

Exploring Patterns of Achievement and Intellectual Development Among Academically Successful Women from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

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In a mixed methods study, the educational experiences of 21 women who were academically successful and disadvantaged as children were explored. The participants' achievement and development patterns are described, and information about encouraging resiliency among students from disadvantaged backgrounds is provided. It was concluded from this study that resilient women who had endured stress as children often developed a highly advanced level of "emotional intelligence" or "interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence." When this emotional intelligence was encouraged the women's academic performance improved.

Gilligan (1982) suggested that in the past developmental theory accounted for male, but not necessarily female development. She claimed that developmental theory identified the stages of growth toward autonomy and ignored the ability to care, share, and create community. Gilligan and many other researchers have argued that critical voices such as those of women, people with varying ethnic backgrounds, and persons belonging to different socioeconomic classes, were missing in the traditional theory base (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Ross-Gordon, 1991).

Chodorow (1974), a leading scholar on women's development, observed that during early socialization "feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does." She suggested that the concept of "being" is central to women because they are the primary socializers and nurturers of children; in comparison, "doing" is primary within men's lives because of the centrality of their work roles.

According to Caffarella and Olson (1993), women's development is characterized by multiple patterns, role discontinuities, and a need to maintain a "fluid" sense of self. The importance of relationships and sense of connectedness to others is central to the overall developmental process throughout women's life spans.

Past research supports the theory that women develop differently than men. The literature suggests that differences between men and women are associated with the idea that women's development is grounded in attachment and affiliation, rather than separateness and autonomy (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Ross-Gordon, 1991).

RESILIENCY

Psychologists often use the term "resiliency" to describe people who function at a high level after experiencing numerous stressors. The disagreement centers on what constitutes stress and on how to measure function. For example, a psychologist may describe a person as resilient if he or she had a psychotic parent and later in life has functional relationships. In this study, resiliency was associated with educational success; however, success can be measured in many other ways.

The idea that some children may adapt to disadvantage in a way that could positively affect ability is not new. Carroll (1940) suggested that low socioeconomic status helped to develop ability. He claimed that many people born in a low socioeconomic level owed their later success to that fact. Many believe Carroll's view was anecdotally supported, but the more widely accepted thesis, based on research evidence, was

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that low status obscures ability and prevents the full development of human potential.

The articles written many years ago about the abilities of disadvantaged children were often offensive, suggesting that disadvantaged children (who at that time were identified almost exclusively as Black children) were really not as incompetent as prejudiced descriptions would suggest. The current study was based on very different assumptions. The women who were interviewed were quite successful. Over half of the participants had doctoral degrees and many were graduates who held prestigious positions in their fields.

DEFINING INTERPERSONAL AND INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE

Gardner (1983) described interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence as access to one's "feeling-life" as well as the ability to discriminate among these feelings. According to Gardner:

In its most primitive form, the intrapersonal intelligence amounts to little more than the capacity to distinguish a feeling of pleasure from one of pain and, on the basis of such discrimination, to become more involved in or to withdraw from a situation. At its most advanced level, intrapersonal knowledge allows one to detect and to symbolize complex and highly differentiated sets of feelings. The other personal intelligence turns outward, to other individuals. The core capacity here is the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions. Examined in its most elementary form, the interpersonal intelligence entails the capacity of the young child to discriminate among the individuals around him and to detect their various moods. In an advanced form, interpersonal knowledge permits a skilled adult to read the intentions and desires—even when these have been hidden—of many other individuals and, potentially, to act upon this knowledge. (p. 239)

Goleman (1995) described a similar concept he called "emotional intelligence." According to Goleman, emotional intelligence includes self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal, self-motivation, empathy, and social deftness. Goleman (1995) and Gardner (1983) both have argued that the traditional view of intelligence is too narrow and ignores a crucial range of abilities that matter immensely in terms of how people achieve.

