A study of parent-child relationships in 21 cases seen by family service, Cincinnati, Ohio

Ruth Ercell Vaughn
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A STUDY OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN 21 CASES SEEN BY
FAMILY SERVICE, CINCINNATI, OHIO

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
RUTH ERCELL VAUGHN

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE 1955
ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with twenty-one cases seen by Family Service of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio during 1952 and 1953 around the problem of parent-child relationships, in an effort (1) to determine what the parental attitude was toward the child presenting the behavior problem, (2) to determine how this attitude affected the child and his development, and (3) to examine all available family background material in an attempt to determine the existence of common factors. Interest in this study developed as a result of a series of seminars held in the agency concerning direct treatment of children, and because the writer had in her case load an instance of damaged parent-child relationships. It was deemed significant because it is recognized that healthy parent-child relationships are important in the development of a child's personality and because a relatively large number of the cases handled by this agency involved problems in parent-child relationships.

Only twelve cases involving children in the latency period - between six and twelve years of age - were included in the study. Because in each of the cases the mother initiated contact with the agency, the material relating to the parent concerned the mother only. Data were secured from the case records in the agency. A check was made of all intake interviews for 1952 and 1953 to determine how many cases were accepted by the agency for continued service. Cases that were closed before being assigned to a continuing worker were eliminated. The cases were read and if the client did not continue contact long enough for the worker to evaluate the services rendered, that case was eliminated. After this examination of cases, there were twenty-one which fell within the area of interest. Because this
was such a small number, it was felt that it would be best to include the entire group.

Data were compiled on schedules formulated by the writer. Literature pertaining to parent-child relationships and to the latency period was read to give background information for the study.

In the light of the purposes mentioned, the following general conclusions were reached:

1. The majority of the twenty-one children studied manifested disturbances of social behavior, although there were some instances of physiological disorders.

2. The mothers, in general, had given some consideration as to factors contributing to the problems of their children, but only eight of them saw themselves as being involved in the genesis of the problem.

3. The mothers, in general, felt that their marital adjustment was not too satisfactory and this factor possibly influenced their feelings toward their children.

4. In all but three of the cases, the mothers felt that their own family relationships had been unsatisfactory and had left them emotionally deprived.

5. Seventeen of the mothers showed adverse attitudes toward their children. In fourteen of the seventeen cases, the mothers had not worked out their own dependency needs and this possibly affected their ability to help their children grow to maturity satisfactorily.

6. An examination of the cases revealed that a specific attitude
of a mother toward her child did not seem to foster a specific behavior problem.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study

More and more parents are applying to case work agencies for help with rearing their children because they are concerned about certain behavior problems exhibited by the children. Traditionally, family agencies have worked with behavior problems of children, but in recent years the focus has changed from a rather superficial one involving environmental manipulation only to one in which the worker seeks to understand more fully the dynamics of the child's behavior and to approach the problem on a deeper level.¹ It is by now a recognized fact that one of the essential factors in the development of a healthy personality is the "establishment and maintenance of healthy affectional relationships."² Assuming that there is no organic defect, the quality of the parent-child relationship is considered the most important factor in personality development. The child has two fundamental needs - the need for security and the need for being loved - two needs for which he is primarily dependent on his parents for satisfaction. The parents themselves have brought into the relationship certain attitudes relating to their own past experiences, their parents and siblings. These attitudes may interfere with the handling of their children. Generally speaking, any tensions which serve to produce frustrations and anxieties in the parents will be evident in their treatment of the child, thereby tending to produce deviant

¹ Mary H. Stark, "Family Agency Treatment of an Emotionally Disturbed Child," The Family, XXVI (May, 1945), 100.
behavior on the part of the child. If, for instance, there is a discordant situation between parents or if there is a family conflict, the child, in an effort to adapt to the situation, may become a behavior problem. He may develop certain patterns of behavior which he considers most expedient in adjusting to the environment in which he lives. From a practical standpoint, he cannot physically escape the situation, so he must adapt to it in some other way. He may react aggressively and become a truant, for instance, or he may withdraw into daydreaming. A vicious circle may thus be set up—he senses a disturbing element in his environment, reacts to it in a way disapproved of by his parents, thereby reactivating the disturbing element.

It is not to be expected that the parents will have no ambivalent feelings toward the child. Nor is it to be expected that there will be complete security in the home, for in such an atmosphere the child would have no reason to move toward growing up. If such an atmosphere existed, the child would remain totally dependent on his parents and would thus remain immature and infantile. There would be no necessity for him to make his own decisions, to take any responsibility or to respond on a mature level to his parents or to others. His every wish would be gratified and complete dependency would be fostered by his parents. It is hoped, however, that the parents' feelings toward the child will fall within the area of a "normal" blend of rejection and acceptance. When there are strong hostile feelings toward the child, felt by him in the form of rejection, neglect or some other "unhealthy" form, there is a strong possibility that a damaged personality will result.

