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OF PARENTS
IN THE LOWER

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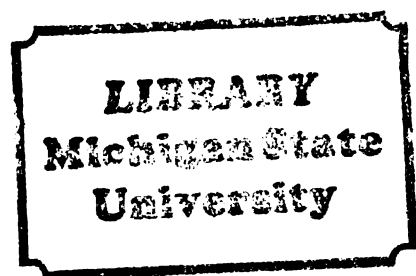
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PRE-ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTION OF
PARENTAL AUTHORITY IN THE LOWER
CLASS NEGRO FAMILY

MacMahon, B. Ellen (THESIS)



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PRE-ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTION
OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY
IN THE LOWER-CLASS NEGRO FAMILY

By

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A PROBLEM

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

A growing emphasis in research involving parent-child relationships is concerned with the child's perception of his parents as a basic source of data both in analyzing familial characteristics and indicating personality and behavioral aspects of the child. Some recent study has been focused on the child's perception of the relative power of each parent and its relationship to the child.

One significant study¹ dealt with religion, social class, age and sex as variables in the child's perception of family authority. A second research project² was concerned with responses of pre-adolescent boys in five social classes as they revealed parental competence, security, acceptance and support. One variation suggested in this study was that parent-daughter relations are not

¹Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, "Religion, Age and Sex in Children's Perception of Family Authority," Child Development, 33 (1962), pp. 781-789.

²Bernard C. Rosen, "Social Class and the Child's Perception of the Parent," Child Development, 35 (1964), pp. 1147-1153.

identical to those between parent-son. A third study³ seeking information on perception of the parents with respect to nurturance, punitiveness, source of fear and competence identified sex differences in responses in that girls seemed to perceive the father with more ambivalence than the boys.

Although social class distinctions in the child's perceptions of parents in relation to various aspects of parent-child interaction have been studied, little attention has been focused on the Negro family or the Negro child's perceptions of the parent-child relationship. Most studies of the Negro family have concentrated on the matriarchal-patriarchal family structure - its variations according to socioeconomic status and its effect on the child's personality and behavior. However, Hylan Lewis⁴ has conducted a study of forty-one parental figures in thirty-nine low-income households to determine power and support provided children as perceived by the parents, but no contrast in viewpoint on the part of the child was indicated.

In 1957, Hill stated that "it is apparent that research on the Negro family has been limited in

³Jerome Kagan and Judith Lemkin, "The Child's Differential Perception of Parental Attitudes," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 61 (November, 1960), pp. 440-447.

⁴Hylan Lewis, Culture, Class and the Behavior of Low-Income Families, Unpublished paper, p. 182.

scope."⁵ And as recently as 1966, Bernard admits that "there are serious gaps in our knowledge of marriage and family among Negroes".⁶ In view of gradual sociological advances in racial relations in the United States and recognition of the deficits in the lower-class Negro family and their effect on the child, research identifying familial patterns and modes of interaction between parent and child is most urgently needed.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to compare responses of pre-adolescent male and female children in the lower-class Negro family in the perception of their parents as providing power and support which are manifestations of parental authority. The specific objectives were: 1) to measure lower-class Negro boys' and girls' perception of their parents as providing power and support, manifestations of parental authority, and (2) to appraise the findings from the preceeding objective and to determine if variations occur between the sexes in their perceptions.

⁵Mozell C. Hill, "Research on the Negro Family," Marriage and Family Living, 19 (February, 1957), p. 30.

⁶Jessie Bernard, Marriage and Family Among Negroes (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. ix.

HYPOTHESES

In this study it was hypothesized that:

1. Both male and female pre-adolescent children in the lower-class Negro family will perceive the mother as the chief source of support.
2. Male pre-adolescent children in the lower-class Negro family will perceive the father as the chief source of power.
3. Female pre-adolescent children in the lower-class Negro family will perceive the mother as the chief source of power.

ASSUMPTIONS

It was assumed that:

1. Children are capable of perceiving parental behavior and the parent-child relationship.
2. Children's perception of their parents as providing power and support, which are manifestations of parental authority, is measurable with the use of questions developed and utilized by Kagan.⁷
3. The questions developed and utilized by Kagan in a study of the child's perception of the parents are reliable and valid for use with the lower-class Negro pre-adolescent.

⁷Jerome Kagan, "The Child's Perception of the Parent," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 53 (September, 1956), pp. 257-258.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Terms used in this study were defined as follows:

1. MALE-FEMALE PRE-ADOLESCENTS: For the purpose of this study all the boys and girls were ten years of age or in the pre-pubescent growth period. Pre-pubescence or middle childhood generally terminates with an average age of ten years.⁸
2. LOWER-CLASS NEGRO FAMILIES: A modified version of the Hollingshead Index of Social Position,⁹ which uses the occupation, education, and residential address of the main wage earner as the principle criteria of status, was utilized in identifying Negro families in Class IV - the lower or working class consisting primarily of skilled and semi-skilled workers. Social class was determined through the child's responses to questions concerning parental occupation and the neighborhood in which the child's school was located. Education of the main wage earner was not considered as a measurement of social position.
3. PERCEPTION: Awareness of external objects, conditions,

⁸Mollie S. Smart and Russell C. Smart, Children: Development and Relationships (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967), p. 305.

