

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Children in Two Age Groups

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It is assumed that when a child draws his or her family, the child is actually drawing his or her perceptions of the family and the child's position within that structure.

Omission of a family member in the family drawing may be associated with feelings of anger or rejection towards the omitted individual. When dealing with children whose parents are divorcing these feelings may be directed toward the parent who does not have primary custody. Primary custody is defined as the parent who shares residency with the child, and who takes care of the child's daily needs.

Fifteen children in early latency (ages 5 to 8 years) and 15 children in late latency (age 9 to 13 years) were chosen at random from the files at Franklin County Mental Health Center in Ottawa, Kansas. This author was looking for files that contained a family drawing from children whose parents were separated or divorced within 3 to 18 months of the time of the drawing. Only those drawings that had each individual labeled were included in the study.

It was hypothesized that the younger age group would omit the parent who does not have primary custody significantly more than the older age group. It was assumed that the medium of drawing would allow the younger children to express their feelings about the divorce or separation without fear of retaliation from the parents. A chi-square procedure was used to analyze the data. The results of the study did not support the hypothesis. The younger age group did not significantly omit the non-primary parent from the family drawing more than the older age group.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN'S
FAMILY DRAWINGS BY CHILDREN IN TWO
AGE GROUPS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	iii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. METHOD	16
Sample	16
Procedure	16
3. RESULTS	18
4. DISCUSSION	20
Suggestions for Future Research	22
REFERENCES	24

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	111
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. METHOD	16
Sample	16
Procedure	16
3. RESULTS	18
4. DISCUSSION	20
Suggestions for Future Research	22
REFERENCES	24

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE	
1. Expected Frequencies (E) and Observed Frequencies (O) Between Two Age Groups	19

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The use of individual drawings as a means of expressing the unconscious motives and personality set of an individual has been documented back to the 19th century. For example, in 1855 Burckhardt was able to draw some astoundingly accurate deductions concerning the dominant personalities and the sociopsychological atmosphere of a whole epoch, the Italian Renaissance, mainly from an analysis of the works of art of that time period (cited in Hammer, 1958).

The study of drawings in a controlled and scientific manner was not truly introduced until 1926 when Goodenough presented a standardized approach for using drawings to assess intelligence with the Draw a Person Technique (DAP) (Kissel, 1988). With the introduction of a standardized method of scoring, the DAP became one of the most used projective techniques in the clinician's arsenal. There have been many subsequent variations of this drawing technique: Kinetic Family Drawing Test, House-Tree-Person, Draw an Animal, and Draw a Person in the Rain.

Clinical interest in drawings has in the past centered around theoretical problems regarding the relationship of genius to mental illness and of the likeness of art of the mentally ill to that from undeveloped cultures and children (Machover, 1949). In the course of administering Goodenough's Drawing of a Man test for usual IQ purposes, it was discovered that careful study of the individual drawings

often yielded rich clinical material not related to the intellectual level of the subject. The graphic communications of children proved to be of such clinical value that drawings of the human figure were soon incorporated in routine clinical procedures and extended to adults of all ages (Machover, 1949).

Unfortunately, through the years the use of drawings as a means to assess personality as been overrun with individuals making judgments about the drawers based on sweeping generalizations. Heidgerd (cited in Hammer, 1958) recommended that "the psychologist who keeps his feet on experimentally firm ground and yet willingly utilizes a controlled and professional imagination, will find much usefulness in drawing techniques" (p. 483). Anastasi (1988) elaborated this point by stating that "the DAP can serve best, not as a psychometric instrument, but as a part of a clinical interview, in which the drawings are interpreted in the context of other information about the individual" (p. 611).

Hammer (1958) stated that drawings should be interpreted with caution. He further stated that in assessing individual drawings there are three points the clinician must remember. First, there is a tendency to view the world in an anthropomorphic way: in one's own image. Second, the term projection is defined as that psychological defense by which one attributes qualities, feelings, attitudes and strivings to objects of the environment (e.g., people, other organisms, things). Third, distortions enter into the

process of projection in that projection has a defensive function. That is to say that tangible, partial or superficial data from the object are invested with meanings from the subject's own life which do not correspond to the real or total picture of the object. Qualities ascribed to the object are denied by the subject.

