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MOTHERS' CRITERIA OF CHILD COMPETENCE ACROSS SOCIOECONOMIC  
STATUS

HANNAH BARANOV  
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Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Pamela M. Cole  
Professor of Psychology  
Thesis Supervisor

Kenneth N. Levy  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## **ABSTRACT**

All parents hope their children will become productive members of their communities, yet there are cultural variations in parenting practices. These variations may reflect different parental conceptions of what it takes to be competent in a given social group. Socioeconomic status (SES) also affects parenting. SES variations in parenting may also reflect culturally specific expectations of competence. It is thought that higher SES parents encourage child behaviors that prepare a child to be a leader, whereas lower SES parents encourage more compliant behaviors. We investigated SES variations in maternal conceptions of child competence. Mothers' descriptions of competent children were classified into different aspects of competence. Logistical binary regressions provided partial support for relations between two aspects of SES (income & maternal education) & competence sub-domains.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### ***Competence***

Children's development of competence is crucial not only for each child's success but for the success of a society. Parents universally share the goal for their children to become productive members of their communities (LeVine, 1977). For this reason, child competence is a widely researched subject (e.g. Brody & Flor, 1998; Durbrow, Peña, Masten, Sesma, & Williamson, 2001; Lee, Super, & Harkness, 2003). The goal of scientific efforts on this topic is to understand the conditions that promote and interfere with children's development of competence.

Competence has been defined in various ways. One approach has been to define competence by the absence of problematic or deviant behaviors, such as unsafe sex, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, poor academic achievement, or crime (Sameroff, Bartko, Baldwin, Baldwin, & Seifer, 1998). However, this approach is very broad and does not detail what constitutes competence. It tells us whether or not a child or youth is participating in deviant behavior. It does not allow us to determine specific areas in which a child is doing well. In order to identify the factors that are promoting or preventing competence we must first establish specific skills that are considered effective so that we can determine the competence of an individual.

An alternative approach is to define competence by general success in life, or the presence of achievements. For example, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) defined child

competence as “a pattern of effective adaptation in the environment” (p. 206). Although this definition has the benefit of defining competence by the presence of behavior, rather than by the absence of problem behaviors, it too is a broad definition. In the interest of being able to understand the variations in effective adaptation in *different* environments, it is useful to generate information that helps us understand specific ways that children in different settings are expected to be competent. Building on this approach, it should be possible to define domains of competence and then to determine whether there are sociocultural differences in how each of those domains are valued and articulated by different individuals. General domains of competence would include cognitive, physical, emotional, and/or social achievement. For example, a physically competent child may have athletic skill or an attractive appearance. A cognitively competent child may have good study habits or be seen as intelligent or inquisitive. An emotionally competent child may be generally happy or calm or be regarded as skilled in coping. A socially competent child may be polite and get along well with classmates (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

The present study investigated individual socioeconomic differences in maternal beliefs about child competence, assessing the degree to which those differences accounted for variability in emphases on different domains or variability in the specific ways those domains were conceived. There are several benefits of distinguishing among domains of competence and their sub-domains. First, this approach describes in a more specific way what constitutes competence in the minds of the respondent. Second, a more specific description of the criteria used in judging competence allows for a more sensitive method of identifying individual differences in adults’ conceptions of



competence. Third, by focusing not only on broad domains but also considering their sub-domains we increase the sensitivity of research exploring both similarities and differences between individuals. This information should yield useful information about how competence is conceptualized by parents of different backgrounds. This information builds the capacity of scientists (a) to understand the parenting beliefs that likely underlie and motivate individual differences in parenting practices and (b) to inform culturally sensitive approaches when developing or implementing parenting programs or policies (Super & Harkness, 1996; Ogbu, 1981).

Evidence that adults of different cultural heritages have different emphases in their descriptions of child competence, and that these emphases appear to explain differences in adults' responses to children's negative emotions, can be found in Cole, Tamang, and Shrestha's (2006) research on two ethnic groups in Nepal. They found that although both Nepali Brahman and Nepali Tamang groups wanted their children to be socially competent, the groups differed in which sub domains of social behavior they emphasized. Tamang elders wanted their children to be gracious and friendly, as evidenced by engaging in proper social etiquette such as knowing the proper forms of greeting for different members of the community. Brahman elders emphasized respect and obedience as features of child competence. These emphases were then used to understand why Brahmans and Tamang caregivers had different responses to child anger and shame. This finding then supports the view that parents' beliefs about the nature of child competence influence their goals for child socialization, and in turn their child rearing practices. In order to understand why children have different developmental

outcomes it is important to examine the differences in parental conceptions of competence and why these differences exist.

Of course, all parents share some universal goals for their children (LeVine, 1977). These include wishing their children to be healthy (physical competence), to do well in school (cognitive competence), to be well adjusted (emotional or self-competence) and to get along with adults and other children (social competence). However, in the interest of understanding individual differences in child rearing, it is important to appreciate that parents may vary in how they define each of these domains of child competence. It has been suggested, however, that they may differ in what skills they believe are most important for their children to acquire (Trommsdorff, Cole, & Heikamp, 2012). Broad definitions of child competence then may require further specification *within* domains to capture emphases or nuances in how parents differ. Two parents may strive for their children to be socially competent, but one may regard that as obedience and respect for authority whereas the other may regard it as social initiative even with adults.

It is clear that individual differences in child rearing exist (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002). One source of these differences may be culture. Super and Harkness (1986) offered a model, called the developmental niche, for understanding how culture influences a child's environment and their development. The developmental niche has three components: "1) the physical and social settings in which the child lives; 2) culturally regulated customs of child care and child rearing; and 3) the psychology of the caretakers." (pp. 552 In the present study we approach the question of individual differences in conceptions of competence due to socioeconomic status variations as

operating much like culture does. The three components of the developmental niche can help us understand how socioeconomic status influences a child's environment and development. Similar to culture, socioeconomic status affects the child's physical setting, the practices used for raising and caring for the child, and the parents' beliefs about the child and parenting. This idea will be discussed in more detail later.

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Previous research has identified a number of factors that influence parenting practices and the development of competence in children. In addition to cultural values that may guide parental practices, other related factors include socioeconomic status (SES). Of the various sociocultural factors that contribute to caregivers' conceptions of child competence, SES is an important but less studied factor. SES influences every aspect of a person's life including health, environment, the people one is surrounded by, and the resources one has access to.