Because it is thus realized that healthy parent-child relationships are

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so essential in the development of the child's personality, and because a relatively large number of the cases handled by Family Service of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio are those involving problems in parent-child relationships, the writer felt that this was a significant area of study. The writer first became interested in this topic as a result of a series of seminars held in the agency, with a psychiatric consultant, around the problem of direct treatment of children. The psychological implications were so numerous that a very definite interest in the subject was aroused and the writer felt that it would be a provocative area of study. These seminars, along with the fact that the writer had in her case load a problem involving damaged parent-child relationships, were the stimuli behind this study.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were (1) to examine a selected number of cases seen by Family Service during 1952 and 1953 around the problem of parent-child relationships, in an effort (2) to determine what the parental attitudes were toward the children presenting the behavior problems, (3) to ascertain how this attitude affected the children and their development, and (4) to examine all available family background material in an effort to determine the existence of common factors.

Method of Procedure

Intake interviews for the years 1952 and 1953 were checked to determine how many cases were accepted by the agency for continued service. Cases that were closed before being assigned to a continuing worker were eliminated. In addition, all cases involving children below six and above twelve years of age were omitted, as the specific interest of the study was in the la-
tency period. The cases were read, and if the client did not continue con-
tact long enough for the worker to evaluate the services rendered, that case
was eliminated. After this examination of cases, there were twenty-one which
fell within the writer's area of interest. Because this was such a small
group, it was felt that it would be best to include the entire number.

Data were compiled on schedules which the writer formulated. Also litera-
ture pertaining to parent-child relationships and to the latency period was
read to give background information for the study.

Scope and Limitations

This study included twenty-one cases involving problems of parent-child
relationships treated by Family Service of Cincinnati and Hamilton County,
Cincinnati, Ohio during the years 1952 and 1953. Only cases involving chil-
dren in the latency period (from six to twelve years of age) were included.
CHAPTER II

THE SETTING

Family Service of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio is a non-sectarian family casework agency. The staff of the agency are professional caseworkers prepared to carry out the basic purpose of the family agency:

...to provide individualized casework services to families which help them attain the most satisfactory and socially productive living possible within the limits set by their capacities and aspirations.1

The agency, originally founded in 1879, is an affiliate of the Family Service Association of America, with services ranging from information and advice about specific problems and resources to continuing counsel about social and family relationships. Problems for which service is given include marital problems, problems in parent-child relationships, emotional disturbances and problems calling for environmental services, which include health and employment matters, service to unmarried mothers and to the aged, and homemaker services.

According to the Case Work Manual (1945), the problems in parent-child relationships handled by the agency include those "in which the current difficulty is the result of poor understanding between parent and child."2

a. Many of these problems involve physical or emotional neglect of children. Though many are complicated by marital difficulty, the presence of neglect indicates that study or treatment must emphasize the needs of the children....

b. Primary objective of the services in this category is to give services which help parents keep their children with them and

1 "Scope of Program: Objectives," in Manual, Family Service of Cincinnati and Hamilton County (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1945), (Unnumbered, mimeographed).

2 Ibid.
if possible, avoid placement....

c. Primary intake considerations in these cases center around the parents' receptivity to case work consideration of the total family problems including parent's own involvement in the child's difficulty; the severity and duration of the problem, the child's response to methods previously used by parents and agencies to deal with them.¹

In some cases it is necessary that the parent see the problem as being apart from the child, and important for the worker to help the parent see the importance of his own feelings in handling the child. Often the worker will

...select the parent as the focus for the treatment relationship although work is also carried on directly with the problem child. Where disorganization of family life affects the parent-child relationship, resulting in the neglected, rejected or disturbed child, the family case worker must have the understanding and skill which will enable her to ascertain the degree of the problem and the best method of treatment. Treatment may consist of working with parents on behalf of the child, in which activity may be focused on parental attitudes and methods, or problems of home management, on the various aspects of physical care, or on other areas of parent-education; of work with the child toward modifying behavior in his home environment, in which the child is helped to accept home difficulties, express feelings toward parents and siblings, and develop satisfactory outlets within and outside the home; of utilization of resources outside the home such as school, health resources, church, etc.²

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
CHAPTER III

THE LATENCY PERIOD

This study was especially interested in cases involving children between the ages of six and twelve years. This age range comprises the period of development known as the latency period. The psychoanalytic school of thought believes that there are several phases in the development of the personality: (1) the oral period, during which the needs and the interests of the infant are centered around his mouth, esophagus and stomach, for he is quite concerned with the taking of food and nourishment; (2) the anal period in which toilet training is of importance; (3) the oedipal period wherein the child is greatly concerned about sexuality; (4) the latency period during which the child begins to cut his ties to the home; and (5) the period of adolescence.

Compared to other periods, the latency period is rather quiet. There appear to be few of the outbursts of the adolescent period, and conflicts of earlier stages seem to be somewhat subdued. He has been successful in repressing some of his more infantile sexual and aggressive impulses and has become somewhat contented so far as the external world can see. As Mowrer and Kluckhohn put it,

Because the child ordinarily remains more or less dependent upon the parents at least until puberty, it is as if he made a contract with them at the onset of latency to be "good" in return for their continued support and protection. Moreover, since the child's wicked, anti-social impulses have only been repressed and not altogether destroyed, the child carries with him through this period a certain amount of "unconscious guilt," which ... tends to make him avid for "social approval" and consequently willing to acquire the skills and knowledge that society expects of him.1

---

This is the period during which the child begins to leave his family to venture into the outer world. "The parent, although seeming to lose his importance ... continues his significant role of providing dependency security as well as an ideal for the child to emulate."\(^1\) If the child has this security and if he has resolved satisfactorily the conflicts of the earlier periods, he can move forward to a good adjustment.