This article is the result of a two-year study to explore the experiences of academically successful women who were disadvantaged as children. The overall goal of the study was to understand how the education system assisted these women in their achievement as well as constructed barriers to their progress. The main goal of this article is to describe the participants' achievement and development patterns. Another goal is to provide information about how educators can recognize and encourage resiliency among women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

METHODS

Description of Participants

Twenty-one women were recruited for this study. To recruit participants, fliers were hung on bulletin boards at three universities in the San Francisco Bay area. Women were considered resilient if they had obtained graduate degrees or completed two years of graduate school and were disadvantaged as children. To qualify as disadvantaged, the participants had to have had these experiences:

- a) They lived in either a poor working class or lower class family as a child.
- b) They were first generation college students.
- c) They experienced at least one type of familial dysfunction or traumatic childhood stress (physical, or sexual abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse or mental illness, severe illness, death of a parent, etc.).

Twelve of the 21 participants had doctoral degrees; others had Master's degrees. Participants came from social science, biological

science, humanities and business backgrounds. These women attended many different type of universities including small liberal arts colleges, expensive private universities, state universities and junior colleges.

Seventeen participants were white, 2 were Hispanic and 2 were AfricanAmerican. Of the white women, 3 described themselves as disabled at the time of the study or in the past. Also, one woman was Jewish and her father had emigrated from Israel and another participant had emigrated from Germany as an adult. Finally, one woman identified herself as a lesbian. The participants ages ranged from 24 to 54 years. Six were in their 20's, 11 were in their 30's, 3 were in their 40's and 1 was in her 50's.

Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected in three ways: interviews, questionnaires and historical records. Information from one data source was used to enrich information provided from other sources. In-depth personal interviews, lasting from 2 to 4 hours, provided information about the educational experiences of each participant. The interviews were open-ended so participants could discuss the important aspects of their lives and educational experiences. The data were coded according to the transcript number, page number and line number.

After the interview, each participant completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire provided the participants with a second opportunity to express their attitudes about their education, but in a different format. The questionnaire was developed before the pilot study and then was revised in light of the results. The questionnaire consisted of 42 questions which participants responded to using a Likert-type scale (1 = *yes*, 2 = *somewhat*, 3 = *no*).

Finally, historical records were used as a third means of data collection. Participants were asked to sign a letter granting me permission to send for their transcripts from high schools, colleges, and graduate schools. These documents provided information about grades, patterns of attendance, dropping and retaking of classes, patterns of grades in certain areas, test scores, colleges where the candidates had applied for

admission, extracurricular activities, number of meetings with counselors, parents' jobs, and other relevant information.

At the end of the interview, some of the women expressed concern that they might have omitted important information. For this reason, they were encouraged to call and continue the conversations by phone, set up a follow-up interview, or send back a follow-up additional information sheets which including 4 questions that asked for open-ended answers regarding their experiences. Space was left after each question to provide for essay-type answers. Ultimately, 2 women asked for follow-up interviews; one was conducted on the phone and one was conducted in person. Also, 6 women completed additional information sheets and 50% of the women sent feedback after reading the results of the final report. The final report was distributed to all participants to check to see if the women's voices were represented accurately.

Rigor

To verify the credibility of this study, the women were given a copy of eight chapters of the final report (including research design, description of the participants, five chapters of results, and the rigor section) and asked to provide feedback on whether or not the results accurately reflected their voices. None of the women claimed that the report misrepresented their voices. In fact, the 11 women who did provide feedback were positive and enthusiastic about the results.

In addition, a chart provided a visual representation of the number of quotes used from each participant as evidence in each section of each chapter. In this way, it was possible to check that the researcher was considering all the women's voices, as opposed to only a few. As was indicated in the Methods section, the interview data were cross-checked with information provided in the questionnaires and in other historical documentation (transcripts). To check my interpretations of the women's interviews, two outside observers assessed the interpretations. These two observers read the analysis and determined that consistent analysis and interpretations were presented.

