

DIVORCE AND THE SCHOOL-AGE
CHILD'S PERCEPTION
OF FAMILY

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	4
Definition of Terms	9
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	10
Introduction	10
The School-age Child's Formation of Social Concepts	11
Children of Divorce	<u>13</u>
Understanding the Concept of Family	<u>16</u>
Summary	19
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	21
Introduction	21
Sample	21
Instruments	23
Cognitive Development Level Test	23
Family Structure Interview	25
Dimensions of "Family" Interview	27
Family Sculpture Game	27
Methods	28
Interviewers	28
Pilot Study	29
Data Collection	29
Data Analysis	33
Reliability and Validity	33
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	34
Piagetian Tasks	34
Family Structure Interview	35
Dimensions Involved in Basic Family Definitions	42
Dimensions Involved in Specific Concepts of "Family," "Mother," and "Father"	48
Further Exploration of the Dimension of "Co-residence"	55
Family Sculpture Game	57
Present Family Sculpture	57
Future Family Sculpture	61

Chapter	Page
Second Acceptable Future Family Sculpture . . .	63
Specific Response Concerning Future Children and Future Marriage	64
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	66
Summary	66
Purpose and Methods of the Study	66
Results	67
Conclusions	70
Suggestions for Further Research	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80
APPENDIXES	83
APPENDIX A - CHILDREN'S FAMILY CONCEPT INTERVIEW (INSTRUCTIONS)	84
APPENDIX B - FAMILY STRUCTURES	94
APPENDIX C - CHILDREN'S FAMILY CONCEPT INTERVIEW (SCORE SHEETS)	102

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Demographics of the Sample	24
II. Mean Number of Dimensions Mentioned in Defining Basic Family Concepts	46
III. Further Exploration of the Dimension of Co-residence . . .	56
IV. The Child's Developing Concept of Family	75

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Affirmation of Family Structures as "Family" by Family Type . .	36
2. Comparison of Preschool and School-age Affirmation of Family Structures as "Family"	43
3. Number of Dimensions Mentioned in Basic Family Concept	44
4. Comparison of Preschool and School-age Use of Dimensions in Basic Family Concept	47
5. Dimensions Involved in Specific Concepts of "Family," "Mother," and "Father"	49
6. Comparison of Dimensions Involved in Specific Concepts of "Family," "Mother," and "Father" by Preschool and School-age Children	54
7. A Sample Family Sculpture Score Sheet	58
8. Number of Children Including Specific Family Members in Their Family Sculptures by Family Type	59

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The family is accepted as the first and one of the most enduring influences on the potentialities for children's development of self-esteem and interpersonal and social competencies. Previous research has been conducted on the effects of divorce and varying family contexts on children's behavior and personality development (Despert, 1953; McDermott, 1968), family functioning (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1981) and children's psychological well-being (Bane, 1976; Jacobsen, 1978). Serot and Teevan (1961, p. 377) state that such studies contain an inherent weakness because they have ". . . failed to take into account the fact that the child reacts to his perception of the situation and not directly to the situation itself." Therefore, the children's perceptions of "family" and their beliefs about their own and desired future family situations must be of primary importance in determining the effects of family context upon them.

Rapid societal changes have brought about new, diverse types of family structures. Primary among these is the single-parent family, which most often consists of a mother and children. Approximately one-half of the children born today are expected to spend some portion of their lives before age 18 in a one-parent family (Bane, 1976; Glick, 1979). The large percentage of children to experience this family context is in part due to the rising incidence of divorce among families

with children. Hetherington et al. (1981) state that the most frequently found family condition in the immediate post-divorce situation is one in which a child is living in a home with a single mother, and is having intermittent or no contact with the father. Knowledge about how changing family contexts, especially those related to divorce, affect children's perceptions of "family" is important for helping children develop to their fullest potential as human beings. Children, regardless of their own family experience, usually perceive "family" as a mother, a father, and a child (Camara, 1979; Moore, Bickhard, & Cooper, 1977; Norris, 1981; Powell, Wiltcher, Wedemeyer, & Claypool, 1981). Do children feel, as Piaget (1928) suggests, that "co-residence" or living together is an essential requirement for "family" or is their concept of "family" flexible enough to include a non-resident parent? Powell et al. (1981, p. 141) state that ". . . the child's own life experience, if it is at variance with the messages of the larger culture, may not be as potent as the message of the larger culture." Children's general perceptions of "family" may, therefore, be rather stable within a given society regardless of the diversity of family types. It is of interest to discover if any differences in perceptions do exist and if they do, under what circumstances they appear.

Moore et al. (1977) felt that children in different Piagetian stages of cognitive development would hold different conceptions of "family." They interviewed children at the three highest levels of cognitive development to determine their perceptions of "family." They found that for all three stages, "family" consists of two parents and a child. Children in single-parent families were more likely to accept a single-parent and child as a family than children of intact families.

Moore's data suggest a relationship between cognitive level and frequency of mention of eight dimensions of family. These included: membership, domestic functions, guidance of children, co-residence, biology, emotions, legal factors, and social role factors.

However, Camara (1979) interviewed school-age children using Moore's eight dimensions and obtained results very similar to those obtained by Powell et al. (1981) with pre-operational youngsters. Children's perceptions of "family" in both studies tended to be very rigid, as Moore predicted for the youngest children, those at the pre-operational level. Although Camara's sample of children should have been in the second level of understanding of family concepts, they responded in the first mode identified by Moore. This point requires further investigation.

Two of Piaget's classifications of cognitive level are applicable to the study of school-age children's perception of "family": (1) the concrete operational level and (2) the formal operational level. Piaget (1967, p. 6) defines the concrete operational level as ". . . the stage of concrete intellectual operations (the beginning of logic) and of moral and social feelings of cooperation (ages seven to 11 or 12, or 'middle childhood')." The formal operational level is defined by Piaget as ". . . the stage of abstract intellectual operations, of the formation of the personality, and of affective and intellectual entry into the society of adults (adolescence)" (p. 6). Children at these cognitive levels use qualitatively different thinking patterns than children at other levels. Results of the research with a sample of school-age children can be added to the knowledge obtained through the investigation of Powell et al. (1981). In this manner, the differences between

pre-operational and concrete and formal operational children's conceptions of "family" can be identified and the nature of the progression of the cognitive formation can be described.

Moore et al. (1977) also found that the sex of the respondent may influence the frequency of mention of the eight dimensions of "family." It appeared that girls used the dimensions of "guidance" and "emotions" more frequently than boys, and that boys focused on the outward appearance of the family by using the dimension of "membership" most often. Camara (1979) used a category which she labeled "nurturing" and also found that girls described "mother" and "father" more often in these affective terms than did boys. It appears that girls may have a more advanced idea about "family" and interpersonal relationships than do boys.

Knowledge of how children's perceptions of "family" may be influenced by family type (especially single-parent families resulting from divorce), cognitive level and sex is of vital importance to parents, teachers and counselors who must help children to understand changes in their own and other family structures. Divorce is a social reality which has great impact on the family and children's perceptions of what a family should be. Results of this research will enhance the ability of helping adults to identify children's levels of understanding in order to individualize their explanations for the maximum benefit of each child.