The child's sex desire is suppressed and that energy is used in acquiring knowledge. Before this time the energy was devoted to the expression of the sex desire and its repression, to an internal struggle with the sex instincts. He usually played alone, but as he reaches the period of latency he begins to be more social and acquires more playmates, mostly of his own sex. He is eager for knowledge at this time and a relatively contented person, seemingly, who greatly desires physical activity and the acceptance of his peer group. This contentment is only apparent, however, for according to some clinicians, this is somewhat of a grim period of life. Perhaps this is true, for he begins to face new situations in which he must depend on himself alone - school and a world of playmates. He becomes somewhat independent of his parents and develops a stronger sense of responsibility about matters of concern to him. His ego becomes stronger during this period, also.

If the child has learned through his contacts with his parents that adults can be friendly, accepting people even though capable of imposing limitations, he can begin his school experiences fairly confident and secure. Too, he can gradually become a part of a group and learn to play with other children. It is essential that he be given the security of feeling accepted.

and loved. Perhaps because this appears to be such a calm period, the parent may overlook the child and be so content with his growing independence that he may not convey to the child his concern and affection. On the other hand, the parent should not give in to all the wishes of the child. He needs the security of not being allowed to act out all of his impulses; he needs to know that there is an accepting adult who can set limits.

Various behavior problems may arise during this period about which the parent is concerned. A fairly common problem is stealing; another is truanting. Generally speaking, those children who develop into behavior problems are really "frightened or angry children, and ... basically ... are eager to learn and want help from their parents in becoming mature."\footnote{Othilda Krug Brady, "Emotional Security for Children," Cincinnati Journal of Medicine, XXIV (1948), 427-431.}
CHAPTER IV

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

Problems Presented

Although it is somewhat platitudinous, the thought that different people may react in different ways to given situations is nevertheless true. Similarly, then, the children included in this study reacted in many different ways to pressures and conflicts and presented a variety of problems. Each, however, was seeking to resolve a conflict, and the behavior problem perhaps represented a defense mechanism set up as a solution to the conflict. As Minna Field has said

Problem behavior in children represents an attempt at a solution of a conflict. What determines the emergence of one or another symptom depends upon a variety of causes in the child's environment. ...Every organ of the body, all bodily functions may be the means through which emotional need is manifested and emotional release secured.¹

English and Pearson² have placed into two categories the attempts of children to solve their psychic conflicts: disorders of the physiological functions of the body, and disturbances in relationships with other people. The twenty-one cases used in this study were classified in this same way. As indicated in Table 1, there was much overlapping in the disorders exhibited. Some of the children had difficulties in both the physiological and the social areas. The data included in Table 1 indicated the behavior problems displayed by these children whose parents felt it necessary that they secure professional assistance in the rearing of their children.

¹ Field, op. cit., p. 296.
² O. S. English and G. H. Pearson, Common Neuroses of Children and Adults (New York, 1937), Chs. 10 and 11.
TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF PROBLEMS PRESENTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disturbances of Social Behavior</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Behavior</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destructiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Difficulties</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal Behavior</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In school work</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In family relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running away</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorders of Physiological Function</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soiling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbances of Motor Function</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shown in the above table gave ample evidence that there is no one way in which a child may react to situations, and served to substantiate the theory that every organ of the body may be involved in the attempt to solve an emotional conflict. The majority of the children developed disturbances of social behavior; however, some developed physiological disturbances as well. Some of them displayed aggressive behavior in some areas, and in other areas withdrew, depending on the situation in which they were placed. Poor school work, for instance, is a form of withdrawal, but was often characteristic of children who were aggressive in other areas. Both, however, may have represented efforts to solve a given conflict.
Age of Children

This study limited itself to children between the ages of six and twelve years. However, it was felt that it might be enlightening if it were determined whether one age was predominant. An analysis of the children by ages showed that no one age predominated but there seemed to be a fairly equal distribution.

Sex of Children

There were seventeen males and only four females. It has been felt by many students of human behavior that boys are normally more aggressive than girls and are thus more likely to be submitted to limits being placed on this aggressive behavior. This may be culturally conditioned, however. The fact that more boys were represented in this study than were girls was no real indication that boys present more problems than do girls. But it was felt that boys may have more opportunity to express aggressive impulses than do girls. In our society, girls are usually expected to be the conforming type, somewhat restricted. This fact may have had some effect on the small number of females involved in this study.

Ordinal Position of Children

Because the ordinal position of a child within a family is considered important, this, too was examined. It is often felt that the youngest in a family is pampered, spoiled and subject to an over-indulgent attitude on the part of his parents and thus more likely to become a behavior problem. Too often is it forgotten that the oldest child may be suffering from a lack of attention which may also lead to a behavior problem. Alfred Adler developed a theory in which he speculated that the eldest child begins to feel
insecure after the birth of the second child, for he has formerly been the center of attention. He may try to regain this position through acting out behavior—being destructive, for example—or by being superior and doing extra things to gain attention. Then if the second child proves superior in some way, the first-born has a revival of this inferiority feeling and he then becomes a problem of some type. The youngest child may either be spoiled or bossed by those above him; this too will lead to problems. The middle child is threatened from both above and below. The only child should present no problem except that when he begins to play with others or go to school, he learns that he is not as important as he first felt.\(^1\) Adler's theory was not proved statistically, but it would nevertheless seem to be fairly valid.