RESULTS

Patterns of Intellectual Development

The participants developed essential skills, expertise, and interests in certain areas yet lacked basic knowledge in more traditional areas. By the time these women were in graduate school they wanted to be free to explore their intellectual curiosity as well as make decisions about what they needed to know. They not only wanted some academic freedom, they considered academic requirements useless and frustrating. This attitude has been identified as a symptom of a lower level of adult development (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). However, this study revealed that rejecting requirements might not represent a lower developmental level, but instead could represent rebellion. The women in this study were able to produce according to traditional standards, but in many cases they were hesitant because they felt doing so invalidated their style of expression. Most of the participants in this study could have easily connected their thinking with the traditional ways of thinking, but many refused because they found traditional methods mind-numbingly simple, providing little opportunity for originality or voice.

Harvard was the first time that I had done school for the sake of thinking. Until then, I had done school for the sake of graduating. And now I'm back in the position of doing things for the sake of getting done, for meeting other people's expectations and requirements and it's something I've never been good at.

In graduate school, I feel very much like I got the chance to find my own voice, which I still struggle with because I see succeeding in an academic setting as playing the game. There's a part of me that plays the game, that knows how to play the game. I learn what they want, and I do it.

Basic Skills Emphasis

The analysis of these women's educational progress suggests that their teachers attempted to teach them basic skills first, such as how to express themselves, how to calculate mathe-

matical equations and how to use proper grammar. Later, they were expected to reflect and connect their knowledge to specific situations. Many of the women in this study showed signs that they had highly advanced levels of thinking at a very young age and were bored with the basic skills curriculum.

The biggest contrast for me as a kid was going from what was done in America to what I faced in the Jesuit schools overseas. Overseas it was challenging. You had to write all the time, you had to defend everything. You had to cite your sources. You were expected to be a scholar. You didn't go to school, you were a scholar. I mean it's a whole different orientation than in the United States.

As a result, they often believed that they had something to offer but that no one recognized their talents. As one participant said:

I know so many women who have always wanted someone to say, "I can tell you're gifted, and I want you to stay in my class because you're really good in this particular area." I know so many women who have wanted that to happen. They all have this seed of awareness that they've got something really great to offer, they just don't know which direction to go. I never had someone initiate that type of support. I had a couple of people that I sort of poked at enough and they finally helped me work things out, that kind of thing.

However, when asked what they had to offer, many participants were unsure; some claimed to be good writers, others said they are empathic, and still others claimed they could relate concepts to specific situations. These descriptions were partial, not fully developed. In the following example, the participant talked about her ability to use her "talent" to compensate for her lack of skills. This is a highly articulate woman with a Ph.D. who is now conducting research at a prestigious university. Still, her description is vague as she compares "talent" and "skills."

I know the respects in which I'm exceptional, and the things that I've been able

to do, I don't think most people could do, because I've substituted talent for lack of skills that I should have had. And not everybody's going to be able to do that. So they've got to get the skills.

Participants expressed anger at poor evaluation methods and rebelled when educators focused on "basic skills." Many of the participants considered basic skills trivial details that had held them back. They experienced standardized tests and other forms of traditional evaluation methods as a way for "the other" to force them to develop and adapt according to traditional expectations and beliefs. These women experienced basic skills training as a process of jumping through hoops. Because participants felt that they had jumped through more hoops than others, they had less patience for what they perceived as arbitrary barriers. They became resentful that educators could not see beyond superficial evaluation methods used to classify them on the basis of trivial details rather than on the depth of their ideas. At times, they perceived their professors as lacking intelligence. This was especially true when professors provided feedback that the participants considered trivial (e.g., "this paper is not APA format"). This perception has been documented in similar studies. For example, Clinchy, Belenky, Goldberger, and Tarule (1985) described a nontraditional student whose standards conflicted with the teacher's:

When the student wrote out of her own experience, she felt she knew what she was talking about, but the teacher felt the paper wasn't about anything. When she pasted together a mess of undigested secondhand information, he was satisfied. (p. 34)

Critical Thinking

Basic skills are not trivial; they are important for creative thinking. Taylor (1990) believes that the learner's ability to become aware of the problems and gaps in information is critical, but the ability to produce alternative solutions and evaluate those solutions, are based on knowing basic concepts. The results of this study suggest that

at a very young age the women who were interviewed may have developed a higher level of emotional intelligence as described by Goleman (1995) or a higher level of inter and intrapersonal intelligence as described by Gardner (1983). Another way to view this finding is that these women had a higher level of critical thinking as described by Taylor (1990). In her description of the connection between critical thinking and creative thinking, Taylor claimed:

Of utmost importance to critical thinking is organization. Organization helps the learner gather a full and comprehensive picture of the problem—bits and pieces are pulled together. The learner is able to go beyond the given and develop new insights about the problem. Thinking is stimulated and many alternative responses are offered for solutions to issues and events. Critical thinking encourages the learner to seek the missing link in information. While the learner uses critical thinking to explore ideas and concepts, creative thinking is used to produce ideas and concepts. Ultimately, a person becomes aware of a problem, the difficulty or gaps in information for which there is no learned response; formulates, hypothesizes and searches for possible solutions from ones' own past experience; evaluates, modifies, tests and retests these possible solutions and communicates the results to others. (p. 2)

Taylor (1990) claimed that critical thinking requires individuals to examine information reflectively and introspectively. In this study, the women's ability to think critically resulted from the need to adapt to difficult environments. One participant said:

At the same time, my disadvantages have made me a far more confident, more mature, more responsible, more motivated, even more self-actualized. I also think, I am more articulate and more able to look retrospectively at what has gone on and pick it apart. I can do all those things, and I can do all those things because really bad things happened to me growing up. So in

one respect they've probably been a benefit, but you could never look at your father's near death and getting off the school bus at a hospital every day as a benefit.

The reason their abilities go unnoticed is because they do not always communicate their ideas well. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the participants felt more comfortable in Ivy League (or other prestigious universities) than they did at less prestigious schools. Those participants who attended Ivy League schools not only believed they were treated with more respect but also reported having connected intellectually with the academic expectations of the school. The participants who attended these colleges claimed professors did not focus on basic skills, but rather on ideas and potential. If the student was lacking skills in a certain area, the college simply provided extra help in the one area without making the student feel inadequate in all areas. The participants felt that officials in Ivy League colleges looked beyond traditional evaluation methods. As uncovered in the transcripts, participants usually received better grades in prestigious schools with a reputation for academic rigor, and received lower grades in less prestigious colleges with a reputation for less rigor. One participant described her experience:

Harvard was the best thing that ever happened to me. And Harvard's program is not rigorous. Harvard's program is not difficult. You don't have to do anything once you get in because getting in is really hard. And if you don't do anything, the only person you're cheating is yourself. I've never felt that way about education before. It was always just a roller coaster ride that you get through and then life starts after. I thought Harvard was cool because it was grad school. I thought that grad school was about learning for the sake of learning and what I found out is that Harvard was cool because it was Harvard. Recently, somebody asked me if Harvard was very rigorous and I said, "No." And he kind of giggled and said, "I knew Harvard wasn't

rigorous." And I don't know how to articulate it, but that's not the point. Harvard isn't rigorous. That's not the point.

Educational Disadvantage Translates to "Average"

Many of the participants claimed that when they entered graduate school they were underprepared academically. Because these women have exceedingly high standards for themselves and because they believe they are deficient in certain areas, such as in their ability to speak out, to attract mentors, to express themselves, to calculate equations, or use proper grammar, they often present themselves as deficient. Therefore, whether or not these women lack basic skills, people sometimes judge them according to their image of deficiency or their level of self-confidence. One participant related her experience:

I think when you go to college, you automatically rate yourself on a continuum of the stories that you're hearing. And although I had more radical experiences, they had more of the valued stuff like economics and statistics and things that I can't do. And they had confidence. They believed that they could get that job at USAID because they could do a regression theory. I don't believe I can get that job because I can't do that stuff, and I know I can't do that stuff. I have this self-doubt that a lot of them didn't seem to have. Now, they may all internally have the same self-doubts. They may have been thinking, "look at her. She's a founding mother of special education in Tunisia and I'll never get to do that." And if that's true, I wish they would verbalize that because it would make me feel better.