⁹August B. Hollingshead and Frederick C. Redlich, Social Class and Mental Illness: A Community Study, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958).

relationships as a result of sensory stimulation.¹⁰

4. PARENT: Any adult male and female living in the home at that time who was perceived by the child in the role of the parent.
5. PARENTAL AUTHORITY:¹¹
 - a. POWER: Actions which control, initiate, change or modify the behavior of another member of the family.
 - b. SUPPORT: Actions which establish, maintain, or restore, as an end in itself, a positive affective relationship with another family member.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the study was to compare the responses of pre-adolescent male and female children in the lower-class Negro family in the perception of their parents as providing power and support.

It was hypothesized that both male and female pre-adolescents would perceive mother as the source of support. It was further hypothesized that male pre-adolescents would perceive fathers to be the chief source of power; whereas girls would perceive mother to be the major source of power.

¹⁰Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education (2nd ed. rev.; New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 389.

¹¹Murray A. Straus, "Power and Support Structure of the Family in Relation to Socialization," Journal of Marriage and the Family, 26 (August, 1964), pp. 318-325.

The next chapter involves a review of research dealing with the child's perception of his parents, the variables which affect his perception, and the reasons for studying family patterns and the parent-child relationship from the child's frame of reference.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The exercise of authority and the bestowal of love are two fundamental aspects of the parent-child relationship which are basic in the family's responsibility for the socialization of the child. The manifestations of parental authority and love (in this study, power and support) vary with sex of the parent, sex of the child, age of the child, social class, and religious affiliation. Parental position in the class structure is one distinguishing factor in identifying the allocation of power and support within a family.

Maas¹² has observed that the parent-child relationship in the lower-class family is psychologically closed, hierarchal, and quite rigid and that children quite frequently fear their parents intensely. Parents in lower-class families have an authoritarian rather than democratic

¹²Henry S. Maas, "Some Social Class Differences in the Family System and Group Relations of Pre- and Early Adolescents," Child Development, 22 (1951), pp. 147-148.

attitude toward child rearing.¹³ Kohn¹⁴ proposes that class differences in the parent-child relationship are a product of differences in parental values. Lower-class parents' values center around extrafamilial statuses and rewards.¹⁵

The probability of the wife's employment and the father's feelings of familial and social inadequacy further operate to reduce the father's involvement in the family and his exercise of authority.¹⁶ As a result, maternal dominance is more common in lower-class families.¹⁷ Social class membership is associated not only with differences in childrearing practices, but also with differential behavior toward sons and daughters.¹⁸ Particularly with respect to daughters, fathers assume little responsibility in

¹³Catherine S. Chilman, "Child-Rearing and Family Life Patterns of the Very Poor: Implications for Home Economists," Working with Low-Income Families (Washington, D. C.: American Home Economics Association, 1965), p. 50.

¹⁴Melvin L. Kohn, "Social Class and Parent-Child Relationships: An Interpretation," American Journal of Sociology, 68 (January, 1963), pp. 471-480.

¹⁵Donald Gilbert McKinley, Social Class and Family Life, (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 102.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Charles E. Bowerman and Glen H. Elder, Jr., "Variations in Adolescent Perception of Family Power Structure," American Sociological Review, 29 (1964), p. 559.

¹⁸Jerome Kagan and Marion Freeman, "Relation of Childhood Intelligence, Maternal Behaviors, and Social Class to Behavior During Adolescence," Child Development, 34 (1963), p. 905.

administering punishment.¹⁹ Bronfenbrenner²⁰ warns of the danger of overprotection of girls in the lower-class family, with more punishment, but less adequate discipline accorded to boys.

Until recently it was assumed that knowledge concerning intrafamilial role relationships must necessarily be obtained only from the parents. Because of his lack of cultural biases, a child's perception is oftentimes less affected by societal patterns and expectations. Perception of family power structure naturally is not the same as the actual power structure of the family; but the child's view of parental distribution of authority and love is usually considered an unpretentious appraisal of parental power distribution. Information based on the child's perception of his parents may be used to clarify problems associated with proper sex-role identification and subsequent personality development; or it may be used to test Parsons' dichotomy of parental roles (instrumental and expressive)²¹ which identifies family power structure.

¹⁹Melvin L. Kohn and Eleanor F. Carroll, "Social Class and the Allocation of Parental Responsibilities," Sociometry, 23 (1960), pp. 372-392.

²⁰Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Changing American Child - A Speculative Analysis," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 7 (April, 1961), pp. 73-84.

²¹Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, Family, Socialization and Interaction Process (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1955), pp. 317-318.

