

**Maternal Expectations, Advice, and Provision of Opportunities:
Their Relationships to Boys' and Girls' Occupational Aspirations**

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Among the socialization goals of the family is the development of children's vocational choices. Parents play an early formative role by encouraging children to pursue some course or activity options while discouraging or ignoring other possible choices. Parents may do this, in part, by providing certain opportunities and materials for their youngsters. Research (e.g., Bradley, Caldwell, & Elardo, 1977; Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988) suggests that the opportunity structure, including toys, books, equipment, and exposure to various activities, that is available to a child can play a primary causal role in the child's development and contribute to the child's abilities. In addition, the work of Eccles and her colleagues (Eccles (Parsons) et al., 1983) illustrates that parents also influence their children's vocational aspirations by making their expectations and values known to their children.

Although there have been some shifts in the types of jobs women now seek, the occupational career paths of women and men continue to differ (Eccles, 1987), and the occupational plans of adolescents correspond to this difference (Gerstein, Lichtman, & Barokas, 1988). The question then arises as to whether parents of boys do or say something systematically different from parents of girls as they influence their children's vocational development. Figure 1 depicts this question. Are there gender differences in the kinds of opportunities and advice provided or in the expectations, aspirations, and ability assessments held by mothers for their sons and daughters, and what is the link to their children's occupational aspirations?

This paper addresses this issue by considering data gathered from adolescents as they made the transition into junior high school. We focused on this period by looking at children in 12 different school districts over four waves of data collection: the fall and spring of the children's sixth grade, and the fall and spring of their seventh grade school year. Children completed questionnaires in the schools. Many of their parents participated by completing mailed questionnaires that asked a broad range of questions about their assessments of their children's skills and motivation, as well as questions about their own beliefs and socialization practices. The data reported here are from approximately 1500 mothers and their children.

Specific parent measures for this study include provision of opportunities for the child (e.g., provided computers, software, or programs, enrolled in music, art, or dance lessons, bought sports equipment); expectations for the child following high school (e.g., go into the military, get married); advice about future (e.g., education or training needed for different jobs, problems of combining work and family); aspirations (e.g., want child to have a job that will support self and family); assessments of child's academic skills and motivation (e.g., how well is child doing in English?, how successful would child be in career requiring math?); and beliefs about family/work roles (e.g., it is better if the man is the breadwinner and the woman takes care of the family).

Student measures include their beliefs about similar family/work roles and their occupational aspirations as assessed by the question of what job they would like to have when they are 30 years old and coded using standard U.S. Occupational Classification codes. Each answer was then sex-typed based on the 1980 U.S. Census Bureau's information on occupations by sex (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1982) as a measure of the traditionality of their aspirations. If 70% or more of one

gender held a particular job, the job was then coded as being sex-typed for that gender.

Pearson product-moment correlations and analysis of variance techniques were used to analyze the data. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that mothers were indeed sex-typed in the opportunities they reported providing for their children: they worked more with boys on the computer ($E=20.49$, $p<.001$; means=1.69 for girls, 1.98 for boys), provided more computers, software, and programs for boys ($E=13.47$, $p<.001$; means=2.03 for girls, 2.31 for boys), provided more math or science books and games for boys ($E=16.44$, $p<.001$; means=2.46 for girls, 2.70 for boys), and more often enrolled boys in computer classes ($E=4.01$, $p<.05$; means=1.21 for girls, 1.25 for boys). Similar patterns existed in their provision of sports opportunities while opposite patterns were found in the area of music, art, and dance: mothers provided more lessons for girls in these areas ($E=81.99$, $p<.001$; means=2.85 for girls, 2.17 for boys) and bought more of these supplies for girls ($E=32.54$; $p<.001$; means=3.02 for girls, 2.64 for boys).

As for the advice and expectations of mothers, Figure 4 illustrates that mothers were significantly more likely to encourage their sons to consider the military, to expect their sons to go into the military right after high school, and to discuss the education or training needed for, and likely income of different jobs with sons. Expecting marriage right after high school and discussing the problems of combining work and family, and were more common to daughters. In addition, mothers were more worried that their daughters rather than their sons would not have happy marriages ($E=18.25$, $p<.001$; means=3.78 for girls, 3.48 for boys); and although they wanted both sons and daughters to have a job that could support themselves and a family, they held this

aspiration more for boys than for girls ($F=56.19$, $p<.001$; means=6.50 for girls, 6.77 for boys).

