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ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN INTACT AND NON-INTACT HOUSEHOLDS

By

Jackie S. Feigon

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

June

1975

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was written under the direction and guidance of Drs. Lauren Langman, Richard Block and Norris Larson, all of whom were of considerable help and encouragement. Dr. Langman, as Chairman of my Committee, made available to me not only his considerable knowledge but his library, Dr. Block offered his constructive criticisms, and Dr. Larson spent numerous hours reading and making detailed comments on several drafts of this thesis, suggesting several major improvements and recommending additional sources of information. To all of them I owe a great deal of appreciation.

The research reported herein was supported by USPH Grant RO1-MH24263-02.

LIFE

The author, Jackie S. Feigon, is the daughter of Sidney T. Swartz and Amy (Saks) Swartz. She was born July 17, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois.

Her elementary and secondary education was obtained in the public schools of Chicago, Illinois, where she was graduated in 1948.

In September, 1963, she entered Roosevelt University of Chicago, and in June, 1968, received the degree
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Working full time as a management consultant in the health care field, she entered Loyola University of Chicago in September, 1971 as a part-time student. In August, 1973, she became project coordinator of an empirical sociological study of intergenerational value transmission under a grant awarded to Drs. Langman and Block of Loyola University, while continuing as a part-time student. In November, 1974 she passed the comprehensive examination at the Ph.D. level with honors. In June, 1975, she was awarded the Master of Arts in Sociology.

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INTRODUCTION

The effect of a parent's absence from the home on the child has been seen as contributing to low academic achievement and a variety of personal problems. The latter includes delinquency, impaired sex role development, problems in interpersonal relations, intellectual defects, anxiety and general personality dysfunctioning, cognitive deficits, impulsive and aggressive behavior, etc. 1

¹The literature discussing loss of a parent (in most cases, the father) as one of the contributing factors tosall kinds of behavioral and personality problems is quite extensive. For illustrative purposes, a few examples in each area are listed below. For low academic achievement, see Deutsch and Brown (1964); Landy, Rosenberg and Sutton-Smith (1967); Sutherland (1930); Kriesberg (1963); Lipset and Bendix (1960); Burgess and Price (1963); Roberts (1958); Evariff (1957); Miller et al. (1964); Lanier (1949); for delinquency, see Glueck and Glueck (1950); Miller (1958); Reckless (1962); for impaired sex role development, see Hetherington (1966); Biller (1969); Money (1965); Hampson (1965); for problems in interpersonal relations, see Lynn and Sawrey (1959); Hoffman (1961); Hetherington (1966); West (1967); Winch (1949); for intellectual defects, see Bronfenbrenner (1967); Deutsch and Brown (1964); Landy, Rosenberg and Sutton-Smith (1967); Kohlberg (1966); for anxiety and general personality dysfunctioning, see Koch (1961); Stolz et al. (1954); Fenichel (1945); for cognitive deficits, see Carlsmith (1964); Witkin (1960); Nelsen and Maccoby (1966); for impulsive and aggressive behavior, see Mischel (1961); Miller (1958); Bacon, Child and Barry (1963); Santrock and Wohlford (1970).

Life history actions which cause psychological stress (separation, divorce, or death of a spouse) have also been used to describe "disorganized" homes. The author does not regard the child who has lost a parent through death or divorce as necessarily coming from a disorganized home; however, some of the cited literature uses this terminology.

band-father has been absent through separation, death or divorce at some time during the youth's life cycle. This is not to say that the mother has not remarried, but only that the event has taken place during some period in the youth's life. Emphasis will be placed on the father's absence from the home as the majority of the youth in our sample lived with their mothers rather than their fathers when the above life events occurred.

The terminology used for describing homes or families in which one parent is absent is almost as extensive as the literature the subject matter evokes. In this paper, the term "intact" household is used to describe a family as one in which there was never dissolution of the marriage either through death or divorce; "single parent" or "non-intact" households are defined as those in which some type of dissolution of marriage has occurred, i.e., long or permanent separation of the parents, divorce, or death of a husband. Remarriage is discussed only in the context of death or divorce of a husband before the birth of the child. It is possible that in the case of separation, death or divorce of a spouse before the birth of the child, the family unit should more likely be viewed with intact families.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Biller's (1970) review of the literature regarding the effects of father's absence on the personality development of the male child indicates that father absence can have a variety of psychological effects. Considering the present divorce rate² and the fact that more than one-tenth of the children in the United States live in households where there is no father (Clausen, 1966; Schlesinger, 1966; Pettigrew, 1964) in the home, it is important to take a closer look at the evidence and see if it is indeed the case that on the average children from intact families are "better adjusted" than children from single parent families.