SES has been defined in various ways in the literature. Some social scientists conceptualize SES as an economic factor, e.g. a person's income relative to other persons, and others conceptualize SES as social status with the emphasis on a person's influence or power relative to others (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Social status can also be measured in terms of a specific form of power, e.g. the status of one's occupation. SES can also be measured by a composite of these factors, such as income, education, and occupation. For the present study, SES is conceptualized in terms of the resources of a family with very young children, focusing on parental educational achievement and income relative to family needs.

It is generally accepted that children of higher SES have better developmental outcomes than children of lower SES (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Most social scientists agree that one reason for this relation between SES and child outcomes is that parents of higher SES have larger incomes that give families greater access to resources that foster successful developmental outcomes. For example, children of higher SES have greater access to high quality healthcare, are more likely to attend adequate schools, and have greater access to learning materials (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Another related reason might be that parents of lower SES are less often able to provide their children with cognitively stimulating experiences. Lower SES parents read to their children less, engage them in less stimulating conversation, and provide less opportunities to practice newly acquired verbal skills. This may not be due strictly to income, but could be due to parental education. For example, in families that are not impoverished (at least by United States government defined poverty), parents may or may not have college education. In one family earning \$40,000 a year, which would constitute economic strain (Zimmerman & Katon, 2005), both parents may have a high school education and both may work to achieve that income. In another family, one parent may be the breadwinner earning that same annual income while the other parent, perhaps a college-educated mother, chooses not to be employed so that she can be a full-time parent to her young children. In this way, parental education and income are distinct if related factors, each of which may be critical in understanding why some but not all lower SES families provide less cognitive stimulation to children. On the one hand a parent who has not been to college might not think their child needs to go to college to

succeed. On the other hand, a parent who did not attend college might want their child to go to college so that they can achieve greater success.

Both economic strain and parental education affect the psychology of parenting, as is argued by Super and Harkness' (1996) developmental niche framework. In this regard, SES can be conceptualized as a sociocultural factor. The circumstances of family life and the resources and opportunities for each member's growth and development should have an influence on parental beliefs about child competence just as culture (broadly defined) influences parenting beliefs and practices and the socialization of children. In Harkness and Super's developmental niche culture influences child competence in three ways; culture affects the child's physical setting, the practices used for raising and caring for the child, and the parents' beliefs about the child and parenting. These three subsystems within the niche interact with and influence each other.

If we think about SES in terms of the developmental niche we see that SES influences child competence similarly to how culture influences child competence. As previously discussed, SES affects the child's physical setting by determining the people the child is surrounded by and the facilities that can be afforded. SES may also influence parents' beliefs and goals about child socialization and parenting practices used to raise children. If we consider SES in central Pennsylvania, for example, we can appreciate that a lower SES family may not have the resources to pay for gasoline to take a young child to different places, e.g. the library, and may not have the resources to buy a home computer. There may be more danger in rural areas, leading to young children being kept close to home. Child curiosity may not be emphasized because of a lack of capacity for enriching the home environment (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002) or for exploring activities

outside of the home. However, if the mother has a college education and has chosen to stay home with her children, she may find creative ways, even with limited income, to provide cognitive stimulation.

Previous studies have found evidence that SES, defined by mother and father's education and father's occupation, influences parental expectations for their children. Various studies have found differences in when mothers expect their children to attain certain developmental milestones. One study found that higher SES parents generally expect children to master academic skills at an earlier age compared to parents of lower SES (Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price, and Dickson, 1980). Another study found that mothers with more education, in comparison to mothers of lower education, expected their children to say their first words, feel emotions, and think earlier. The mothers of lower education expected their children to be toilet trained and have proper behavior, such as saying thank you and addressing adults politely, at an earlier age than mothers of higher education (Tardif, Au, Wellman, and Nakamura, 2000). These studies, however, do not detail the specific aspects of competence parents of different SES might consider; rather these studies focus on skills that all parents seek for their children and show differences in when competence in any skill area is achieved by children.

Previous research has also found differences in parental values in mothers of differing SES. One study found that mothers of lower SES valued obedient, respectful, and quiet behavior in their children more than mothers of higher SES (Harwood, 1992; Harwood, Miller, & Lucca Irizarry, 1995). These studies focused primarily on how culture influences mothers' values but their findings on how SES influences mothers'

values warranted further research. Other studies have shown similar results, e.g. that lower SES parents value conformity in their children while higher SES parents value autonomy (e.g. Kohn, 1979; Tudge, Hogan, Snezhkova, Kulakova, & Etz, 2000; Wright & Wright, 1976). One speculation that might explain this trend is that lower SES parents expect their children to attain jobs where conformity and respectfulness is necessary, whereas higher SES parents expect their children to attain jobs where autonomy is important (Kohn, 1963, 1969).

Evidence suggests that maternal education, one variable used to measure SES, influences child competence in two domains: cognitive and self-competence. Brody, Stoneman, and Flor (1995) found that mothers with more years of education were more likely to be involved in their children's schooling i.e. attending teacher-parent conference, and participating in school activities. They also found maternal involvement was positively correlated to child self-competence and academic competence.

### ***The Present Study***

A wide range of studies have examined the differences in parental expectations and values between affluent parents and impoverished parents but not many studies have examined the differences between the higher and lower ends of the middle range of SES. It is important to study parental values in a narrower range of middle class families as looking at the extreme high ends and low ends of the SES spectrum decreases the generalizability of the study. In this particular study we investigate whether parental expectations differ as a function of SES, with a contained sample in the middle range of

SES. We measured SES by mother's education and by income to needs ratio. We then asked our sample of mothers to tell us about two competent children, a boy and a girl. Our research team then coded their response using a coding system developed for the MECCA project. The coding system includes five broad domains of development: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and self.

The present study was designed to investigate whether mothers of different SES put greater emphasis on certain sub-domains, within these broader domains, of child competence. The reviewed literature suggests the following predictions:

1. Mothers of higher SES, as indexed by family income to needs and/or maternal education, compared to mothers of lower SES will be more likely to refer to the following sub-domains of child competence: curiosity (within the cognitive development domain), social initiative (within the social development domain), emotional valence (within the emotional developmental domain), and independence (within the self developmental domain).
2. By contrast, mothers of lower SES compared to mothers of higher SES will be more likely to refer to other sub-domains of social competence, specifically: social sensitivity and obedience (within the social development domain), emotional regulation (within the emotional development domain), and self-control (within the self development domain).



