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This study investigated the relationship between the number of years in which a child has been labeled as gifted and family members' perceptions of their family's social environment. Second, possible differences between gifted childrens' and siblings' perceptions of their family's environment were investigated. A significant negative relationship was found between the number of years of labeling time and mothers' perceived level of cohesion, organization and control in the family environment. A significant positive relationship was found between the number of years in which the gifted child had been labeled and the gifted child's growing orientation to achievement and with unlabeled siblings' perceptions of independence in the family environment. These results suggest that families in which there are both gifted and unlabeled children may experience significant stress and that mothers feel this stress more acutely than fathers. Also, it appears that the gifted label does not lead unlabeled siblings to perceive their family environments in a substantially different way from identified gifted children in the family.

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by

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Relationship Between a Gifted Child's Label and Perceived Family Environment

Research on gifted children has generally focused on the varying attributes that define giftedness, the cognitve development of gifted children and the special educational needs of the gifted. Much of the current discussion of social environments of families with gifted children derives from historical analysis and/or speculation. Several authors in this field (Albert, 1980; Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Cornell, 1983; Webb et. al., 1982) have stressed the need for investigations of the specific patterns of family interaction that may be characteristic of families with gifted children, especially the interaction between parent and gifted child and between gifted and nongifted siblings. Most of the few studies that have investigated interpersonal relationships in families of gifted children have examined the effects of the family on the gifted child's intellectual and creative development (Albert, 1978; Albert, 1980; Groth, 1971; Tabackman, 1976; Thiel & Thiel, 1977). More recently, several researchers have investigated the effects that the presence of a gifted child may have on the family system (Albert, 1978; Colangelo and Dettmann, 1983; Colangelo and Brower,

1987; Cornell, 1983; Cornell and Grossberg, 1987; Fisher, 1978; Hackney, 1981; Karnes and Shewdel, 1987; Ross, 1964).

In research involving families of gifted children, three general findings have been supported: first, that gifted children have the same psychosocial developmental needs as unlabeled children; second, that families with gifted children share some common characteristics; and third, that families with gifted children face special problems in addition to normal developmental needs.

Characteristics of gifted families

Investigations of the common characteristics of families with gifted children suggest that these families allow independence among their members and emphasize intellectual and cultural activities and interests. Colangelo and Dettmann (1983) conducted a review of the literature on families with gifted children and found that parents of gifted children show more willingness to allow their gifted child to choose his/her own friends, to make independent decisions, and to develop activities and interests outside the home.

Tabackman (1976) investigated the relationship between the academic achievement of gifted adolescents and their perceived family environment. Compared to a

normative sample,these gifted adolescents and their families reported a stronger orientation to intellectual and cultural activities and to independence of family members, a lower than average perception of open conflict, control and organization in their family system, a lower than average orientation to achievement as an ideal and to active recreational pursuits, and finally, a lower than average emphasis upon religion and morality. These families did not differ from the normative sample on the degree of mutual support and openly expressed feelings.

Problems faced by gifted families

Investigations of problems faced by families of gifted children have looked at parent-child and sibling relationships and at the general effect of the gifted child's presence within the family system. From his clinical work with families of gifted children, Hackney (1981) reports that the presence of a gifted child effected changes in the normal roles of the family. Specifically, parents often experienced difficulty in clarifying distinct differences in the parent-child roles because their gifted child's intellect and sensitivity. Parents' perceptions of themselves were altered by the overwhelming responsibility of meeting

the special intellectual needs of their gifted children. Also, the gifted child's special needs called upon these families to make special adaptations and concessions in terms of money and time, and parents struggled with the issue of how far they should go in stretching the family's resources to meet these needs.

Several authors have noted the potential for disrupted sibling relationships that exists in families with gifted children (Ballering & Koch, 1984; Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Cornell, 1983; Fisher, 1978; Ross, 1964). Parents may experience real difficulties in giving equal attention to both gifted and unlabeled children, and miscommunication between parents as to what they expect of their gifted and other children may cause problems for both the children and the marital relationship (Colangelo and Dettmann, 1983).

Ballering and Koch (1984) compared the perceived affect in family relationships from the perspectives of gifted and unlabeled siblings. Their results highlight two important areas of interaction in families with gifted children. First, the gifted/nongifted distinction is an important variable in describing family relationships as their results show that unlabeled children assigned more negative affect to

mothers than their gifted siblings did. Second, these authors conclude that the gifted/nongifted distinction may affect sibling relationships more than it does parent-child relationships, as the perceived affect in the father-child relationships did not differ between gifted and unlabeled children. The results of this study indicate that unlabeled children perceive more positive affect in their relationship with their gifted siblings than do the gifted children. Specifically, gifted children showed less positive affect towards their gifted siblings and more negative affect towards their unlabeled siblings than did unlabeled children.

Cornell (1983) provides some empirical support for a positive labeling effect that influences the parent--child relationship and the psycho-social adjustment of siblings of children labeled as gifted. Cornell emphasizes the importance of the parents' perceptions of their child's giftedness and his results indicate that in the majority of families with children in gifted programs, at least one parent did not perceive the child as gifted. Also, parents who perceived their child as gifted seemed to be prouder of that child and reported a closer relationship with the child. Cornell concludes that these data offer support for a positive labeling

effect in parents' perceptions of gifted children.

In that study, comparisons of the psychosocial adjustment of gifted and unlabeled control children yielded no significant differences. Unlabeled siblings of gifted children, however, were found to be less well-adjusted compared to unlabeled children with no gifted sibling. Cornell interprets these results as an indication that the labeling of one child as "gifted" may implicitly label the sibling as "nongifted" and that this negative label may lead to poorer self- esteem and adjustment difficulties in siblings of children labeled as gifted. He discusses these findings from a family systems perspective and suggests that the positive labeling process may be a process of "idealization" (in contrast to scapegoating). While the scapegoated child is the focus of family hostility, the child labeled as gifted may become the focus of family pride and admiration. Family idealization may place a heavy burden on the gifted child to maintain his or her superior performance; another possibility is that one child's giftedness may injure the self-esteem and adjustment of unlabeled siblings. Cornell calls for further data on this question.