Furthermore, although graphic representations portray individual idiosyncratic characteristics of the artist who composed them, five criticisms have been directed at the DAP test (Johnson & Greenberg, 1978). The first points to the relative incapability of the test to show one-to-one significance between molecular (sign-signific, isomorphic) features of human figure drawings and specific characteristics of the person. Second, the drawings may not convey molar (global, "holistic") features which are reliable or valid. Third, there have been criticisms of methodological issues, notably in studies concerned with standardization of scoring, testing of specialized scales or connected to interrater reliability. Fourth, the results of some studies have questioned the DAP's construct validity at either molar or molecular levels. Finally, it has been criticized for the use of drawings as personality measures. Human figure drawings require that the subject produce his or her own stimuli which is thereafter analyzed and interpreted. Because of the complexities of the drawing task, these stimuli are necessarily idiosyncratic and unstandardized.

It is clear from the above arguments that the drawing

technique, or DAP, is flawed by the fact that data collected by this technique are idiosyncratic; and thus extremely difficult to standardize. However, even with the inherent flaws, the DAP is still considered a valuable clinical tool.

Payne (1990) stated that children's human figure drawings have been studied from various perspectives: as measures of nonverbal intelligence and impulsivity, as indicators of a person's self-esteem, ethnic identity, sex-typing and sex-identification, and as reflections of the status, power or significance of others. Drawing is an activity that children generally like to perform; therefore, the drawing task does not elicit feelings of uneasiness. Asking a child to draw a picture in the clinical setting not only provides the clinician with useful information on how the child perceives his or her family, but the drawing acts as a medium for establishing rapport.

What is particularly interesting to this author is the use of family drawings by children from divorced homes. In preparing the literature review portion of this thesis, it was surprising that so few studies could be found dealing with this topic. Stirtzinger's (1986) review of the literature on children's drawings reported that children draw what is important to them, predominantly people, followed in frequency by animals, houses, and trees. If this is the case, a child's drawing in a diagnostic or therapy situation could prove immensely valuable in ascertaining the perception the child has towards his or her family.

According to Lowery and Settle (1985) the disruption of a family by divorce is seen as not one event, but a collection of less stressful events which, together, exceed some children's tolerance of stress. Divorce seems to have some negative short-term effects on most children's social or cognitive development, but younger children seem to have more severe reactions to the divorce of their parents. For example, children under age 5 at the the time of divorce are more vulnerable to developmental disruption and depression. The younger child also tends to show more anxiety than the older siblings.

Preschool children (2 1/2 to 6 years of age) reported being frightened and confused and tended to blame themselves for the divorce (Lowery & Settle, 1985). Stirtzinger (1986) conducted a study of 26 preschool children whose parents had been separated or divorced for a period of 2 to 12 months. Out of 10 children not living in the family home, 4 drew the family home that they once lived in, not their current home. Of the children still living in the family home, 6 out of the 16 drawings included both parents in the home. It is interesting to note that in a study conducted by Wallerstein and Kelly (cited in Stirtzinger, 1986) 80% of the parents told children nothing about the divorce, neither explaining the decision to divorce nor of its occurrence - especially to preschool age children.

Early latency children (7 to 8 years of age) did not blame themselves, but expressed feelings of sadness, fear and insecurity. In later latency (9 to 10 years of age) the

children had a better understanding of the situation and could better express their anger. The adolescents (13 to 18 years of age) most openly expressed their anger, sadness and shame (Lowery & Settle, 1985).

Projective drawing research suggests that despite the confusion and contradiction arising from the multitude of idiosyncratic scoring systems, both the Draw-A-Person and the Family Drawing Test (FDT) may reflect variables related to adjustment level (McPhee & Wegner, 1976). To illustrate that drawing can be used to assess adjustment level, Parish and Dostal (1980) asked a total of 738 children to evaluate themselves, their mother and their father. They concluded that children from intact families evaluated themselves significantly more favorably than those from divorced or nonremarried families. In addition, children from divorced families tended to perceive (i.e., evaluate) themselves and their parents less favorably than did children from intact families.