In research dealing with the child's perception of parental roles, Hartley²² found that pre-adolescents in two socioeconomic classes consider homemaking duties to be the woman's role and the money-getting role still primarily the man's, even though the mother may work outside the home and the father occasionally assists with indoor tasks. Differences between the responses of boys and girls, particularly with respect to the father's role, have been indicated by Finch,²³ James,²⁴ and Piwovar.²⁵

Piwovar, in testing Negro pre-schoolers, found that both boys and girls responded to mother's role positively, but that boys had a larger percentage of negative responses to the father's role than did the girls. Heider²⁶ suggests that a powerful person is perceived as positive if he is seen to be benevolent and as negative if

²²Ruth E. Hartley, "Children's Concepts of male and Female Roles," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 6 (1959), pp. 83-91.

²³Helen M. Finch, "Young Children's Concepts of Parent Roles," Journal of Home Economics, 47 (February, 1955), pp. 99-103.

²⁴Jeannie H. James, "The Young Child's Perception of the Father Role as Related to the Father's Perception of His Own Role." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1965.

²⁵Elaine M. Piwovar, "Preschoolers' Responses to Questions Concerning Parental Roles While Enrolled in a 1965 Headstart Program of a Settlement House," Child Study Center Bulletin (Buffalo: State University College, 1966), 2, pp. 110-115.

²⁶Fritz Heider, The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958).

he is seen to be malevolent. Emmerich²⁷ feels that the assessment of children's perceptions of role concepts is prerequisite to the analysis of identification patterns acquired through a process of role modeling. In one of his studies dealing with the six-to-ten-year-old child's concept of paternal roles, it was found that girls perceive the mother more positively than the father whereas boys perceive the father more positively than the mother.

It has been suggested by Breznitz and Kugelmass²⁸ that adolescent girls encounter more difficulty in the development of sex-role differentiation, because they view the same-sex parent as more expressive; whereas boys perceive the opposite-sex parent to be more expressive. Grinder and Spector²⁹ further corroborated this pattern when they found that adolescent boys and girls attribute more resource control to the same-sex parent.

In other words, girls view their mothers as both the source of power and the source of support, whereas boys view mothers as supportive and fathers as more powerful. This may, however, be due to differences in the age of the

²⁷Walter Emmerich, "Family Role Concepts of Children Ages Six to Ten," Child Development, 32 (1961), pp. 609-624.

²⁸Shlomo Breznitz and Sol Kugelmass, "The Perception of Parents by Adolescents," Human Relations, 18 (1965), pp. 103-113.

²⁹Robert E. Grinder and Judith C. Spector, "Sex Differences in Adolescents' Perception of Parental Resource Control," Journal of Genetic Psychology, 106 (1965), pp. 337-344.

child. For instance, Kagan, Hosken and Watson³⁰ found that girls from six to eight years of age view the father as more hostile and punitive than do boys of the same age. However, in an earlier study of pre-schoolers, Emmerich³¹ found that girls assign the more powerful role to the mother. Emmerich³² later found age changes in children's role perception. Kagan and Lemkin³³ suggested that the girl's ambivalence in her perception of the father may exist because the girl sees the father as a more distant figure (because of lack of identification with him) and as a potential love object and source of affection.

Three commonly held views of parent role differentiation in our society are that mothers are generally more supportive and nurturant toward their children than are fathers; that parents exert more power toward their child of the same sex; and that parental nurturance-restriction varies with the age of the child, especially with respect to the son. In a study³⁴ which investigated variations in

³⁰Jerome Kagan, Barbara Hosken and Sara Watson, "Child's Symbolic Conceptualization of Parents," Child Development, 32 (1961), pp. 625-636.

³¹Walter Emmerich, "Young Children's Discrimination of Parent and Child Roles," Child Development, 30 (1959), pp. 403-419.

³²Emmerich, "Family Role Concepts of Children Ages Six to Ten."

³³Kagan and Lemkin, op. cit., p. 445.

³⁴Walter Emmerich, "Variations in the Parental Roles as a Function of the Parent's Sex and the Child's Sex and Age." Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 8 (1962), pp. 3-11.

the parent roles associated with the parent's sex, child's sex, and child's age, these three expectations were supported.

A number of studies further confirm the theory that parents exert more power toward their same-sex child. In one of the earliest studies dealing with the child's perception of parents, Gardner³⁵ found that there was a tendency for the parents to punish the child of the same sex. Bowerman and Elder³⁶ state that boys tend to report father rather than mother as the principal authority figure, and the reverse is true for girls. Hoffman³⁷ reported that boys attributed more discipline, positive affect, and instruction to fathers than girls did. Urie Bronfenbrenner³⁸ submits that each parent tends to be more active, unyielding, and demanding with a child of the same sex, and more lenient and indulgent toward a child of the opposite sex. The punitive parent, therefore, is more likely to be seen as more powerful.

³⁵L. Pearl Gardner, "An Analysis of Children's Attitudes Toward Fathers," Journal of Genetic Psychology, 70 (1947), p. 17.

³⁶Bowerman and Elder, op. cit., p. 559.

³⁷Lois Wladis Hoffman, "The Father's Role in the Family and the Child's Peer-Group Adjustment," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 7 (1961), pp. 97-105.