Fisher (1978) investigated the effects of positive

labeling on families with gifted children and found that parents' perceptions of their child's giftedness were more significant than the school designated label; in fact, one-third of the parents interviewed disagreed with the school's assessment of their child as gifted or as nongifted. In those families who agreed with the school's designation of their child as gifted, the gifted label increased parental expectations and increased their tolerance for unusual behavior by the gifted child.

In summary, two developmental trends are suggested in the literature. First, gifted children present special challenges to both their parents and their siblings. Second, the specific characteristics of parent-child and sibling interaction and of the family system as a whole are related to the psychosocial adjustment and the potential achievement levels of both gifted children and their siblings. It is apparent that family environments and relationships are important in shaping both the normal psychosocial development and the special intellectual and creative potential of gifted children. Conversely, the presence of a gifted child in the family is important in shaping family environment and may be a critical factor in the psychosocial

adjustment of children who are either overtly or covertly labeled as "nongifted."

Design

This study investigated family environments as perceived by gifted children, unlabeled siblings, and mothers and fathers. The following three research questions were examined:

Relationship between labeling period and perceived family environment

Previous research has looked at giftedness as an either-or state. The present study investigated the relationship between perceptions of family environment and the number of years that an identified gifted child had been labeled. The number of years that the gifted child had been labeled as gifted was measured in units of one year and constituted an independent variable for each member of the family. Subjects' scores on the 10 subscales of the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1981) constituted the 10 dependent variables for each family member.

Hypotheses: gifted children

Prior research (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Tabackman, 1976) suggests that gifted children will perceive a high degree of independence and an emphasis

on intellectual and cultural interests in their family. Data concerning affective environment are not consistent. Tabackman's study (1976) found no significant differences in the FES subscales of Cohesion and Expressiveness between familes of gifted high school students and the normative sample. Cornells' study (1983) suggests that gifted children perceive greater cohesion and expressiveness due to parents' feelings of closeness and pride in their gifted child. In contrast, Ballering & Koch (1984) suggest that both gifted children and their siblings will perceive more conflict and less cohesion in their family environment due to the stress caused by the gifted/nongifted distinction. Since previous data do not provide a coherent pattern of affect in the family of the gifted child, the directionality of the correlation between family environment and the length of time that gifted labelling has occured is not hypothesized in the present study.

Hypotheses: siblings

Prior research (Ballering & Koch, 1984; Cornell, 1983) suggests that unlabeled siblings perceive more conflict and less cohesion and expressiveness in their families as a result of the labeling of their gifted sibling. It is possible that unlabeled siblings may

also perceive a greater emphasis on achievement orientation, due to the high achievement levels of their gifted sibling.

Hypotheses: parents

According to several studies, (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Cornell, 1983; Fisher, 1978; Hackney, 1981) it appears that parents may perceive greater conflict in the family environment if they cannot work together to meet the needs of both their gifted and unlabeled children. Parental disagreement about the child's classification or potential may be a further source of conflict. The role confusion and financial stress described by Hackney (1981) may lead to increased conflict; however, it may also lead to parents' attempts to cope by efforts to improve communication (expressiveness) and organization and to exert greater control through clear-cut rules and procedures.

Parents' perceptions of giftedness for unlabeled and labeled children

This analysis measured parents' covert perceptions of unlabeled children in the family in terms of their potential for being classified as gifted. Parents' classification of their unlabeled child's potential for someday being identified as gifted, measured by the

response categories of "very likely," "likely," and "not likely," consituted the independent variable for each unlabeled child. A fourth category was all identified gifted children. Perceptions of family environment were compared between unlabeled and labeled children. The childrens' normalized scores on the 10 subscales of the FES consituted the 10 dependent variables.

Hypotheses

Cornell's data (1983) suggest that gifted children and those children whose parents think it "very likely" or "likely" that they will someday be classified as gifted will perceive their family's psychosocial environment differently from those children who are covertly labeled as "nongifted." The gifted and "very likely/likely" to be labeled gifted children should perceive more expressiveness and cohesion in their family climate compared to the "not likely" group if the "idealization" process that Cornell hypothesizes has a positive developmental effect on this group

Mothers' and fathers' perceptions of family environment

This analysis investigated the question of whether mothers and fathers in families with identified gifted children and unlabeled children perceive their family's

social environment in significantly different ways. Parental sex constituted the independent variable and subjects' normalized scores on the 10 subscales of the FES constituted the dependent variables.

Hypotheses

In their FES Manual, Moos and Moos (1981) report no significant differences between mothers' and fathers' perceptions of their familys's social environment as measured by the FES. In the present study, we tested this variable due to the tentativeness of the previous null findings.

Method

Subjects

Subject selection procedure

An advertisement seeking research subjects was placed in three newsletters which serve the gifted population. This advertisement (see Appendix A) described the research as a study in which the family environments of gifted children would be investigated by Dr. James Polyson and colleagues at the University of Richmond.

A total of 583 families with gifted children responded to the advertisement described above. Each family was screened to determine if they met the

eligibility requirements of this research: i.e., each family must include at least one gifted child and at least one unlabled sibling, and both of these children must be between the ages of 6 and 19. Of the initial group of families who responded to the advertisement, it was apparent that 60 families met this criteria and that 143 other families might be eligible. For these 143 families, it was not clear from their response letter whether their family included at least one unlabeled sibling. Therefore a letter was sent to these 143 families in which parents were asked to suppply the names and ages of their gifted child(ren) and the names and ages of "other siblings" in the family (see Appendix B).

A total of 131 responses was received from this pool of 143 potentially eligible families. It was then determined that 94 of these families did not meet the eligibility requirements of this study and that 37 families did meet the eligibility requirements. These 37 families were then combined with the 60 eligible families that were first selected from the initial responses to the advertisement of this research project. Therefore, out of the original 583 families that responded to the notice of this research, 97 volunteer

families met the criterion of this study.

Research materials were sent to these 97 families and 73 families returned these research materials in the stamped and addressed envelopes provided to each family. It was then determined that 24 of these 73 families could not participate in this study for the following reasons:

1. In 8 families, the parents indicated that they considered all their children to be gifted and so did not discriminate between the gifted child(ren) and sibling(s) when completing the questionnaire sent to them.
2. In 8 families, the siblings were too young to read and understand the Family Environment Scale test booklet.
3. In 3 families, the siblings were not available to complete the Family Environment Scale.
4. In 2 families, parents did not provide their impression of the unlabeled siblings' potential for someday being classified as gifted.
5. Three families decided not to participate in the study.