Knoff and Prout (1985) claim projective drawing(s) can be used as: (a) an "ice-breaker" technique to facilitate child-examiner rapport and the child's comfort, trust, and motivation; (b) a sample of behavior that involves a child's reactions to a one-on-one-child-examiner interaction with a semistructured task; (c) a projective technique that investigates the interaction between a child or adolescent's personality and his or her perceptions of relationships among peers, family, school and significant others; and (d) a technique linked to a clinical, diagnostic interview that

moves discussion beyond a drawing's actions and dynamics to more pervasive psychological issues and concerns. Koppitz (1983) believes that family drawings in particular show children's perceptions of their families and their place within those families.

Kissel (1988) suggested several guidelines when using a drawing technique with children. First, the child is required to have organizational and interpretive skills. Second, the child must have sufficient ability to visualize the characteristics of a human figure, as they are not asked to copy a figure, but to conceptualize and visualize it. Third, the child is called upon to use fine motor skills as he or she reproduces the visualized image of the person.

Isaacs and Levin (1984) conducted a study of 41 children from ages 5 to 11 whose parents had been separated from 1 to 16 months. Their study found that none of the children deleted their mother from the drawing. Fathers on the other hand, were omitted by 15% of the children in the first year of their parents separation, and 25% in the second year. Seventeen percent of the children added someone to their drawings in the first year, and another 17% added people in the second year. In the first year of the separation, 50% of the children who omitted their father added someone to their drawing outside of the nuclear family. When the father was included, only 11% of the children included other people. After the first year, 46% of the children in the sample drew their fathers as taller than their mothers. After the second year, however, this dropped to only 12%

drawing their fathers as the taller parent.

Reznikoff and Reznikoff (1956) examined 100 family drawings by second grade children ranging in age from 7 to 9. According to their findings, boys and girls from middle class families differed only in that boys significantly more often omitted the mother figure. Children from low income families significantly excluded the mother in their drawings, and made an older sibling the larger member of the family while making themselves the smallest.

Sobel and Sobel (1976) used the Kinetic Family Drawing technique (KFD) to examine the drawings of 20 male adolescent delinquents compared to a group of 20 normal male adolescents. Significantly, the delinquent adolescents tended to omit most if not all of their family members in the drawings.

In their review of the literature, Klepsch and Logie (1982) stated that childrens' drawings of a family reflected their attitude towards their family; therefore, omissions of family members and the size of figures drawn are important. It is significant if a family member is left out. Omissions may indicate concern or negative feelings about or rejection of that person. Isaacs and Levin (1984) reported in their study that when the fathers were omitted from the drawings, the mothers tended to report that visits were a source of some arguments. When the drawing included the father, the mother tended to report that there were no arguments around visitation. Isaacs and Levin found that children from separated families, at least where the mothers predominately

have custody, do not omit their mothers, but with time increasingly omit their fathers from the drawings.

Deren (1975) indicated that the family drawing is not always an exact replication of the subject's family. Family drawings may include an expression of hostility toward family members as seen by the more frequent omissions of figures by children.

Omitted figures may be associated with rejection, denial, isolation, or subtle conflict with the figures (Reynolds, 1978). Omitted family members represent forgetting, which is expressive of a negative attitude, rejection or symbolic elimination of that person (DiLeo, 1973). Finally, Hammer (cited in Swensen, 1968) stated that omitting significant details in drawings is related to withdrawal and feelings of emptiness.

In contrast to the previous studies that studied omissions of family members in family drawings of children, other studies show that children do not always omit family members. For example, Jones-Niesenbaum (1985) used the Animal Kinetic Family Drawing (AKFD) and the Kinetic Family Drawing technique (KFD) to assess how parental divorce affects the self-concept of latency children. Group 1 consisted of 15 children whose parents were divorced, while group 2 consisted of 20 children from intact families. Participants in the study were children from 6 to 10 years of age. Of the children from the divorced group, 73% included their father in the KFD even though the mother was the only parent living in the home. Jones-Niesenbaum

speculated that this type of drawing may indicate the child still feels that both parents are an important part of the family. In addition, a greater number of children from the divorced group depicted a father in the AKFD than in the KFD. Of the divorced group, 93% included both parents in the KFD and the AKFD. A surprisingly large number of children (47% divorced group, 76% intact group) represented a mother and father and a baby in their AKFD regardless of their actual family structure.