In their assessments of their children's abilities, as shown in Figure 5 girls were seen as doing better and having more natural talent in English, and mothers thought girls would be better at careers requiring English than boys. Mothers also felt that girls were doing better in math than boys, but that boys had more natural talent in math and would be better at a career requiring math than girls. In addition, it was more important for the mothers that their child do well in math if they had a boy ($F=8.29$, $p<.01$; means=6.36 for girls, 6.47 for boys), and they reported getting more upset if their sons rather than their daughters got a low grade in math ($F=12.97$, $p<.001$; means=5.25 for girls, 5.48 for boys). Interestingly, the students themselves agreed with their mothers: girls were seen as being better than boys at careers requiring English, and boys were seen as being better than girls at careers requiring math.

In sum, thus far, there are indeed significant gender differences in the kinds of opportunities and advice provided and in the expectations, aspirations, and ability assessments held by mothers for their sons and daughters. The next step was to explore the link between these findings and the children's occupational aspirations, and see whether similar differences exist within sex. Figure 6 depicts this model. Analyses were run examining some of the areas in which significant sex-of-child effects were found to test if there would also be significant traditionality of occupational aspiration effects. Figure 7, for example, shows that mothers tended to be more likely to provide math or science books to those daughters who aspired to male-typed occupations (non-traditional girls) than to those who aspired to female-typed jobs (traditional girls). Mothers thought their non-traditional daughters had more natural talent in English, but also in math, than their traditional daughters, and they got more

upset if these daughters got a low mark in math than if traditional girls did not do well in math. Conversely, mothers talked more to their daughters who aspired to more female-typed occupations about the importance of looking good than to their daughters who aspired to male-typed jobs. They also expected daughters who aspired to more female-typed occupations to be more likely to get married right after high school than their non-traditional peers. Mothers saw these traditional girls as being more likely to give up when faced with difficult problems than their non-traditional peers, and interestingly, traditional girls themselves reported that they counted on their parents to solve problems for them more than non-traditional girls.

Finally, traditional attitudes in the 7th grade, were found to be related to 10th grade career-related values (Barber, Fuligni, Eccles, Colarossi, 1990). In examining the social influences on these values, it is important to consider the relationship between similar values held by mothers and daughters. Figure 8 adds mothers' values to the model and suggests that mediating the effects through their children's values may also influence the traditionality of girls' occupational aspirations. In fact, several of the mothers' and girls' family/work role values were related. For example, mothers' belief that it was better if the man was the breadwinner and the woman took care of the family was related to their children's identical belief, $r=.17$, $p<.001$. As seen in Figure 9 girls aspiring to female-typed occupations were more likely to endorse this belief as well as the belief that babies need mothers around most of the day than their non-traditional peers. Mothers' belief that working mothers can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with their children as non-working mothers was related to their children's beliefs that it is okay for mothers to have full-time careers, $r=.18$, $p<.001$. Non-traditional girls were more likely to endorse this belief, as well as the belief that women are better wives and mothers if they have paid jobs.

In this paper, we have shown that beliefs and values are related to occupational aspirations and plans for the future. Additionally, we have provided evidence of the following links: sex of child to mothers' behaviors, expectancies, and advice; mother's behaviors, expectancies and advice to children's career aspirations; and children's beliefs to children's career aspirations. We have additional evidence (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, in press) that documents the link from mothers' gender role beliefs to mothers' behavior, expectancies, and advice; and from the interaction of mothers' gender role beliefs and child's sex to mothers' behavior, expectancies, and advice. Finally, we have evidence suggesting that this link is stronger if the child is an adolescent rather than an elementary school-aged child, thus supporting the hypothesis that gender role socialization intensifies during the adolescent period; and Barber et al. (1990) provide further documentation of the link between children's beliefs and values and their career aspirations.

What we see here is that parental socialization practices in the form of provision of opportunities, expectations, and beliefs are a logical and important place to look for one source of adolescent values and aspirations. We need to look more closely at these, and other possible sources of adolescent values, and at the larger social context in which both the adolescents and their parents are operating such as larger cultural prescriptions.