Harsh and Schrickel suggest that

Parents are seldom as wise in caring for a first child as they are after more experience. They pamper the child or get horribly annoyed by distractions or mishaps which later they endure calmly. Often they are better adjusted in their adult roles when later children arrive and are thus able to provide a more consistent, friendly environment. In less favorable circumstances, however, parental discord may be at its worst for the last child to experience.\(^2\)

In this study it was found that ten of the twenty children were the oldest of the children in their families, three were in the middle, five were the youngest, two were only children, and one was second of several children. Though the sample used was perhaps not adequate enough to actually verify the point of view of Harsh and Schrickel, it does seem that they have a fairly

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valid theory, for in this sample there were more first-born children presenting behavior problems as was mentioned above.

Below is a case illustrating some of the more damaging effects of sibling rivalry, wherein an oldest child was compared unfavorably with a younger sister who was not only exceeding him in school, but was rather conforming in other respects as well. He then began to withdraw from his family and from other people, and thus began to cause his mother to become concerned about him.

M, an eleven year old male, who had been doing poor work in school, and who had become rather listless, had begun to withdraw from most social contacts for some time prior to being brought to the attention of the agency. It was learned that M had become rather defiant toward authority, especially toward his mother. He had always been rather shy, but in school he was somewhat of a problem because he insisted on "showing off" at inappropriate times. He had had difficulty in responding to children and made friends infrequently. His sister, with whom his mother continually compared him, was independent and seemingly able to make friends easily. She seemed to be exactly what his mother wanted, whereas his mother felt that because he had not completely fulfilled her hopes for him he was a failure. She wanted him to be independent and assume responsibility just as his ten year old sister was doing. This apparently disturbed M, and he simply began to withdraw from the situation.

One of the strong factors in the development of this boy's behavior problem was the rivalry between him and his sister.

Factors Contributing to the Problems

To what factors do the parents attribute these problems with their children? Although students of the behavioral sciences concur that parental attitudes and treatment of a child are of immense importance in the development of a child's personality, many parents do not realize that this is true. They give many reasons for their child's acting out behavior, or they may be quite baffled and can think of no reasons for the behavior. A few of the mothers recognized that their handling of their children possibly contributed to the
problems presented. Table 2 below gave an indication as to what factors
the parents felt were responsible for the disturbances in their children.
There was some overlapping in these factors.

TABLE 2

FACTORS SEEN BY PARENTS AS CONTRIBUTING TO CHILD’S PROBLEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent handling by parents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure home life</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations too high</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental affection</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor neighborhood</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty of family's future plans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling rivalry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowded home conditions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference of father who was out of home</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of father from home</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother employed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulgence by relatives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not know</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factors listed in the above table indicated that some of the parents had
a degree of awareness with reference to their involvement in the problems of
their children. Those mothers who felt that they handled their children in-
consistently, who felt that the home life was insecure, that their expecta-
tions were too high or that they were unable to give necessary affection to
their children showed considerable awareness of the part which they played
in the entire problem. Others projected the blame for the problem onto
some other force. As was seen in Table 2, one of the mothers considered
the fact that there was sibling rivalry between the siblings as an important
factor in the development of her child's problem. Another used "poor neigh-
borhood" as an explanation for her boy's problem. Still another attributed
responsibility for her child's problem to uncertainty of the family's future
plans. These undoubtedly were contributing factors but it could hardly be
said that they were of major significance. Indulgence by relatives and crowded home conditions were other factors which these mothers grasped as possible answers to their queries as to why their children became problems.

There is yet another group - those mothers who gave reasons which are generally given and are socially acceptable. Such factors as employment of mother, absence of father from the home and interference of the father who was out of the home were given by several of the mothers. Again these were undoubtedly contributing factors, but these mothers were quite unaware as to their own possible involvement in the development of the problems of their children. Nevertheless, the fact that in so many of the cases there had been some thinking about possible causes showed that the parents were interested and concerned. Several of the mothers were unable or unwilling to conceive of any possible reasons why their children acted as they did, and therefore were at a complete loss as to how to begin handling the problems. This was part of the role of the social worker - to help the parents gain some understanding of the contributing factors to the problem, and once the understanding was gained, then some move could be made toward alleviating the problem.
CHAPTER V

FAMILY BACKGROUNDS AND PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN

The thesis upon which this study rested was the fact that the parent-child relationship is of great significance in the development of the child's personality. The parents bring to the relationship certain feelings and memories and life experiences that may foster or impede the development of a healthy relationship with the child. It is important to know what these parents were like, what their backgrounds were and what kind of adjustment they were making. Because the mothers initiated contact with the agency in all these cases, most of the information available concerned them. Moreover, the mother or mother surrogate is the person with whom the child has his first and most significant relationship, so it is important to know what she is like. If she herself has an excessive amount of personality difficulties, it is likely that she will have difficulties in rearing her children. The extreme importance of the mother's role is pointed up by Margaret Gerard when she says

Since the mother is usually the most constant individual in the child's life, particularly during the most formative years, her personality, her behavior, and her attitudes toward the child and in his presence are usually the most important influences in the infant's choice of modes of impulse (instinct) satisfaction. ...As each mother's personality is different from others', as each family's standards and habits are different, so does each child experience social pressure in different ways.¹