Purpose

The general purpose of this study was to carry out an in-depth investigation of school-age children's perceptions of "family."

Specific objectives were to determine differences which existed according to family type, cognitive level and sex in school-age children's perceptions of valid family structures and their present family structures, desired future family structures and alternatives acceptable as future family structures. Dimensions salient in children's perceptions of "mother," "father," and "family" were also explored. In order to identify perceptions of family structure, children were shown 20 drawings depicting possible family structures. They were asked to identify which ones were a family and which ones were not. The dimensions of family to be explored were those defined by Moore et al. (1977) in her initial study. They included membership, domestic functions, guidance of children, co-residence, biology, emotions, legal factors and social role factors. Previous work (Moore et al., 1977; Powell et al., 1981) using the methodology of coding children's spontaneous responses for dimensions of family have not indicated "co-residence" as a salient dimension. However, when probing questions related to "co-residence" were added (Powell et al., 1981), only 40 percent of the children felt that a family could still be a family if they did not live together. Children from intact families felt that "co-residence" was an essential feature of being a mother or father more often than did children of single-parent families. Jones (1979) identified a difficulty in distinguishing between "co-residence" and "membership" when coding certain answers. Therefore, probing questions about "co-residence" were included in the present study in order to deal with this problem.

A further purpose of the study was to explore children's perceptions of their own present and desired future families. Children were asked to make a concrete, physical representation of their families with

abstract, wooden figures and a grid-type board using the Family Sculpture Technique previously employed in clinical studies (Cromwell & Fournier, 1980; Weber, 1981). An additional purpose of this study was to determine whether concrete and formal operational children differ greatly from pre-operational children in their perceptions of "family." If so, a developmental progression paralleling Piaget's (1967) cognitive stages may be identified as was suggested by Moore et al. (1977).

Research questions asked in this study were:

1. Which of a number of possible family structures do school-age children most often define as "family?"

Based on the findings of Powell et al. (1981) and Camara (1979), it was expected that school-age children would most often define "family" as a unit comprised of a mother, father, and child or a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, and child. There should be no significant differences based on the sex or family type of the respondent.

2. What are the dimensions which school-age children use to define "mother," "father," and "family?"

Based on the findings of Powell et al. (1981) and Camara (1979), it was predicted that school-age children would use the dimensions of "membership" and "biology" most often to describe "mother," "father," and "family." There were no significant differences based on the sex of the respondent. Further, it was predicted that children from single-parent families would utilize the dimensions of "membership" and "co-residence" less often than children of two-parent families in defining these terms.

3. In further probing, do school-age children identify the dimension of "co-residence" as a necessary criterion for "mother," "father," and "family?"

Based on the findings of Powell et al. (1981), it was predicted that 60 percent of the children would identify "co-residence" as a necessary criterion for "mother," "father," and "family."

4. What type of family structure do school-age children depict as the composition of their own families?

Camara (1979) stated that children usually have not been given the opportunity to talk separately about parents and families in general and their own particular families. Children may perceive that their own families are like the "norm" in some ways, different in others, and they might be able to say so if given a chance. Based on Camara's findings, it seems reasonable that school-age children would identify the members of their families. Further, no significant differences based on sex would be evident, and children from single-parent families would identify their fathers as members of their families less often than children from two-parent families.

5. What type of family structure do school-age children represent as the composition of their desired future families?

Based on the findings of Camara (1979), it was predicted that school-age children would represent a mother, father, child unit as the composition of their desired future families and that no significant differences would be found based on sex or family type.

6. If deprived of their first choice for "desired future family" composition, what will school-age children identify as another acceptable alternative?

Based on the wider family experience of the children from single-parent families, it seems reasonable to predict that these school-age

children would be able to identify acceptable alternatives to their desired future families more often than children of two-parent families. No sex differences were anticipated.

7. What is the relationship between the children's representations of their own families and their identification of varying structures as "family?"

Based on the findings of Camara (1979), an assumption would be that school-age children would be able to distinguish between their own families and their identifications of varying family structures as "family." No significant sex differences were predicted. Children of two-parent families would have a match between their own family structures and their definitions of "family." Children of single-parent families would be able to identify the differences between their own family structures and their definitions of "family."

8. What is the relationship between the children's representations of their "desired future family" structure and their identification of varying structures as "family?"

Based on the findings of Camara (1979), it was predicted that the children's representations of their "desired future family" structure would match their identification of varying structures as "family." No significant differences would be found based on sex or family type.

9. What is the relationship between the children's representations of their own present family structure and their representations of their "desired future family" structure?

Based on the findings of Camara (1979), it appeared that children of two-parent families would identify their own families as being of the

same type as their "desired future family" structure. Children of single-parent families would have a discrepancy between their own present and "desired future family" structures. No sex differences were expected.

10. Do school-age children indicate a desire for: (a) future children and (b) future marriage?

Based on the findings of Camara (1979), it appeared that most children would indicate a desire for both future children and future marriage. Marriage was seen as a necessary prerequisite to having children, and children were desired for companionship reasons.

Definition of Terms

Many of the terms used in this study have specific meanings. The following definitions will provide for a uniform interpretation of these terms:

1. Pre-operational Thought - The state of intuitive intelligence, of spontaneous interpersonal feelings, and of social relationships in which the child is subordinate to the adult (ages two to seven years, or 'early childhood'). (Piaget, 1967, p. 5)
2. Concrete Operational Thought - The stage of concrete intellectual operations (the beginning of logic) and of moral and social feelings of cooperation (ages seven to 11 or 12, or 'middle childhood'). (Piaget, 1967, p. 6)
3. Formal Operational Thought - The stage of abstract intellectual operations, of the formation of the personality, and of affective and intellectual entry into the society of adults (adolescence). (Piaget, 1967, p. 6)
4. Conservation - A conserving child recognizes that certain properties of objects remain unchanged despite certain changes in the objects themselves. (Evans, 1975, p. 200)

The eight dimensions of the family as identified by Moore et al. (1977) are defined explicitly in the section on data collection and scoring procedures.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Social cognition as it is most frequently discussed in the literature deals with peer and authority relationships (Damon, 1977; Selman & Byrne, 1975; Youniss & Volpe, 1978) or the understanding of social customs, conventions, and institutions (Damon, 1977; Furth, 1980; Turiel, 1978). The progressive development of social cognition and how it affects children's perceptions of "family" can only be surmised from this body of knowledge.

The family as a social institution is experiencing rapid change. Children's perceptions of their familial environment are of the utmost importance in determining the effects which these changes might have upon their development. More specific studies have thus been initiated to determine how children perceive "family." Despite differences in age, sex, and family type, children seem to hold similar rigid views about what constitutes a family. Two parents and children seem to be the accepted norm. Moore et al. (1977) suggested that a progression of stages exists in the child's developing concept of family. Camara (1979) and Powell et al. (1981) interviewed school-age and preschool children respectively and encountered very similar perceptions between the two groups. The formation of the concept of "family" by a concrete and formal operational sample of children should be explored and

reviewed in light of these previous studies.