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Figure 1. MODEL OF MATERNAL INFLUENCE ON BOYS' AND GIRLS' OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

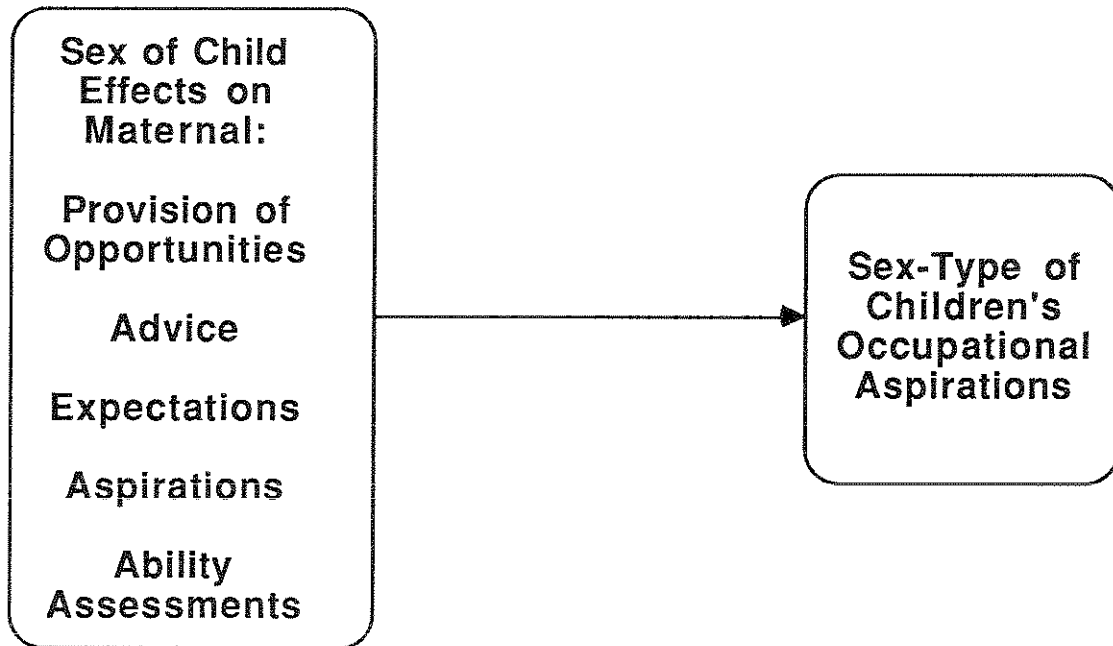


Figure 2. Mothers' Provision of Opportunities by Sex of Child

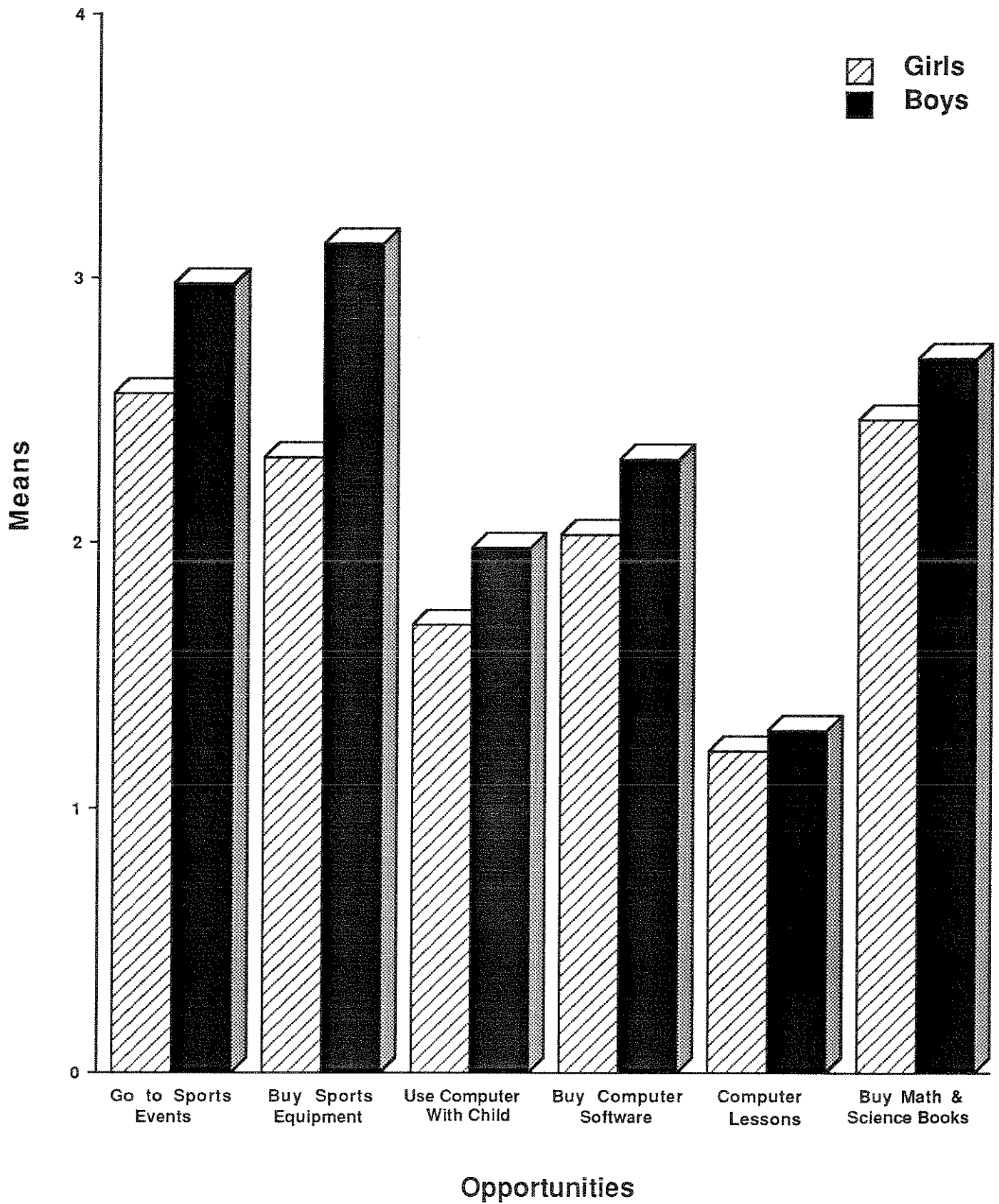


Figure 3. Mothers' Provision of Opportunities by Sex of Child