DiLeo (1983) examined 42 human figure drawings by children from broken homes. Of this total, 27 kinetic family drawings contained both parents even when there had actually been a single parent in the home (the mother in all but one instance). Clearly, although a child is living apart from the nonprimary parent, both parents are very much in the child's thoughts.

One of the most important goals in designing any clinical test is the achievement of a culturally unbiased test. While the DAP is considered by some to be such a test, the interpretations can indeed be culturally biased. Every interpreter of a clinical test brings with him or her an ethnocentric background that contaminates the test interpretation. For example, in Western culture omission of family members are looked at in a negative light; however, the following two studies remind the reader that each culture has its own structure of family composition, and that in reviewing the data on omissions the sample type and its culture must always be considered.

Cabacungan (1985) conducted a study of 197 middle class students of Japanese and Filipino descent. The Japanese significantly drew their actual family size more often than the Filipino child. Japanese also omitted less characters, but added nonmajor figures as well, mostly grandparents. In contrast, the Filipino child omitted the father and mother figures more often than the Japanese child. Both groups drew mother figures the largest. In addition, family composition in both cultures undervalued the presence of the sibling with more persistence by the Japanese. It is done by drawing less than what he or she actually has or by outright omission.

Nuttall, Chieh and Nuttall (1988) compared Chinese children with Caucasian United States children, assuming that family drawings reflected the cultural patterns and values of those two groups. The results indicated that Chinese children significantly more often included their fathers and mothers than did the United States children. Mothers were incorporated into drawings by 88% of the Chinese boys and 93% of the Chinese girls in contrast to only 46% and 64% of the United States boys and girls, respectively. The results of the fathers were similar except that the United States girls included their fathers less often than their mothers: 64% drew mothers and 44% the fathers. Incorporation of extended family (grandparents, aunts and cousins) was significantly more frequent for the Chinese than for the United States sample.

Another interesting variable in children's drawings is

size of the parent figures. The average drawing of a full figure is approximately seven inches long, or two-thirds of the available space (Hammer, 1958). Isaacs and Levin (1984) in their review of the literature stated that very small figures are suggestive of a lack of power or of low status, whereas comparatively large figures represent a dominating stance or unusual attempts to be in charge. Wilkinson (1985) in his review of the topic stated that large size of the person stems from people who feel very inadequate.

Holtz, Moran and Brannigan (1986) reported that American children tended to draw the father figure the largest, the mother figure somewhat smaller, and the self figure still smaller. Since strength is attributed to the person the child considers the dominate parent figure, it is not surprising that the father figure was drawn the largest.

Payne (1990) studied the effects of parental presence or absence in the home on the size of male and female drawings. The sample consisted of 480 Barbadian children ranging from age 7 to 13 years of age. The results indicated that female figures were bigger, on average, than those of male figures. Overall, roughly three quarters of the children (72.9% boys and 74.1% girls) drew larger female than male figures. For boys, there was no significant difference in the size of male drawings produced by boys living with or without fathers. However, boys who did not live with their mothers tended to draw larger female figures than did boys who did live with their mothers. For girls, there was no significant difference in the size of female drawings

produced by girls living with or without their mothers. There was also no overall difference in the size of male drawings produced by girls living with or without their fathers; however, among the older girls there was a tendency for girls living with their fathers to produce larger male drawings than did those living without their fathers.

O'Brien and Patton (1974) in their study of 104 school aged children found that children from intact families drew father figures larger than mother figures. These authors speculated that size of the figure reflects perceived power or status of significant others.

In contrast to the above studies that support the idea that the size of figures drawn by children is significantly important, there are studies that report contradictory results. For example, Mostkoff and Lazarus (1983) conducted a study of 50 elementary school aged children using the Kinetic Family Drawing technique (KFD). They reported that variables related to figure size, including size of self in relation to other figures, were rated unreliable.