The School-age Child's Formation of Social Concepts

The concrete and formal operational levels of cognitive thinking are defined by Piaget (1967) as:

The stage of concrete intellectual operations (the beginning of logic) and of moral and social feelings of cooperation (ages seven to 11 or 12, or 'middle childhood'). The stage of abstract intellectual operations, of the formation of the personality, and of affective and intellectual entry into the society of adults (adolescence). (p. 6)

Concern for the relationship between the developing concept of family and the cognitive developmental stages began with an early study by Piaget (1928). He outlined three stages in children's identification of family. In the first stage, children call all those who live with them family. In the second stage, they identify family members as blood relations who reside in the immediate vicinity. In the third stage, children include all blood relatives in their definition of family. Concrete and formal operational children will be in the second and third stages when describing their families. Piaget's belief in the progressive development of social understanding stems from his conviction that ". . . the intelligence that deals with the physical and logical world is basically not different from the intelligence that deals with the social world" (Furth & Wachs, 1975, p. 10). Social cognition, therefore, develops as a result of interaction with and adaptation to social reality.

The parallels between social concepts and cognitive levels have been of concern to many researchers. Jurkovic (1980) states that the family is an idea or interpersonal concept whose meaning can assume a

variety of forms depending on one's cognitive orientation. Kohlberg (1964) found a developmental progression in his study of morality and described the phenomenon in this way:

The 'stage' approach to understanding such responses characteristic of an age group involves the analysis of their underlying thought structures and the comparison of such structures found in different age groups in order to define the general direction of development. Such 'stages' are then used to understand developmental differences among children of a given age and to isolate major social and intellectual influences upon development. (p. 395)

This interest in describing cognitively based stages, or qualitatively distinct ways of organizing and understanding experience, has expanded into an approach to the study of children's developing understanding of the social world. Sequential stages have been identified in the development of moral judgement (Kohlberg, 1964), conceptions of the self (Broughton, 1978), friendship (Cooney & Selman, 1978; Youniss & Volpe, 1978), and the understanding of social customs, conventions, and institutions (Damon, 1977; Furth, 1980; Turiel, 1978).

Bernstein and Cowan (1975) also found a parallel sequence of development with their study of social causality. Twenty boys and girls at each of three age levels (3-4, 7-8, 11-12) were given an interview concerning their concepts of how people get babies. Piagetian-type tasks were administered first and a definite progression developed as the children's performance on the tasks increased with age, intercorrelations were high, and children tended to perform at the same absolute cognitive level on each task. Their concepts of human reproduction proceeded through a Piagetian developmental sequence concerning physical and social causality and identity concepts.

Selman and Byrne (1975) described a developmental sequence in the process of social perspective-taking. At level 0 (egocentric

perspective-taking), children can identify thoughts and emotions in other people, but they confuse other perspectives with their own. At level 1 (subjective perspective-taking), children understand that others' thoughts and feelings may be different from their own because they are in different situations or have different information. At level 2 (self-reflective perspective-taking), children reflect on their own thoughts and feelings. They can anticipate other perspectives and they realize that this anticipation influences their own perspectives. At level 3 (mutual perspective-taking), children can assume a third party point of view. This progression of social perspective-taking influences how children view much of their world, including kinship ties and family relationships. The ability to view other people in the context of complex interpersonal relationships must develop over time in a sequential manner. Developmental progressions containing parallels between social concepts and cognitive levels may be found when results of studies dealing with perceptions of "family" are compared using samples of children in varying cognitive levels of development.

Children of Divorce

In the United States today about one in every six children under 18 lives in a single-parent family (Ogg, 1976). The effect of the absence of one parent, usually the father, on the children's development has been studied in several areas related to family functioning and parental roles. Hetherington, et al. (1981) studied 24 divorced families in which the children lived in a home with the mother and had intermittent or no contact with the father. These families were compared with 24 intact families. It was discovered that divorced mothers and their children

had a more chaotic lifestyle. They were less likely to eat dinner together and read before bedtime, and children were more likely to be late for school.

2 Aldous (1972) studied 210 low income, preschool children from one-parent and two-parent families in order to determine if father absence affected children's perceptions of adult role assignments. Children generally perceived adult roles in conventional ways, i.e., fathers work and mothers take care of children. This indicates that ". . . children have a knowledge of conventional adult sex role assignments despite father absence and role reversals in their own families" (Aldous, 1972, p. 64).

3 Despert (1953) discussed the idea that a well-handled divorce is probably better for the child than an unhappy marriage. He felt that the latter, actually emotional divorce, was more harmful to children's developing personalities because it left them in limbo with feelings of great insecurity about what would occur next in their families. Despert found that the school-age child may respond to divorce with a wholesale rejection of marriage: "I'll never get married" (p. 64). This was not a typical response of younger or older children. This indicates that divorce which occurs during the middle years may negatively influence children's perceptions of marriage.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1974, 1975, 1976) and Kelly and Wallerstein (1976) have discussed how divorce affects children's perceptions of parents and "family." Their intensive study included 131 children between the ages of 2-1/2 and 18 years from 60 families in California. Their goal was to explore the differential responses of children at various ages to divorce and the related changes in family structure and

functioning. Interviews were conducted upon the initial separation of the parents and then again one year later. Preschoolers often showed regressive behavior, but tolerated substitute caretakers well. Their relationships with their fathers often became more consistent and affectionate while their relationships with their mothers deteriorated (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1975). They generally had a flexible idea about what a family could be and, therefore, gained successful adjustment to the divorce through explorations of the changes and added support of the new family system. School-age children often reacted with fear about possible future family changes. None of the children was pleased or relieved with the divorce, despite a history in many of these families of chronic, often violent marital conflict to which most of the children were witness (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1975). There was a strong sense of loss at the departure of the father. Many children harbored fantasies of responsibility for the divorce and of possible reconciliation. Teenagers most often reacted with anger against one or both parents. They expressed deep concern about their own possible future marriage. Some decided never to marry while others opted to consider marriage at an older age (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974). Adolescents also expressed unrealistic concern about finances and their future lives in general. Their perceptions of family life were often negative in nature.

Ahrons (1979) conducted a study of 41 divorced parents who had joint custody of their children. This research investigated the co-parenting relationship, the nonparental relationship, the boundaries between the two previous functions, and the parent-child relationship. The respondents expressed a strong desire for the other parent to continue parenting after the divorce. The most common pattern of divorced

familing which occurred was one in which the children have two active parents living in two households. A major task for the parents in this post-divorce arrangement was the separation of their spousal and parental roles. Boundaries between these two subsystems needed to be clarified. Ahrons (1980) developed a conceptual framework for redefining divorced families using results from this research study:

A family's divorce frequently results in the establishment of two households, maternal and paternal, which become the nuclei of the child's 'family of orientation'. These two subsystems can be conceived of as an organic unit, that is, a binuclear family. (p. 439)

Divorce is a social reality which has great impact on the institution of the family. How children perceive divorce and the new family structures which result may affect what they perceive a family to be. Further investigation into children's perceptions of "family" and how they are affected by divorce are necessary additions to research dealing with single-parent children.

