without it affecting the whole of us.

Does that mean declarations of wanting to change should be ignored or considered insincere? Of course not. What it does imply is that counselors may need to consider the value of "psychological-education." If clients are trusted and respected, and surely they ought to be, then they have a right to the therapist's knowledge base. There are trade-offs to changing which deserve to be acknowledged and addressed.

It was only after I was willing and able to discuss with addicts the loss associated with giving up an addiction that I saw any progress. Even the most devastating behavior has some value to the person engaging in it. Recognition that "giving up" a behavior and, in some cases, a consuming life-style, must be treated seriously, begins to increase the person's comfort level.

Further, if the counselor is energetically moving toward success while the client is resisting changing his or her identity, the client necessarily will experience loneliness and abandonment. Wanting to change is the first step. Having the courage to change may be another matter.
I have rarely seen clients who didn't know the solutions to their problems. Their reason for committing to therapy was to gain the strength to effect that solution.

Social Service Agencies

Help Lines refer callers to agencies to successfully emancipate them from their present plight. It is exactly what they should be doing. I am not suggesting that helping professionals should be encouraging people to accept less than happy existences. However, to be consistently baffled by those who ultimately refuse help in order to return to their previous circumstance is to deny that chosen roads do not always reflect upward (or outward) mobility.

Are support people and systems responsible for supporting identities that are seemingly destructive, unattractive, and/or failure-oriented? The answer is "no". In the same way that people are entitled to choose their destinies (to the extent choice is available), professionals are entitled to choose where they will put their energies.

Suicidal individuals will often put forth a complicated challenge. "Don't I have the right to take my life and shouldn't you respect that?" Nothing caused me more conflict in my career as a therapist. After much struggle, I was able to answer the challenge. "Yes, you have the right to take your life, but I have the obligation not to assist you in that effort." I made it clear that I was in the business of helping people enhance their lives, not end them. I was not the person to call for suicide assistance.
Thus, I assumed that when I did get a call, despite statements to the contrary, the person was asking for support in finding a way to continue living.

Social service agencies whose missions are well-defined operate from a place of clarity. If clarity exists, they need not ruminate about being able to help everyone (though they certainly can lend their expertise to helping other organizations develop to fill the gaps).

Once again, believing everyone can or should be helped by one's organization is operating under the assumption that the organizational goals are universal. Success, enhancement, betterment, and improvement are important aspects of social service, but need not be totally shared to be viable.

**Employee Motivation**

More complicated than trying to reach individually set goals is the challenge to achieve a level of success set by others. Incentive programs in the workplace have become extremely sophisticated and the "buzz word" for the 80s and 90s is "motivation"...motivation geared at personal and, ultimately, company success.

If it were simply a matter of teaching technique then it would be a fairly easy task. However, big and small businesses spend enormous resources directed at motivating their employees to use the available techniques. The explanation for declining morale is most often put in terms of "fear of failure". The assumption is that if people were guaranteed success they would naturally be self-motivated.
Despite the general acceptance of the Peter Principle (Peter, 1969), defined as a reluctance to rise above one's level of competence, there has been the feeling that it is a principle applicable to just a few. "Competence" has become the key concept. But what about the competent person who doesn't want to rise? Is it mere laziness or is laziness sometimes the excuse for maintaining the status quo and remaining in a place of familiarity? The absence of success avoidance concerns in motivational literature is startling. It appears in the psychological sections of bookstores, but the increasing numbers of books dedicated to "getting ahead" neglect the issue almost entirely. Peters who wrote In Search of Excellence (1982) and A Passion For Excellence (1985) articulates the position of motivational material in a sentence (1982, p.55). "All of us are self-centered, suckers for a bit of praise, and generally like to think of ourselves as winners." If that is so, then why doesn't everybody react positively to praise and then pursue winning?