³⁸Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Some Familial Antecedents of Responsibility and Leadership in Adolescents," ed. Luigi Petrullo and Bernard M. Bass, Leadership in Interpersonal Behavior (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), pp. 239-271.

Droppleman and Schaefer,³⁹ in a study of the differences between boys' and girls' perception of the two parents, revealed that both parents are seen as more nurturant and as less rejecting and controlling by girls than by boys. Bronson, Katten, and Livson⁴⁰ unearthed a difference between boys' and girls' perceptions in that there was a slight tendency for more sons than daughters to perceive their fathers in a strong authority role.

Research conducted by Hess and Torney⁴¹ dealing with the child's perception of parents included such variables as age of child, sex of child, social class, and religious affiliation. Differences in the child's perception relating to these variables were supported with the exception of social class, although there was a tendency for girls from working-class families to see mother as boss more frequently than did girls from middle-class families. With regard to family authority and religious affiliation, the difference between religious groups was as marked as the effect of either sex or age in that the tendency for Catholic children to perceive one parent as dominant rather than both parents as equal in power was true for both boys

³⁹Leo F. Droppleman and Earl S. Schaefer, "Boys' and Girls' Reports of Maternal and Paternal Behavior," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 67 (1963), pp. 648-654.

⁴⁰Wanda C. Bronson, et al., "Patterns of Authority and Affection in Two Generations," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 58 (1959), p. 148.

⁴¹Hess, and Torney, op. cit.

and girls.

The child's perception of his parents has significance for identifying intrafamilial role patterns and for clarifying problems associated with proper sex-role identification. In addition, studies of parent-child interaction, as viewed from the child's frame of reference, can provide insights into the child's personality development and subsequent interpersonal relationships.

Serot and Teevan⁴² obtained results which indicated that the child's adjustment is related to his perception of his relationship within the family; that his perception of the relationship is unrelated to his parents' perception of the same; and that the parents' perception of the relationship is unrelated to his offspring's adjustment.

Parental behavior, as described by the child, can offer clues for interpreting various personality characteristics observable in the child. Baumrind⁴³ submits that a pattern of parental behavior high in control and nurturance produces self-assertive, self-confident, and self-controlled behavior in young children. Bronfenbrenner⁴⁴ contends that boys tend to be more responsible when the father is the

⁴²Naomi M. Serot and Richard C. Teevan, "Perception of the Parent-Child Relationship and Its Relation to Child Adjustment," Child Development, 32 (June, 1961), pp. 373-378.

⁴³Diana Baumrind, "Parental Control and Parental Love," Children, 12 (November-December, 1965), p. 234.

⁴⁴Bronfenbrenner, "The Changing American Child."

principal disciplinarian, whereas the opposite is true for girls. Hoffman argues that unqualified power assertion on the part of either or both parents (which is exemplified by direct commands, threats, deprivations, and physical force) contributes to the development of hostility, power needs, and heightened autonomy strivings in the child.⁴⁵ Siegelman,⁴⁶ in a study of the child's perception of parental power assertion, related introversion in children to punishing and unaffectionate parental behavior.

One of the first studies⁴⁷ using the child's perceptions of parent attitudes and behavior as the independent variable in an attempt to study personality and ego development revealed that girls perceived themselves as significantly more accepted and intrinsically valued by parents than did boys. Ausubel believes that the social sex roles of boys and girls are culturally determined in that a girl's status is ascribed, whereas a boy must achieve a social sex role. Therefore, parents tend to behave toward their children in response to expected societal patterns.

⁴⁵Martin L. Hoffman, "Power Assertion by the Parent and Its Impact on the Child," Child Development, 31 (1960), p. 142.

⁴⁶Marvin Siegelman, "Loving and Punishing Parental Behavior and Introversion Tendencies in Sons," Child Development, 37 (1966), pp. 985-992.

⁴⁷David P. Ausubel, et al., "Perceived Parent Attitudes as Determinants of Children's Ego Structure," Child Development, 25 (1954), p. 179.

Research involving the Negro child is limited; that specifically related to the Negro child's perception of his parents is particularly scarce. In a test of Negro pre-schoolers for verbal responses to the questions "What does a father do?" and "What does a mother do?" Piwovar⁴⁸ encountered differences in the replies of boys and girls, with girls showing a greater variety in their responses. In a test of the relationship between mobility aspirations, race, and family experience, Smith and Abramson⁴⁹ compared white and Negro adolescents in their reaction to parental discipline and evaluation of parental attitudes and found no racial differences. Neither of these studies, however, was directly concerned with the child's perception of the family's power structure.

Straus⁵⁰ has concluded that knowledge of the interrelationships between conjugal structure and the socializing process is especially tentative among Negroes. With regard to sex-role identification as a factor in the child's socialization, the Negro child is placed in a particularly ambivalent position in attempting to identify with a member of a "despised and discriminated-against

⁴⁸Piwovar, op. cit.

⁴⁹Howard P. Smith and Marcia Abramson, "Racial and Family Experience Correlates of Mobility Aspiration," Journal of Negro Education, 31 (1962), p. 120.