Understanding the Concept of Family

In a pioneering study, Moore et al. (1977) examined the effects of cognitive level, sex, and intactness of family on the child's developing concept of family. Interviews were conducted with 84 white, middle-class children at three Piagetian cognitive stages (ages 4 to 13), one-half from intact families and one-half from divorced families. The children were asked to identify which of a series of different structures were families as well as to answer some open-ended questions. Their spontaneous, verbatim responses were scored for frequency of mention on eight dimensions of family. The results indicate a progression of stages in the development of the concept of family, and certain

dimensions are important to the children's definition of the family. The dimensions used to classify children's responses were: membership, domestic functions, guidance of children, co-residence, biology, emotions, legal factors, and social role factors. The concrete operational children described the family with emphasis on categorical status and generalized normative functions. Formal operational children regarded family functions and roles in the light of purposes and intentions. Children from divorced families mentioned "membership" and "co-residence" criteria less often than those from intact families. The overall results of this study suggest a sequential stage development of the concept of family.

In order to determine more specifically the pre-operational child's perception of "family," Powell et al. (1981) explored the problem in relation to this specific group of children. Interviews were conducted with 56 three to six year olds who were determined to be at the pre-operational level. One-half of the subjects were from intact families and one-half were of divorced families with the mother as the head of household. The samples were evenly divided by sex. These results were also compared with those of Moore et al. (1977). It was found that the structures most often identified as "family" by both two-parent and one-parent children were:

1. Mother, Father, Child, Grandmother, Grandfather
2. Mother, Father, Child

It was also found that the mother-child structure was least often identified as "family" by children from both family types. "Family composition appears to be defined normatively as at least two parents and a child, with one-parent-child families identified least often as

families" (Jones, 1979, p. 78). Family dimensions used most often were "membership" and "biology."

Powell and Thompson (1981) conducted the same interview used by Powell et al. (1981) in a study of the Australian child's developing concept of family. The subjects were 34 Australian pre-primary children, one-half from single-parent and one-half from two-parent families. These children identified structures including two opposite sex adults with or without children as "family" more often than they identified single-parent and child structures as "family." Children from single-parent families headed by mothers were no more likely to identify that structure as "family" than children of two-parent families. Family dimensions most often used by these Australian preschool children were "membership" and "biology."

Norris (1981) conducted a similar study using 70 children from a cooperative nursery school in Kansas in order to test the reliability of the Family Concept Interview and to compare her findings with Powell et al. (1981). It was found that children's responses were very stable and reliable over a one-week period of time. Agreement between the test and retest results was 91 percent. Children did not identify unrelated animals or objects as "family" and they did identify the same structures as "family" most often defined as "family" by the children in the study conducted by Powell et al. (1981).

Camara (1979) developed an in-depth study of family concepts using a sample of 32 children between the ages of 9 and 11. One-half were from intact families and one-half were from single-parent families. They were equally divided by sex. The children were interviewed concerning their concepts of family using the eight dimensions identified

by Moore et al. (1977). Camara's results were quite similar to those of Powell et al. (1981), even though the children in Camara's study were older and should have been in Moore's second level of conceptualization. Camara's subjects unanimously agreed that two parents and a child make a family. They also used the dimensions of "biology" and "membership" in their definitions. These responses are much more rigid than would have been expected by Moore's hypothesis about the progressive development of the concept. Camara also had the children place magnetic figures on a metal board to represent their own families. Many of the children from single-parent families did not include a father in their representations even though they all had contact with their fathers at least once a week. Camara then had the children represent their "future family" in the same way. Almost all of the children identified themselves as having two parents and children in their "future family." Camara's study reveals an interesting problem concerning the theory about successive stages of development of the concept of family. Her school-age children seemed to define "family" in essentially the same manner as pre-operational children in studies by Moore et al. (1977), Norris (1981), Powell and Thompson (1981), and Powell et al. (1981). Concrete and formal operational children must be studied more specifically in order to further explore the development of children's perceptions of "family."

Summary

Previous studies in social cognition have indicated a developmental progression in children's understandings of relationships and roles. It has been speculated that the experience of divorce may alter children's

perceptions of and adjustment to the social world. In studies with preschoolers in the United States (Norris, 1981; Powell et al., 1981) and in Australia (Powell & Thompson, 1981), children of one- and two-parent families perceived a "family" to be a group of people consisting of a mother, a father, and at least one child. Despite differences in sex and family type, children seem to hold similar views about the "family" as a societal institution.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Data for this study were collected as part of a larger study of resources and relationships in one- and two-parent families. Objectives of the larger study were to examine how one- and two-parent families vary in:

1. the nature of parent-child relationships (acceptance-rejection, psychological autonomy-psychological control, firm-lax discipline), as reported by both parents and children,
2. use of time (e.g., paid work, education, recreation, household maintenance, community service), and
3. perceptions of adequacy of resources (e.g., time, money, energy, information, family and community support systems).

This chapter describes the research sample, research instruments, procedures, and data analysis as they relate to the specific objectives concerning children's perceptions of "family."

Sample

Subjects were randomly selected from a population of several hundred eligible two-child families. Potential subjects were identified through letters to representatives of churches, singles' groups,

and square-dance clubs in the metropolitan area of Tulsa, Oklahoma. A total of 161 names of one-parent families and 299 names of two-parent families were obtained. The two lists of names were alphabetized separately according to surname of the family and numbered consecutively. Using a table of random numbers, 30 families from each group were selected.

A decision was made to screen and schedule interviews with one telephone call. Two doctoral students telephoned the families selected, explained the research, and asked questions to determine if the family met the criteria for participating in the study. If the family had two and only two children in the criterion age categories, were the natural or adoptive parent or parents of both children, had no other adults living in the household, and, for one-parent families, had been legally separated or divorced for at least one year, and had not remarried, then the respondent was informed that his/her family qualified for participation in the research. Additionally, the respondent was apprised that the interview would take approximately two and one-half to three hours and would require that all family members be present. Respondents were assured that any information provided would be strictly confidential, that the family's participation was completely voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Ultimately, attempts were made to contact all 161 one-parent families and 150 of the 299 two-parent families. Seventeen of the former and 12 of the latter families could not be reached by telephone. In addition, the screening procedure revealed 97 one-parent and 64 two-parent families which did not meet criteria for the study. Major reasons for families not meeting criteria were as follows:

1. Some had too few or too many children.
2. One or both children were not in the specified age range.
3. The relationship between one or both parents and one or both children was something other than that of natural or adoptive parent.
4. Some had other adults living in the household.
5. Some were headed by a single parent for reasons other than separation or divorce.
6. Some one-parent families had not been legally separated or divorced for at least one year.
7. Some custodial parents had remarried.
8. Some divorced parents shared custody of the children with the former spouse.

For each family which did not meet all criteria established for the study, another family was randomly selected from the appropriate list. The subjects of this part of the study were 60 children, 26 boys and 34 girls, who ranged in age from 7 to 11. Demographic data for the sample families is summarized in Table I.

Instruments

Cognitive Developmental Level Test

This instrument was used to determine the child's level of cognitive development as defined by Piagetian theory. The cognitive developmental level test used in this study was based on the writings of Phillips (1969). There were four parts to the Cognitive Developmental Level Test. The first three parts were conservation tasks utilized previously by Moore et al. (1977), Norris (1981), and Powell et al.