When participants perceived themselves as deficient, they usually were comparing themselves to other highly successful students in prestigious universities. Their perceptions seemed skewed, given that most of them earned good grades and scored well on standardized tests. Still, because of psychological barriers, lack of guidance, continual moving, or lack of

educational resources, these women may have been exposed to education that was not as effective as that received by more privileged students. Perhaps because these women faced barriers in their educational process, despite their potential and hard work, they ultimately achieved at an average (or slightly above average) level. For this reason they might occasionally have been encouraged, but were rarely given the support that many other high achievers are provided. In fact 17 of the 21 women claimed they never had a mentor in college or graduate school. Some of the participants commented:

I had no mentor. Did I later on have an informal mentor? Not really.

The only time I talked to my advisor as an undergrad was when I decided to declare a double major, and literally are interaction was this: I had the forms. I said, "I want to do this." He said, "Do you think you can handle it?" I said, "Yes." He signed. That was it. That was all the advising I got during my undergraduate career.

I've never had an advisor. Professor X will be my first advisor, if he actually is my advisor. I got all the way through the educational system without ever having an advisor.

Occasionally, as fledgling academics or as students, these women developed theories about human behavior based largely on personal observations and reflection. In these situations, other professionals often assumed the women's ideas were based on theories that had been presented elsewhere by experts, when actually these students had independently developed the theories on their own, with little or no knowledge of related research. These women never told anyone who could encourage their potential because they were too modest to tell people the truth about their original ideas. The following is one participant's example of this phenomenon. Notice at the end of the statement that she clearly wanted education professionals to recognize her talents without needing to advocate for herself.

I think I can see overall patterns and make comparisons between things that are not

obvious to other people. In my very first history class, I took Western Civilization, we had to write a paper, and I wrote a paper and a got a B+ and was astonished because I thought it was an A paper. I'd put a lot of thought into it. And later I found out that the TA (teacher's assistant) said I hadn't taken the ideas far enough, which was a little strange. It struck me as a little strange because I knew that what I'd done was above and beyond the call of duty in terms of the ideas that were in the paper. Later, what I found out was that the TA was assuming that I had read a book by Robert Graves and that my paper was based on the things that he said in that book. I'd never seen that book, and essentially what I'd done was, I had independently come up with the same idea for how the changes in the citystate in Greece had affected the growth of the arts. The TA had quite rightly said that if I'd read that I should have applied it, so it was a misunderstanding. What I think should have happened was that at some point one of the professors should have noticed that I was doing something different than what most history students do and said something to me. They should have at least asked.

This quote illustrates how this participant's thinking was advanced while her basic skills may have been lacking because she obviously had never been exposed to the work of this particular theorist in her field.

Because these women felt pleasing the teacher was important, they tended to gravitate toward subjects where they had control over their achievement. They wanted to know that they could accomplish their goals with hard work or talent. In science and math, students must often experiment, overcome confusion, and at times, accept failure. In these areas, students learn as much from their failures as their triumphs. The participants in this study always wanted to know the answers.

Impostor Complex

These women were extremely hesitant to tell

educators that they had something to offer. Often they waited, hoping and praying that someone would recognize their talents. They were unsure of their talents and needed someone to reassure them before boldly pronouncing their place in the professional world. This phenomenon stems from modesty and a lack of confidence. Some psychologists might attribute this phenomenon to the "impostor complex," wherein women fear that if people knew the truth about what they really knew and how smart they really are, they would be disappointed with the reality. The women in this study overwhelmingly suffered from this complex. One participant claimed:

I always felt like they would just see a stupid person—that they would find out. I felt when I was in class, I wore a big mask and if they saw who the real me was, they would see through it all.

A second participant expressed the impostor complex this way:

This may sound like self-pity, but where I work now, everybody has parents who were academics. I really feel different from them. I really do. Sometimes I feel illegitimate in some way. Like I'm an impostor. It's just because everybody else is different? I feel like I didn't learn some social graces or something that they learned.