The stereotypic picture of the mother, father and 2.4 children composing the "normal" household in the United States may not reflect reality. The divorce rate is increasing, 3 and obviously single parents, for some or all of the time, are raising their children alone. Does it

In an article in <u>Fortune</u> Magazine, Paul Glick and Arthur Norton of the Census Bureau calculate that 30 percent of the men and women now 30 years of age will divorce before their death and 5-10 percent of all married couples will divorce a second time.

³In 1960, 9 per 1,000 existing marriages ended in divorce; in 1970 the percentage increased to 13.4 and in 1974 the rate has been calculated as 18 per 1,000.

then follow that because there is or will be an increase of children who have experienced living in single parent households that they will achieve less academically than children from intact households and/or will have various personality problems due to the circumstance of their parents' dissolution of their marriage? Is it the expectation of socializing agents that a child coming from a single parent household will have problems, academic or otherwise? Do researchers operate under a self-fulfilling prophecy, " . . . in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true (Merton, 1957: 423)? Have sociologists relied perhaps too heavily on data from the records of agencies where children from single parent households may often be defined as having "problems?" If so, it is with no great surprise that we discover what we already "knew." Consider the following example:

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that teacher expectations of high academic potential among their students resulted in those students achieving higher scores on intelligence tests. Teachers in an elementary school were informed that certain of their students showed unusual potential for intellectual growth. Names of 20 percent of the children in the school were drawn randomly and assigned high IQ scores which were then given to the

nificant gains in IQ, much higher than the other children in the classrooms where no indication of their "potential" had been given to the teachers. "The change in the teachers' expectations regarding the intellectual performance of these allegedly 'special' children had led to an actual change in the intellectual performance of these randomly selected children" (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968:vii). They speculated that:

. . . (B)y what she said, by how and when she said it, by her facial expression, postures, and perhaps by her touch, the teacher may have communicated to the children of the experimental group that she expected improved intellectual performance. Such communications together with possible changes in teaching techniques may have helped the child learn by changing his self concept, his expectations of his own behavior, and his motivation, as well as his cognitive style and skills (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968:180).

suggested that only slightly more broken homes than intact homes appeared in the delinquent group than the control group in their study of Chicago school boys and Juvenile Court cases. Furthermore, they found that the correlation between high delinquency rate areas and high broken home rate areas was small. This started a controversy over the effect of broken homes on delinquency and was a contradiction of several earlier studies which found a much higher rate of delinquency in youths coming from broken homes than intact homes (see, for example, Burt, 1925). Later research by the Gluecks (1950) found

almost twice as many delinquents as nondelinquents with backgrounds of broken homes. Recent research has emphasized intervening variables such as age, sex, type of offense, etc. and have considered broken homes as but one aspect of delinquency.

Project on delinquency found little difference between youths from broken homes and intact homes on self reported delinquency, controlling for race. In discussing the results, Hirschi comments as follows:

The figures . . . are consistent with recent research on the relation between the broken home and self reported delinquency. They show only a very weak relation favoring the intact home. Yet the 'broken-homes-cause-delinquency' hypothesis is so firmly ingrained in the common sense that data like those represented here cannot be expected to seriously weaken it. There is a relation between the broken home and delinquency. The problem is that the relation is, compared to the expectation, very weak (Hirschi, 1969:242).

It is interesting to note that Ross and Block (1975) found that a higher incidence of broken homes in a community was not related to police contacts or arrests. However, severe actions in the juvenile courts (incarceration) increase in communities where there was a higher incidence of broken homes. The information on a juvenile's home life was available to the courts and not to the police. Thus, the institutions of social control in a community may define broken homes as a greater threat

to the community whereas the police statistics do not support this definition.