TABLE I
DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Divorced Families	Married Families	
	n=29	Mothers n=30	Fathers n=30
ETHNIC GROUP			
White	27	30	29
Native American	1		1
Asian American	1		
AGE			
under 35	10	8	3
35-40	16	17	17
over 40	3	4	10
Missing		1	
RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE			
Protestant	23	24	24
Catholic	2		
Jewish	1	3	3
Other	3	3	3
EDUCATION			
High School Graduate	3	5	
Some College	12	11	7
College Graduate	14	14	23
OCCUPATION			
Administrative/Professional	16	9	27
Technical/Clerical/Sales	8	8	5
Service		1	2
Farming and Related			
Precision, Craft, Repair	1	2	1
Laborer			
Homemaker		10	
Student	2		
MONTHS EMPLOYED PREVIOUS WORK			
None		1	
Less than 20		8	
20 to 40	14	6	14
over 40	13	5	16
not employed	2	10	
EARNINGS			
Under \$5,000		6	
\$5,000 to \$9,999	4	4	
\$10,000 to \$14,999	11	3	
\$15,000 to \$19,999	8	2	2
\$20,000 to \$24,999	5	1	4
\$25,000 to \$29,999			5
\$30,000 to \$34,999	1		4
\$35,000 to \$39,999		1	1
Over \$40,000		2	14
Family Information:			
	Divorced	Married	
Tenure			
Buying	24	29	
Renting	4	1	
Other	1		
Type of Residence			
Single Family Unit	25	30	
Apartment	3		
Mobile Home	1		
Length of time married for two-parent families			
Years		Range	12-24
		Mean	15.18
		Std. Dev.	2.76
Length of time married for one-parent families			
Years		Range	2-16
		Mean	10.69
		Std. Dev.	3.46
Length of time as one-parent family			
Months		Range	12-108
		Mean	56.03
		Std. Dev.	25.76
Length of time as one-parent family			
Years		Range	1-9
		Mean	4.67
		Std. Dev.	2.15

(1981). The fourth part, a hypothesis testing task, was used by Weber (1981). This test classifies each child's performance according to these three cognitive levels--(1) pre-operational, (2) concrete operational, and (3) formal operational--defined by Piaget (1967) as:

The pre-operational level is the stage of intuitive intelligence, of spontaneous interpersonal feelings, and of social relationships in which the child is subordinate to the adult (ages two to seven years, or 'early childhood'). The stage of concrete intellectual operations (the beginning of logic) and of moral and social feelings of cooperation (ages seven to eleven or twelve, or 'middle childhood'). The formal operational level is the stage of abstract intellectual operations, of the formation of the personality, and of affective and intellectual entry into the society of adults (adolescence). (pp. 5-6)

The subjects were tested in three areas of conservation: (1) mass, (2) number, and (3) volume. The fourth task dealt with hypothesis testing in the area of water displacement. The Cognitive Developmental Level Test is located in Appendix A.

Family Structure Interview

This portion of the interview consisted of 20 pictures of possible family structures. The instrument was an expanded version of earlier instruments developed by Moore et al. (1977), Norris (1981), and Powell et al. (1981). Earlier studies (Norris, 1981; Powell & Thompson, 1981; Powell et al., 1981) using somewhat limited choices of family structures found that over 70 percent of the children affirmed all of the structures depicted as "family." One of the objectives of this study was to determine the outer limits or boundaries of the child's notion of "family." What structures would children not affirm as families? Further, earlier studies failed to answer the question of whether children perceived that adults in the family should be of the opposite sex or

whether the presence of more than one adult was sufficient. Also, the question of the number of children needed in order to have a family had not been advanced. Powell et al. (1981) suggested that research including a wider diversity of family structures, depicting same and opposite sex adult pairs, different numbers of children, children without parents, and varying family sizes was needed.

The 20 family structures included were:

1. Mother, Father, Child, Grandmother, Grandfather
2. Mother, Father, Child
3. Mother, Father, Two Children
4. Mother, Father, Three Children
5. Mother, Father, Six Children
6. Mother, Child
7. Mother, Two Children
8. Mother, Three Children
9. Father, Child
10. Father, Two Children
11. Father, Three Children
12. Mother, Father
13. Grandmother, Grandfather
14. Mother, Child, Grandmother
15. Father, Child, Grandfather
16. Two same-age adult females, Child
17. Two same-age adult males, Child
18. Two Children
19. Three Children
20. Six Children

These are depicted in Appendix B.

An earlier reliability study (Norris, 1981) with a more limited version of this instrument established that preschool children did distinguish these human family groupings from structures depicting unrelated animals and objects. Further, 91 percent agreement was obtained from respondents in a test-retest situation in which one week elapsed between the two administrations of the test. On the basis of these results, reliability for the instrument and the method with school-age children was assumed.

Dimensions of "Family" Interview

This portion of the interview consisted of three open-ended questions dealing with basic family concepts and three questions probing the dimension of "co-residence" originally formulated by Moore et al. (1977) and Powell et al. (1981). The questions were:

1. What is a family?
2. What is a mother?
3. What is a father?
4. Can a family still be a family if they don't live together?
5. Can a mother still be a mother if she doesn't live with her children?
6. Can a father still be a father if he doesn't live with his children?

Family Sculpture Game

This instrument is an adaptation of the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (KFST) described by Cromwell and Fournier (1980) and utilized by Weber (1981). The KFST was developed to capture family members'

perceptions of relationships in their family, and has been used primarily in clinical research and therapy. For the purposes of this study, emphasis was placed on the children's perceptions of their own current family structures and how those perceptions compared to their desired future family structures. The technique involved the children in concrete representations of their families utilizing 17 wooden spindles of various shapes and sizes and a 100-square grid on which to place them. The children represented their present families, their desired future families, and a second alternative for their desired future families. In a personal communication with Weber (March, 1981), it was learned that this technique was quite effective in encouraging children to discuss their perception of "family." The task has a game-like nature and was, therefore, enjoyable for the children. Two specific questions dealing with the desire for future children and future marriage were asked after the sculptures had been completed. These were:

1. Do you want to have children when you grow up?
2. Do you want to get married when you grow up?

The instruction sheet for the Family Sculpture Game is located in Appendix A. The data sheets are in Appendix C.

Methods

Interviewers

Data were collected by five two-person teams of interviewers. Ten of the interviewers were female and one was male. Five interviewers were trained as lead interviewers; i.e., to collect information from both parents and children. Another six persons were trained to obtain information from the children and served as assistant interviewers.

Training for interviewers included lecture/discussion and observation of a staged interview with opportunity for questioning and discussion.

Pilot Study

Prior to actual collection of data, a pilot study was conducted with an available sample of five divorced and five married families in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Purposes of the pilot study were to determine the most effective methods for collecting information from families, to identify potential problems with the instruments, and to provide experience in data collection procedures for interview teams.

Data Collection

Data were collected during April and May, 1981, through individual interviews with the children in the setting of their own homes. Two distinct interviews were conducted simultaneously at each home, one with the parents and the other with the children. Data for this study were collected as game-like activities between the administration of two standardized instruments used in the larger study. The total interview with the children lasted approximately one hour, with the instruments used in this study comprising about 30 minutes of the interview.