Marital Adjustment of Parents

An examination of the lives and experiences of the mothers involved in this study revealed some rather interesting facts. Many of the mothers first

came to the agency around the problem of their children, and it was later learned that one of the basic problems was that of poor marital adjustment. Perhaps the mother identified the child with her partner, a partner who was not satisfying her own needs, or perhaps the mother saw her children as being obstacles to her breaking a tie with an unsatisfactory mate. H. W. Newell\(^1\) stated that parents often see their children as an extension of themselves and their own hopes. If their hopes are not fulfilled through their children and had not been fulfilled through themselves, then they may reject their children, which in essence is a rejection of themselves as failures. If a marital relationship is not satisfactory, then the product of the marriage—the child—may not be acceptable. Table 3 indicated the feeling of the mothers regarding their marital adjustment.

**TABLE 3**

**MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AS SEEN BY MOTHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fifteen of the homes the parents were still together, but only three of the mothers considered the marriage as "good" or comparatively stable. Six of the marriages were already dissolved. This might have indicated that the children in these homes were subjected to some tensions and strife before the marriage was finally dissolved. Such pressures could undoubtedly make them

feel somewhat insecure. The end result could perhaps be a "problem" child.

In three of the cases, this was the second marriage for the mother. This, too, could be a rather traumatic experience for a child. Two of the mothers felt that the present marriage was not satisfactory. In two of the cases the child was a product of the father's first marriage; in one, the child was a product of the mother's first marriage. There was no real indication in two of these cases as to just what this might have meant for the child. In one case, however, it was fairly clear that conflicts had resulted from the fact that the stepmother was not as understanding as she might have been, as is illustrated in the brief case summary below.

Case 3. A nine year old male whose stepmother was having a great deal of difficulty in handling him presented the problem of being somewhat uncontrollable in the home, "impudent and sassy." He lived with his "real" mother until he was six when he came to live with his father and stepmother who had been married only two months. The stepmother said she was fond of him when he first came, but at the time of contact with the agency, felt that she almost hated him. When she and her husband were first married, she had not looked forward to having his son with them immediately. Then when he came to live with them, she did not like it and vented some of her hostility on the boy. He apparently felt the rejection and reacted aggressively.

The relationship between marital adjustment and treatment of the child was shown in several of the cases.

Case 6. This is the case of a twelve year old male, oldest of three children, who had been stealing and having difficulty in school. He lived with his maternal grandparents the first eight years of his life, for his father was seriously ill with tuberculosis of the bone. Thus the family was unable to establish a home of their own. His mother saw him infrequently until the time he was five, when the family was re-established for two years and again broken up because of the father's illness. The boy was sent back to his grandparents for a year. His mother feels that he was indulged by his grandparents and feels that she is more like a sister to him. This mother is the middle of five girls. She always felt that her sisters looked and acted better than she did. She felt that she had never done anything with herself, that her marriage at twenty had interfered with her career or a training for a career. Her parents had disapproved of her marriage from the beginning as her husband was ill even then. The worker in this case felt that this woman had been trying to com-
pete with her son; she had strong feelings of personal inadequacy and of emotional deprivation, as she felt that she had received little attention from her parents but her son had received a great deal from them.

In this case, it seemed that the mother felt that her early marriage had meant that she was unable to pursue a career. She then saw her son as a product of this marriage that had blocked her success at a career, and the fact that her son was a product of an unsatisfactory marriage may have angered her. This feeling might have been conveyed to her son and prevented the establishment of a good relationship between the two.

Case 19. This is a seven year old male, who was an exhibitionist, hyperactive and accused of setting fires. He was also having difficulty in school. This boy's mother strongly identified him with his father who had twice deserted her, the last time leaving with another woman. The mother placed the boy as soon as she could, even though she never gave any thought to placing the other children. Both she and her mother, a very domineering woman, identified the boy with the father, transferred their negative feelings for the father to the boy, and rather openly rejected him by asking if they need ever take him home again. The mother simply did not want him, and openly expressed it.

Case 8 is an example of a child who was born at a time when his parents were experiencing a great deal of marital difficulty. His mother was in labor with the boy for four days. In addition to this, at this time she was living with her in-laws and having much trouble with them and her husband, whom she felt was neglecting her. Possibly because these rather difficult threatening emotional experiences occurred at the time the boy was born, the mother openly expressed rejection of him, who had responded by being enuretic, destructive and aggressive.

Family Backgrounds of Mothers

What kind of family backgrounds do these mothers come from? Were their own early lives happy and secure, or did they feel emotionally and/or materially deprived? The pictures that these mothers gave of their early lives were quite naturally subjective for oftentimes there is a tendency to remember the "good old days." There is a tendency to repress from the consciousness events which are really quite painful. On the other hand, some
people remember only the unpleasant experiences and tend to overplay them. There was nevertheless some validity to the pictures given by the mothers of their previous life experiences, for if one thinks of an event as being unpleasant or pleasant, it is true so far as he is concerned. Table 4 gave an indication as to how these mothers viewed their own backgrounds. In only nine cases were both parents in the home. Only three of the mothers felt that they had had secure, happy homes. The majority of them remembered childhood as being rather unhappy. Such experiences undoubtedly influenced the personality development of these mothers, and probably colored their reactions to their own children later on. As stated before, people do bring to the marital and parental relationship attitudes which have their roots in their own past experiences. Because of these experiences, then, a parent may develop adverse attitudes toward a child, or the opposite course may be taken. It was important, then, not only to examine the attitudes of these parents but to examine them in relation to their own experiences and backgrounds.