The fact that "how to motivate" books abound is testimony to their necessity. Perhaps rethinking the "bottom line" is in order. For some folks, "losing" at one level is "winning" at another. The fact that success avoidance is not discussed or even mentioned delivers the message that it doesn't exist. People who understand the phenomenon in themselves tell me that they rarely, if ever, talk about it because they think they, alone, have the problem.

It is presumptuous to motivate based on the belief that everyone shares a similar goal and that their success and the success of the company are intertwined and of high priority.
Advertising

So many advertisements are based on the assumption that promise of success sells products because everybody wants success. It has been an accepted notion that big homes, large cars, fancy clothes, and powerful people sell products because those manifestations reflect the public's dreams. The "home of the free and the brave" has been translated into the "home of the powerful and performance-oriented".

It has also been assumed that people who do not follow this road do not because of limited opportunity, not lack of wanting. The constant barrage of "you can arrive here too" if you use such and such a product does not take into account that at least part of the population would use exactly that as a reason not to buy the product.

The argument can be made that "advertising reflects society so it must be right". Advertising reflects the views its creators and sponsors have of society. Projecting their quest for success is a natural response. It is similar to evangelizing about a good book: it's hard to imagine others not liking it.

Re-examination is in order.

Law and Correctional Institutions

Without going into the deterrence literature, I will speculate on the reason some people break laws to get caught. Law enforcement officials all have their stories about the "obvious crime" - "it's almost as though s/he did it in full view or left so many clues in order to be apprehended". Once sentenced, it may
be these same individuals who attempt escape two weeks before parole in order to lengthen their sentences.

Social psychologists refer to the latter as a response to institutionalization, a syndrome which emanates from excessive dependence on the institution. Goffman (1961) takes it further when he talks about hospital patients converting to the hospital's view of them as sick and requiring their incarceration. But what of the person whose identity places him or her comfortably in the situation of breaking laws and ultimately being incarcerated prior to institutionalization?

George helped define recidivism. From the time he was 11 years of age he had been incarcerated more often than not. I met him when he was 32 and nearing the end of the last of many jail terms. When I asked him his plans, he said, "oh, I'll get a job, screw around, do a B & E, and come back here." I reminded him that he purported to hate prison. "I do. What's that have to do with it? Some people hate the suburbs, but they know it's where they belong. This where I belong. I'm a criminal. It's me. I know how to do it.

The law enforcement community was George's vehicle for playing out his identity. He used it the way priests use the church, CEOs use big business, and baseball players use Yankee Stadium. It was an arena for solidifying a self-concept to which he was very much attached by the age of 10 (according to his own description).
What may be deterrence for most, is an invitation for some. If those in criminal justice purport to care about recidivism, criminal identity cannot be ignored.

**Medical Profession**

Health has long been accepted as a universal goal, despite the fact that illness-identity is not uncommon for reasons spanning labeling and secondary gain, to providing a vehicle to reach self-defined and important goals.

Once again, people in the medical field should not be expected to enable illness, but they should be educated in the area of health avoidance. Professional schools are sorely lacking in all areas of social-psychological learning, to be sure, but if altruism isn't enough reason to institute it then perhaps cost/effective arguments will be more appealing.

Time and money spent in treatment, to the exclusion of understanding and teaching, insures a certain percentage of waste. It cannot be assumed that all people crave optimum health and view themselves as deserving of it. If it were so, cigarettes, alcohol, and legal and illegal drugs would have a far reduced market.

There has been a fairly successful attempt in this country to become a health-oriented society. Individuals have incorporated that value into their identities in seemingly record numbers. Those who have not may not have found a point of integration and many have not even tried. If behavior reflects identity and identity behavior, then those who have not embraced a health-orientation are not assimilating the message.
If there were an easy example of success avoidance it would be in the area of self-destructive behavior leading to ill-health. What is a mystery is that the notion still remains a surprise...perhaps even an out-and-out refusal to believe it.

**Parenting**

Assuming most parents want "the best for their children" and assuming, to some small extent, there is a chance of seeing those children objectively, the concept of success avoidance needs to be employed periodically.