## Chapter 2

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants included 128 mothers of children at 36 months of age who were interviewed for the larger longitudinal study. However at the 36-month laboratory visit 5 of the subjects were not continuing with the study. Another 3 subjects had incomes that were above the income criteria. Another 3 subjects missed the lab visit. Out of 117 tapes 7 tapes were missing, 3 tapes had no audio, and 1 tape was over 75% inaudible. The present study used data from 106 of the participants.

Families were recruited for a larger longitudinal study from rural and semi-rural areas in central Pennsylvania. In order to participate in the study families had to meet certain inclusionary criteria. The family had to have a child who would be age 18 months at the time of the first visit (+/- 2 weeks). The child must have lived with the family from at least three months of age and could not have any conditions that could restrict participation in laboratory tasks, e.g. deafness. Finally, the household income had to be above U.S. federal government poverty threshold but no greater than the national median income level adjusted for family size.

The recruitment process had multiple stages. The child development researchers first worked with population researchers to identify census tracts in rural and semirural communities and towns that had (a) a high density of families with young children and (b) had a high density of families with the income inclusionary criteria. Next, graduate

students studied the history and other aspects of these communities. After educating themselves about the communities, the principal investigator and graduate students met with community leaders to describe the study and learn about the leaders' concerns for young children in their communities. This included clergy, school principals and day care directors, community politicians, and medical practitioners. Next, undergraduate research assistants combed published birth announcements in local newspapers to identify families with children that met the age inclusion criterion. Those families' residences were then crosschecked with the census tract data.

Families that were thus identified were sent project letters inviting them to participate in this study. In addition to this primary method, the research team also recruited participants through announcements at community events and posted in public places as well as distributed at preschools and daycares. Finally some families participated through word-of-mouth. After sending letters, team members followed up the letters with phone calls to invite families to participate. Interested families then receive information about the purpose of the study, its activities, and the time commitment. If the family was willing to participate, a phone interview was conducted to further determine income eligibility and basic demographic information and the first home visit was scheduled. Parental education and income information was determined by: education plus assessing all sources of income (i.e. amount of money earned per week, month and/or year for each working person living in the house, any checks received regularly).

Power analysis was used to determine how many families to enroll in the study. Researchers aimed to enroll 125 families and were able to enroll 128 families. Three of

the 128 families were not income eligible, leaving 125 families that met all of the inclusion criteria. Out of the 128 families that were initially enrolled, 120 families completed the larger longitudinal (retention rate of 96.8%). The eight families that withdrew from the study did not differ demographically from the families who completed the study. Demographic data revealed that 94% of the children who completed the study were Caucasian and 5.8% were from an ethnic minority. The ethnic minorities present in this study included African American, Hispanic, and Asian.

Families participated in a number of visits at child ages 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, and 48 months and finally at 5 years. These visits included four home visits and five laboratory visits that were conducted in the Child Study Center at The Pennsylvania State University. In this project, we focused only on a mother interview that was conducted during the lab visit for when the child was 36 months of age. The data used included 108 mothers and their 36-month-old children ( $M$  age in months = 35.67,  $SD$  = .85). Three mothers did not complete the lab visit. Although the mother's interview is the focus of this project, the children engaged in a number of tasks during the laboratory visits and intelligence and language testing. The procedure for only the mother's interview, which was used for the current project, is described.

### ***Measures***

A modified version of the Criteria of Child Competence (CCC) interview, developed by Eric Durbrow and Ann Masten (1999), was used to assess mother's views of child competence. This interview was developed in order to understand which qualities and behaviors in children mothers perceive as competent. The semi-structured format of this interview, in theory, allows mothers to talk about what they believe to be important

and to avoid generating more focused questions that could influence mothers' responses. A structured questionnaire, for example, might direct a mother's attention to certain attributes that she might not have mentioned or might have limited a mother's responses to only the qualities and behaviors that the interviewers felt were important enough to include on the questionnaire.

Mothers were asked seven free-response CCC questions (Appendix A). First, the mother is asked to think of a child between the ages of six and twelve. The mothers did not indicate the name of the child but provided the specific age and gender of the child. Next, the mother was asked, "How, in what way, is that child doing well?" The mother was then asked about the same child, "In what way is this child not doing so well?" After the mother answered both these questions for the first child she was asked to think of a second child in the same age range but of the opposite gender. The mother was then asked the same questions for this child. If an interviewer felt that a mother's response to any of the questions was too brief or too general they were allowed to ask the mother certain follow up questions. The follow up questions included: How is he/she doing in school? Is he/she well behaved and obedient? Is he/she helpful at home? Does he/she get along well with peers? Finally, mothers were asked why certain children turn out the way they do, even though this data wasn't used for this project? Data from this latter question were not part of the present thesis.

### ***Procedure***

Trained graduate and undergraduate research assistants conducted the interviews with the mothers during the 36-month laboratory visit. All of the CCC interviews were audio-recorded so that they could be transcribed at a later time. The audio-recorded

interviewers were each assigned a number to ensure that participant confidentiality was maintained. Later, the recorded interviews were transcribed word-for-word by a graduate researcher, and two undergraduate research assistants.

An unpublished CCC coding system (Friedlmeier, 2010) was formerly adapted for a separate, cross-cultural study (Wood, Cole, Trommsdorff & others, in preparation) and was used to code mothers' responses to the questions in the present study. Mothers' responses were coded on 4 different levels. First, the examples of competencies that mothers emphasized in their responses were categorized into one of five broad domains: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, or self-development. Second, if possible, the descriptor was classified into a subcategory of the broad domain, e.g., Social Initiative within Social Development or Emotional Regulation within Emotional Development (see Appendix for full coding system). If a sub-domain could not be determined, the response remained in the general classification. Third, the descriptor was given either a positive or negative code according to whether the mother was referring to a positive or negative quality or behavior of the competent child. For example, if a mother said that the child followed directions well then this response would receive a positive code. If the mother said the child did not follow directions well then the response would be assigned a negative code. Fourth, the coder indicated the degree to which the mother emphasized (i.e. how much she spoke about) the domain or sub-domain of competence on a scale of 1-3 (1 = not heavily emphasized (less than 10 words in description), 3 being the most strongly emphasized (over 20 words used in description)). In the emphasis code the coder also indicated whether the descriptor was unprompted or prompted by a follow up question from the interviewer. If a mother gave several examples of one domain or sub-

domain these examples were treated as a whole and only given one code but a larger emphasis code.

