by Phyllis Schlafly

Mothers, Leadership, and Success

July 18, 1991

Why are some people driven to strive for success, while others are content with lesser goals? Do strong-willed, dominant, achievement- oriented leaders have different genes, or a superior brain, from the rest of mere mortals?

A highly successful businessman who built up one of the largest homebuilding companies in the United States during the l-970s, Guy Odom, thinks he has the answer to these questions. He tested his theories of personality by instituting company personnel practices that enabled him to hire achievement-oriented men and women.

Odom developed the thesis that child-rearing practices are the root of adult successes and failures, and that adult success is not only established during early childhood, but is established specifically by mothers. If the mother demands achievement and excellence from her child during his early formative years, she builds into the child a life pattern of achievement.

According to Odom, the mother does not have to have a high I.Q. or be highly educated; her race, creed and nationality are irrelevant. The key factor is what she demands of her child.

The period from birth to age five has the most profound influence on the child and the most lasting influence on him as an adult. the person directly responsible for a child's day-to-day nurture and rearing, usually the mother, instills the attitudes, needs, fears, and behavior that govern the child’s later life.

The child's dominance level is determined by the mother. The child becomes dominant or nondominant to the degree that the mother makes and enforces her demands of the child in all those little daily tasks that seem minuscule in the life of an adult, but are monumental in the life of a toddler.

If the mother makes greater-than-average demands on her child during these early years, she forms his personality to demand achievement for himself. The more demands a mother makes on her child for achievement, the stronger his achievement motivation will be.

Odom chose the word “dominance” to describe the personality characteristic which distinguishes mothers who rear their children for success from those who are permissive. Odom defines dominance as the characteristic of striving to influence and affect the behavior of others; he uses dominance as synonymous with leadership.

Odom relates how so many famous Americans, such as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford, had dominant mothers. He quotes many successful men from history who attributed their success to their mothers, such as Napoleon and Abraham Lincoln.

Lyndon Johnson's strong need to control others was instilled in him by his highly dominant mother who seemed under a compulsion to make him achieve. Robert Moses, who built so much of New York City, displayed a notorious trait of dominance which was transferred to him from his mother, who in turn was given it by her mother.

Children of highly successful fathers rarely equal their fathers' successes, even though they have every advantage of heredity and environment. That's because, according to Odom, most successful men in all occupations marry nondominant wives. The dominance trait -- that is, the compulsion for achievement -- is passed by the mother, not the father.

Odom says that, where information is available on the mothers of American Presidents, the dominance trait is clearly evident. The absence of the dominance trait in the sons of American Presidents is conspicuous. Only one of our 41 Presidents had a son who achieved anything like the his father’s success: John Quincy Adams, who was the son of a dominant mother, Abigail Smith Adams, the wife of President John Adams.

Unfortunately, as a nation realizes affluence, the affluent dominant women tend to have fewer children. When dominant women limit or stop having children, in only a couple of generations a majority of people become nondominant.

Odom chronicles the rise and fall of many societies throughout history, but notes that one society, the Jewish, has maintained its superiority of intellect and achievement for over 4,000 years despite all kinds of persecution. For this unique achievement, Odom credits the Jewish mothers, who are famous for their dominance, aided by the Jewish tradition of determining religious descent through the female line.

In America today, most dominant women are professionals, upwardly mobile executives in all branches of commerce and finance, or even politicians. They are achieving success in those fields instead of in the child-rearing and child-educating fields, and most are bearing, few if any children and are not personally rearing those they do have.

The reduction in the pool of dominant mothers who are rearing successful, achieving children is an ominous trend that could signal the decline of our society. Odom's theories, which he presents j-n a book entitled Mothers. Leadership and Success, deserve thoughtful discussion.