⁵⁰Straus, op. cit.

group."⁵¹

SUMMARY

This review of the literature has indicated that much research has been conducted involving the child's perception of the parent. Those variables which have effect on this perception include the sex of the parent, the sex of the child, the age of the child, the social class position, and the family's religious affiliation.

Generally, it has been found that girls of various ages and social classes perceive the mother as both the source of nurturance and restriction and that boys of various ages and social classes consider the mother to be nurturant and the father to be restrictive. Some studies have not shown a distinct differentiation in the girl's perception of the father's role.

One study which included religious affiliation as a variable noted a tendency for one of the Catholic parents to be perceived by both boys and girls as more dominant than the other rather than equal in power as was true from the Protestant child's point of view.

The child's conception of intrafamilial relationships is studied because it clarifies the child's sex-role identification and personality development. In addition,

⁵¹Joseph H. Douglas, "The Urban Negro Family," ed. John P. Davis, The American Negro Reference Book (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 349-350.

the child's perceptions provide insights into familial role patterns, power structure, parental behavior and its effect on the child's development.

Much of the research dealing with the child's perception of the parent and the parent-child relationship involves only white, and most notably, middle-class families. Therefore, the present study attempts to identify sex differences in perception of parental authority and love in the lower-class Negro family.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework on which this research is based supports the assumption that the child is capable of perceiving parental behavior and the parent-child relationship. This perception is one indication of parent-child interaction and its effect on the child's personality development.

SAMPLE

The student sample which provided data for this research project was selected from one fourth-grade and five fifth-grade classrooms of three elementary schools in predominantly lower-class neighborhoods in Lansing, Michigan. From a total sample of 146 students tested, 55 were eligible, 30 boys and 25 girls. The sample was not chosen as a random or a representative one, but included all eligible students present in the classrooms on the days in which the questionnaire was administered.

To keep the project within manageable limits, it was decided to confine this inquiry to one racial group, one social class, and one age group. The pre-adolescent child was chosen so that responses would be free of complex

pubertal implications. The age of ten is considered a time in which the child, although not completely independent of parents, exhibits a certain amount of self-reliance.

For a child to be eligible for this sample, he had to be a member of the Negro race; in the pre-adolescent age group, specifically ten years of age; and living with two parent figures (male and female), at least one of whom was gainfully employed in a semi-skilled or skilled occupation as defined through use of Hollingshead's Index.

Of the 146 students tested, 136 students were Negro, 10 were white. Seventy-two of the Negro students were disqualified because of age. There were 12 twelve-year-olds, 52 eleven-year-olds, 8 nine-year-olds, and 64 ten-year-olds tested. Of the 64 ten-year-olds, 3 were ineligible because of father's occupation, and 6 were ineligible because they indicated no male figure living in the home.

INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE

Data were collected for this research with a structured questionnaire⁵² which was comprised of seven introductory questions to determine the child's eligibility for inclusion in the sample and four questions which Kagan⁵³ developed and utilized in a study of the child's perception

⁵²See Appendixes I and II.

⁵³Kagan, "The Child's Perception of the Parents."

of his parents. These four questions were used to elicit the child's responses regarding his perception of parental authority. The first question dealt specifically with support, the next three questions with power.

A pilot study of the questionnaire was administered to a fifth-grade Protestant Sunday School group in East Lansing, Michigan. The group of children tested was identified through parental occupation as being members of middle-class families. This preliminary testing alerted the researcher to the possibility that a third response of "both," in addition to the responses "mother" and "father," might be needed. However, in the formal testing with the lower-class sample, the issue was not encountered.

The questionnaires were administered in approximately fifteen minutes by the researcher to an entire fourth- or fifth-grade class. The questionnaires were coded by the use of an asterisk or hyphen and were distributed in such manner that the researcher could classify completed forms with Negro or white students without their having to indicate race. The research project was introduced to the students as a joint venture between their school and Michigan State University to elicit attitudes toward parents of fourth- and fifth-grade students. A poster, on which the question was printed in large letters, was displayed by the researcher as each question was read aloud so the students would know which question was being discussed. To encourage honesty on the

part of the students and to insure privacy, it was stressed that no questionnaire could be identified in any way with any particular student.

ANALYSIS

To determine the significance of difference between the observed and expected frequency of boys and girls perceiving their parents as supportive or powerful, chi square tests were computed. This type of analysis was chosen because of the method of selecting the sample and the kind of data secured.⁵⁴ The .05 probability level, or less, was established as the level at which differences would be considered statistically significant.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted under the following limiting factors:

1. Pre-pubescence was defined as middle childhood or the period of pre-adolescence before the onset of puberty. Pre-adolescence generally terminates by the age of ten years. Although all children in the sample were ten years of age, puberty may have been a factor in influencing the responses made by some of the children.

⁵⁴while it is clearly the case that the sample of students tested in this research is not a random sample, the chi square test was used simply as a technique for ascertaining the probability of observing the set of internal frequencies in the table given the marginal distribution of the variables.