Description of gifted families

Family size and composition.

The total subject sample for this study comprised 49 families (N=213) with at least one gifted child and at least one unlabeled sibling, both of whom were between the ages of 6 and 19. The total number of subjects was 213 persons: 55 gifted children, 64 siblings, 48 mothers and 46 fathers. Forty-five of these familes had both a mother and a father present in the home. In 3 families, the fathers were not present, and in 1 family, the mother was not present. The composition of these 49 families is described below:

1. 31 families with 1 gifted child and 1 sibling
2. 11 families with 1 gifted child and 2 siblings
3. 1 family with 1 gifted child and 3 siblings
4. 4 families with 2 gifted children and 1 sibling
5. 2 families with 2 gifted children and 2 siblings

Parents' age and level of formal education.

The mothers' mean age was 39 and the fathers' mean age was 44. All parents in this study had completed a high school education. The mothers' mean number of years of formal education was 15 years; the fathers' was 15.9 years. The specific breakdown of parents' years of formal education is described below:

1. High School degree only: 11 fathers
   12 mothers

2. High School degree plus less than 4 years of undergraduate education: 6 fathers

10 mothers

3. College degree only: 14 fathers

15 mothers

4. College degree plus graduate education: 14 fathers

10 mothers

(Data are missing for 1 father and 1 mother)

Geographical characteristics.

The 49 families in this study are a national sample representing 23 states.

Childrens' age and sex.

The gifted children in this study included 33 boys and 22 girls; the unlabeled siblings included 28 boys and 36 girls. The gifted childrens' age range was 6 to 17 years while the siblings' age range was 6 to 19 years. The mean age of both the gifted children and the siblings was 12 years.

Gifted childrens' education and IQ.

Of the 55 gifted children in this study, 49 reported that they were in a special educational program for the gifted. Thirty six parents reported their gifted child's IQ score. For the 39 gifted children for whom these data were available, the IQ range was 120 to

185 and the mean IQ was 141.

Length of time labelling has occured

One year and 12 years are the shortest and longest labeling times for the gifted children under investigation here. The mean number of years was 4.2.

Materials

Family Environment Scale

Description and rationale.

The Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos, 1974; Moos & Moos, 1976; Moos & Moos, 1981) is a 90-item True-False questionnaire designed to assess the psychosocial environments of families as perceived by each member of the family. Three subscales of the FES comprise a Relationships dimension: Cohesion measures the degree of mutual support among family members; Expressiveness measures the degree to which feelings are openly expressed in the family; Conflict measures the degree of openly expressed anger and hostility.

Five subscales comprise the Personal Growth dimension: Independence measures the extent of self-sufficiency and assertiveness allowed by the family system; Achievement Orientation measures the degree to which school and work activities are cast into an achievement orientation; Intellectual-Cultural

Orientation assesses the degree of interest expressed and encouraged in intellectual, cultural, social and political issues; Active-Recreational Orientation measures the extent of participation in recreational pursuits; Moral-Religious Orientation measures the extent to which moral and religious issues and ethics are stressed as value systems in the family.

The last two subscales comprise the Systems Maintenance dimension of the FES: Organization measures the degree of clear planning and structure in the family's activities; Control measures the extent to which family activities are governed by rules and procedures (see Appendix C for a sample of representative items used to measure each subscale of the FES).

Form R of the FES (standardized on a sample of 285 families) measures the perceptions of family members as they perceive their present family environment (Moos & Moos, 1976). Form R contains 9 statements for each of the 10 subscales, with the items arranged so that every tenth statement corresponds to the same subscale. In scoring the FES, subject's responses are tabulated for each FES subscale to produce a raw score so that each subject has 10 raw scores. The Form R raw scores are converted to standardized T- scores using the Standard

Score Conversion Table provided in the FES Manual. The authors report that these standardized scores are based on the means and standard deviations of the scores of a representative group of 1125 nationally distributed, normal families (Moos & Moos, 1981).

In their review of the various methods available to assess family functioning, Forman & Hagan (1983) classify the FES as a standardized, multidimensional assessment procedure designed to characterize the entire family system. These authors note that the FES offers the researcher maximum flexibility in assessing family functioning because it produces a composite picture of all family members' perceptions. The fact that Moos developed the FES to assess the attributes and characteristics of family environments as they are subjectively perceived by family members themselves has led some to object that this method does not allow independent observers to objectively verify the family's functioning (Sines & Zimmerman, 1981). Because the objective of this study is to investigate subjective perceptions of family environment, the FES is a useful dependent variable.

Internal consistency.

Moos and Moos (1981) report that the 10 subscales

of the FES have internal consistency ranging from .61 to .78. Moderate internal consistency is reported for the Independence (r=.61) and Achievement Orientation (r=.64) subscales. Substantial internal consistency is reported for the Cohesion (r=.78), Organization (r=.76), Moral-Religious Emphasis (r=.78) and Intellectual--Cultural Orientation (r=.78) subscales.

Independence of subscales.

The FES subscale intercorrelations average around .20, indicating that each subscale measures distinct but partly related facets of the family environment (Moos & Moos, 1976). The subscale intercorelations account for an average of less than 10% of subscale variance.

Test-retest stability.