"Why?" is the question most asked in parenting-help groups. "Why does she only strive for second best?" "Why do they act in ways that complicate their lives and make people upset with them?" "Why doesn't he take advantage of his talent?" "Why won't she try?"

The dilemma is as much the shock of not understanding one's children as it is the presenting problem. Parents can't imagine being so close to someone and know him or her so little. It is a prime example of the impossibility of fully appreciating so personal, so complicated, and so dynamic a mechanism as self-concept. Again, it is a matter of trust - trusting that reasons do exist for behavior and that those reasons are viable, strong and, to some extent, entrenched.

The ramifications for parenting are profound: parents cannot assume they know their children intimately enough to completely understand and predict the course of their lives. This is surely a frightening thought. However, the greatest respect that can be offered children, and anyone else for that matter, is the
acknowledgement that they have expertise in self-understanding. If we want to know others - truly know them- we must learn from them and at the same time expect whatever information is communicated will only be a fraction of the "story". Relevant to my theory, the most obvious place of input for parents is for them to raise their children in a way that supports the development of high self-esteem. Where self-esteem is low, it becomes a matter of learning from the children about their self-images in relationship to failure and success. With understanding and a collaborative effort, behavior becomes explainable and efforts to help more easily defined.

Recommendations For Research

The self-consistency theory as applied to success avoidance suggests attention should be paid to the importance that maintaining identity congruence plays in success path decisions. Rationally and experientially the theory has significant implications for understanding the tendency toward success avoidance, but practical application awaits research findings on a number of levels, in a variety of areas, with a broad population.

The relationship between identity and success path will be better understood when a sophisticated measure of success avoidance is developed and an interview protocol is established.

In my opinion, both quantitative and qualitative studies, with males and females, at various age levels, in a variety of circumstances, are necessary. Although it is imperative that priority be given to the measurement agenda, much can be gleaned from in-depth interviews with people who identify
themselves as success avoiders. By advertising for subjects, the researcher need not worry about bringing his or her own judgement to the project. Those subjects who volunteer to be interviewed will essentially be defining success for themselves and identifying their own behavior as avoidance.

The major differences between my theory and Horner's would be best researched in a longitudinal study measuring self-esteem in childhood and success avoidance at various life stages.

The rich data resulting from such a field study should provide the material needed to develop a more objective measure that will be useful on a broader basis with larger samples. Naturally, age and culturally appropriate versions are required.

I reiterate that the objective measure should not be used exclusively, but in conjunction with a qualitative approach. The major differences between my theory and Horner's would be best researched in a longitudinal study, measuring self-esteem in childhood and/or adolescence and success avoidance at various life stages.

Once the proper research techniques are perfected, the theory of self-esteem/self-consistency can be tested. If it proves to be viable, the research agenda should be expanded to include the philosophy and approaches of institutions in order to discover whether they are in sync or at cross-purposes with the populations they serve.

**Discussion**

Maintaining a stable identity through organization and selective perception wards off threat to what Rosenberg (1981 in
Rosenberg and Turner, p.611) refers to as the individual's self-hypothesis. Conversely, individuals affect the society in which they live according to how they play out their identities.

Much of what men do voluntarily depends upon what they conceive themselves to be. Each takes his personal identity so much for granted that he does not realize the extent to which his life is structured by the working conception he forms of himself. The things that a man does voluntarily, and even...involuntarily, depend upon the assumption he makes about the kind of person he is and the way in which he fits into the scheme of things in his world (Shibutani, 1961, p.214-15).

