

P1 Horner Summary  
ENG 200-1  
Mincey  
Feb 4, 2005

A Summary of  
Matina Horner's "A Bright Women is  
Caught in a Double Bind"

What was it like to be a woman in the 1960's through the 1970's? The essay called "A Bright Women is Caught in a Double Bind" takes a look into America's past and studies how women were effected intellectually by our society ideals of being lady like. This popular essay which was published in 1969 was written by Matina Horner, who has a Ph.D. in psychology. In this essay, Horner addresses why women have a "motive to fear success" in our society. Her reasoning to look into this topic is that there seemed to be motivational differences for achievement in men and women in our society.

et al. Horner wanted to address motivational differences because of a prior study done by David McClelland. David McClelland conducted a study by giving the TAT (thematic appreciation test) to men. This test "isolates[ed] the psychological characteristic of the need to achieve." This 1953 study only concerned men and Horner sought to know what caused motivational differences of achievement in both men and women through group studies.

To understand the following studies of Horner's it is crucial to know her definitions of important phrases. "Double Bind" refers to a women being trapped between the society standards of what it means to be lady like, and trying to be a

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Indicate historical context  
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successful intellectual. Another phrase, “motive to avoid success” is defined by Horner  
“as the fear that success in competitive achievement situations will lead to negative  
consequences, such as unpopularity or loss of femininity....” This definition is one sided,  
and her studies will also be typically one sided. Horner’s studies will normally address  
the “motive to avoid success” in women.

Understanding these definitions will help clarify Horner’s essay as she conducts  
her studies. Before conducting her three staged study of motivational differences Horner  
made three hypotheses regarding her thoughts in relation to what the study would  
generate. The first stated that women are more prone to avoid success because of  
society’s view of being lady like. Secondly, women not requiring success will not  
experience the “motive to fear success”, while women seeking success, especially in  
careers, will experience anxiety from this motive. Horner final hypothesis was based on  
women working alone or with another female, and not in direct competition with any  
males.

To see if her hypotheses were correct Horner started the first stage of her study.  
In the first stage “90 girls and 88 boys all, undergraduate students of the University of  
Michigan” wrote stories on the topic of a student who has achieved success. The males  
wrote a story of a male who had achieved an intellectual success, while the females wrote  
about a female who had achieved the same intellectual success as the male. Horner also  
gave the TAT to both sexes. The TAT allowed Horner to measure the “motive to  
achieve.” Once completed the stories were graded by Horner on the “motive to avoid  
success.” The scoring of the stories were based off “negative imagery of concern about

Revise for clarity 9d

doing well” relating to the stories written by the group of students. This “negative imagery” Horner used to produce a score <sup>1248c</sup> of the “motive to avoid success.”

After scoring the stories, Horner <sup>d</sup> made three categories to represent the stories that she had received. In the first category, she placed <sup>13</sup> stories that told of social anxiety concerning ~~the~~ rejection by society; which was <sup>53</sup> written by the majority of females. <sup>43a</sup> The <sup>39</sup> second category, women students wrote stories about disapproval of the female’s actions, <sup>57k</sup> and whether or not she was a woman based on society’s standards. The final grouping <sup>57k</sup> wrote that women in our society could not be ambitious enough to ever achieve intellectual success.

After grading these stories for the “motive to avoid success”, Horner’s first hypothesis was supported by the following evidence. “65% [of the females] told stories that fell into one or another of the above categories.” While only “10 percent” of boys <sup>51</sup> told stories which fell into one of these three categories. From these results, Horner concludes in her first stage that society’s ideal of being lady like <sup>14</sup> hinders women’s success, which is her first hypotheses, while society pushes men to succeed. These stories indicated this because more women wrote stories about the “motive to avoid success” <sup>15 sing sp</sup> than men. <sup>50</sup>

After supporting her first hypotheses <sup>sing sp</sup> with evidence, Horner wanted to support her third hypothesis <sup>57a</sup> through stage two of her study. Horner’s motivation for stage two was to see if females had less anxiety in isolation and would have more “motive to avoid success” when in competition with men. Horner also speculated that competition with males will consequently “lower their performance” <sup>for</sup> of the females. In the first stage of this study Horner gathered university students in a “large competitive group” and these <sup>57c</sup>

students were given "a series of achievement tests." After the group competition Horner began the second stage of this study by assigning a student to one of three experimental groups. Horner made three groups: the first group was in competition with the same sex, the second in competition with the opposite sex, and the last were men and women isolated by themselves.

After analyzing the tests, Horner's results proved her third hypotheses. The results in which Horner analyzed were the differences in scores on "the series of achievement test" from the men and women in the isolated group, to their scores in the prior "large competitive group". Through differences in the scorings, Horner found that women had less "motive to avoid success" when isolated than in competition. Women who didn't fear success had similar test scores to men, in which both had higher scores in competition. Women who ranked as having a high "motive to avoid success" improved in isolation versus competition. These results are shown drastically when Horner excluded the men from the results. "93 percent" of women with low "motive to avoid success" did better in competition while "seventy-seven percent" of women with a high motive did better in isolation. Horner's results supported her hypotheses that women will have the least "motive to avoid success" when they are in isolation and not in competition with males.

Horner now had evidence for her third hypotheses, but she still conducted a third stage of the study to collect more evidence. In the third study, Horner asked the males and females in prior study of the different groups "How important was it for you to do well in this situation?" Horner had them rank this question using a one to one hundred scale. Horner's reason for this study was to enquire about the students own opinions of

their anxiety in different groupings. Horner found that "low fear girls" of the motive did not prefer to work in isolation or competition while "high fear girls" of the motive preferred working in isolation. Horner concluded that when a woman is not in competition with a male, since society's strain will not be working on them, women will "fully explore their intellectual potential."

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This three stage study supports Horner's hypotheses through evidence. These hypotheses and collected evidence lead Horner to her main point that women are "caught in a double bind". In our society, success is more acceptable for men than women.

Distinguish between 1969 and 2005

Horner's data supported that men are not hindered by society's strains and aren't

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affected by competition. Men did better in competition than in isolation in her second study. In addition, women did better in isolation than in competition with men, which

dm 43e

was verified in her second stage. According to Horner, society hinders women success due to the ideal of being lady like in our society. Being lady like does not emphasize

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38a Reduce this

intellectual ability in our society. Consequently, it is looked down upon by men. This social view of being lady like will plague females with the "motive to avoid success" as

they become intellectuals. To conclude, Horner notes that this "psychological barrier"

which is imbedded into the American society will hinder all women as they embark to

break the mold of the "motive to avoid success" and become intellectuals in our society.

Does she go this far?

Works Cited <sup>SR</sup>

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Horner Matina "A Bright Women is Caught in a Double Bind." 1969. Reprinted in Steiger, Richard and Roy Helton, Going to the Source Wadsworth, 1989.