Test-retest reliabilities for scores on the 10 FES subscales ranged from .68 to .86, with an 8 week test-retest period. A one week test-retest period yielded test-retest reliabilities of individual scores in a range of .52 to .89 (Forman & Hagan, 1983)

Questionnaire

In a questionnaire format (see Appendix D), parents were asked to provide the following information:

1. For each gifted child in the family:

   a. child's name, sex and birth date

b. age at which <u>each</u> parent first suspected that the child is gifted

c. age at which <u>both</u> parents learned for certain that the child is gifted

d. whether the child participates in a gifted program, and which one

e. the child's IQ and test used to measure IQ

2. For each "other child" in the family:

a. child's name, sex and birth date

b. parents' perceptions of whether it is "very likely," "likely," or "not likely" that the child who is not currently classified as gifted will someday be identified as gifted

c. the child's IQ and test used to measure IQ

3. Parents were asked to report how many years of formal education that each partner had completed: 12 years = high school degree and 16 years = college degree

Procedure

Instructions to subjects

Each family was sent a research packet that included the following materials:

1. 1 FES test booklet (Form R of the Family Environment Scale)

2. 1 FES answer sheet for each member of the family
3. 1 envelope per family member
4. the questionnaire described above
5. cover letter
6. informed consent form
7. 1 stamped and addressed return envelope

The cover letter (see Appendix D) provided instructions for taking the Family Environment Scale. If a child was too young to read and understand the Family Environment Scale booklet, parents were asked to indicate this fact on the answer sheet provided for that child and to return the unused answer sheet. Each envelope had written on it the name of one family member, and parents were asked to have each family member seal his/her answer sheet inside the envelope provided.

An informed consent provision followed the cover letter (see Appendix D). Each parent was asked to read this statement and sign and date it if he/she was willing to have his/her family participate as volunteers in this study.

Statistical analysis: Relationship between labeling period and family environment

For parents and unlabeled siblings, the gifted

labeling variable was operationally defined as the period (in years) for the first child who had been labeled as gifted, i.e., the period during which at least one gifted child was present in the family. The gifted labeling variable for gifted siblings was the number of years that he or she had been identified as gifted in the family.

Subjects' raw scores on the 10 FES subscales were converted to normal scores by using the conversion table provided in the FES Manual (Moos & Moos, 1981).

Subjects were divided into 4 groups: gifted children, unlabeled siblings, mothers and fathers. A oneway multivariate analysis of variance was done for each group to determine whether gifted childrens' perceptions of their family environment are significantly correlated with the length of the period during which they have been labeled, and whether other family members' perceptions of family environment are significantly correlated with the number of years in which their gifted child has been labeled.

A multivariate F-ratio was calculated for each of these 4 groups of family members to determine if an overall significant difference in FES scores exists between subjects in each of these groups. Ten uni-

variate F-tests were performed on each group to isolate the specific subscales of the FES at which significant differences occurred. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the direction of effect in those cases where a predictive relationship existed between the number of years in which the gifted child had been labeled and a significant difference in perceptions of family environment between gifted children, between unlabeled siblings, between mothers and between fathers.

Parents' perceptions of giftedness for unlabeled and labeled children

All siblings of the identified gifted children were assigned to a "likely," "very likely," or "not likely" group. The identified gifted children made up the fourth group. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was done to determine whether significant differences in subjects' FES scores exist among the children in each of the four categories of overt and covert labels of giftedness.

Mothers' and fathers' perceptions of family environment.

A one-way multivariate ANOVA was performed to determine if mothers and fathers in these families had

significantly different perceptions of their family's environment.

Results

Relationship between labeling period and perceived family environment

A single factor multivariate ANOVA was performed for each of 4 groups of subjects: gifted, siblings, mothers and fathers. Results are reported below for each category of subject.

Gifted children (N=55)

Multivariate tests of significance yielded, F (10, 44) = 3.606, $p < .05$, indicating a significant predictive relationship between gifted childrens' FES scores and the number of years in which labeling had occured. Ten univariate F-tests performed on each subscale of the FES produced significant F values and Pearson r's for 4 subscales: Achievement Orientation, Moral--Religious Emphasis, Organization and Control. The results of these univariate F-tests and the Pearson correlation coefficients for each FES subscale are reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Siblings (N=64)

Multivariate tests of significance yielded, F (10, 53) = 2.950, $p < .05$, indicating a significant predictive relationship between the number of years that the gifted child in the family had been labeled and the siblings' FES scores. Ten univariate F-tests performed on each subscale of the FES yielded significant F values for 4 subscales: Independence, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Organization and Control. The results of the univariate F-tests and the corresponding Pearson correlation coefficients for each FES subscale are reported in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Mothers (N=48)

Multivariate tests of significance produced, F (10, 37) = 2.704, $p < .05$, indicating that a significant predictive relationship existed between mothers' FES scores and the number of years that their gifted child(ren) had been labeled. Ten univariate F-tests

performed on each subscale of the FES yielded significant F values for 3 subscales: Cohesion, Organization and Control. The results of the univariate F-tests and the Pearson correlation coeficient are reported in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Fathers (N=46)

Multivariate tests of significance yielded, F (10, 35) = 1.037, p > .05. Although the overall F ratio is not significant in this analysis, the bivariate r value for the subscale of Organization is significant and replicates the significant results found for the mothers of gifted children, thus guarding against Type I error. Fathers' univariate F-tests and the Pearson correlation coefficients for each FES subscale are reported in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Mothers' and fathers' perceptions

of family environment

In the direct comparison of mothers and fathers, multivariate tests for homogeneity of the variance--covariance matrix yielded, F (55, 27228) = 1.081, p > .05, indicating that the criterion variables in this analysis are not singular. Multivariate tests of significance yielded, F (10, 83) = .615, p > .05, showing that no significant differences in FES scores of mothers and fathers were found.

Parents' perceptions of giftedness for unlabeled and labeled children

The original N of 64 siblings was reduced to 51 because of missing data on the variable of parents' judgement of the child's gifted potential. This created a MANOVA with very unequal number of subjects in each category, 1) gifted children: N = 55; 2) "very likely-/likely" siblings: N = 19; 3) "not likely" siblings: N = 27; 4) siblings whose parents disagreed about the likelihood of that unlabeled child someday being classified as gifted: N = 5. Because of the small number of subjects in the last category (5 subjects:10 dependent variables), the variance-covariance matrix for this cell was singular. However, the overall multivariate test for homogeneity of variance-covariance yielded, F (110,

9553) = .908, $p > .05$, indicating an overall independence of the dependent variable variance-covariance matrix. Multivariate tests of significance produced, F (30, 273.65) = 1.007, $p > .05$, showing that no significant differences were found in the FES scores of these 4 groups of children.