2. Social class, as defined through the use of Hollingshead's Index, may not be applicable in classifying the Negro family.
3. To limit the scope of this study, analysis was focused solely on the variable of sex difference in children's perceptions of parents. Had other variables such as social class, age of the child, and race been studied, other results may have been obtained.

SUMMARY

Fifty-five lower-class Negro boys and girls, ten years of age, completed a questionnaire indicating their perception of their parents as either supportive or powerful. The four questions used to elicit their responses were analyzed with the use of chi square tests.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The child's conception of his parents as either supportive or powerful was elicited through the use of four questions. Results from each question are presented in tables below. The data have been analyzed through the use of chi square tests.

Question 1 (Table I) indicated which parent the child considered to be supportive. Both boys and girls perceived mother as the support figure. The difference between expected and observed frequencies was significant at the .05 level.

Questions 2 and 3 (Tables II and III), which indicated the child's concept of parental power, were not statistically significant in establishing a difference between the responses of boys and girls.

Question 4 (Table IV), which was most relevant in determining which parent the child perceived as the power figure, revealed a significant difference at the .01 level.

Table V, which is a combination of Questions 2, 3, and 4, illustrates which parent is perceived more frequently to be the power figure.

TABLE I

Question 1: "If you were in an argument at home with your mother and father, who would be on your side, your mother or your father?"

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS^a RESPONDING
"MOTHER" OR "FATHER" TO QUESTION 1 - SUPPORT

Group	N	Mother	Father
Boys	30	70%	30%
Girls	25	72%	28%

^aTotal: 55 $\chi^2 = 4.8$ $p < .05$

Both boys and girls perceived their mother to be the major source of support. This result is in agreement with a number of studies which have found that children of either sex consider the mother to be more nurturant and loving than the father and supports Hypothesis I of the study.

TABLE II

Question 2: "Let's make believe you were bad and your mother and father were both at home. who would punish you, your mother or your father?"

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS^a RESPONDING
"MOTHER" OR "FATHER" TO QUESTION 2 - POWER

Group	N	Mother	Father
Boys	30	57%	43%
Girls	25	56%	44%

^aTotal: 55 $\chi^2 = NS$

The responses of girls did not show a statistically significant difference from those of the boys. It is evident that more girls in this sample felt that their mothers would be more punishing than their fathers. This supports Hypothesis 3, but the difference was not statistically significant. Boys also indicated that, even though both parents were present in the home, the mother would more likely punish the child. This does not support Hypothesis 2. It is interesting to note that there was very little difference between the responses of boys and girls for this question.

TABLE III

Question 3: "Who is boss in your house?"

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS^a RESPONDING
"MOTHER" OR "FATHER" TO QUESTION 3 - POWER

Group	N	Mother	Father
Boys	30	37%	63%
Girls	25	52%	48%

^aTotal: 55 $\chi^2 = NS$

This question did not indicate a statistically significant difference between the boys' and girls' perception of one of their parents as being more dominant than the other. However, more boys than girls considered father to be the dominant figure in the home. This supports Hypothesis 2. It is noteworthy that only a slight majority of girls considered mother to be the dominant parent. This does not give much support to Hypothesis 3.

TABLE IV

Question 4: "Who are you scared of more, your mother or your father?"

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS^a RESPONDING
"MOTHER" OR "FATHER" TO QUESTION 4 - POWER

Group	N	Mother	Father
Boys	30	27%	73%
Girls	25	64%	36%

^aTotal: 55 $\chi^2 = 7.4$ $p < .01$

This question indicated a significant difference in the boy-girl perception of parents as sources of power. More boys feared the father and more girls feared the mother. This gives strong support to Hypotheses 2 and 3.

TABLE V

Total of responses to Questions 2, 3, and 4

PERCENTAGE OF BOY AND GIRL RESPONSES^a
 "MOTHER" OR "FATHER" TO QUESTIONS^b RELATING TO POWER

Group	N	Mother	Father
Boys	90	40%	60%
Girls	75	57%	43%

^aTotal: 165

$\chi^2 = NS$

^bQuestions 2, 3, 4

When the replies to the three questions relating to power were combined a difference in the perception of boys and girls was revealed, but it was not statistically significant. More than half of the boys indicated that they considered their father to be the authority figure, while only slightly over half of the girls indicated their mother to be the major source of power. These responses tend to support Hypotheses 2 and 3.

DISCUSSION

Table I appears to indicate that both boys and girls perceive mother as the more supportive parent. This result is substantially corroborated in a number of studies based on the child's perception of his parents as sources of authority and love.

As far back as 1943, Meltzer⁵⁵ found that both boys and girls average more acceptance reactions to mother than father. And as recently as 1966 in a study of Indian children, Ghosh and Sinha⁵⁶ stated that the mother was conceptualized as the major source of affection and nurturance by both pre-adolescents and adolescents.

Other research previously discussed which found that both male and female children of various age groups consistently perceive the mother as more nurturant, expressive, and less restrictive than fathers, include studies by Emmerich,⁵⁷ Droppleman and Schaefer,⁵⁸ Breznitz

⁵⁵H. Meltzer, "Sex Differences in Children's Attitudes to Parents," Journal of Genetic Psychology, 62 (1943), pp. 311-326.