Upon arrival in each home, the researchers generally met the family as a group, introduced themselves, and initiated good rapport with the subjects. The families were then divided into two groups--adults and children. The children's interview was conducted either in the children's room or another spot away from the parents. The children were first informed of the confidentiality of the interview, including the

fact that none of the information would be shared with their parents. The interview began with the Piagetian tasks for the younger siblings. The older siblings usually left the room and were called back at specific times during the interview to complete the tasks required of them. The Piagetian tasks allowed the children to become familiar and comfortable with the researcher. Both people sat on the floor and manipulated the materials needed for the tasks. First, the child was asked about conservation of mass, number, and volume using play dough, colored chips, and water glasses. Then the hypothesis testing task was given using the play dough and water glasses to demonstrate a water displacement event (see Appendix A). The requirements for passing each task were explicitly described in the instrument. If the interviewer felt that a child did not pass, a description of the child's response was necessary. The primary researcher classified the children by cognitive level based on how they performed on these tasks. The subjects who passed two or three of the tasks were classified as concrete operational, while those passing all four tasks were classified as formal operational. Next, both siblings were asked to complete a paper and pencil test related to the larger study. Next, the younger siblings were asked to respond to the Family Structure Interview. The 20 drawings depicting possible family structures were placed face down in front of the children. Randomization was achieved by having the children pick any card and tell whether or not each one depicted a family and why it was a family or not a family. The recorder placed a check mark in the appropriate column indicating the children's affirmation or rejection of each structure. Explanations of the responses were written beside the description of each picture on the score sheet (see

Appendix B). The Dimensions of "Family" Interview, consisting of three open-ended questions and three questions probing "co-residence", was presented to the children next. Responses to these questions were tape-recorded and also written verbatim on the score sheet by the recorder. The responses were scored by the author and one other researcher, who had had previous experience with these dimensions, to determine the presence or absence of a particular family dimension in the answer given by the child. These dimensions, developed by Moore et al. (1977), were defined in their initial study as follows:

Membership - The child gives a list of specific persons or roles when referring to the composition of the family.

Domestic Functions - The child mentions general family maintenance or activity (e.g., studies, cooking, earning money, going on a picnic).

Guidance - The child refers to family activity geared specifically toward the nurturance of children (e.g., taking care of children, helping with homework, or to solve problems).

Co-residence - The child's answer refers to the personal proximity or co-residence of persons (e.g., living together or having a house).

Biology - The child mentions things having to do with biological relationships or physical age (e.g., being a woman, being old, having a child).

Emotions - The child refers to affective factors (e.g., loving one another, being happy, being lonely).

Legal Factors - The child makes a reference to a legally defined status or process (e.g., being a wife, getting married, having custody of a child).

Social Role Factors - The child's answer explicitly includes mention

of roles, expectations, or social customs (e.g., flowers at a wedding, being a good parent).

Next, another paper and pencil task related to the larger study was completed.

The final task of the children was the Family Sculpture Game. This portion of the interview was also tape-recorded. The children were given 17 wooden dowels of varying shapes and sizes and asked to represent their present and future family's structures on a 100-square grid. First, they were directed to choose and label the figures which they needed to represent their present families. Then the children placed the figures on the grid to "show how you see your family now." After this representation was completed, the children were asked to remove the pieces and to show the family they would like to have when they grow up. Labeling and placing of the figures proceeded as before. Finally, the children were asked, "If you couldn't have this family in the future, what other kind of family would be all right with you?" The children generally added or subtracted figures from the "future family" structure. The children's sculptures were represented on gridded score sheets by marking each square utilized with the name of the person represented by the figure used. A number was also placed in each square to show the order in which the figures were placed. The size and shape of figures used to represent each family member was recorded next to the grid by placing the name of the person on a line following the drawing of the appropriate figure. Examples of a typical score sheet are located in Appendix C. After all of the sculptures were completed, the children were asked specifically about their desire for future children and future marriage. These responses were recorded verbatim on the score sheet.

Data Analysis

Descriptive methods were used to determine children's perceptions of:

1. family structure (Family Structure Interview)
2. dimensions to describe mother, father, and family (Dimensions of Family Interview)
3. dimension of "co-residence," specifically
4. family structures (Family Structure Game), both present and future
5. desire for future children and future marriage, specifically.

Chi-square analyses were employed to determine differences in children's perceptions of family structures, use of dimensions to describe "mother," "father," and "family," and representations of family members in family sculptures due to sex, family type, or cognitive level.

Reliability and Validity

The interview of Moore et al. (1977) was considered to be a valid technique for determining children's concepts of "family" because research studies of Norris (1981), Powell et al. (1981), and Powell and Thompson (1981) had supported the usefulness of the technique and the consistency of the findings with varying samples of children.

In order to establish inter-rater reliability in coding the data for the eight dimensions of "family," the author and one other researcher who was experienced in coding data for these dimensions independently scored all of the data related to family dimensions. Percentage of agreement was 96.8 percent.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Piagetian Tasks

The subjects were tested in three areas of conservation: (1) mass, (2) number, and (3) volume. They were also given a water displacement task to determine hypothesis testing ability. The subjects who passed two or three of the tasks were classified as concrete operational. Those who passed all four tasks were classified as formal operational. It was expected that most school-age children would be classified as concrete operational when tested on these traditional Piagetian tasks. However, 60 percent of the children in this sample passed all four tasks and were, therefore, classified as formal operational. Seven year olds were all classified as concrete operational. Eight and nine year olds appeared to be in a transitional stage, with half being concrete operational and the other half being formal operational. Ten and eleven year olds consistently completed all four tasks and were placed in the formal operational stage of cognitive development. For the purposes of further data analysis, ages were collapsed into two categories. There were 31 seven, eight, and nine year olds who were grouped together as young children. There were 29, ten and eleven year olds who were placed in an older group. There was a significant difference in cognitive level by age ($\chi^2 = 5.884$, 1 df, p < .015). It appears that these children are following the sequence of cognitive development outlined by

Piaget (1967); however, they scored higher on Piagetian tasks than was predicted. Essentially, rather than representing two discrete stages of cognitive thought, concrete and formal operational, this sample of children can be more accurately described as transitional and formal operational. There was no significant difference in performance on these tasks by sex of child ($\chi^2 = .554$, 1 df, p < .46) or by family type ($\chi^2 = 1.11$, 1 df, p < .29).

Family Structure Interview

Twenty structures were presented in random order to the subjects according to the procedure described in Chapter III. Results of children's affirmation of family structures as "family" are depicted in Figure 1. There were no significant differences by sex in the affirmation of any of the family structures.

The family structures most often affirmed as "family" were:

1. Mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, child (98.3 percent)
2. Mother, father, two children (98.3 percent)
3. Mother, father, three children (98.3 percent)
4. Mother, father, child (95 percent)
5. Mother, father, six children (93.3 percent).

There were no significant differences in the affirmation of these structures by either family type or cognitive level.

Although a more comprehensive set of structures was included in the present study, these findings are consistent with those of Moore et al. (1977), Camara (1979), Norris (1981), Powell et al. (1981), and Powell and Thompson (1981). The structures which include a mother, father,

grandparents and one child, and those depicting a mother and father with either two or three children were equally accepted (98.3 percent). Typical comments made by the children included: "Everyone is there" and "There's a mom, dad, and kids. Everybody for a family." The subjects were certain of their responses to these structures. Only one "don't know" response was given for these groups.