There is some tentative data to support the hypothesis that loss of a parent may, in fact, have some positive affects on academic achievement. Gregory (1965) suggests that loss of a parent through death or divorce may have some developmental value under certain conditions. In a study of students at Carlton College over a five year period it was found that loss of a parent did not affect academic achievement and, in fact, the evidence suggests that loss of a parent through death or divorce in some cases increased academic strivings among some of the brighter students. A study by Hilgard et al. (1960) found that men who lost their fathers during childhood were very successful in their academic pursuits. It was suggested that this might have occurred in spite of, or perhaps due to, a tremendous overdependence on their mothers.

Carlsmith (1964) found that middle class boys who lost their fathers in early childhood scored equally well or higher in verbal aptitude. Biller (1970) suggests that academic achievement rests heavily on verbal ability, hence middle class males may not be handicapped by loss of a father. Studies by Kriesberg (1963), Sewell et al. (1957), Lipset and Bendix (1960) and Kahl (1953) have shown that children of parents of low income, low educa-

tion, low occupational status, etc. are lower on academic achievement than children from single parent homes. Other studies have looked at the influence of socioeconomic composition of the high schools on academic achievement of students and their aspirations for higher education (Wilson, 1959; Hardt, 1961).

It is not only the psychological significance of not having a father that may create difficulties for the educational achievement of children in fatherless families. His absence is likely to mean that his former wife is poor, lives in generally poor neighborhoods, and lacks social, emotional, and physical assistance in childrearing. Furthermore, how husbandless mothers accommodate themselves to these circumstances can have important consequences for their children (Kriesberg, 1967:288).

While studies by Deutsch and Brown (1964) and Burgess and Price (1963) suggest that children from fatherless families operate under an educational handicap (have lower IQ's, are retarded in school, complete fewer years of school than children from intact families), Robins et al. (1966) and Nye (1957) report no differences. Parry and Pfuhl (1963) compared children who loved in one parent and remarried households in terms of school achievement and found no difference. However, children from intact families (as in the definition of "intact" cited earlier) were not part of the sample.

The primary purpose of this paper is to test the two opposing points of view, using the data collected for the Intergenerational Transmission of Values study con-

ducted by Langman and Block (1973-1975). One view states that loss of a parent (generally the father) in childhood has detrimental effects on academic achievement, the other that this loss has no effect or may, in fact, have a positive effect insofar as academic achievement is concerned.

The use of the Langman and Block data is advantageous in that it was not collected to test for academic achievement but rather for empirical research on value transmission. This eliminates a possible bias in data collection, increasing the validity of the results obtained when utilized to test for academic achievement.

When Gregory (1965) conducted his study of students at Carlton College he hypothesized that deprivation in childhood, defined as death or divorce of a parent, may lead to an increased need for achievement in academic performance. His sample consists of 127 college students at Carlton College who lost a parent through divorce or death (whether remarried or not) with a control group of 127 students who came from intact families. He examined four dichotomized variables concerning loss of a parent during childhood—type of loss (death or divorce); sex of parent lost; whether loss occurred prior to age 10, or subsequently; and whether remaining parent remarried. While the Langman and Block sample does not correspond to Gregory's and thus cannot be replicated, two of the variables Gregory used will be considered in the present

analysis—type of loss dichotomized as death and divorce or separation; and life cycle of youth, trichotomized as before birth of youth, before age 10 or after age 10.

Neither sex of parent lost nor remarriage will be dealt with in the present analysis.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The total sample consists of 404 families 4 of 1974 high school seniors and those who graduated three years prior to that time from three high schools in the Chicago Area and three in Orange County, California. The six sub-samples were randomly selected proportionately from the class lists in each of the schools. terviews were conducted during March-June, 1974 in the home of the subjects. They were conducted by Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey and consisted of the following: One youth self-administered questionnaire, parent(s) self-administered questionnaire, parent(s) life history, and a parental in-person interview covering the three most important events (as designated by each parent) that occurred in their lives, as well as several mandatory interview areas. A family interview was conducted with the youth and both of his/her parents. the case of separation and divorce, the interview was with the youth and the parent with whom he/she was living and had lived with for the major part of his/her life. In those cases in which the parent with whom the youth

If we use income as a determinate of middle class, then this sample is composed of mainly middle class families—average annual income over \$19,000 with 8.7 percent of the sample having incomes of over \$50,000 annually.

was living had remarried, interviews were obtained from both the parent and the step-parent. For this analysis, only data from the youth self-administered questionnaire and the mother's self administered questionnaire and life history are employed.