Lawton and Sechrest (1962) hypothesized that a difference should be found for the size of the father figure relative to the mother. To test this hypothesis 61 father-present and 58 father-absent boys ranging in age from 84 to 167 months drew family pictures. In general, the results did not support the supposition that there should be a difference in figure drawings of boys from father-present and boys from father-absent homes.

Children's drawings provide a clinician with a rich

source of information about the child, his or her perceptions about his or her place in the family, and information concerning the dominant adults in the child's life. This is of particular value when dealing with children from divorced homes. From the literature cited in this report, the reader is now aware that a divorce affects children at all age levels. According to DiLeo (1973) children are especially affected by divorce in the early years; unfortunately, this is the time when most divorces occur. Lowery and Settle (1985) reported that pre-school children up to and including early latency (2 1/2 to 8 years) have a greater degree of difficulty in expressing their emotions about the divorce. A child in this age range will often blame himself or herself for the divorce because the child is not able to separate him or herself from the parent conflict. Children in this age group often feel confused, angry and frightened. Omissions of parent figures in drawings may be symbolic of anger and rejection. In contrast, later latency children to adolescents (9 to 18 years) are able to express their feelings about the divorce much more easily, and are able to separate themselves from the parent conflict; thus, omissions in their drawings are less likely.

The hypothesis addressed by this study is that younger children will tend to omit from the family drawing the parent who does not have primary custody. To date, previous research on this topic has not produced clear results. Whether or not omissions occur is important in that

psychological interpretations are affected by the presence or absence of features within drawings.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Sample

Fifteen boy and girl subjects ranging from ages 5 to 8 years and 15 boy and girl subjects ranging from ages 9 to 13 years were selected from active and holding files at Franklin County Mental Health Center located in Ottawa, Kansas. Data were compiled according to the following criteria: (a) a child's family drawing was drawn within the first five weeks of therapy, and presented names of family members; (b) parents (not step-parents) separated or divorced within 3 to 18 months of the drawing; (c) diagnosis of "Adjustment Disorder" for the child; (d) either an "information sheet" that contains family structure information, including who has custody of the child, or a mental status exam was available; and (e) lower socioeconomic status (which is a requirement for a Kansas medical card). Family drawings were collected by the clinical staff and interns from the year 1981 to present. Participants names were not recorded.

Procedure

Files containing family drawings were pulled beginning with the current year and working back in time until 15 sets of data per group were obtained. Figures that were partially drawn or half of a figure were considered part of the family composition. Determining if the absent parent had been omitted was accomplished by comparing the child's

noted in the "general information sheet" located in each child's file. In the event that these data were not located on the general information sheet, they were located within the mental status exam.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Analysis of the data was based on a total sample of 38 subjects. The sample of younger children (ages 5 to 8 years) had a final total of 19 participants. The final sample for the older children (ages 9 to 13) also consisted of 19 participants. The overall mean age for the younger age group was 6.89 years ($SD = 1.24$). The mean age for the males in this category was 6.90 while the mean age for the females was 6.89. The overall mean age for the children in the older age group was 10.74 years ($SD = 1.66$). The mean for the males in the older age category was 10.82 while the mean age for the females was 10.63. Overall mean age for both age groups was 8.82 ($SD = 2.42$).

The basic design of this research was of a nonparametric nature. Observed frequencies were compared with expected frequencies to see if the two were significantly different. This design format produced a contingency table with gender serving as the independent frequencies, and age (young versus old) serving as the two categories.

A 2 x 2 chi-square was used to assess whether the distribution across the categories of a particular classification was different compared to categories that were placed in another classification. Please refer to Table 1 for a complete listing of observed and expected frequencies for both groups.