The structures which included adults with no children were accepted as families somewhat less frequently. These were:

6. Grandmother, grandfather (71 percent)
7. Mother, father (66 percent).

These findings are consistent with those of Camara (1979), Norris (1981), and Powell et al. (1981). Acceptance of the adult-only structures was between 20 percent and 32 percent lower than the acceptance of the parent/child structures in each of these studies. The subjects made comments such as, "They don't have any children" or "Their children are grown up, maybe." The presence of children seems to be a salient factor in the school-age child's conception of "family." Concern was expressed over those structures without children represented.

The structures showing single-parent groups were accepted as families by approximately half of the children. These were:

8. Father, two children (53 percent)
9. Mother, two children (51.6 percent)
10. Mother, three children (51.6 percent)
11. Father, three children (46.7 percent)
12. Mother, child (43.3 percent)
13. Father, child (41.6 percent)

This group of structures revealed the only significant differences by

family type. The one-parent children affirmed these structures consistently more often than two-parent children, and the differences were significant for three structures. These were : (1) the structure depicting a father and two children ($\chi^2 = 4.286$, 1 df, p < .04); (2) the structure depicting a mother and two children ($\chi^2 = 4.517$, 1 df, p < .03); and (3) the structure depicting a mother and three children ($\chi^2 = 4.833$, 1 df, p < .03). In all cases these structures were affirmed more often by one-parent children. An interesting finding, consistent with earlier studies (Camara, 1979; Norris, 1981; Powell et al., 1981) was that father/child one-parent families were affirmed as often as mother/ child one-parent families by a group of one-parent children all but one of whom resided with their mothers.

These findings are not consistent with earlier research with preschool children which showed no difference between one- and two-parent children in affirmation of single-parent family groups (Norris, 1981; Powell & Thompson, 1981; Powell et al., 1981). At school-age, the children appear to be making more use of their own family life experiences to form a more differentiated concept of family. The present findings are consistent with those of Moore et al. (1977), whose sample of pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational children affirmed single-parent groupings only 54 percent of the time. Single-parent children in this previous study composed more than half of the group deciding that the single-parent structures were families. This is also consistent with the findings of Camara (1979) in which nine to eleven year old children affirmed single-parent groupings about half of the time with single-parent children affirming these groupings more frequently.

Common responses made by the children were: "You need a mom" or "The dad is missing." These are the main responses given by preschoolers in previous studies (Norris, 1981; Powell et al., 1981). The presence of two adults of the opposite sex appears to be a salient feature in the perception of "family" for school-age children as well as preschoolers. Responses made by subjects who affirmed single-parent structures included, "They could be a divorced family" or "The dad could have died." The presence of more than one child seems to be of importance to children living in single-parent situations. Responses to the structures with a mother, father, and one child, a mother and one child, and a father and one child revealed that these single-parent children accepted groups with only one child much less frequently than those with two or three children. Again, these children seemed to be representing their own life experience, since all subjects lived in two-child families.

The difference in the affirmation of single-parent structures was significant by cognitive level for two of the structures. Formal operational children accepted the single-parent father with two children ($\chi^2 = 4.029$, 1 df, p < .05) and the single-parent father with three children ($\chi^2 = 4.381$, 1 df, p < .04) more often than concrete operational children. Formal operational children consistently affirmed single-parent structures more often than concrete operational children, even though the differences were not statistically significant for the other four single-parent structures. There was no significant difference between the one-parent and two-parent children by cognitive level. It appears that children at a higher level of cognitive functioning can accept this "family" variation more easily than children in a lower level of

cognitive development. Further, it appears that family experience, in this case divorce, helps children to attain this same flexibility in their perception of "family." The social cognition of single-parent children may be more advanced than that of two-parent youngsters. The formal operational children also had a higher rate of "don't know" responses for the structures. The impression of the interviewer was that the children were attempting to incorporate divergent ideas into their conception of "family" as they were being interviewed. Common responses were, "It could be a family where the mom died" or "It could be a family, I guess, even after a divorce" or "I'll have to think about that one. I just don't know." It appeared that they were attempting to accommodate these new alternatives into their existing ideas of "family." This is consistent with Piaget's theory of how children progress from the young child's rather primitive cognitive structure to the relatively more sophisticated cognitive functioning of adults. In this case, the children were modifying their existing concepts of "family" so that the new stimuli, the single-parent structures, could fit into their conceptions.

Structures depicting two adults of the same sex with one child were affirmed infrequently. These were:

14. Mother, grandmother, child (28.3 percent)
15. Father, grandfather, child (25 percent)
16. Two same age males, child (15 percent)
17. Two same age females, child (6.6 percent).

There was no significant difference in the acceptance of these structures by cognitive level or family type of the respondent. These structures had the highest rate of "don't know" responses and these were

generally made by formal operational children.

The low rate of affirmation of these structures is not consistent with the findings of Norris (1981) with preschoolers. In that study, 84 percent of preschoolers accepted same sex adults (mother, grandmother, and father, grandfather) as a family. In the present study, the children who affirmed these structures as families commented, "Maybe the dad died" or "Those men could be brothers." Sometimes the subjects expressed surprise at these groups, saying, "I don't get this one" or "How can there be two moms?" Two adults of opposite sex seem to be an important feature in the school-age child's concept of family.

The structures showing children only were almost never accepted as families. These were:

18. Two children (1.6 percent)
19. Three children (1.6 percent)
20. Six children (0 percent).

There were no significant differences by family type or cognitive level. School-age children were certain about their responses to these structures. Only three "don't know" responses were recorded. Comments included, "That can't be a family. Those kids need parents" or "Kids can't be a family by themselves." At least one adult, and preferably two of opposite sex, with one or more children is the preferred structure for a "family."

In comparing the results of previous studies with preschoolers (Norris, 1981; Powell & Thompson, 1981; Powell et al., 1981) and the present study with school-age children, it is important to note that school-age children show a more differentiated concept of "family" than preschoolers. Preschoolers affirmed all structures representing human

figures as families, while school-age children affirm certain structures and reject others (Moore, 1977; Camara, 1979; and the present study) (see Figure 2). It appears that school-age children are using a higher level of social cognition, and that their own life experiences do have an impact on their concept of "family."

Dimensions Involved in Basic Family Definitions

The responses to the following open-ended questions were classified according to the eight dimensions of "family":

1. What is a family?
2. What is a mother?
3. What is a father?

Although all questions provided the opportunity to record any dimension mentioned by the subjects, the likelihood of mention may not have been equal for all dimensions. Therefore, the mean scores for the dimensions cannot be reliably compared across dimensions. Information concerning the role played by the various dimensions in the child's concept of family is available only in analysis of group differences in the frequency of mention of each dimension taken separately.