Data shown in Table 4 indicated that many of the twenty-one mothers considered their own family experiences as being unpleasant. The very fact that in many of the homes one of the parents was absent was of importance. In the instance of the absence of an adequate female figure from the home situation, the girl may find it impossible to identify with a feminine figure. Such a lack may make it difficult for her to find gratification in the feminine role later on in her life. This was certainly true in several of the cases in which the mothers felt inadequate in the role of a mother, which in turn certainly influenced the handling of their children.
TABLE 4
MOTHERS' FAMILY BACKGROUNDS

Background in Terms of Parent Figure	Frequency

Both parents in home ........................................... 9

Father seen as punitive and rejecting .......... 2
Mother seen as punitive and rejecting .......... 1
Parents overpermissive ................................... 1
Both parents rejecting ................................... 1
Both parents domineering ............................... 1
Secure, happy home ........................................ 3

Reared by mother as father absent from home .............. 7

Death ......................................................... 3
Separation .................................................. 2
Desertion .................................................... 1
Not married to mother ..................................... 1

Reared by father as mother absent from home because of death .. 3

Reared by stepmother ........................................ 2

Considered abusive ......................................... 2
Considered kind ............................................

Reared by mother and stepfather ......................... 3

Stepfather considered abusive ......................... 2
Stepfather considered kind .............................. 1

Reared by other relatives .................................. 3

Considered abusive ......................................... 2
Considered kind ............................................. 1

Reared in institution ....................................... 2

Total ....................................................... 29

If the father is absent, the girl may become too strongly attached to her mother. This, too, is damaging. In those cases where a stepparent was in the home, one must consider several factors. Most of these mothers felt that the stepparent was abusive. Whether this was objective reality or not was not known. The important fact, however, was that the mothers felt that the parent
was abusive. Possibly the fact that the "new" parent dethroned the child from her position of prominence with her "real" parent was of significance. To the child, this was important, and it might have helped block out the positive elements in the personality of the "new" parent.

Those mothers who had to live in institutions or with other relatives undoubtedly looked upon this as rejection by the parents, and this also had much influence on them. This was overt rejection; the child had been removed from the home, and although the step may have been taken for very practical reasons, the child did not know this and understand it. To her this possibly meant that she was not wanted. This surely influenced the attitudes of the mothers toward themselves and toward the world.

What of those mothers who lived with both parents? Of the nine mothers coming from unbroken homes, only three considered their childhood experiences secure and happy. The remainder did not consider their parents as very affectionate and loving, and as has been stated repeatedly in this study, it is quite necessary that a child have the security of knowing that he is loved and wanted by his parents.

Of the twenty-one mothers involved in this study, eighteen did not look back at their early years with appreciation. When the personalities of the remaining three mothers were examined, the question arose as to how secure and happy their homes actually were, or whether they simply refused or were afraid to consider the fact that their early years were not too rewarding.

Case 7. This is one of the three mothers who felt that her home life was secure. She is the eldest of two children; both parents are yet living. She led a very sheltered life, had no date until her senior year in high school, was very shy, a good student and quite conforming. The family was secure financially and she termed her home as being happy. The worker felt that this mother was unsure of herself as a woman and had been unable to fulfill satisfactorily her role as a wife and mother. The mother herself felt that she expected too much of her own son, that she expected
of him the same conformity that her mother expected of her. She resented her sister who did not conform but who apparently still received both intangible and tangible objects of affection from her parents.

Although this mother described her home as a happy one, at times she apparently permitted herself to admit that there were some important aspects of her home life that she did not actually enjoy - aspects which possibly influenced her own development.

Summaries of the backgrounds of a few of these mothers gave some indication as to their conceptions of their own childhood experiences. This added to the understanding of the factors which colored the personalities of these mothers.

Case 8. This mother remembered her early life as being unsettled. Her father died when she was seven; she was placed in a Masonic Home along with her brothers. She lived there until she was fifteen at which time she returned home where her mother had remarried. The stepfather, she felt, was resentful toward her and unkind. She herself felt that her mother had rejected her by placing her in the Home. At seventeen, she married, admittedly to escape the home situation.

Case 20. This mother was three or four years old when her father died. Her mother then married a man who drank and who was abusive, she felt. He beat her mother and the children often; when she was nine, the Ohio Humane Society placed her in an institution. She ran away, and at sixteen was placed in a workhouse. Again she ran away, met her present husband, became pregnant by him and then married him.

Case 17. This mother felt that her own mother was too lenient with her and her sister. Her father died when she was ten; her mother then began teaching in order to support the family. She did not insist that the children take any responsibility in the home, was a managing person, rather difficult to take. She was too busy to take time with her children. Thus this mother felt that her own family relationships were highly insecure and that she had been emotionally deprived.

In these brief summaries, it was seen that these mothers had experiences that might have affected their own feelings toward their children. Even in the case of the mother who said she felt happy and secure, her sheltered life and feelings of resentment toward her sister may have been factors in a poor ad-
justment which affected her relationship with her child.