Two trained coders, who had also conducted transcription, coded the 108 CCC interviews. Both coders were trained by a master coder until they reached a level of accuracy with master coded interviews of 85%. After achieving accuracy, the cases were assigned to each coder by the principal investigator in order that the coders were unaware of which cases were being double-coded to evaluate inter-rater reliability. For determining reliability, 23% of cases were double-coded. Reliability across sub-domains was calculated using the  $\kappa$  (Cohen's Kappa) statistic. There was strong agreement across sub-domains for mothers' positive responses,  $\kappa = .82$ , and across sub-domains for mothers' negative responses,  $\kappa = .73$ .

The variables used in the present study were SES conceptualized as income to needs ratio (INR) and maternal education, whether or not the mother completed college, as well as the following sub-domains of development: cognitive curiosity, social sensitivity, social initiative, obedience, emotional valence, emotional regulation, independence, and self-control.

## Chapter 3

### Results

#### *Overview of Analyses*

The purpose of this thesis was to determine whether two specific aspects of socioeconomic status are associated with mothers' endorsement of specific sub-domains of child competence. The data analyses focus on two aspects of socioeconomic status—maternal education and household income relative to national standards—and maternal emphasis on sub-domains of five general aspects of child competence—curiosity, social sensitivity, initiative and obedience, emotional valence and regulation, and self-independence and control.

Before presenting the results, an overview of the data analysis plan is provided. First, we examined whether child gender or child age was related to any of the target sub-domains of child competence and would need to be controlled in testing hypotheses. To test any associations with the gender of the child the mother was describing, the Mann-Whitney U test was used. Spearman's Rank Order correlations were conducted to test any associations with the age of the child the mother was describing.

The next set of analyses focused on the hypotheses that household income to needs ratio (INR) and maternal education would be associated with endorsement of eight specific sub-domains of child competence. To test associations between these sub-

domains and INR, independent-samples t-tests were conducted. We conducted  $\chi^2$  analyses to examine the associations between the target sub-domains and maternal education. Finally, to test the main effects and potential interaction effects of INR and maternal education with maternal emphases on specific sub-domains, logistical regressions were conducted.

### ***Gender and Age***

First, we examined relations between child gender and the degree to which mother emphasized each target sub-domain. Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to evaluate whether child gender was associated with the degree of emphasis. Only one significant difference, of eight possible differences, emerged. Girls were described as independent more than boys,  $p < .05$ . As a result of this single unexpected and potentially spurious result, we omitted gender as a covariate.

The relation between child age and maternal emphasis on each sub-domain was examined using Spearman's Rank Order correlations. No significant relations between the age of the child and the degree to which mothers emphasized each target sub-domain were found. As a result we also omitted age of the child as a covariate.

### ***Relation between Income to Needs and Maternal Emphasis***

In the next step of the analysis we used recoded variables for each sub-domain. Specifically, because the emphasis rating created highly skewed distributions, and because the primary question was whether a mother focused on a particular sub-domain,



we created binary codes reflecting that the mother did or did not refer to each sub-domain. Certain sub-domains that were predicted to show relations to the two SES factors were not endorsed by enough mothers (percentage of sample who endorsed the sub-domain < 20%). The sub-domains of emotional valence, emotion regulation, and self-control were not analyzed further (see Table 1 for frequencies and percentages of sample endorsing each target sub-domain). Note that percentages in the columns and rows do not total 100% because mothers could refer to more than one sub-domain.

Preliminary *t*-tests were conducted to examine the INR for mothers who did and did not endorse target sub-domains. Only one significant difference of five possible differences emerged. Mothers who referred to a child's independence had a higher 30m INR ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) than mothers who did not refer to Independence ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ );  $t(104) = 1.969$ ,  $p = .026$ . These preliminary analyses did not consider income in the presence of education or the interaction of family income and maternal education (see logistic regressions section).

Table 1. *Frequency and Percentage of Mothers Endorsing Each of the Target Sub-domains*

Target Sub-domain	n	%
Cognitive Curiosity	68	64.2
Social Sensitivity	38	35.8
Social Initiative	69	65.1
Social Obedience	25	23.6
Emotional Valence	20	18.9
Emotional Regulation	1	0.9
Self-Independence	34	32.1
Self-Control	7	6.6

*Note.* n=number of response; columns and rows should not add to 100%.

### ***Relation between Maternal Education and Sub-domains of Child Competence***

Next, we examined the direct relation between maternal education and child competence descriptions. For these analyses we followed the suggestions of the literature (M.E. Wadsworth, personal communication) and focused on the distinction between completing or not completing college.  $\chi^2$  analyses yielded no effects of college education on the likelihood that a mother endorsed a sub-domain. However two sub-domains—social sensitivity and self-independence—approached significance.

Mothers who completed college tended to refer to social sensitivity more often than mothers who did not complete college,  $p = .090$ . Mothers who completed college also tended to refer to self-independence more often than mothers who did not complete

college,  $p = .097$ . Table 2 displays the counts and percentages of mothers who did or did not complete college who referred to social sensitivity in describing competent children. Note the percentages displayed in the table are the percent of responses out of all the responses of mothers in the given category for maternal education, either did complete college or did not complete college. Therefore, the percentages down the columns should add up to 100% but they should not add up to 100% across the rows. Table 3 displays the counts and percentages of mothers who did or did not complete college who endorsed self-independence. Similarly to Table 2, the percentages displayed in Table 3 are the percent of responses out of all the responses of mothers in the given category for maternal education, so the percentages down the columns should add up to 100% but they should not add up to 100% across the rows.

Table 2. *Frequency and Percentage of Mothers Endorsing Social Sensitivity*

		Did Mother Complete College		
		Completed College	Did Not Complete College	
Did Mother Endorse Social Sensitivity	No	n	27	41
		%	56.3	70.7
	Yes	n	21	17
		%	43.8	29.3

*Note. n=number of response; %=% of responses within Did Mother Complete College; rows should not add to 100%.*