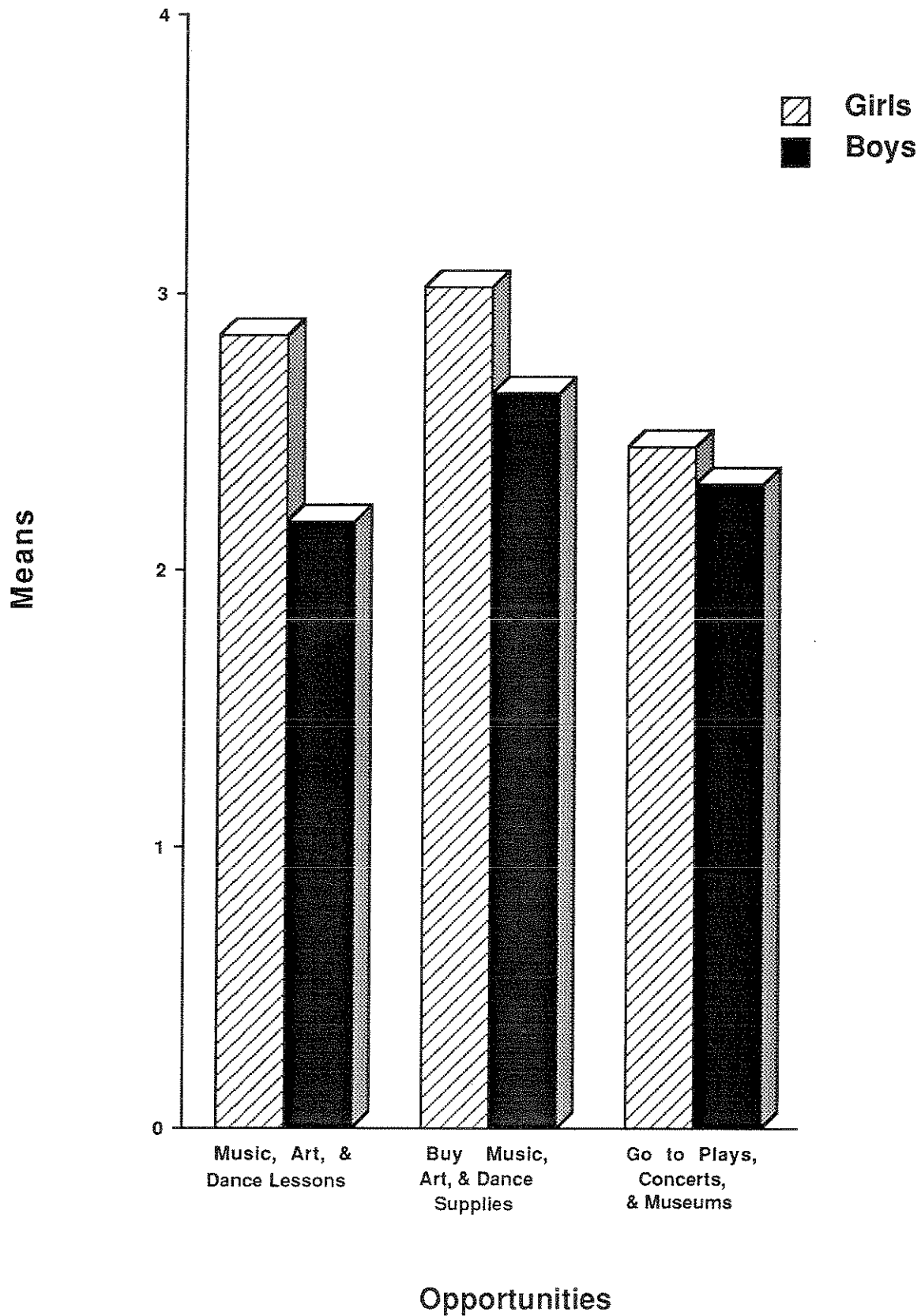


Figure 4. Mothers' Advice and Expectations by Sex of Child

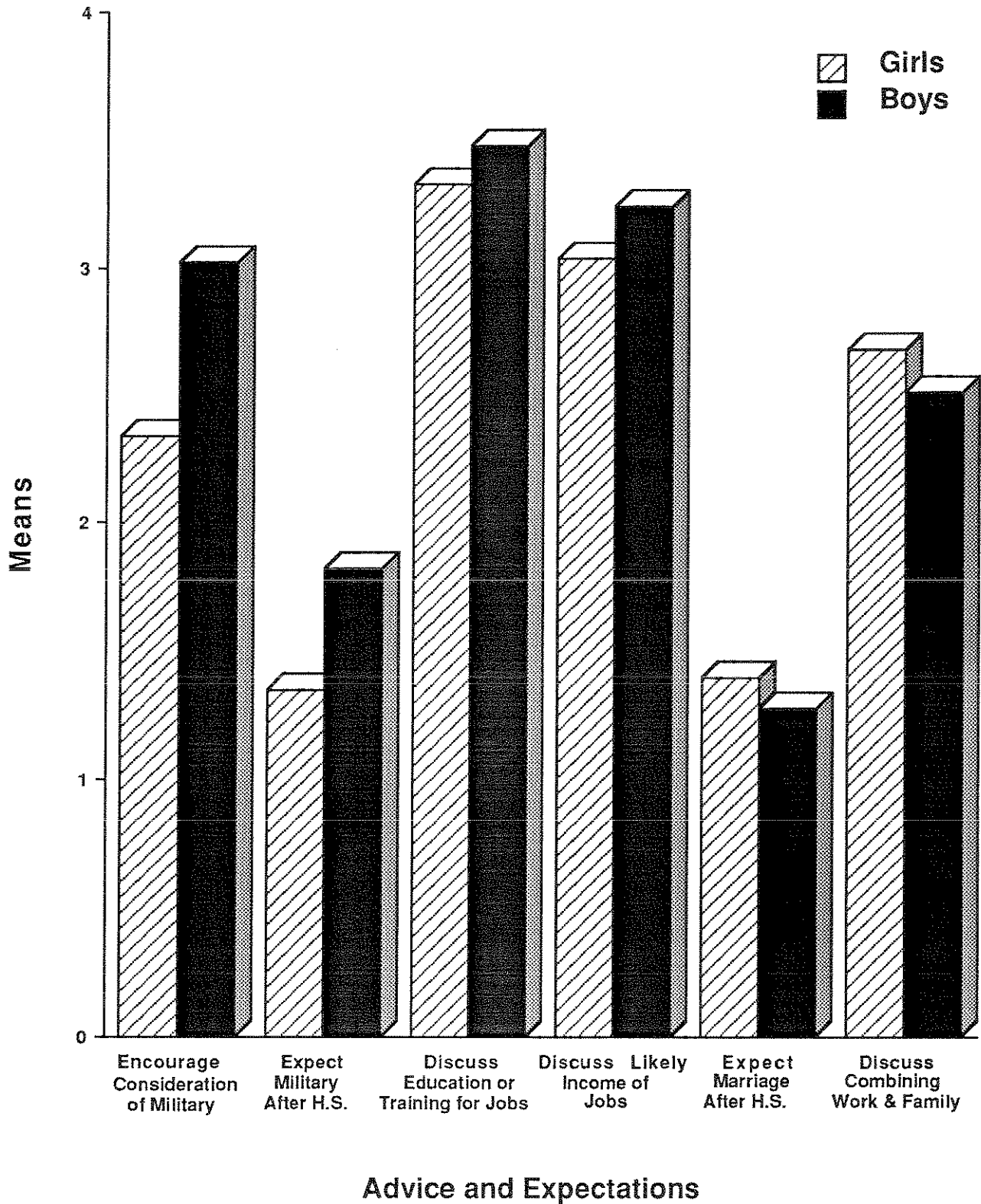


Figure 5. Mothers' Assessments of Abilities by Sex of Child