⁵⁶E. S. Ghosh and Durganand Sinha, "A Study of Parental Role-Perception in Siblings," Journal of Psychological Researches, 10 (1966), pp. 8-13.

⁵⁷Emmerich, "Parental Identification in Young Children" and "Variations in the Parental Role as a Function of the Parent's Sex and the Child's Sex and Age."

⁵⁸Droppleman and Schaefer, op. cit.

and Kugelmass,⁵⁹ Kagan and Lemkin.⁶⁰ In a study of social class differences in families, McKinley⁶¹ found that mothers in the lower class are more often the source of emotional support.

With the exception of the study conducted by Ghosh and Sinha, all of these investigations were carried out with white, middle-class children. It would seem, however, that there are no racial differences in the perception of mothers as more nurturant and supportive by both male and female children.

Table II reveals no statistical difference in the responses of boys and girls. However, more girls chose mother as the major disciplinarian than father.

This question produced an unexpected result from boys. Although in later tables it was evident that more boys considered the father to be the dominant and fearful parent, Table II suggested that mother handled the discipline. It might be suggested from this that mothers are more frequently at home than the father or that this responsibility is delegated to the mother in the lower-class home. Kohn and Carroll⁶² submit that lower-class

⁵⁹Breznitz and Kugelmass, op. cit.

⁶⁰Kagan and Lemkin, op. cit.

⁶¹McKinley, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

⁶²Melvin L. Kohn and Eleanor E. Carroll, "Social Class and the Allocation of Parental Responsibilities," Sociometry, 23 (1960), pp. 372-392.

fathers assume little responsibility toward their children of either sex, considering this to be the mother's domain.

McKinley⁶³ has proposed that the father in the lower-class family not only functions less when he is in the home, but that he is there less frequently than the father in upper classes. In a comparison of boys' attitudes toward fathers in two social classes, Rosen⁶⁴ found that social class differences in the boys' perception of the parent were greater with respect to father than with mother. The mother in both social classes was considered to be nurturant and expressive. Fathers in the lower class were viewed as less competent, emotionally secure, accepting, and interested in their child's performance than fathers in the middle class.

Bronfenbrenner⁶⁵ submits that boys tend to be more responsible when the father rather than the mother is the principal disciplinarian and that girls are more dependable when the mother is considered to be the authority figure.

Table III indicated that girls continue to perceive their mothers as the more powerful parent, whereas boys consider their fathers to be the dominant conjugal figure. The results of this question are in agreement with

⁶³McKinley, op. cit., p. 103.

⁶⁴Rosen, op. cit.

⁶⁵Bronfenbrenner, "The Changing American Child - A Speculative Analysis."

a study by Hess and Torney⁶⁶ which found that boys are more inclined than girls to see father in the ruling position and girls more apt than boys to see mothers as boss.

The boys response to this question may have been culturally influenced. Through mass media, classroom, or neighborhood associations, the child may have become aware of the prevailing societal pattern whereby fathers are expected to be the dominant figure in the home.

Table IV appears to indicate that boys perceive their fathers and girls, their mothers, as the most fear-provoking parent. These results are in accord with studies previously discussed which found that parents exert more power toward their same-sex child.

Table V combines the three questions used to elicit the child's conception of a parental authority figure. This table appears to indicate that boys perceive their father to be the source of power, whereas girls consider their mother as the source of authority. However, there was not a statistically significant difference between the responses of boys and girls.

SUMMARY

In this study it was hypothesized that:

1. Both male and female pre-adolescent children in the lower-class Negro family would perceive the mother as

⁶⁶Hess and Torney, op. cit.

the chief source of support. This hypothesis was supported.

2. Male pre-adolescent children in the lower-class Negro family would perceive the father as the chief source of power. This hypothesis was supported by two out of three questions asked to determine the boys' perception of his parents as providing power.
3. Female pre-adolescent children in the lower-class Negro family would perceive the mother as the chief source of power. This hypothesis was supported by all three questions dealing with power.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to compare responses of pre-adolescent male and female children in the lower-class Negro family in the perception of their parents as providing power and support which are manifestations of parental authority.

Fifty-five boys and girls (30 boys; 25 girls) in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in Lansing, Michigan, completed a questionnaire which revealed their sex, age, parents' occupation, and perceptions of parental authority and love.

It was hypothesized that both male and female pre-adolescent lower-class Negro children would perceive their mother as the chief source of support. This hypothesis was substantiated. It was further hypothesized that boys would consider their father to be the major source of power. This hypothesis was supported by two out of three questions used to elicit the child's perception of the parental authority figure. The one question which failed to identify father as the authority figure revealed that the boy considered mother to be the disciplinarian. The

third hypothesis, that the girl would perceive the mother to be the chief source of power, was supported.