Table 3. *Frequency and Percentage of Mothers Endorsing Self-Independence*

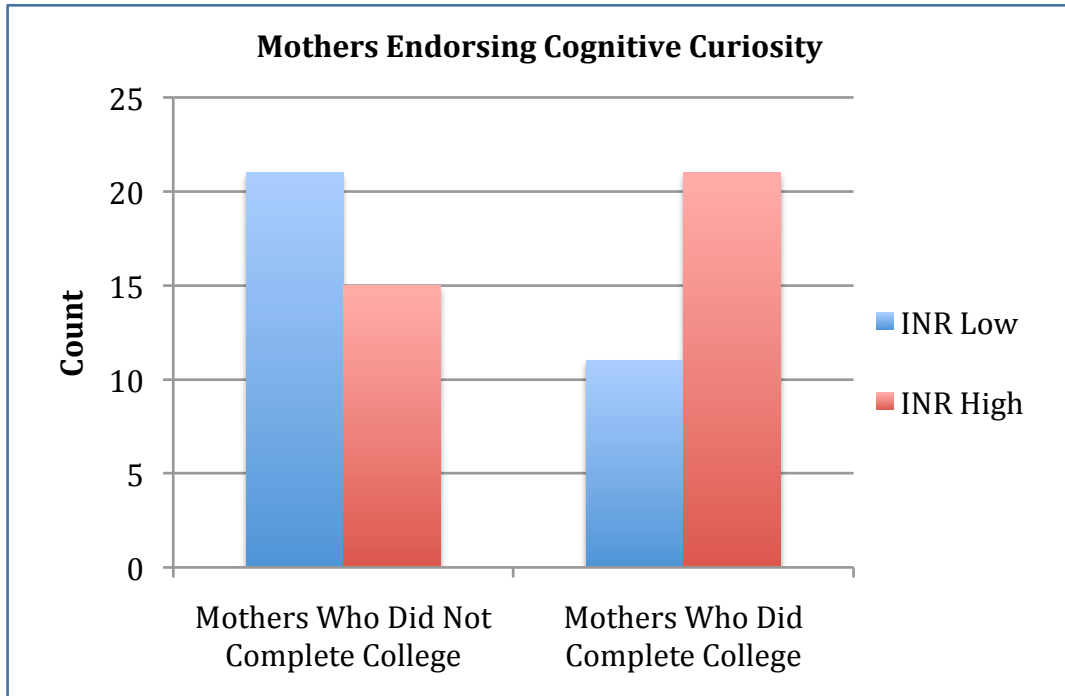
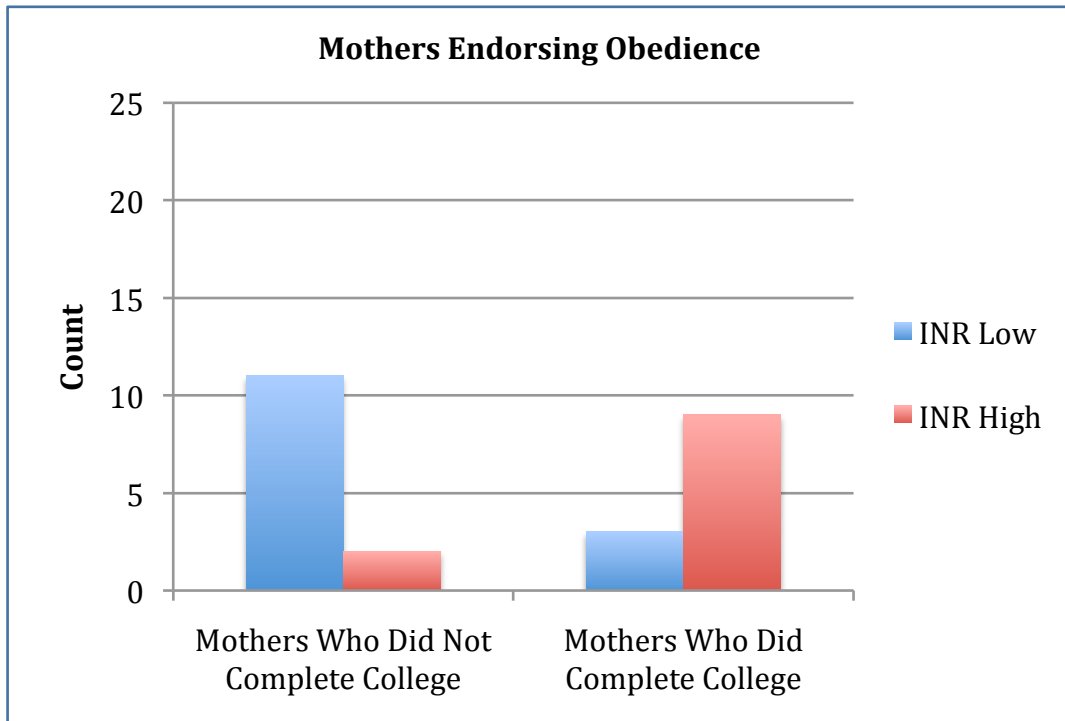
		Did Mother Complete College		
		Completed College	Did Not Complete College	
Did Mother Endorse Self-Independence	No	n	29	43
		%	60.4	74.1
	Yes	n	19	15
		%	39.6	25.9

*Note. n=number of response; %=% of responses within Did Mother Complete College; rows should not add to 100%.*

*Relation between INR, Maternal Education, and Maternal Endorsement of Sub-domains of Child Competence*

The preliminary analyses focused on a single SES factor in relation to each target sub-domain but the central focus of this thesis was to understand each factor in the presence of the other and in interaction with each other. We therefore performed logistic regressions to ascertain the effects of INR and maternal education and their interaction on the likelihood that mothers endorse predicted sub-domains.

For the sub-domain cognitive curiosity there were marginal main effects for INR (Wald (1) = 3.15,  $p = .076$ ) and maternal education (Wald (1) = 2.75,  $p = .084$ ) as well as a marginal interaction between the two variables (Wald (1) = 2.99,  $p = .084$ ). For the sub-domain self-independence there was a significant main effect for INR (Wald (1) = 4.38,  $p = .036$ ) and a marginal main effect for maternal education (Wald (1) = 3.20,  $p = .074$ ). There was no main effect for INR or maternal education in the sub-domain social obedience, however, there was a marginal interaction between the two variables (Wald (1) = 2.75,  $p = .079$ ).

Figure 1. *Count of References to Cognitive Curiosity*Figure 2. *Count of References to Obedience*

## Chapter 4

### Discussion

#### *Overview*

This study was designed to provide insight into how mothers of varying SES conceptualize child competence. Mothers who either had or had not completed college with varying INR were interviewed using an open-ended response format that allowed mothers to describe both male and female children between the ages of six and twelve whom they believed to be doing well. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine whether mothers of higher SES (determined by maternal education and INR) referred to certain sub-domains more in comparison to mothers of lower SES and vice versa. The findings provide partial support for the predictions and also revealed unexpected relations. That is,

1. In general, mothers endorsed curiosity (within the cognitive domain), sensitivity and initiative (within the social domain), and independence (within the self-development domain) more than obedience (within the social domain), valence and regulation (within the emotional domain), and self-control (within the self-development domain),
2. Mothers who had higher INR or had completed college tended to refer to curiosity and independence more often than mothers who had lower INR or had not completed college, as expected, and

3. Unexpectedly, mothers who had lower INR who had completed college and mothers with a higher INR who had not completed college tended to refer to curiosity and obedience less often than mothers who were either lower or higher in both SES factors.