Attitudes of Mothers Toward Children

Different scholars have classified adverse attitudes of parents toward their children in different ways, but most of them are basically the same. English and Pearson have placed such attitudes into three categories: rejection, overprotection and indulgence.¹ Rejection is evidenced in a number of ways: through subtle constant criticism; sly, provoking of a child to wrath for the amusement of the adult and following the wrath with punishment; constant depreciation of the child's efforts along with praising another child; persistent teasing and ridicule; attempts to have a strictly obedient child regardless of whether the obedience is exacted because it is correct or only to gratify the whim of the parent. The overindulgent parents give in to their child's every wish and thus do not prepare him for the fact that he must inevitably face - that as he grows up and goes out on his own he cannot have everything he wishes. Those parents who are overprotective of the child are unconscious of the fact that they do not like the child. English and Pearson suggest that the parents become conscious of this fact early in the child's life and feel horror at having such feelings. They therefore repress the feelings, then become afraid that something terrible will happen to the child, and finally become overprotective of him.

Similar classifications made by other scholars seemingly agree with that described above, in that the basic attitude is really rejection regardless of how it is manifested - as overprotection, overindulgence or overt rejection.

¹ English and Pearson, op. cit., pp. 55-57.
At any rate, the attitude of the parent toward the child will be manifested in the way he treats the child. Even though the parent may seek to disguise it, and even though the attitude may be somewhat subtle, the child will still feel its effects.

Table 5 showed the attitudes of the mothers in this study toward their children. (Little information was available regarding the attitudes of the fathers.)

**TABLE 5**

**MOTHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overtly rejecting</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother expects child to conform exactly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father expects child to conform exactly*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father makes unfavorable comparison with other children*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother rejects as a result of circumstances of marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatens to put child away</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overprotective</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No obvious adverse attitude</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*According to mother, this is attitude of father.

Some of the parents showed their rejection in more than one way. Only four of the mothers, as was shown in the above table, did not display obvious adverse attitudes toward their children. The remainder showed rejection of their children in one form or another. These attitudes were apparently conveyed to the child who reacted either aggressively, through withdrawal or through physiological disorders. (See Chapter IV). Such reactions possibly gained for them the attention which they desired.
In relating the attitudes of the mothers to the family backgrounds of these mothers, certain interesting facts were learned. Of the six mothers who expected the child to conform exactly, three came from homes which they considered happy and secure. Again, however, the question arose as to whether these homes were really as happy as the mothers described them. Perhaps these mothers were relatively happy because they themselves conformed at home and thus incurred no wrath from their parents. Because they were conforming, they may have expected their own children to conform exactly and when such perfection was not achieved, difficulties in the parent-child relationship arose. Two of the mothers who hoped for conformity from their children were from broken homes, but homes into which a stepparent was finally brought. One might speculate here and say that these mothers also conformed at home so that they might endear themselves to the "new" parent. This, however, is purely speculative. The last mother in this group came from a home in which the parents were felt to be domineering. This in itself implied that the child was expected to act just as the parents wished.

Table 5 showed that in only one case did the mother feel that the father expected perfection. The worker felt that this mother herself was an anxious, adequate woman wed to a passive dependent man whose strivings for mastery and self-assertion resulted in unreasonable demands from the children. This mother, however, was from a broken home and had lived with relatives described as somewhat abusive.

The mother who felt that the father made unfavorable comparisons with the other children was a rather passive person married to a man who was quite insecure and who felt that he must assert his dominance in the home. This mother overtly rejected the child herself as she threatened to put him
away in an institution on several occasions. Her own mother died when she was quite young, and her father married a woman that was not kind to her.

In the next category - mother rejecting as a result of the circumstances of marriage - were three mothers: one from a home in which the parents were overpermissive, one from a home in which the father was punitive and rejecting, and one from a home in which the father was out of the home because of desertion.

Four of the mothers threatened to put their children away in institutions or other homes. One of these mothers came from a home in which the father was punitive and rejecting, one from a home where the father was separated from his family and one from a home where a stepfather was present and considered to be abusive. The fourth (described in the previous section) was from a home in which the mother was dead and her father had remarried.

A number of the mothers displayed overprotective attitudes toward their children. In breaking down factors in these six mothers' previous life experiences, it was discovered that two came from homes thought to be happy and secure, one had lived in an institution, one had a stepfather who was described as kind, one lived with a mother described as punitive and rejecting, and one lived with her mother only, as she was an illegitimately conceived child.

In only four cases were there no obvious adverse attitudes. One child, for instance, had been subjected to much shifting about from place to place and relative to relative, but economic circumstances had necessitated this. In the other three cases the mothers were from homes broken by the death of one or both parents and had themselves had rather difficult lives. In each of the four cases, the mothers seemed to have a low estimate of themselves and some feelings of inadequacy as women and mothers. This may perhaps have had something to do with their difficulty in handling their children.
The majority of the mothers who showed adverse attitudes toward their children were from backgrounds which they thought of as punitive, and felt that the emotional atmosphere in their homes had been of a quality that left their emotional needs unmet and virtually starved. Such experiences left them so deprived that they naturally could not offer their children too much affection. It is recognized that a parent can give to a child only if he himself has matured, and to the degree to which he has matured. In fourteen of the seventeen cases in which adverse maternal attitudes were evident, the caseworkers felt that the mothers had not worked out their own dependency needs and had not worked out their feelings toward their own parents. This probably meant that the mothers were still searching for means of gratifying their own dependency needs and could not perform adequately the function of a mother. A mother who has not been able to reach "an adult degree of independence may dread changes in (his) children, may fear their breaking away from home protection and entering a world which the parent himself has always feared to meet." These mothers have not learned the lessons involved in growing up. How then can they be too effective in helping their children grow up and make an adequate adjustment? The parent who is too dependent will possibly produce a child who is too dependent and unable to make a satisfactory adjustment.