Two additional analyses were done to test for differences based on differential parental perceptions of the unlabeled and labeled children. First, the fourth category of siblings was excluded to eliminate the low cell N. This left 3 categories of subjects: 1) gifted children (N = 55) 2) siblings whose parents agree that it is "likely" or "very likely" that this child will someday be classified as gifted (N = 19), and 3) siblings whose parents agree that it is "not likely" that this child will someday be classified as gifted (N = 27). Multivariate test for homogeneity of variance-covariance showed, F (110, 9553) = .908, $p > .05$. Multivariate tests of significance produced, F (20, 178) = .813, $p > .05$, again indicating that there are no significant differences in FES scores between these 3 groups.

A further one-way MANOVA was done to determine if a significant difference in perceptions of family

environment exists between gifted children (N = 55) and their siblings (N = 64) (all siblings were collapsed into one group for this analysis). Multivariate tests for homogeneity of variance-covariance yielded, F (55, 42163) = .872, p > .05. Multivariate tests for significance resulted in, F (10, 108) = .640, p > .05, showing that gifted children and their siblings did not have significantly different perceptions of their family environment.

Discussion

Relationship between labeling period and perceived family environment

Interpersonal relationships

These results support prior research which suggested that family relationships are put under stress when a child has been labeled as gifted.

A significant predictive relationship was found for the number of years in which a gifted child had been labeled in the family with mothers' decreasing perceptions of cohesiveness and support (Cohesion) in the family environment. These results suggest that mothers of gifted children may carry more of the emotional stress that is involved in raising a gifted child. Hackney (1981) reports that a recurrent theme expressed by

parents of gifted children is: "How much should we adapt to the needs of our child?" (p. 53). He states that parents may struggle with the uncertainty involved in living from day to day with this question and that the issue of giftedness in a child may become " . . . a phantom member of the family, assuming a role, dictating additional rules, and requiring constant attention. But because it is a phantom member, it is all the more difficult for members to negotiate the issues that arise, or even to anticipate those issues" (p.53). Because all of the families in this study had both gifted children and siblings, it is possible that mothers feel a greater sense of responsibility for giving equal attention to their gifted and nongifted children, for balancing expectations of their gifted children and nongifted children, and for sharing family resources among all their children.

Two other findings in this study support the hypothesis that mothers of gifted children perceive and experience the stress related to raising both gifted and unlabeled children more than fathers do. First, no significant relationship was found for the number of years in which the gifted child had been labeled in the family with changes in fathers' perceptions of family

environment. This finding suggests that fathers are less affected by the effects of the gifted label in the family system. The reason for this may be the predominance of mothers of traditional families in child-care activities and responsibilities (Rossi, 1984). It is possible that mothers in traditional families without gifted children may also feel more of the stresses involved in parenting.

Second, no significant differences were found between mothers' and fathers' perceptions of family environment when these were tested without the independent variable of the gifted child's labeling time. Moos and Moos (1981) found no significant differences in husbands' and wives' perceptions of their family's social environment as measured by the FES. The fact that this study did find a significant difference in mothers' and fathers' perceptions of cohesiveness in their family's environment lends further support to the hypothesis that fathers are not as susceptible to the potential stressors involved over time in raising a family with both gifted children and unlabeled/nongifted children. It is important to note, however, that these differences between mothers and fathers are differences of degree, and that fathers also perceive and experience

the difficulties involved in raising gifted children. These differences should be addressed in future investigations of the family environments of families with both gifted and unlabeled children.

Ballering and Koch's (1984) hypothesis that the gifted/nongifted distinction is an important factor in predicting how gifted children and their siblings perceive the affective environment of their family is not supported by the findings of this study. No significant relationships were found for gifted childrens' or siblings' perceptions of Cohesion, Expressiveness, or Conflict in their family environment with the number of years in which the gifted child had been labeled. Partial explanation for these different findings may be found in the different sample size and testing instruments used in the 2 studies under comparison.

The present study investigated 49 families of gifted children, with 55 gifted subjects, and 64 (nongifted) siblings, while Ballering & Koch's study (1984) investigated 20 families of gifted children with 22 gifted subjects and 25 (nongifted) siblings. The mean age of the children was approximately the same in both studies, 10 years old and 12 years old. The larger

N investigated in the present study offers a more representative sample of the population of families of gifted children.

The test instrument used by Ballering & Koch (1984) is the Family Relations Test (Bene & Anthony, 1978), a projective test which measures the degree of positive and negative affect that each child assigns to relationships with his/her mother, father and sibling(s). As a projective test, the validity of the FRT is questionable; Ballering & Koch (1984) report that correlations between the child's perceptions and those of other family members may be very low. While this study has conceptualized Ballering and Koch's results into an hypothesis that is tested by the FES, it is possible that the differing results may be partially attributed to the different dependent variables. Forman and Hagan (1983) have noted in their review of family assessment methods that efforts to cross-validate family functioning instruments with one another are not always successful because of the differing strategies which are used to conceptualize and measure behavioral observations.

Cornell's (1983) hypothesis that labeling children as gifted leads to a process of "idealization"

of the gifted child within the family system is not supported by the findings of this study. Cornell's results indicate that parents who perceived their child as gifted reported more pride in that child and a closer relationship with that child. These results suggested two hypotheses for the present study: 1) that gifted children would perceive more Cohesion and Expressiveness in their family environments and 2) that siblings of gifted children would perceive less Cohesion and Expressiveness in their family systems. Neither of these hypotheses were supported by the results of the present study, as the gifted children did not differ significantly from each other in their perceptions of Cohesion and Expressiveness as the length of the labeling time increased and nongifted siblings did not differ from each other in their perceptions of Cohesion and Expressiveness as the length of the labeling time increased.

Three major differences in the two studies are noteworthy in discussing these results. First, Conrnell's subject sample included only 30 gifted children and 10 nongifted siblings of gifted children, while the present study included 55 gifted children and 64 nongifted siblings. The significantly larger sample

size of the present study, especially in terms of siblings of gifted children, is a more representative sample of the population of families with gifted children.

Second, Cornell's (1983) study measured parents' feelings of closeness, pride and similarity with their gifted child by interviewing the parents, an unstandardized measure of family functioning, while this study has used the FES, a standardized questionnaire. As noted previously, it is possible that the differences in results may be partially attributed to the different dependent variables which the two studies have used to measure family functioning.