The findings are discussed in terms of the five sub-domains of development included in the analyses: curiosity, sensitivity, initiative, obedience, and independence. Limitations of this study and future directions are also discussed. Of the eight sub-domains that were the focus of this study, cognitive curiosity and social initiative were mentioned by the most mothers. This is noteworthy as it appears that these mothers, from economically strained households in central Pennsylvania, responded similarly to mothers in a cross-national study contrasting mothers from nations that value self-independence (Germany and U.S.) with those that value self-interdependence (Nepal and India; Wood et al., unpublished manuscript).

### *Cognitive Curiosity*

Curiosity was one of the two most frequently endorsed sub-domains. This category involved a child's eagerness to learn and be inquisitive. As predicted, mothers of higher INR and mothers who had a higher level of education (had completed college) tended to refer to cognitive curiosity more often than mothers of lower INR and mothers who had not completed college. Although this trend was not significant it did approach significance and is therefore worthy of note. Interestingly and unexpectedly, mothers who



had either both a lower INR and a lower level of education or were higher in both of these SES factors were more likely to refer to curiosity than mothers who were higher in one SES factor and lower in the other factor. Mothers, with both higher INR and higher education, may have emphasized curiosity as a feature of child competence, reflecting their encouragement of leadership qualities (Kohn, 1963). Mothers with both lower INR and lower education, on the other hand, may also emphasize this aspect of competence if they hold goals for their children's upward mobility (Laud & Johnson, 2012). Another possible explanation for this unexpected finding and other unexpected findings discussed later may be that our sample was restricted to economically strained families, who were above poverty and below middle class. In the few available studies that have been published that relate to the topic of SES and parental socialization goals, the participants represented a wider range of incomes (e.g. Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price, & Dickson, 1980; Tudge, Hogan, Snezhkova, Kulakova, & Etz, 2000).

### ***Obedience***

The sub-domain obedience involves a child's ability to follow directions given by elders. The prediction that mothers with lower levels of INR and education were more likely to refer to obedience, compared to mothers with higher levels of the two SES factors, was not supported. Similar to cognitive curiosity, mothers who had either both a lower INR and a lower level of education or were higher in both of these SES factors were more likely to refer to curiosity than mothers who were higher in one SES factor and lower in the other factor.

### *Independence*

The sub-domain independence involves a child's ability to rely on him or herself and be autonomous. As predicted, mothers of higher INR were significantly more likely to refer to independence than mothers of lower INR. Furthermore, results revealed that mothers who had completed college were marginally more likely to refer to independence than mothers who had not completed college. One hypothesis that might explain this trend is that higher SES parents expect their children to obtain jobs that require leadership qualities including autonomy (Kohn, 1963).

### *Social Sensitivity*

The prediction that mothers with lower levels of the two SES factors—income to needs and education—were more likely to refer to social sensitivity, compared to mothers with higher levels of the two SES factors, was not supported. Although no significant relations between either of the SES factors and sensitivity were found, an unexpected trend that approached significance was found. Mothers who did complete college were more likely to endorse sensitivity. This finding was not supported in the literature. It is possible that individuals who attend college are more exposed to the importance of being sensitive to others needs in their classes.

### ***Social Initiative***

Social initiative was the most frequently endorsed sub-domain. This category involves a child's ability to initiate and maintain good social interactions. The prediction that mothers with higher levels of INR and education were more likely to refer to social initiative, compared to mothers with lower levels of INR and education, was not supported. No significant relations were found between either of the SES factors and initiative.

It is also important to note that in general, mothers endorsed curiosity, sensitivity, initiative, and independence more than obedience, valence, regulation, and self-control. This is consistent with findings for U.S. mothers in a cross-national study of maternal conceptions of child competence (Wood, Cole, Trommsdorff & others, in preparation).

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

This study encountered several limitations as a consequence of the methodology, which need to be considered for future research. The present study used a free-response interview in order to understand which types of qualities and behaviors in children mothers perceive to be competent. The benefit of this style of interview is that mothers can elaborate on their responses and give a more detailed answer. However, with this type of interview there are a number of disadvantages. Firstly, it is difficult to attain

absolute accuracy and reliability between interviewers and coders. In the interview step, interviewers did not deliver follow up prompts consistently. It is possible that inconsistencies in how follow up questions were asked and when they were asked caused mothers responses to differ in length and detail. Furthermore, interviewers did not consistently ask follow up questions when a mother responded with an ambiguous response. Responses such as “well-behaved”, “good in school”, “well-adjusted”, and “resilient” are too general to determine which specific domain or sub-domain of development the mother meant to endorse. For example, a mother who said a child is “good in school” could mean that the child is obedient and follows directions well, or has a lot of friends in school, or is successful academically. Although such responses were given frequently they were deemed “uncodeable” and these responses were lost. For these reasons, follow up questions were not used in the statistical analysis. If the follow up questions were delivered more consistently and with the goal of clarification for coding in mind they could provide us with a better understanding of the types of qualities and behaviors mothers of differing SES value in their children.

Another limitation of this study was the issue of isolating descriptors within responses for coding. It was difficult to determine when a certain part of a mother’s response had to be separated from another part of the response because the mother was endorsing a different domain or sub-domain. This problem likely negatively affected inter-rater reliability. In future research this problem could be reduced if interviewers understood the coding system so that they could clarify with mothers if it was unclear whether mothers were endorsing a single or multiple domains or sub-domains.

Another limitation of this study was the task of transcribing the audio-recorded interviews. In certain cases the tapes were inaudible or hard to hear. Data was lost during the transcription step because of this issue. This problem may be resolved in future research if interviewers held a small test run before each interview to determine if both the interviewer and the interviewee are able to be clearly heard from where the tape recorder is placed and how loudly they are speaking.

A limitation of the analyses in this study was that only mothers' responses to questions on how a child is doing well were included. Mothers' responses to questions on how a child is not doing well also provide information on what qualities and behaviors mothers value in their children and how they differ as a function of SES. For example if a mother were to say that a child is not doing well because they do not get along well with other children we might conclude that mothers value social cooperation. Future research might include both mothers' positive and negative responses in their analyses.