The issue of success-avoidance and identity consistency is one example of many that support the above notion and is, in turn, supported by it. Both society and individuals are best served by understanding motivation and empathizing with and respecting the various social-psychological processes that influence personal and group life. It is not always easy to assimilate. Resistance to change is not the special purview of the population-at-large. I have found great difficulty in accepting what I, myself, have written and concluded. I am, after all, committed to the notion that "change is really the only constant". And I, like so many, adhered to the theory that believing in that philosophy would somehow insure that it would happen with some ease. Ironically, I find internalizing what I have written here (and come to agree with) is extremely difficult because it requires cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change on my part. I find myself resistant. Perhaps I have proved my theoretical point.
APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT BEST REFLECTS YOUR ANSWER TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. IF THE QUESTION IS NOT APPLICABLE, DO NOT ANSWER IT.

1. AGE
   0  Under 20
   1  20 - 23
   2  23 - 25
   3  26 - 28
   4  Above 28

2. SEX
   0  Male
   1  Female

3. WHAT IS YOUR ACADEMIC YEAR?
   0  Not matriculated
   1  Freshman or sophomore
   2  Junior
   3  Senior
   4  Graduate Student

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4. WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL GRADE POINT AVERAGE?

0  Below 2.0
1  2.1 - 2.5
2  2.6 - 3.0
3  3.1 - 3.5
4  3.5 - 4.0

5. HOW MUCH EDUCATION WOULD YOU EVENTUALLY LIKE TO COMPLETE?

0  High School Degree
1  Associates Degree
2  Bachelors Degree
3  Masters Degree
4  Doctoral Degree

6. WHAT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED BY YOUR FATHER (OR STEP FATHER)?

0  Completed Grade School
1  Completed High School
2  Completed High School and also had other training but not college
3  Completed College
4  Graduate Degree
7. WHICH CATEGORY BEST FITS OR FITTED YOUR FATHER'S PRIMARY OCCUPATION?

0  Semiskilled or unskilled worker
1  Skilled worker or supervisor
2  Clerical or sales person
3  Proprietor of own business
4  Professional

8. WHAT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED BY YOUR MOTHER (OR STEP MOTHER)?

0  Completed Grade School
1  Completed High School
2  Completed High School and also had other training, but not college
3  Completed College
4  Graduate Degree

9. WHICH CATEGORY BEST FITS OR FITTED YOUR MOTHER'S PRIMARY OCCUPATION?

0  Semiskilled or unskilled worker
1  Skilled worker or supervisor
2  Clerical or sales person
3  Proprietor of own business
4  Professional
10. HOW CERTAIN ARE YOU THAT YOU CAN BE WHATEVER YOU WANT TO BE?

4  Very likely
3  Likely
2  50-50 Chance
1  Unlikely
0  Very unlikely

11. WHAT JOB(S) DO YOU CONSIDER REFLECTIONS OF SUCCESS?

12. ARE YOU LIKELY TO STUDY FOR AN EXAM

2  ahead of time
1  at the last minute and it works
0  at the last minute and it does not work

13. ARE YOU MOST COMFORTABLE TELLING YOUR FRIENDS YOU HAVE A GRADE OF

4  A
3  B
2  C
1  D
0  F

14. ARE YOU HAPPY WITH A GRADE AVERAGE OF
15. IF YOU ARE A SUCCESS, YOU WILL HAVE
   2    more friends
   1    the same number of friends
   0    less friends

16. WHAT JOB(S) WOULD YOU LIKE TO HOLD IN THE FUTURE?

17. FAILURE IS SOMETHING YOU
   0    fear
   1    don't worry about

18. WOULD YOU RATHER BE A
   1    leader
   0    follower

19. IS RECOGNITION SOMETHING YOU WOULD
   1    like
   0    not like

20. IF YOU GOT AN AWARD, WOULD YOU BE
   2    happy
   1    embarrassed
   0    not caring

21. IF GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE, WOULD YOU BE MOST LIKELY TO
   1    take it
   0    refuse it
22. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO YOU TO DO WELL?
   2   very
   1   fairly important
   0   unimportant