Analysis of the data was originally made on the above sample with the family group as the basic unit of analysis, either as a triadic or diadic relationship, to measure for parental differences. As the differences were not significant between the mothers and the fathers of the Intact family household, the analysis will consist of the mother and youth in each category—intact and single parent households.

DATA ANALYSIS

The question pursued is whether or not the youth of an Intact family differs in his academic achievement and aspirations from the youth whose mother has experienced the loss of a husband through separation, divorce or death. In line with Gregory's framework, the following three hypotheses are tested against the present data.

- 1. There will be no difference in academic achievement between youths from intact and non-intact families.
- 2. There will be no differences in aspiration level between youths from intact and non-intact families.
- 3. There will be no differences in the aspirations for the youths academic achievement nor in what they feel the youth can achieve between mothers from intact and non-intact families.⁵

⁵Kriesberg (1967) compared married and husbandless mothers regarding their attitudes and behaviors toward their children's educational achievement and found that the husbandless mothers were generally more concerned about the educational achievement of their children than were the married mothers. The husbandless mothers were more likely to make higher demands on the children for grades than married mothers even though the distribution of grades was approximately the same for both groups of children.

The first analysis is of the youth's High School grade point average. Table 1 shows the response to the question, "What was/is your high school average?" The overall comparison is of the high school grade point average between youth from intact and non-intact families. Within the category of non-intact families, the question raised is whether the age of the youth at the time of the loss has a differential effect on his/her academic achievement. In addition, type of loss, i.e. separation/divorce or widowed is examined to see if there are any differing effects. Table 1 shows the overall comparison between youth from intact and non-intact families. As can be seen, there is no significant difference in High School Grade Point Average between the two youth categories. Therefore null hypothesis 1 cannot be rejected.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of high school grade point average of youth from non-intact families by age of loss. No significant differences were found in the Under 10 and Over 10 distributions of grade point average for youth who experienced the loss of a parent, whether this loss was through separation/divorce or death. This same pattern was consistent throughout the rest of the tables. When we look at the Before Birth distribution, however, a different pattern emerges. Sixty-four percent of the youth in this category received high school grade point averages of a to B+. It is possible that this result

TABLE 1
HIGH SCHOOL GRADE POINT AVERAGE

	INTACT FAMILIES	NON-INTACT FAMILIES
A to B+	25.2	31.9
B to C+	54.6	46.8
C to D	20.2	21.3
	N = 258	N = 94
	$\chi^2 = 2.781 < \chi^2_{.05,2}$	= 5.991

TABLE 2

HIGH SCHOOL GRADE POINT AVERAGE AMONG NON-INTACT FAMILIES BROKEN DOWN FOR TYPE OF LOSS AND AGE OF YOUTH AT TIME OF LOSS

	DIVORCED/SEPARATED	WIDOWED
	Before Birth	Before Birth
A to B+	64.7	33.3
B to C+	23.5	33.3
C to D	11.8	33.3
	N = 17	N = 3
	Under 10	Under 10
A to B+	25.0	11.1
B to C+	60.0	66.6
C to D	15.0	22.2
	N = 20	N = 9
	Over 10	Over 10
A to B+	28.6	23.5
B to C+	53.6	35.2
C to D	17.9	41.2
•	N = 28	N = 17
•		

happened by chance, given the small sample (17) in the Before Birth category, even though the chi square for this distribution is significant. Given the large number of potential contrasts to be made, one or two chance significant results are to be expected. More to the point, this difference in pattern does not show up for the other dependent variables. Since this was the case, detailed breakdowns for College Grade Point Average and aspirations are not shown.

One could speculate that since the separation/
divorce or death occurred before the birth of the youth,
in actuality the youth was in fact part of an intact
family rather than in a single parent family. Therefore,
it is likely that this occurence before the youth's
birth would have no effect, and that Before Birth should
not be a separate category but incorporated into the
Intact Families category.

The youth were asked, "If you went to college/are now in college, what was/is your grade point average?

As can be seen in Table 3, there were no significant differences (Chi square = 3.3972) between the youth from intact and non-intact families; hence null hypothesis 1 cannot be rejected.