Another limitation of the analyses in this study was that mothers' emphasis of specific domains and sub-domains were not included. It is possible that mothers of higher SES emphasize certain sub-domains more than mothers of lower SES and vice versa. The exclusion of emphasis in our analyses may account for why certain predicted relationships were not found, despite support from the literature.

This study provided information on how mothers' conceptions of child competence differ according to SES. Future goals for understanding how SES influences what mothers believe constitutes child competence include interviewing mothers from a wider range of income to needs ratio and from varying levels of developed environments (e.g. urban, suburban, rural). In addition, future research might look at how different

aspects of SES relate to mothers' endorsement of domains and sub-domains. Future research might also examine mothers' perceptions of why certain children become competent members of the community while others do not. Another interesting direction for future research is to explore how SES influences mothers' ideas of when children are expected to be acquire certain skills that mothers value.

**Appendix A****CCC Interview (Questions 1-7)**

1. Is the child you are thinking of a boy or a girl?

2. How old is that child?

3. How (in what way) is that child doing okay?

4. Now in what ways is this child not doing so well?

OK. You told me about a child (of age, of gender). Now let's talk about a boy/girl (select child of same age by of opposite gender) this same age.

5. How old is that child?

6. How (in what way) is that child okay?

7. Now in what ways is this child not doing so well?

## Appendix B

### CCC Coding Manual

Our adaptation of the Criteria of Child Competence (CCC) interview asked a mother to think of one 6-12 year old child who was doing well and describe why, and then think of another child of the opposite gender and describe why that 2<sup>nd</sup> child was doing well. This allowed us to see the underlying criteria mothers use to define competence.

For each child, the mother was asked ‘How (in what way) is that child doing okay?’ and ‘In general, in what way does this child not doing so well?’

Mothers’ responses to these questions were coded using a multi-level system for classifying the *emphases* implicit in the mothers’ descriptions:

1. Did the mother emphasize one or more developmental domains (Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional, or Self) or just make a very general (General) statement? If she emphasized a developmental domain, the response was classified at Level I (A=Physical, B=Cognitive, etc). If the mother emphasized one or more developmental domains, did the mother further emphasize a more specific aspect of that domain? Each developmental domain could be classified in terms of subdomains at Level II. If a domain was given but without any specification, it was classified as General.
2. For the above 2 classification levels, coders indicated whether the mother referred to this domain or sub-domain as a positive (+) or negative (-) feature of the child. For example, if a mother said a child is empathic to her friend’s needs, that would be Domain Social, subdomain (Social Sensitivity), positive. If on the other hand, a mother said that a child was overly sensitive, it was coded as negative.
3. Finally, coders wrote mothers’ phrases that were coded in a ‘Qualitative’ column in the data spreadsheet so responses could be re-classified as coding scheme further develops.

The major challenge for this type of work is “chunking” responses. When mothers appeared to be using a variety of words or phrases to illustrate one aspect of child competence, coders were instructed to “chunk” these into one response.

Then coders were asked to rate these chunks in terms of emphasis on the specific domain. In other words, did mothers provide a great number of examples in this domain? Did mothers



spend a great deal of time talking about this domain? Coders were instructed to rate mothers' emphasis on the domains they touched upon to get a sense of what mothers really emphasized as how they define competence.

When a response was so general it could not be classified in one of the Level I domains, it was treated as Uncodable, e.g., "well-adjusted," "consistent behavior," "open-minded," "well-behaved," "resilient," or "open" without any elaboration indicating a particular domain.

### **Domains & Subdomains**

**I: Physical Development** (mother's emphasis is on the child's health, appearance, skills)

**A: Nutrition/Sleep** (*child's diet, food intake, sleeping patterns*)

[+] sleeps whole night, takes good naps, good appetite

[-] doesn't sleep whole night, picky eater, doesn't rest when needed

**B: Activity** (*energy level, physical skill*)

[+] energetic, active, athletic, coordinated

[-] restless, lethargic, too active (but if reference to ADHD, see V)

\*If mother is emphasizing interests rather than physical skills or weaknesses for activities like dancing or sports, classify as II.A.s.(+ or -)

**C: Health/Appearance** (*physical wellness, beauty*)

[+] strong, beautiful/handsome, healthy

[-] weak, often or usually sick, unattractive

**II: Cognitive Development** (*child's skill at thinking, learning, motivation to learn*)

[Code GENERAL for "does schoolwork well," "learns well" & UNCODABLE if "OK/good at school" "does good/well in school" which does not even indicate cognitive skill]

**A: Curiosity** (*desire to learn, be inquisitive*)

[+] excited about going to school, curious, has interests/ hobbies, motivated to do well in school

[-] no desire to study, learn, go to school, bored, not interested in studying

**B:** Intellectual Ability (*scholastic skill, achievement, self-application, creativity*)

[+] very smart, ahead of age group, logical, witty, makes up stories, creative, imaginative, studies easily

[-] slow to learn new information/concepts, held back in school

**III. Social Development** (*quality/skills in interpersonal matters, including following rules*)

[Code GENERAL if “good at home,” “good with others,” “troublemaker” “Well behaved at home,” “well behaved at school”

**A:** Prosocial (*acts with others in mind, for another’s benefit*)

\* *getting along with siblings - has to be younger sibling when not specifying being helpful, specifying being helpful without “younger” or “smaller” gets this code*

[+] helps younger siblings, good sharer, affectionate, loving, compassionate, accepting of younger siblings, helping, sharing

[-] bully, aggressive, unfriendly, doesn’t share, violent, doesn’t help siblings, lying, bossy

**B:** Social sensitivity (*emphasis on understanding others’ needs/emotions*)

[+] considers others’ feelings, anticipates how other might feel, reads others’ emotions, polite, respectful, respects elders (when no context is given), empathic, can see from others’ point of view, comforting

[-] inconsiderate of other’s feelings, rude

**C:** Social Initiative/Cooperation (*starts or maintains good social interactions*)

[+] extroverted, outgoing, plays with other kids, gets along with others, compromises, has a lot of friends, tolerance, greets others

[-] introverted, too reserved, quiet, loner, plays by self, has no friends, doesn't connect with friends at school, talks too much, social withdrawn, doesn't play well with others

**D:** Communicative Skill (*expresses needs, ideas meaningfully*)

[+] articulate, tells well, says wants clearly, good at diffusing arguments

[-] struggles to express wants

**E:** Obedience (*listens to and follows directions from elders*)

[+] listens to grown-ups, follows directions well, obeys elders

[-] doesn't listen, ignores parents, won't follow instructions, tests limits, disagrees, back-talks, stubborn, naughty, mischievous