Mothers' Attitudes and Problem Behavior

One of the purposes of this study was to determine how the parental attitude toward a child affected him and his development. The speculation may be offered that a given parental attitude fostered in a child a specific behavior.

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1 G. W. Preston, "The Significance of Parental Attitudes for the Destiny of the Individual," *Mental Hygiene*, XII (October, 1928), 758.
problem. In an effort to determine whether this was true in the present study, the data presented in Table 6 were examined.

**TABLE 6**

**MOTHERS' ATTITUDES AND PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Attitudes of Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overly Rejecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overprotective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No obvious adverse attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbances of Social Behavior</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Behavior</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destructiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Difficulties</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal Behavior</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In school work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In family relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running away</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorders of Physiological Function</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There are more behavior problems than children and more attitudes than mothers, for some of the mothers displayed two attitudes just as some of the children presented several problems.

Here again some overlapping was seen, for some of the mothers were both overtly rejecting and overprotective. This was the instance in one case wherein the child was both enuretic and having difficulty in school, in a case where the child was presenting problems in the sexual area, and in a case of a child who was stealing and having difficulty with school work. The data
presented in the table did not substantiate the speculation offered above. It did, however, apparently corroborate the theory that was presented earlier in this study - that what determined the emergence of one or another symptom did not depend solely upon the mothers' attitudes, but were also influenced by a variety of factors in the environment. Different factors were present in the environment of the children studied, and these factors were also of importance in determining which behavior problems developed. Again it must be remembered that different people do react to similar situations in different ways. The data in Table 6 rather clearly indicated that a specific parental attitude was not associated with a specific behavior problem.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

One of the primary concerns of the family agency is to strengthen family life. In line with this, the family agency is concerned with the parent-child relationship, as it is recognized that this relationship is of great significance in the development of the child's personality. When this relationship is not healthy, serious disturbances can develop and be manifested through the behavior of the child.

This study was concerned with twenty-one cases seen by Family Service of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio during 1952 and 1953 around the problem of parent-child relationships, in an effort (1) to determine what the parental attitude was toward the child presenting the behavior problem, (2) to determine how this attitude affected the child and his development, and (3) to examine all available family background material in an attempt to determine the existence of common factors. Only cases involving children between six and twelve years of age were used for this study. Because in each of these cases the mother initiated contact with the agency, the material relating to the parent concerned the mother only.

In light of the above purposes, then, the following general conclusions were reached:

1. The majority of the twenty-one children studied manifested disturbances of social behavior, although there were some instances of physiological disorders.

2. The mothers, in general, had given some consideration as to factors contributing to the problems of their children, but only eight of them saw themselves as being involved in the genesis of the problem.
3. The mothers, in general, felt that their marital adjustment was not too satisfactory and this factor possibly influenced their feelings toward their children.

4. In all but three of the cases, the mothers felt that their own family relationships had been unsatisfactory and had left them emotionally deprived.

5. Seventeen of the mothers showed adverse attitudes toward their children. In fourteen of these seventeen cases, the mothers had not worked out their own dependency needs and this possibly affected their ability to help their children grow to maturity satisfactorily.

6. An examination of the cases revealed that a specific attitude of a mother toward her child did not seem to foster a specific behavior problem.

Since attitudes represent behavior patterns, it was concluded that the attitudes of the parent toward the child will inevitably be manifested in the treatment of the child. Whether the attitude is one of overprotection or of overt rejection makes little difference. The child in either case is prevented from maturing properly. The quality of the relationship between parent and child is of extreme importance, especially to the child, and if he feels the rejecting attitude of the parent then he becomes confused and seeks to solve his problem in some way. One child may elect to react aggressively and another may elect to withdraw from the situation. But the important fact is that he must select an unhealthy way out of a situation, and if he had had more understanding and mature parents this could possibly have been prevented.
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Appendix A

SCHEDULE

1. Case Number
2. Referral Source
3. Date of Application
4. Date closed (if closed)
5. Identifying information regarding child considered as problem:
   a. Age
   b. Grade in school
   c. Ordinal Position in family
6. Identifying information concerning parents:
   a. Mother: Age Race
      Previous marital history
      Brief description of personality (as seen by worker)
      Social History (briefly)
   b. Father: Age Race
      Previous marital history
      Brief description of personality (if available)
      Social History (briefly, if available)
7. How do parents term their marital adjustment?
8. Siblings: Number Ages
9. Presenting problem as seen by parent: description of problem and its duration
10. What do parents see as contributing factors to the problem?

11. How have parents been handling the problem?

12. Have there been previous problems with this child? If so, describe the problem and how it was handled.

13. Do the other children in the family present such problems?

14. What type of assistance was desired by parent?

15. Have parents received help with this problem from other social agencies, or have they asked help from lay people?

16. What was worker's impression of problem and contributing factors?