

THEMATIC RESPONSES OF FATHER-ABSENT CHILDREN

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The influence of father absence on the child has been explored in countries like Norway and the United States. The present study is an attempt to test the following hypotheses which were drawn from the investigations of Bach (1945, 1954), Gronseth (1957), Lynn (1959), Sears (1951), and Stolz (1954) in their independent researches on the effects of father separation on the behavior of boys and girls:

1. That boys from father-present homes will produce significantly greater percentage of masculine father-doll actions than boys from father-absent families.

2. That girls from father-present households will likewise produce significantly higher percentage of masculine father-doll actions than girls from father-absent families.

3. That boys from father-present homes will produce significantly lower percentage of feminine father-doll actions than boys from father-absent families.

4. That girls from father-present households will produce significantly lower percentage of feminine father-doll actions than girls from father-absent families.

5. That boys from father-present households will produce significantly lower percentage of feminine brother-doll actions than boys from father-absent families.

5. That boys from father-present produce significantly lower percentage of

father affection doll episodes allotted to the brother- and sister-dolls than the father-absent group.

7. That the father-present group will produce significantly higher percentage of brother-doll aggression episodes than the father-absent group.

8. That boys from father-present homes will produce significantly greater percentage of brother-doll aggression episodes than boys from the father-absent group.

9. That girls from father-present homes will produce significantly greater percentage of brother-doll aggression actions than girls from the father-absent group.

METHOD

Twenty-four children, aged 5 to 9, equally divided into two groups and matched in terms of sex, age, birth position, size of family, type of school, and educational background of parents served as subjects. The first group consisted of children whose fathers were present and therefore shared with the mothers the child-rearing responsibility. The second group consisted of children whose fathers had been away from home from 3 to 5 1/2 years. Child-rearing, in this instance, became the responsibility of the mothers.

The stimuli consisted of four dolls: father, mother, brother, and sister. The adult dolls were five inches high and the child dolls three inches tall. The dolls' legs and arms were movable to enable the toys to assume the desired positions.

The doll house was roofless with dimensions of 22 x 28 inches. It was divided into two bedrooms, a sala, a dining room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Pieces of furniture corresponding to the different parts of the house were glued to the floor. Manipulation of these objects was, therefore, minimized while interactions with the dolls were maximized.

Moments after each subject was brought to the experimental room for the first time

and was shown the doll house, he was told by E that she was collecting children's stories and that she would like to listen and record one of his anecdotes. The physical facilities of the doll house were explained and the four doll characters were introduced to him. To insure that the subject remembered who each doll represented, he was asked to hold each character as the researcher said, "Now, let us see if you remember well who each of these dolls is. Show me father doll, mother doll, brother doll, and sister doll." All the 24 subjects responded correctly to the above request with apparent eagerness and interest.

A uniform procedure was followed during the entire duration of the data-gathering period. Each child was exposed to three play sessions of 20 minutes each, separated by a period of two to four days. The E recorded verbatim the episodes narrated by the children. If the subjects inquired about the E's activity, they were told that their stories were being recorded so that they could be read later. No attempts on the part of E were made to elicit definite responses; all the subjects were afforded the freedom to produce their own stories about the dolls.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The nine hypotheses postulated earlier in this report shall be used as guidelines for the interpretation and discussion of results.

TABLE 1

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF BOYS' PERCENTAGES OF FATHER'S MASCULINE DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL FATHER-DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present boys	Father-absent boys	C. R.
9.90	1.99	4.10**

** $p < .01$

The first hypothesis, that boys from father-present homes will produce significantly greater percentage of masculine father-doll actions than boys from father-absent families, is supported by the results. Bach (1945) in his studies of children's doll play fantasies reported that about 75% of normal young children's doll play are faithful reproduction of reality conditions. If one were

to apply this finding to explain the present data, one may expect that boys who have more frequent contacts with their fathers would consequently dramatize them in their doll play as they see them performing their masculine roles more than the father-absent boys.

TABLE 2

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF GIRLS' PERCENTAGES OF FATHER'S MASCULINE DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL FATHER-DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present girls	Father-absent girls	C. R.
8.42	0.91	4.55**

** $p < .01$

The aforementioned rationale may also be utilized to explain the phenomenon of higher percentage of masculine father-doll actions produced by father-present girls compared to father-absent girls.