The third major difference involves the design of the two studies: Cornell investigates parental attitudes towards gifted children at one point in time while the present study isolates significant relationships between the number of years in which a child has been labeled as gifted and the direction of any changes in family members' perceptions of their family environment. The findings of the present study suggest that labeling a child as gifted does not effect significant differences in how gifted children and their siblings perceive the affective relationship dimension of their family

environments.

Systems maintenance

The Systems Maintenance dimension of family environments achieved statistical significance for gifted children, their siblings and their mothers. Each of these groups reported a decreasing emphasis on organization and control in their family's environment as the number of years in which the gifted child had been labeled increased. These results support the hypothesis that the presence of a gifted child in the family system is an important factor in shaping the systems maintenance dimension of family environments. The specific pattern suggested by these results is that as the number of years in which a gifted child has been labeled increases, all family members except fathers perceive a decrease in the emphasis placed on organization and structure in shaping the responsibilities and activities of the family members and a decreasing use of rules and clear-cut procedures to govern family interactions and activities. These results replicate Tabackman's (1976) findings and also support Hackney's discussion (1981), based on clinical observation, of the difficulties faced by families with gifted children, especially in regard to maintaining distinct differen-

tiation in parent-child roles.

Prior use of the FES to compare family functioning in normal and distressed families indicates that a low degree of clear structure in governing family activites is one sign that the family is experiencing significant stress. A low level of organization in the family system was one measure which characterized families in which one parent was depressed from matched control families (Billings & Moos, 1983). In addition, well-organized families with clearly defined rules and procedures have been associated with optimal family functioning (Moos & Moos, 1983).

Areas of personal growth

The results of this study in measuring areas of personal growth that are emphasized by the family were somewhat suprising. Prior research (Tabackman, 1976; Collangelo & Dettman, 1983) indicates that families with gifted children encourage a high degree of independence among their family members and that they emphasize intellectual and cultural issues and activities. Tabackman (1976) also reports that families with gifted children reported a lower than average orientation to achievement in school and work activities. The present study's results do not indicate that there is a growing

emphasis on intellectual and cultural issues as the length of time that the child has been labeled as gifted increases. It is possible, however, that families with gifted children do emphasize and encourage discussion of intellectual and cultural issues in the home, but this is not a behavior which increases over time.

In terms of family members' attitudes towards achievement and independence, the expected results were not obtained: as the number of years in which the child has been labeled as gifted within the family increases, the gifted children perceive a growing orientation to achievement as an ideal to be pursued, while unlabeled siblings perceive a greater degree of freedom to make their own decisions, to be assertive and self-sufficient. The gifted childrens' increasing perceptions of achievement as an ideal supports the results of Fisher (1978), who found that the gifted label increased the expectations and demands that parents placed on their gifted child, and also supports Cornell's (1983) assertion that the positive labeling process ("idealization") may place a greater burden on gifted children to strive for and maintain a superior performance. This finding does not replicate Tabackman's (1976) finding that the families of gifted adolescents perceived less

emphasis on achievement orientation when compared to a normal sample.

Both gifted children and their siblings, but not mothers or fathers, reported a decreasing emphasis on moral and religious issues in the family environment as the length of the labeling process increased. No explanation is apparent for this interesting finding and further research is needed to investigate whatever relationship may exist between the gifted labeling process and the emphasis that is placed on religious and moral values by the family.

Parents' perceptions of giftedness for unlabeled and labeled children

Cornell's hypothesis that siblings of gifted children (covertly labeled as "nongifted" by their parents) will experience and perceive a more stressful psychosocial environment within their family systems is not supported by this study's findings. In this investigation, we have measured the "idealization" process hypothesized by Cornell by looking for significant differences in perceptions of family environment between: 1) gifted children; 2) those siblings thought "very likely/likely" to be someday classified as gifted by their parents; 3) those siblings thought "not likely"

to be someday identified as gifted by their parents; and 4) those siblings whose parents disagree over the likelihood of this child's potential giftedness. No significant differences in perceptions of family environment, as measured by FES scores, were found between the 4 groups described above. A second analysis found no significant differences between the first 3 groups described above, and an additional analysis found no significant differences between the FES scores of gifted children and all of their siblings when collapsed into one group.

Cornell (1983) bases his hypothesis that siblings of gifted children suffer from adjustment difficulties and poor self-esteem on his study's findings that nongifted siblings of gifted children were found to score significantly higher on the Neuroticism and Anxiety traits of the Children's Personality Questionnaire, Form A (Porter and Cattell, 1979). The present study measures gifted childrens' and siblings' perception of their psychosocial environment with the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1981), a completely different dependent variable. It is possible that the different nature of the 2 dependent variables may partially account for the different results obtained by

the 2 studies. Further research should continue to pursue this investigation of the psychosocial adjustment of siblings of gifted children.

The finding that no significant differences in FES scores were found among the 4 groups of children suggests that the gifted label does not implicitly place a negative label of "nongifted" on siblings of gifted children and that these siblings do not necessarily (de facto) perceive and experience a psychosocial environment in their family systems that contributes to adjustment difficulties and poor self-esteem. This finding is also an important component in the investigation and measurement of disruption in sibling relationships in those families that have both gifted and nongifted children. Ballering and Koch (1984) have argued that the gifted/nongifted distinction affects sibling relationships more than it does parent/child relationships because their results indicated that perceived affect in father-child relationships did not differ significantly between gifted and nongifted children. The present study offers an alternative explanation of this finding, as it was found that in the families tested, it was the fathers only who showed no significant relationship between perceptions of family

environment and the number of years in which their gifted child(ren) had been labeled. We have discussed this finding as an indication that fathers are less affected by the presence of a gifted child in the family. Ballering and Koch's (1984) finding that perceived affect in father-child relationships did not differ significantly between gifted and nongifted children is therefore consistent with this study's finding that fathers were less affected, over time, by the presence of an identified gifted child in the family system.