23. DO YOU ENJOY COMPETITION?
   2   very much
   1   some
   0   not at all

24. IN COMPETITIVE SITUATIONS, ARE YOU
   2   comfortable
   1   fairly comfortable
   0   uncomfortable

25. SUCCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT ARE
   0   threatening
   1   nonthreatening

26. FAILURE IS
   0   threatening
   1   nonthreatening

27. WHICH IS EASIER?
   1   success
   0   failure

28. SUCCESS HAS MORE
   1   positives
   0   negatives
29. FAILURE HAS MORE
   0  positives
   1  negatives

30. DO YOU THINK YOU WILL BE
   4  highly successful
   3  moderately successful
   2  average
   1  moderately unsuccessful
   0  unsuccessful

31. DO YOU IMAGINE YOU HAVE A
   2  high I.Q.
   1  average I.Q.
   0  low I.Q.

32. HOW VISIBLE (NOTICED BY OTHERS) DO YOU LIKE TO BE?
   4  highly visible
   3  moderately visible
   2  average
   1  moderately not visible
   0  not visible at all

33. WHAT OCCUPATION WOULD YOUR PARENTS LIKE TO HAVE?

34. WHAT OCCUPATION WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE?
HERE ARE SOME STATEMENTS THAT DESCRIBE PEOPLE AND THEIR ATTITUDES.
PLEASE CIRCLE A NUMBER FOR EACH OF THEM TO SHOW HOW OFTEN IT APPLIES TO YOU.

0 = NEVER
1 = OCCASIONALLY
2 = OFTEN
3 = VERY OFTEN
4 = ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS

35. I try to meet my own standards in things I do. 0 1 2 3 4
36. I am ambitious and work hard to get ahead. 0 1 2 3 4
37. I have a positive attitudes toward myself. 0 1 2 3 4
38. I feel that I am a person of worth - at least the equal of others. 0 1 2 3 4

HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO DO THE FOLLOWING? PLEASE CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER.

0 = UNLIKELY
1 = SOMETIMES LIKELY
2 = VERY LIKELY

39. Have a chance to go out with someone you want to date but not go. 0 1 2
40. Go to a movie with friends when you really need to study for an exam the next day. 0 1 2
41. Not do an extra credit project when you know it will make your grade higher. 0 1 2
42. Keep an achievement a secret from family or friends. 0 1 2
43. Refuse an offer of a job or promotion that would be good for you. 0 1 2
44. Not run for office of an organization when you have a good chance of winning. 0 1 2
45. Not apply for a position that you have a good chance of obtaining. 0 1 2
46. Avoid publicity, even for something positive. 0 1 2

EVERYONE GETS INTO CONFLICTS WITH OTHER PEOPLE AND SOMETIMES THESE LEAD TO PHYSICAL BLOWS SUCH AS HITTING REALLY HARD, KICKING, PUNCHING, STABBING, THROWING SOMEONE DOWN, ETC.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ASK ABOUT HOW OFTEN THESE THINGS HAPPENED TO YOU, AND HOW OFTEN YOU SAW THEM HAPPEN TO OTHERS WHEN YOU WERE AROUND 12 OR 13 YEARS OF AGE.

PLEASE CIRCLE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH STATEMENT USING THIS KEY:

\[ \begin{align*}
0 &= \text{NEVER} \\
1 &= \text{ONCE DURING THAT TIME} \\
2 &= \text{TWO OR THREE TIMES DURING THAT TIME} \\
3 &= \text{ONCE A MONTH OR LESS} \\
4 &= \text{MORE THAN ONCE A MONTH}
\end{align*} \]

47. One of my siblings did this to me. 0 1 2 3 4
48. A sibling did this to another sibling. 0 1 2 3 4
49. I did this to a sibling. 0 1 2 3 4
50. My father did this to me. 0 1 2 3 4
51. My father did this to my sibling. 0 1 2 3 4
52. I did this to my father.
53. My mother did this to me.
54. My mother did this to my sibling.
55. I did this to my mother.
56. My father did this to my mother.
57. My mother did this to my father.
References