TABLE 3

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF BOYS' PERCENTAGES OF FATHER'S MASCULINE DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL FATHER-DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present boys	Father-absent boys	C. R.
1.02	5.63	3.11**

** $p < .01$

Between-group comparison of the boys' percentages of feminine father-doll actions showed that the father-present boys produced a significantly smaller percentage than the father-absent boys. Such a finding is in consonance with the third hypothesis. One may attribute these results to the fact that in the father-present families, the children are more exposed to both the father and

the mother figures from whom they see realities of masculine and feminine roles distinctly performed by each parent according to social expectations; whereas, in father-absent homes, the children see only the mother figure undertaking her daily chores.

TABLE 4

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF GIRLS' PERCENTAGES OF FATHER'S FEMININE DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL FATHER-DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present girls	Father-absent girls	C. R.
None	2.72	

The same explanation as the above may account for the father-present girls producing no feminine father-doll actions compared to girls from father-absent families.

TABLE 5

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF BOYS' PERCENTAGES OF BROTHER'S FEMININE DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL FATHER-DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present boys	Father-absent boys	C. R.
.36	1.31	1.20

It is interesting to note that there is no significant difference in the between-group comparison of boys in the percentages of feminine brother-doll actions. These findings do not bear out the predicted outcomes as postulated by the fifth hypothesis. One may attribute these results to strong social pressures. Philippine culture dictates that boys possess masculine traits while girls possess feminine characteristics. These expectations may, therefore, be reflected

in the play production of boys as they identify themselves with male roles. Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) reported similar findings: after age four, boys break down in their patterning of feminine-maternal qualities under the expectations that males model themselves after males.

TABLE 6

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGES OF FATHER AFFECTION ALLOTTED TO BROTHER AND SISTER OUT OF THE TOTAL AFFECTION DOLL ACTIONS ALLOTTED TO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE DOLL FAMILY

Father-present group	Father-absent group	C. R.
53.85	81.48	2.32*

* $p < .05$

Between-group comparison of percentages of father affection allotted to brother- and sister-dolls agrees with the prediction of the sixth hypothesis that the father-present group will produce significantly lower percentage of father affection doll episodes allotted to brother- and sister-dolls than the father-absent group. If one were to interpret this result, one cannot apply Bach's rationale (1945) of reality productions of doll play on father-absent subjects. At this juncture, speculations are drawn to explain the obtained results. It may be conjectured that mothers of father-absent subjects may have often mentioned to their children the great affection that their fathers have for them; the subjects may have also witnessed father-child affectional relations existing among their classmates and playmates. All these may have developed in the father-absent children a longing for the affection of the absent fathers. Such a need are projected in the doll play episodes of father-absent children who narrated anecdotes about an affectionate father who looks for brother and sister

and who kisses them, a father who goes to the bakery and comes home with plenty of cakes and cookies for brother and sister, and a father who looks at his children and finally sits down and plays with them.

TABLE 7

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGES OF BROTHER'S AGGRESSION DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF BROTHER'S TOTAL DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present group	Father-absent group	C. R.
5.15	0.60	4.38**

** $p < .01$

Data on brother-doll aggressive actions support the seventh hypothesis. The father-present group produced significantly higher percentage of brother-doll aggression episodes than the father-absent group. The following is offered to explain such outcomes: father-present children may be pushed by their parents a little too hard toward achievement and as a result become more aggressive. On the other hand, father-absent children are not exposed to frustrating situations and are, therefore, less aggressive. Such a difference in approaches to child rearing may have contributed to observed differences in percentage of aggression of father-present and father-absent children. Another explanation is offered: father-present children relate themselves daily with parents who may frustrate and punish them. They, therefore, experience ambivalent feelings toward their parents. Their resentment may also find expression in the greater occurrence of aggressive doll play actions as compared to father-absent subjects.

The same rationale may also be employed to explain the observed higher percentage of aggressive brother-doll

actions narrated by father-present boys and girls as compared to father-absent boys and girls.

TABLE 8

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF BOYS' PERCENTAGES OF BROTHER'S AGGRESSION DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF BROTHER'S TOTAL DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present boys	Father-absent boys	C. R.
6.47	0.44	3.55**

** $p < .01$

TABLE 9

BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF GIRLS' PERCENTAGES OF BROTHER'S AGGRESSION DOLL ACTIONS OUT OF BROTHER'S TOTAL DOLL ACTIONS DURING THE THREE 20-MINUTE SESSIONS

Father-present girls	Father-absent girls	C. R.
3.93	0.72	2.53*

* $p < .05$

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