Another participant said:

Well, I had some bad experiences in graduate school, but it wasn't a function of anyone trying to make me feel that I didn't belong or that I wasn't any good. Most of my stuff was internal because it was a struggle for me to feel like it was okay for me to be doing this. Like before I took my orals—when I was reading my stuff and writing my stuff and thinking my stuff, I was fine. But every time that I was in a position where they could finally say, the emperor really doesn't have any clothes, I would just be terrified. I don't remember my orals. I was so terrified.

Unfortunately, most teachers did not seem to recognize these women's special talents.

Because these women did fairly well in academics, teachers may have been confused. On one hand, they seemed independent and capable; on another hand, they lacked confidence. They earned good grades, yet produced average standardized test scores. Ultimately these women felt ignored. They believed they were slightly above average and were half-heartedly encouraged to continue, but because people did not recognize or understand their abilities, their exceptional talents went unnoticed or undervalued. Consequently, their fears were supported.

Patterns of Achievement

This study provided a unique opportunity to study the women's achievement patterns between elementary and graduate school. Their achievement patterns were closely associated with their development patterns. Most participants claimed to have enjoyed and excelled in elementary school. Unfortunately, in high school and in college, their feelings were not as positive. To be precise however, "not doing well," for this population could mean the difference between earning an A average and a B average. In graduate school, the participants did very well academically. Many participants claimed they turned away from academics in high school, and then later in graduate school they became interested in learning again. Other researchers have described this pattern. (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1992; French & Murphy, 1983; Orenstein, 1994).

Elementary School through College. Many of the women claimed they were recognized in elementary school for two reasons: for being nice, obedient girls and for easily completing academic requirements. One participant stated, "In elementary school, I got good grades. I just did the work and I got good grades. It wasn't so much an effort." Another participant said:

School wasn't that hard back then. It really wasn't. It just wasn't. Plus the only thing that I felt that I could really do well was school, which meant that as long as I'm alive I wasn't going to give that up because that was the only thing that I was worth a damn at. But also, it just wasn't difficult back then.

It is possible that one reason why elementary school was easy for these women was because they had already developed a high level of critical thinking skills. These higher level skills propelled them easily through the early grades. In an AAUW report (1992), investigators suggested that because girls are ahead of boys in some areas in elementary school, teachers often turn their attention to boys who need extra help. In these cases, girls are left to move through the required curriculum independently. They do this easily, but they are not challenged to learn beyond what is expected. Later, in high school when social issues become important, they suffer from missing the opportunity to reach their full potential in elementary school.

Although the participants were recognized for their accomplishments in elementary school, they felt anonymous in high school and college. Since, as girls, the participants thrived on recognition, which was often lacking at home, they found other ways to get attention in high school. Some became cheerleaders, some took drugs, and others became dependent on boy-friends. They turned away from academics because they were no longer being rewarded for this type of achievement. It is possible that one reason they did not excel was because in high school achievement was not always based on whether or not they were good girls, and the curriculum often starts emphasizing basic skills. In fact, once they started competing with a larger number of students, often they were no longer the best. So, they turned away from academics because if they were no longer recognized for being the best, they were no longer interested.

Graduate School. Once the women were able to move past their difficulties in high school and college, in graduate school they did very well. So their achievement patterns indicated that they did well in elementary school, less well in high school, better in college, and very well in graduate school. The women did well in elementary school and graduate school because they received more individual attention and recognition.

I think I liked grade school because I liked the concept of getting good grades. All of a sudden I was getting some strokes for something, and I liked that.

I'd have to say in my younger years, individual attention—whether this was just a personal thing, or because of what I was going through as a kid, but personal attention was like a light that I expanded under. It was a great experience to have somebody, even just for a moment, take an interest.

Again in graduate school, it's like I'm the star student. I have a couple of professors who believe that clearly that I am a good student, and it's great because they ask me to be their teaching and be research assistants and stuff.

Also, in graduate school, these women were expected to use higher-level thinking skills, could draw on their strengths in reflection and analysis, and started connecting intellectually with the schools expectations. In addition, students were also allowed to be more independent. Many adult educators claim that returning students (or older students in general) enjoy an independent style of learning, which assumes that adult students are more intrinsically motivated and self-directed (Sheehan, McMenamin, & McDevitt, 1992). In many graduate schools, participants are responsible for their own learning and have opportunities to explore their interests.