Summary

This study is a beginning step in research of the family environments of gifted children. Neither giftedness per se nor the gifted label itself were investigated, rather it is the relationship between the number of years in which a gifted child has been labeled and family members' perceptions of their family's social environment which has been investigated. Indirectly, parents' perceptions of the gifted label have been examined. It is important to note that many potential influences on a family's social environment exist apart from giftedness: parents' occupations and work environments, finances, childrens' school environment,

disability or sickness, and general developmental processes. No literature reporting the effects of adolescent development on perceptions of family environment as measured by the FES exists to the knowledge of this researcher, and it is therefore not possible in this study to distinguish the separate influences of adolescent development and giftedness on a family's social environment. Aside from this observation, the major limitation of this study is the volunteer nature of the families who participated. This selfselection of subjects may limit the generalizability of results. The study's large sample size of 213 persons, however, does provide a statistically sound basis for hypothesis-testing.

The major finding of this study is that mothers of gifted children report decreasing perceptions of cohesion, organization and control in their family environments as the number of years in which their gifted child(ren) has been labeled increases. This finding suggests that mothers of gifted children perceive and experience the stress involved in raising a family with both gifted and unlabeled children more than fathers do. In the areas of personal growth, significant relationships were found for gifted childrens'

growing orientation to achievement as an ideal and for siblings' growing perceptions of independence in the family with an increasing number of years that the gifted child had been labeled. The hypothesis that siblings of gifted children experience self-esteem and adjustment difficulties was not supported by this study.

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Table 1

Gifted Children: Univariate F-Tests With (1, 53) Degrees of Freedom

Variable	r2	r	F	Sig. of F
Cohesion	.041	-.201	2.238	.141
Expressiveness	.008	.090	.435	.512
Conflict	.053	.230	2.964	.091
Independence	.030	.173	1.626	.208
Achievement	.097	.312	5.712	.020*
Intellectual/Cultural	.000	-.017	.016	.900
Active/Recreational	.002	-.042	.092	.762
Moral/Religious	.090	-.301	5.268	.026*
Organization	.177	-.420	11.361	.001**
Control	.083	-.288	4.796	.033*

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 2

Siblings: Univariate F-Tests With (1, 62) Degrees of Freedom

Variable	r2	r	F	Sig. of F
Cohesion	.002	.041	.103	.749
Expressiveness	.040	.199	2.558	.115
Conflict	.001	-.030	.055	.816
Independence	.100	.317	6.921	.011*
Achievement	.032	.178	2.026	.160
Intellectual/Cultural	.015	-.122	.934	.338
Active/Recreational	.035	-.187	2.236	.140
Moral/Religious	.112	-.335	7.838	.007*
Organization	.118	-.344	8.311	.005*
Control	.163	-.404	12.086	.001*

*$p < .01$.

Table 3

Mothers: Univariate F-Tests With (1,46) Degrees of Freedom

Variable	r2	r	F	Sig. of F
Cohesion	.083	-.288	4.145	.048*
Expressiveness	.004	.066	.204	.653
Conflict	.007	.085	.333	.567
Independence	.075	.273	3.703	.061
Achievement	.020	.142	.946	.336
Intellectual/Cultural	.020	.143	.953	.334
Active/Recreational	.060	-.245	2.946	.093
Moral/Religious	.015	-.123	.712	.403
Organization	.108	-.328	5.546	.023*
Control	.097	-.311	4.936	.031*

*$p < .05$.

Table 4

Fathers: Univariate F-Tests With (1,44) Degrees of Freedom

Variable	r2	r	F	Sig. of F
Cohesion	.234	.055	2.540	.118
Expressiveness	.141	.020	.889	.351
Conflict	.207	.043	1.966	.168
Independence	.162	.026	1.186	.282
Achievement	.056	.003	.138	.712
Intellectual/Cultural	.033	.001	.047	.830
Active/Recreational	.053	.003	.122	.728
Moral/Religious	.110	.012	.540	.466
Organization	.380	.145	7.452	.009*
Control	.041	.002	.074	.787

*p <. 01.

Appendix A

Published notice of this study

This advertisement was published in the following publications:

1. The newsletter published by the Virginia Association for the Education of the Gifted.
2. Communique, the newsletter of the National Association for Gifted Children.
3. Gifted Children Monthly, a publication that also reaches a national sample of persons interested in the special concerns of gifted children.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS WANTED

RICHMOND, VA. What are the family environments of gifted children like? You can help determine the answer by participating in research on this subject conducted by the University of Richmond.

Dr. James Polyson and colleagues in UR's department of psychology want to find out about interpersonal relationships, areas of personal and intellectual growth, and the family structure and organization of "gifted families." They're asking you to send them your name and address and the names and ages of your children.

You'll be sent questionnaires to fill out that will take about twenty minutes to complete. (You're under no obligation to do so if you change your mind.) All information will be kept strictly confidential. In return for your participation, you will receive a report of the research results.

Interested parties may write to Dr. James Polyson at the Department of Psychology, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA 23173.

Appendix B

Initial letter sent to families interested

in participating in study

October 7, 1985

Name
Address

Dear Parents:

Thank you very much for offering to participate in our study of gifted children and their families. In the enclosed stamped envelope please send us the name(s) and age(s) of your gifted child(ren) and the name(s) and age(s) of their sibling(s), if any. This will inform us of how many questionnaires to mail to you. For your convenience, simply fill in the information in the spaces below and return this letter to us. Thanks again for your help.

Yours truly,

James Polyson, Ph.D.

Anne Hall

Gifted Children		Other Siblings	
Names	Ages	Names	Ages

Appendix C

Family Environment Scale Subscale Descriptions (Moos & Moos, 1976)

RELATIONSHIP DIMENSIONS

1. Cohesion — The extent to which family members are concerned and committed to the family and the degree to which they are helpful and supportive to each other.
   (Family members really help and support one another.)

2. Expressiveness — The extent to which family members are allowed and encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings directly.
   (There are a lot of spontaneous discussions in our family.)

3. Conflict — The extent to which the open expression of anger and aggression and generally conflictual interac tions are characteristic of the family.
   (Family members often criticize each other.)

PERSONAL-GROWTH DIMENSIONS

4. Independence — The extent to which family members are encouraged to be assertive, self-sufficient, to make their own decisions, and to think things out for themselves.
   (In our family, we are strongly encouraged to be independent.)