Are there differences in the aspiration level between youth from intact and non-intact families? The youth were asked, "What are your educational goals?

TABLE 3
YOUTHS' COLLEGE GRADE POINT AVERAGE

	INTACT FAMILIES	NON-INTACT FAMILIES
A to B+	31.1	29.0
B to C+	57.7	38.7
C to D	22.2	32.2
	N = 90	N = 31
7	$\chi^2 = 3.3927 < \chi^2_{.05}$	2 - 5.991

Table 4 compares the educational goals of the youth in the two categories regarding this question. There were no significant differences (Chi square = 6.217) between the youth from intact and non-intact families, which confirms hypothesis 2.

Tables 5 and 6 examine the mothers educational aspirations for their son/daughter and the probable educational level they feel the youth will attain. The patterns remain the same for those youth from intact and non-intact families, with no significant differences. It has been hypothesized that there would be no differences and the data goes along with this assumption.

TABLE 4
EDUCATIONAL GOALS OF YOUTH

INTACT FAMILIES	NON-INTACT FAMILIES
9•2	11.8
8.4	12.9
14.2	15.0
34.1	26.8
19.5	15.0
14.6	18.2
N = 261	N = 93
6.217 $< \chi^2$.05,5	= 11.070
	9.2 8.4 14.2 34.1 19.5 14.6

TABLE 5

MOTHERS' ASPIRATIONS OF
EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUTH

	INTACT FAMILIES	NON-INTACT FAMILIES
High School Graduate	3.9	3.2
Business-Trade School	9.4	12.6
Some College	16.1	13.7
College Graduate	38.6	42.1
Master's Degree	16.5	13.7
Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc.	15.4	14.7
	N = 245	N = 95
χ^2 =	2. 319 < $\chi^2_{.05,5}$	= 11.070

TABLE 6

PROBABLE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL FOR YOUTH BY MOTHERS

	INTACT FAMILIES	NON-INTACT FAMILIES
High School Graduate	6.3	5.2
Business-Trade School	8.6	10.4
Some College	20.0	22.9
College Graduate	34.9	31.3
Master's Degree	16,•1	17.7
Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc.	14.1	12.5
	N = 255	N = 96
$\chi^2 =$	1.651 $< \chi^2$.05,5	= 11.070

SUMMARY

In this paper, the attempt was to test two opposing points of view regarding academic achievement of youths who lost a parent during childhood, either through death or divorce. One view states loss of a parent (generally the father) in childhood has detrimental effects on the youth's academic achievement, the other view states that this loss has no effect or may, in fact, have a positive effect insofar as academic achievement is concerned. It was found that there were no differences in academic achievement as indicated by high school and college grade point average between youth from intact and non-intact families, as had been hypothesized.

It was further hypothesized that there would be no differences in aspirational levels between youth from intact and non-intact families. The hypothesis was confirmed by the data. If, as Gregory (1965) speculated, there may be a psychological need for academic achievement for children from single parent families, perhaps psychological tests (projective) would be a better methodological tool to test this speculation, although Gregory failed to do so.

The third hypothesis was that there would be no

differences in the aspirations for the youths' academic achievement nor in what they feel the youth can achieve between mothers from intact and non-intact families; this hypothesis was confirmed.

It is possible that Biller's (1970) suggestion that academic achievement rests heavily on verbal ability and hence the absence of a father may not have as much effect in middle class males may be operating in this sample. In addition, the expectation, at least in middle class high schools, is that youth will continue their education and go to college, necessitating a fairly high grade point average.

This study did not confirm either the hypothesis that loss of a parent during childhood has an adverse effect on academic achievement or the hypothesis that there may be some developmental value on increased academic achievement resulting from the loss of a parent.

Rather, loss of a parent in childhood in of itself has no effect, either positive or negative, on the youth's academic achievement or educational aspirations.

One could speculate that with greater societal acceptance of divorce, researchers will not have the expectation that "broken" homes cause (or at the least, affect academic achievement, sex role development, etc. and will focus on other variables. As attitudes change and there is greater acceptance of alternative family

forms, perhaps our focus will be more on the quality of relationships rather than emphasis on the structure of the "traditional" family.

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APPROVAL SHEET

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

9/13/15

Lauren Langman, Chairman