I liked graduate school because I could do exactly what I damned well pleased. I started stopping taking drugs before I went to graduate school, and I absolutely stopped when I was in graduate school, and the reason was because for the first time in my life, I couldn't do what I needed to do and use. Also, graduate school was me-directed. It wasn't somebody telling me to memorize something about a cell membrane that I didn't care about. For the first time, I could do what I wanted to do and I loved it. So who needs drugs? I was high on grad school.

A second participant said:

This is how the whole thing goes when I got into graduate school, I thought, Now I understand; this is what school is all about. Going through undergrad is paying your

dues. When you go to grad school you pick something that interests you and you focus in you glean from all these cool people and you get all this support. This is grad school! I was so excited.

The participants emphasized the importance of independence because although they encountered more tolerance for free thinking in graduate school, it was still not as andragological or as independent as the women would have preferred. Even in graduate school, the women's first priority was to make people happy, whether or not they were learning anything. When they tried to please the teacher, the women became frustrated and believed they had to "play the game." One participant said:

In graduate school, I felt very much like I got a chance to find my own voice, which I still struggle with because I see succeeding in an academic setting as playing the game. There's a part of me that plays the game, that knows how to play the game. I learn what they want, and I do it. Is that male? But then I think of what Carol Gilligan and Mary Belenky have done. They did it. They found a way to be in an academic setting and still open doors for women.

DISCUSSION

This article reports findings from a qualitative study that explored the experiences of women who achieved highly in academics and who were also disadvantaged as children. As noted in the study, resilient girls may develop differently than nonresilient girls or those children who do not face poverty and stress. These women developed a specific type of higher level thinking ability at an early age and this ability assists them throughout their lives.

Higher-level thinking skills made elementary school easy for the participants. Their success in the early grades planted the idea in their minds that they were smart, and although they had to struggle later in school, they held onto the idea that they had something special to offer. Unfortu-

nately, their struggles were exacerbated because few people recognized their potential. This oversight was not always the result of blatant discrimination. Educators did not recognize these women's potential because the women often lacked basic skills. In addition, although these women have always believed they had something to offer, they could never really describe exactly what that was. Many participants used the word *empathy*, others used the word *intuition* others claimed they could fit things together to make a whole. The women in this study may have had what has recently been described as "emotional intelligence" by Goleman (1995), "inter- and intrapersonal intelligence" by Gardner (1983), and "critical thinking" by Taylor (1990).

The skills defined in these constructs may have been overlooked for these women because people have only recently suggested that these skills might characterize a specific type of intelligence. Also, because these types of skills were often associated with women, such skills may never have been valued in the ways other types of intelligence, such as mathematical intelligence, were. Not surprisingly, educators may not have understood or encouraged emotional intelligence among students.

Suggested Strategies

Education professionals should focus on these women's strengths as a place to begin building self-esteem so that ultimately these girls and women can move on and take risks in other areas. The results of this study indicate that understanding and valuing emotional intelligence could be an important key to recognizing, understanding, encouraging, and evaluating resilient girls and women.

The following educational strategies are suggested for encouraging resilient girls and women to reach their full potential.

Development

- Resilient girls from disadvantaged backgrounds may develop differently. They may develop a strong sense of inter and intrapersonal intelligence at a young age as a result of adapting to a stressful environment.

- Educators need to be careful about how they evaluate children and adults from disadvantage backgrounds. These students may develop the ability for higher-level thinking skills and lag behind in basic skills causing them to appear less able than they are.
- Educators need to encourage girls in their areas of strength to empower them to move beyond these areas and take risks.

Achievement

- Since girls and women do much better academically in elementary school and in graduate school, educators need to learn

from what we do right in those grades and apply those strategies to high school and college (e.g., attention, independence, higher-level thinking).

- In early grades, educators need to reward girls for standing up for themselves, being independent and achieving in academics, not just for being nice girls.

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