Table 1

Expected Frequencies (E) and Observed Frequencies (O)Between Two Age Groups

	<u>Younger</u> (ages 5 to 8)	<u>Older</u> (ages 9 to 13)
Male	O = 10.0 E = 10.5	O = 11.0 E = 10.5
Female	O = 09.0 E = 08.5	O = 08.0 E = 08.5
Total	<u>N</u> = 19	<u>N</u> = 19

A chi-square (X^2) was computed to see if there was a relationship between age of the child and parent omission in family drawings. A Yates Correction for Continuity was necessary because of the small size of the expected frequency of less than 10 in two groups (McCall, 1986). The Yates correction consisted of subtracting .50 from the total obtained when subtracting the observed frequency from the expected frequency. This correction changed the chi-square figure from .01 to .21, (X^2) (1, N = 38) = .1, $p > .05$. However, even with the Yates correction, no significance was found. Contrary to the proposed hypothesis, the data reflected no such relationship between age of subject and parent omission.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The results of this experiment did not support the proposed hypothesis. The younger age group (ages 5 to 8 years) did not omit the absent parent from the family drawing significantly more than the older age group (ages 9 to 13 years).

The results obtained by this study are not consistent with the available literature. There are several possible reasons for this inconsistency. First, the assumption that drawing style indicates emotional factors may not be valid. Second, the possibility exists that the occurrence of parent omission in family drawings is not as common as the available literature states, and that generalization from one aspect of a family drawing is just that: a generalization. The reader is advised to view the family drawing for a general impression, then look for aspects of the drawing that could be explored further with the subject.

A third possible reason for the inconsistency is the inclusion of only children with the diagnosis of an "Adjustment Disorder." Children who are diagnosed with another disorder (e.g. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder or Conduct disorder) may also share the same feelings and reactions to the parents divorce as would a child diagnosed with an Adjustment Disorder. However, a child with a more severe diagnosis may be more likely to omit a parent from a drawing. For example, Sobel and Sobel (1976) found significance in family member omissions when

they compared family drawings from normal adolescent males to that of male adolescent delinquents. Sobel and Sobel stated that since many delinquents suffer from poor impulse control, it was hypothesized that a motoric, "acting-out" type test might be effective with this population. Indeed, the male delinquent group omitted parents from the family drawings significantly more than the normal adolescent group.

A fourth factor to be considered is the sample itself. By only concentrating on those individuals who come from low income homes (a requirement to possess a Kansas medical card) a possible bias could have occurred. That is, perhaps children from low socioeconomic homes perceive families differently than their higher socioeconomic peers (Deren, 1975; Jones-Niesenbaum, 1985; Reznikoff & Reznikoff, 1956). It is possible then that drawing styles could differ according to socioeconomic status.

Finally, the lack of significant findings between age of child and parent omission in family drawing could be influenced by the geographic area sampled. Since subjects were chosen from one region in Kansas, Franklin County, a small rural location, perhaps it is possible that a bias could have been introduced.

To conclude, it was hypothesized that children in the younger age group would omit the parent who does not have primary custody significantly more than the older age group. It was assumed that children in the younger age group would have a greater degree of difficulty expressing their

feelings particularly towards an adult. The drawing technique, it was hypothesized, would have acted as a medium for the child to express his or her feelings without fear of retaliation by the parent. The results of this research did not support the hypothesis. There was no difference in parent omission in family drawings by the two age groups.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding drawing techniques as diagnostic measures; however, even with this controversy the drawing technique is commonly used.

Therefore, further research is needed on this topic. First, in analyzing the results of the present study it was apparent that family member omissions was not as common as the literature leads one to believe. It would be interesting to compare the percentage of intact family drawings to those that contain family member omissions. If family member omissions are a rare occurrence, this should be noted in the literature.

Second, as stated in the discussion section, the inclusion of only those children with the diagnosis of an Adjustment Disorder may have limited this research. A future researcher could examine family drawings from children who are diagnosed with disorders other than Adjustment Disorders. Furthermore, the qualifications for admittance to the study could be opened up to include children from all socioeconomic groups.

Third, in the research conducted by Stirtzinger (1986), it was found that children still living in the family home

were more inclined to draw both parents in the family drawing. The child's residency was not a variable in my research. It would be interesting to compare the content of family drawings of those children who are still in the family home to those who are not. Those children who are not living in the family home may feel the effects of divorce more because of the change in their living environment.

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