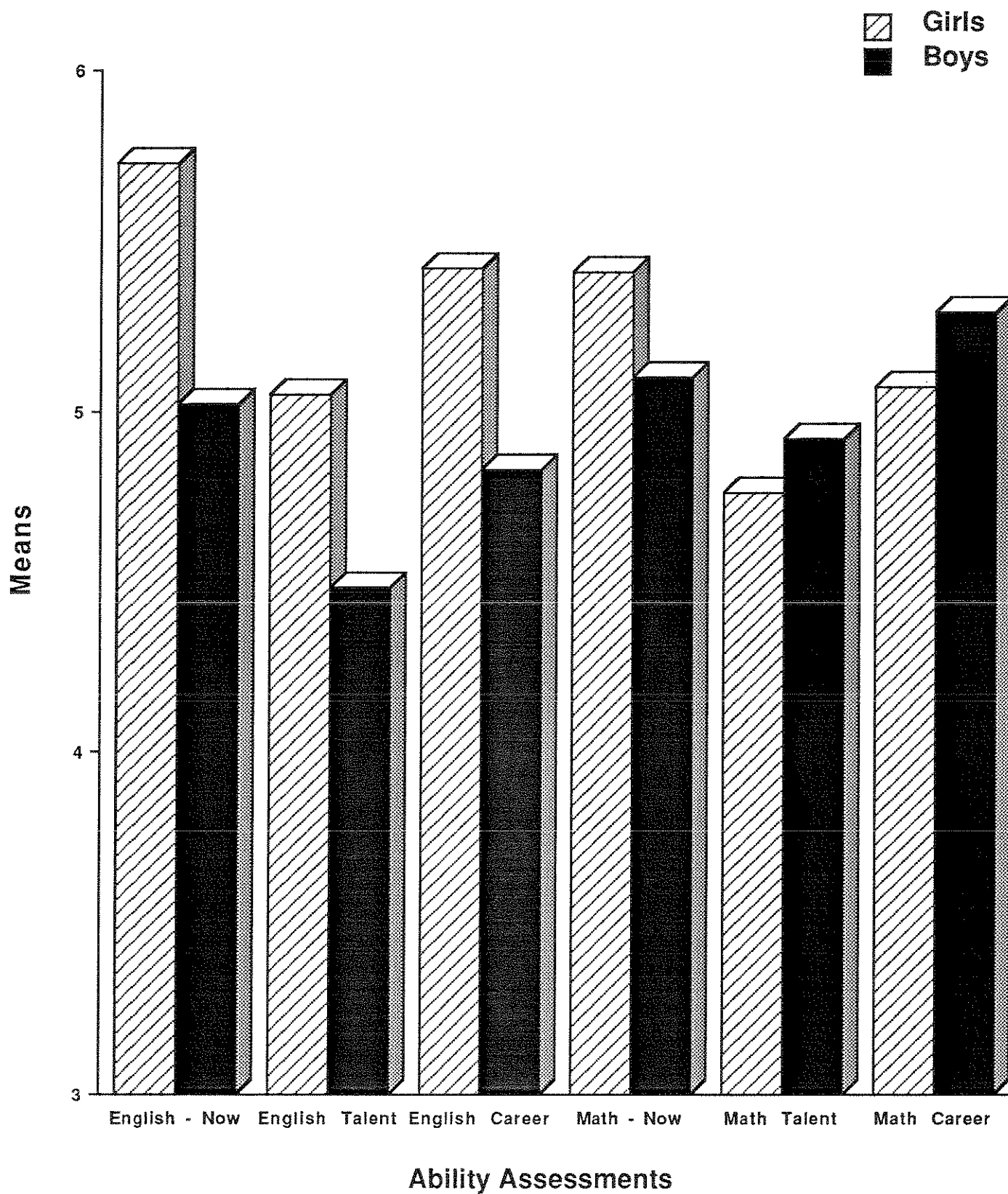


Figure 6. MODEL OF MATERNAL INFLUENCE ON GIRLS' OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