5. Achievement Orientation — The extent to which different types of activities (e.g., school and work) are cast into an achievement-oriented or compete tive framework.
   (Getting ahead in life is very important in our family.)

6. Intellectual-Cultural Orientation — The extent to which the family is concerned about political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities.
(We often talk about politics and social problems.)

7. Active-Recreational Orientation — The extent to which the family particpates actively in various recreational and sporting activi ties.
(We often go to movies, sports events, camping, etc.)

8. Moral-Religious Emphasis — The extent to which the family actively discusses and emphasizes ethical and religious issues and values.
(Family members attend church, synagogue, or Sunday School fairly often.)

SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE DIMENSIONS

9. Organization — The extent to which order and organization are important in the family in terms of structuring of family activities, financial planning, and the explicitness and clarity of rules and responsi bilities.
(Activities in our family are pretty carefully planned.)

10. Control — The extent to which the family is organized in a hierarchical manner, the rigidity of rules and proce dures, and the extent to which family members order each other around.
(There are very few rules to follow in our family.)

Appendix D

Letter and questionnaire sent

to participating families

Dear Parents:

Thank you for your offer to participate in our research project. Enclosed please find one copy of the Family Environment Scale booklet and an answer sheet for each member of your family (parents and children ages 6 to 19) to complete. Attached to each answer sheet is an envelope with the name of the family member who will use this answer sheet. Please have each family member seal his or her answer sheet in this envelope when they have finished marking their answers. Instructions for taking this test are provided on the front page of the booklet. You and your children will need about 20 minutes to mark your answers on the separate answer sheets provided. Please use a pencil and do not mark in the booklets themselves. Choose a quiet,relaxed time in which to take this test so that you can think carefully about the questions. If your child needs assistance in understanding how to fill out the answer sheet, feel free to help, while respecting his or her privacy. If your child cannot read the Family Environment Scale booklet by him/herself, indicate this on the answer sheet and return the unmarked answer sheet in the envelope provided.

Again, we thank you for your decision to participate in our research program. We hope through our research to gain a better understanding of gifted children and their families. Please return your answer sheets and booklet within 2 weeks. We will send to all participating families a report of our results. If you have any questions, please call us at (804)289-8123.

Dr. James Polyson
Anne Hall

Before answering the questions on the following two pages, please read the statement below and sign in the space provided.

We understand that we are being invited, as parents of gifted children, to participate as volunteers in a study of family environments of gifted children. This

research is being carried out under the direction of Dr. James Polyson at the University of Richmond. We understand that if either we or our children do not wish to participate in this study we may return the blank answer sheets and Family Environment Scale booklet in the envelope provided. We further understand that our identity will be held totally confidential. Any publications resulting from this study will contain data which is anonymous and which does not disclose the identity of individual participants.

We hereby agree to offer information that is accurate to the best of our knowledge; we also voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Mother's Signature _____

Father's Signature _____

Date: _____

Please answer the following questions for <u>each</u> <u>gifted child</u> in the family.

1. (1st) gifted child's name _____ sex __
birth date _____
How old was this child when each of you first suspected that he or she is gifted?

Mother: _____ Father: _____

How old was this child when you both learned for certain that he or she is gifted?

_____

What gifted program, if any, does this child participate in?

_____

What is this child's IQ, if known? _____

What test was used to measure this child's IQ,if known?

_____

2. (2nd) gifted child's name _____ sex __
birth date _____

How old was this child when each of you first suspected that he or she is gifted?

Mother: _____ Father: _____

How old was this child when you both learned for certain that he or she is gifted?

_____

What gifted program, if any, does this child participate in?

_____

What is this child's IQ, if known? _____

What test was used to measure this child's IQ, if known?

_____

Please answer the following questions for each other child in the family.

1. (1st) child's name _____ sex ___
birth date _____

Do you feel it is likely that this child who is not currently classified as gifted will someday be identified as gifted?

Mother:_____ very likely _____ likely _____not likely

Father:_____ very likely _____ likely _____ not likely

What is this child's IQ, if known? _____

What test was used to measure this child's IQ, if known?

_____

2. (2nd) child's name _____ sex ___
birth date _____

Do you feel it is likely that this child who is not currently classified as gifted will someday be identified as gifted?

Mother:_____ very likely _____ likely _____ not likely

Father:_____ very likely _____ likely _____ not likely

What is this child's IQ, if known? _____

What test was used to measure this child's IQ, if known?

_____

3. How many years of formal education has each parent completed?
(High school degree = 12 years, College degree = 16 years)

Mother: _____ Father: _____

Appendix E

Summary letter sent to all volunteer families

Dear Families:

We thank you for volunteering to participate in our project on the family environments of gifted children. Many of you did not receive research materials from us because your family did not meet the narrow eligibility requirements of this study. We are taking this oopportunity to show our appreciation for your interest in our research by presenting a brief summary of the objectives and results of our study.

We first investigated how families with gifted children respond to the gifted label over time. Does the presence of an identified gifted child in the family effect predictable changes in the family's social environment? Our results indicate that all family members do perceive their families as being less organized as the number of years in which the gifted child has been labeled increases. It is well known that parents of gifted children face special challenges, and our study suggests that mothers may experience the stress related to these challenges even more acutely than fathers do. Gifted children reported an increasing emphasis on achievement, whereas their siblings perceived more emphasis on independence in their family's environment. In the latter case, the independence may have both positive and negative aspects: positive in the sense of less pressure, negative in the sense of less involvement.

Our second investigation looked at how the gifted label might affect the ways in which gifted children and their siblings perceive their family's social climate. We asked parents to tell us which of their children they thought might be likely or not likely to be somday identified as gifted and then compared these childrens' responses to those of the gifted child. Our results suggest that being labeled as gifted does not produce a negative perception of the family environment, contrary to what previous researchers have suggested. This held true for gifted children as well as their siblings.

Our study is a beginning step in investigating the family environments of gifted children and we thank you for making this research possible.

Yours truly,
Anne Hall
James Polyson, Ph.D.

Vita

Anne Hall received a B.A. from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1982. She is currently a resident of New Haven, Connecticut where she is a graduate student at Yale Divinity School.