The specific objectives of this investigation were to measure lower-class Negro boys' and girls' perception of their parents as providing power and support and to determine if variations would occur between the sexes in their perception of parental authority and love. A difference did result in that boys perceived the father and girls, the mother, as the major source of power. The findings of this study are in agreement with those of other researchers who have attempted to identify the perceptions children have of their parents.

Therefore, it can be concluded from this study that both male and female pre-adolescents in the lower-class Negro family will perceive their mother as the chief source of support and love. It can be further concluded (on the basis of two out of three responses) that the father in the lower-class Negro family will be viewed as the authority figure by the boy, whereas the mother will be perceived as the major source of power by the girl.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As Gorer⁶⁷ has intimated, the attitudes a child has toward his father and mother are the indicators of his

⁶⁷Geoffrey Gorer, "Theoretical Approach - 1941," ed. Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein, Childhood in Contemporary Cultures (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 32.

attitudes toward all persons he will encounter throughout his lifetime. Therefore, a study of the child's perception of parental roles and the parent-child relationship provides insights into the development of the child's personality and his patterns of interaction with others.

Studies of the Negro child's perception of parents may be a means of identifying factors which contribute to or hinder the development of the self-concept. As minority group members, these children tend to identify with the dominant culture. In a comparison of northern and southern Negro and white preschool children on race awareness, Morland⁶⁸ found that in both regions Negro subjects preferred and identified with the white race. This may have grave consequences on interpersonal relationships within the Negro family and on the child's subsequent interpersonal encounters.

During the pilot study of the questionnaire administered to a group of middle-class Sunday School children, it was evident that a third response might be needed whereby the child could indicate both parents simultaneously as sources of love or power. However, when the same questionnaire was administered to lower-class Negro children, there were no requests for an alternative response.

⁶⁸J. Kenneth Morland, "A Comparison of Race Awareness in Northern and Southern Children," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 36 (1966), pp. 22-31.

This may further substantiate the generally accepted concept of lower-class conjugal role separation as compared with the equalitarian family pattern which prevails in middle-class families. Maas⁶⁹ submits that parents in the "core culture" are viewed by the child as being relatively equal in power; whereas in the lower class, familial relationships are hierarchal with the child removed from direct communication with both parents.

It was suggested earlier that the boys' perception of his father as the authority figure may have been influenced by societal patterns encountered in mass communication media or in school and neighborhood contacts. Why were the girls' perceptions not influenced by the same factors so that she would choose father as the chief source of power?

The majority of responses from lower-class Negro girls in this study established the mother as both the source of power and support. This finding is in agreement with other studies which have found that the girl is far more ambivalent toward the father than toward the mother and more often considers the mother to be both the authority and love figures. What implications does this have for the girl's proper sex-role identification? If the mother in the lower-class family works outside the home, as is often the case, what effect does the mother's employment have on

⁶⁹Maas, op. cit., p. 147.

the girl's choice of a role model?

It was rather interesting that although the lower-class Negro male pre-adolescent considered the father to be boss in the home and the more fear-arousing parent, he chose mother as the disciplinarian. Perhaps mother is home more often to administer punishment or perhaps disciplining children is felt to be part of her role. Or did this reveal that the mother may, in actuality, be perceived as the source of authority? Would the child have been aware of any cultural patterns establishing father as disciplinarian as well as the dominant, fear-provoking figure?

This study has revealed family and child-rearing patterns which may exist in the lower-class Negro family. More research is needed to substantiate the findings of this study. Research is also needed to dispel the myth that the Negro family varies from the modal pattern in this society. For it seems that within social classes Negro and white family patterns appear to be similar. Through the cooperation of the Lansing Public School District and this Department, rapport may be established with the Negro families in this community so that the opportunity for further research might become a reality.

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APPENDIX I

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
East Lansing, MichiganFIFTH-GRADE ATTITUDE TEST

1. BOY? GIRL?
2. What is your age? 9 10 11 12
3. Who lives in your house?
Mother Stepmother Grandmother
Father Stepfather Grandfather
Aunt Uncle Older Sister Older Brother
4. Is your father working now? YES NO
5. What kind of work does your father do? _____
6. Is your mother working now? YES NO
7. What kind of work does your mother do? _____
8. If you were in an argument at home with your mother and father,
who would be on your side, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER
9. Let's make believe you were bad and your mother and father were
both home. Who would punish you, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER
10. Who is the boss in your house, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER
11. Who are you scared of more, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER

APPENDIX II

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
East Lansing, Michigan

FIFTH*GRADE ATTITUDE TEST

1. BOY? GIRL?
2. What is your age? 9 10 11 12
3. Who lives in your house?
Mother Stepmother Grandmother
Father Stepfather Grandfather
Aunt Uncle Older Sister Older Brother
4. Is your father working now? YES NO
5. What kind of work does your father do? _____
6. Is your mother working now? YES NO
7. What kind of work does your mother do? _____
8. If you were in an argument at home with your mother and father,
who would be on your side, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER
9. Let's make believe you were bad and your mother and father were
both home. who would punish you, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER
10. Who is the boss in your house, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER
11. Who are you scared of more, your mother or your father?
MOTHER FATHER



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