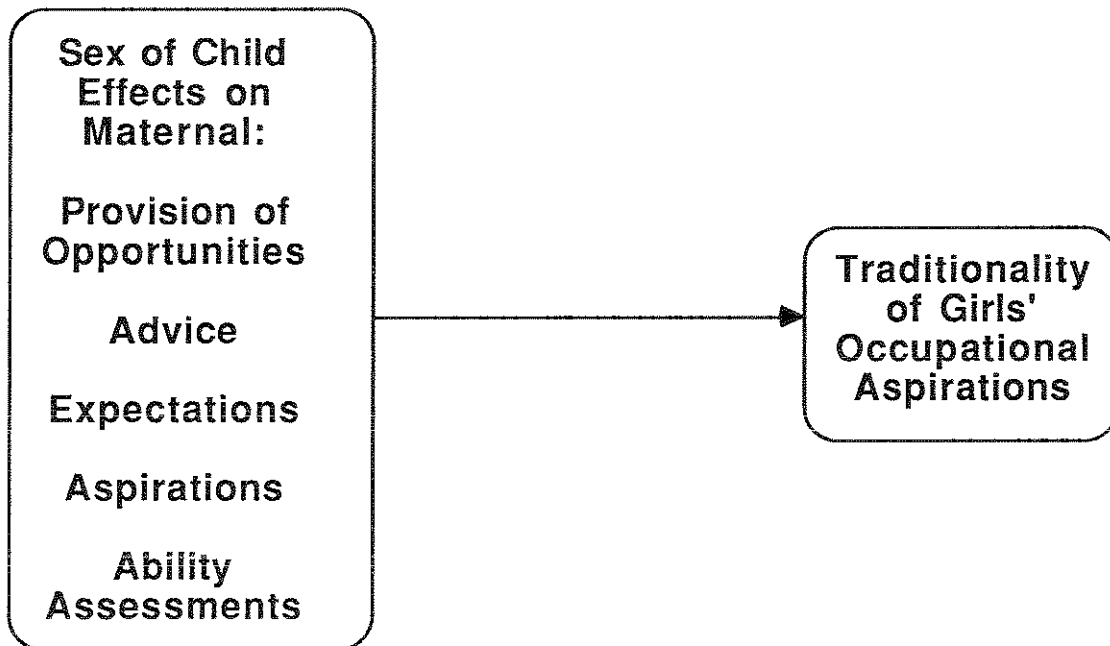


Figure 7. Mothers' Ratings by Traditionality of Girls' Occupational Aspirations

Non Traditional/Male-Typed Aspirations>

Traditional/Female-Typed Aspirations:

- ▣▣▣▣➔ Provided more math or science-related games, equipment, etc.
- ▣▣▣▣➔ More natural talent in English
- ▣▣▣▣➔ More successful in career requiring English
- ▣▣▣▣➔ More natural talent in math
- ▣▣▣▣➔ More successful in career requiring math
- ▣▣▣▣➔ More upset with low grade in math

Traditional/Female-Typed Aspirations>

Non Traditional/Male-Typed Aspirations:

- ▣▣▣▣➔ Talked more with child about importance of looking good
- ▣▣▣▣➔ Expect marriage more often right after high school
- ▣▣▣▣➔ Child gives up more often when faced with difficult problems

Figure 8. MEDIATED MODEL OF MATERNAL INFLUENCE ON GIRLS' OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

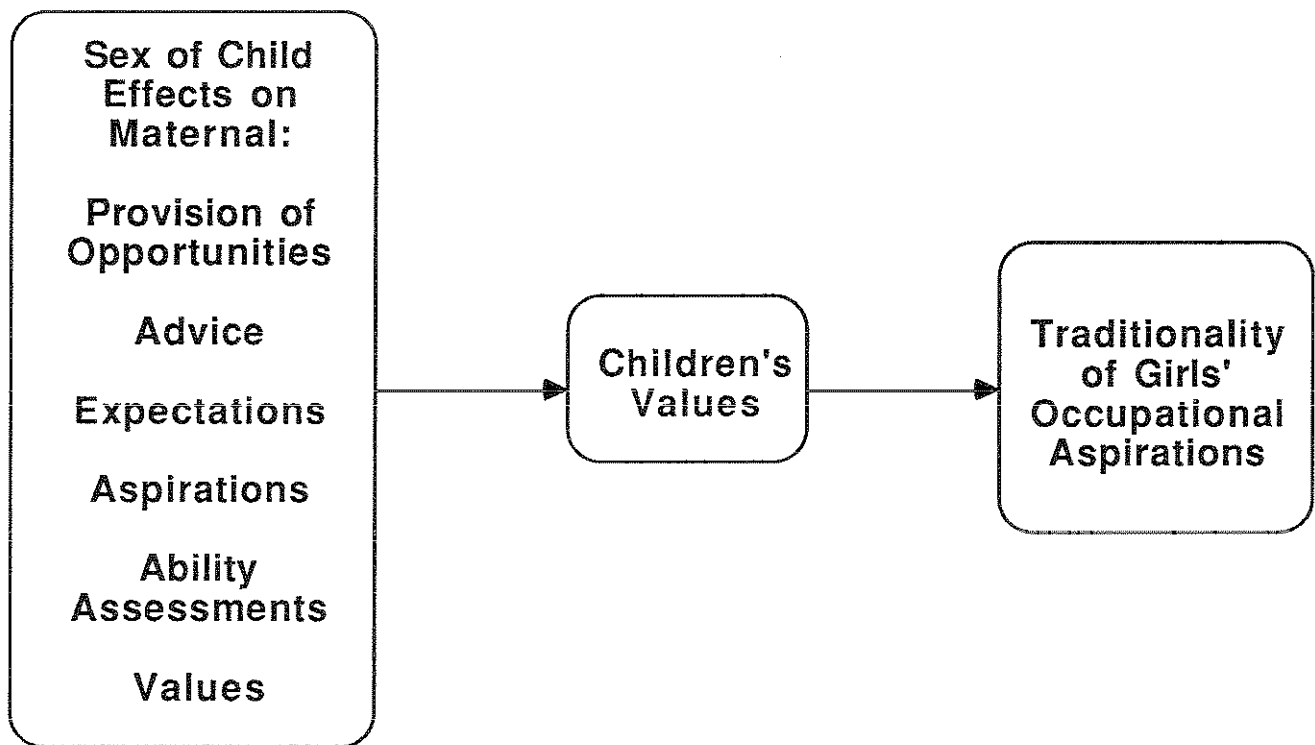


Figure 9. Girls' Work & Family Values by Traditionality of Their Occupational Aspirations