**IV:** Emotional Development (*explicit reference to emotion skill/problems*)

**A:** Emotional valence (*emphasis on moods, happy/unhappy, good/bad mood*)

[+] calm, enthusiastic, happy-go-lucky

[-] doesn't enjoy, overly exuberant, anxious, complaining

**B:** Emotional regulation (*emphasis on control of emotions*)

[+] emotionally stable, never throws temper tantrums, adjusts emotions well

[-] temper tantrums, cries, has meltdowns, upset when not getting his/her way, difficult to sooth

**V:** Self Development (*emphasis more on child's autonomy or self-organization*)

**A:** Independence (*individuality; self-reliance; influence of others on child*)

[+] has individuality, becoming her own person, confident, does things without being asked, doesn't allow others to roll over her, is strong-willed, asks for help when needed, brave

[-]bit of a mamma's girl, needy, needs or seeks attention in negative way, carries a blanket everywhere, insecure, boasts, acts entitled

**B:** Self-control (*self-control, planfulness, organization*)

[+] self-control, initiates studying on own, completes homework in timely way, works hard, neat and tidy, plans well

[-] can't focus, doesn't stay in seat, can't stop from grabbing or hugging others, lazy, watches too much TV

### The Emphasis Code

The purpose of this code is to capture the degree to which a mother is emphasizing one domain of competence over others and relative to other mothers. Two criteria are used to assess emphasis on a particular domain:

- a) the length of time she spends speaking about said child on a particular domain
- b) the number of examples or references she gives to articulate how well/not so well said child is doing on a particular domain.

The emphasis codes are as follows:

1 = Mother provided one example or only referenced domain once or touched briefly upon a specific domain (< 10 words)

- a. Example, "He gets good grades on tests"

2 = Mother provided two examples or referenced the domain twice or touched at greater length upon a specific domain (> 10, < 20 words)

- a. Example, "He gets good grades on tests, always turns in his homework on time."

3 = Mother provided three examples or referenced the domain three times or touched at great length upon the specific domain (> 20 words)

- a. Example, "He gets good grades on tests, turns in his homework on time, and is on the honor roll, just generally a really smart guy."

*When to Use the Word Count Over Number of References*

Sometimes mothers will only report one example, but will talk at great lengths about this example, relative to the other domains she talk about. You'll know this is the case when you look at the transcript *with soft eyes* and see that a chunk of the transcript is dedicated to just this one example of domain.

- a. Example: So he is really an athletic because of his football playing. He can throw the ball to almost anyone down field and can pretty much outrun any of the players who try to sack him. He was quarterback this one time and the coach on the other team was telling his guys to sack him, and well they just couldn't catch up, you know? So he's really something special on the field. He's also really smart and does well in school.

In these instances, code based on the length of time (or in transcription terms amount of wording) spent discussing a domain even though they're really only expanding on one example.

*Prompted and Unprompted Emphasis*

Throughout the CCC interview, mothers are providing spontaneous responses, but are often responding to interviewer prompts, both structured (FU HOME, FU SCHOOL, FU WELL BEHAVED) and unstructured (PB codes). Because emphasis in spontaneous and prompted reports might be qualitatively different, coding for each should be separate. In the coding sheets, two columns are present: "Spontaneous Emphasis" and "Prompted Emphasis."

- Mother's responses which come before any prompting from an interviewer other than the question "In what ways is this child doing well?" should be coded for Spontaneous Emphasis with either a 1, 2, or 3 in the Spontaneous Emphasis column.
- Mother's responses which come after any prompting from an interviewer (e.g. FU codes or PB codes) should be coded for Prompted Emphasis with either a 1, 2, or 3 in the Prompted Emphasis column.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

Hannah Baranov

16 Overbrook Parkway, Wynnwood, PA 19096  
(610) 256-3495 | hzb5034@psu.edu

### EDUCATION

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**Pennsylvania State University**, Schreyer's Honors College, College of Liberal Arts, State College, PA May 2014  
Candidate for Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

- ◆ Dean's List 2011, 2011–12, 2012-13, 2013
- ◆ Certificate of Superior Academic Achievement for Spring 2012, Spring 2013
- ◆ The National Society of Leadership and Success

### WORK EXPERIENCE

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**Research Assistant**, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA Dec 2011 – May 2012 | Jan 2013 – Present  
*Child Study Center*

- ◆ Transcribing and coding interviews with mothers from rural Pennsylvania regarding criteria for child competence.
- ◆ Collaborated with research team to develop a coding manual for project.
- ◆ Coded interviews with mothers from 5 countries regarding their criteria for child competence.

**Intern**, M.I.N.D. Mental Health Charity, London, England Aug – Dec 2012  
*I.R.I.E. Day Centre, City and Hackney M.I.N.D.*

- ◆ Assisted clients with self-referral for clinical assessment.
- ◆ Input client information into referral system for clinical assessment.
- ◆ Interacted with clients to schedule appointments. Assisted case management team with additional office work.

**Tutor**, Kumon, Philadelphia, PA May – Aug 2012 | May – Aug 2013

- ◆ One-on-one reading and math tutor for students K through 12.

**Counselor**, Camp Starfish, Rindge, NH June – Aug 2011  
*Swim Instructor and Lifeguard*

- ◆ Cared for children with behavioral, emotional, and psychological disorders throughout the day and overnight.
- ◆ Responsible for instructing children in swimming with one-on-one lessons. Responsible for lifeguarding.

### VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

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**Volunteer**, Lankenau Medical Center, Wynnwood, PA May 2013 – Present  
*Emergency Department*

- ◆ Stocking medical carts and patient rooms, keeping rooms and hallways generally tidy.
- ◆ Attending to patient call lights, providing patients with ice and water, running errands for physicians or nurses.

**Intern**, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA May – Aug 2013  
*Department of Psychiatry*

- ◆ Consented patients for the National Network of Depression Centers (NNDC) study.
- ◆ Input patient information into NNDC registry
- ◆ Shadowed psychiatrists. Assisted with additional office work.

**Volunteer**, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, Wynnwood, PA Dec 2010 – Jan 2011

- ◆ Assisted with paperwork. Called donors and thanked them for their contributions.
- ◆ Helped staff to prepare for the upcoming fundraising event, the Lemon Ball.

### SKILLS

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**Languages:** Conversational in Russian, Spanish.

**Computer Skills:** Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel.

**Certifications:** CITI Social and Behavioral Human Subjects Research (IRB) Course, American Red Cross Lifeguard Training