There were no significant differences by family type, sex, cognitive level, age, or mother's work status in the mention of the eight family dimensions for the total group of three basic family concept questions. The "biology" dimension was mentioned most frequently, followed by "guidance" (Figure 3). Some examples of responses which were classified as "biology" are, "A mother is a lady who has babies," and "A dad is a man who has some children." Responses indicating "guidance"

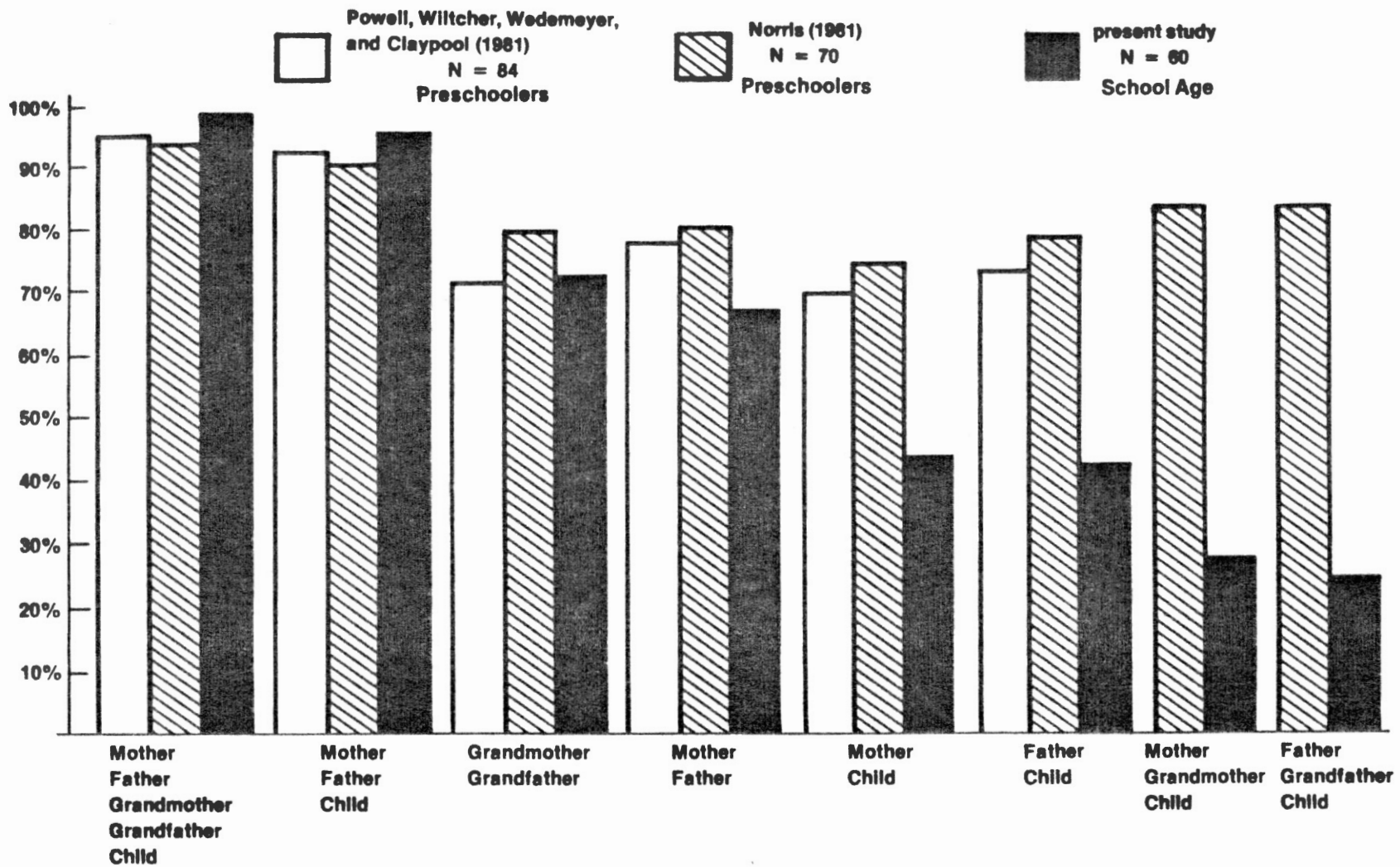


Figure 2. Comparison of Preschool and School-age Affirmation of Family Structures as "Family"

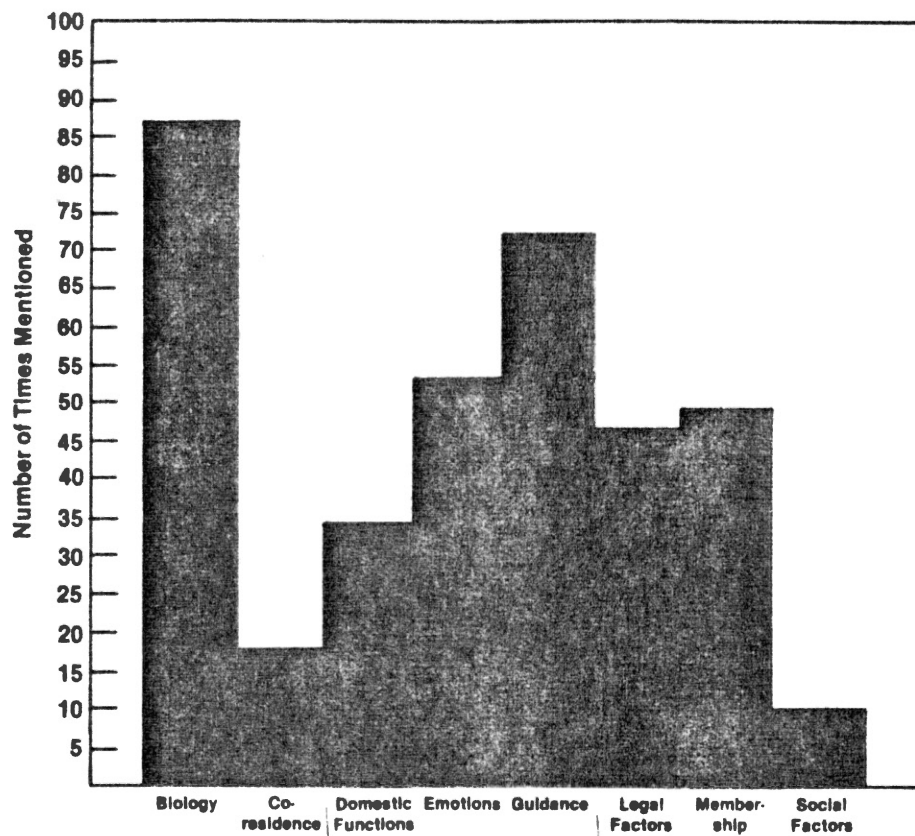


Figure 3. Number of Dimensions Mentioned in Basic Family Concept

were, "A father takes care of his children," and "A mother is the lady who is in charge of taking care of the kids."

Other dimensions which were mentioned fairly often were "emotions," "membership," and "legal." An example of a response indicating "emotions" is, "A family is a group of people who love each other." "Membership" was indicated by responses such as, "A family is a mom, a dad, some brothers and sisters," and "It's a group of people." A response indicating "legal factors" was, "A family starts when a boy and girl get married."

Least mentioned were the dimensions of "domestic functions," "co-residence," and "social factors." Examples of responses in these categories were:

1. "Domestic Functions" - "A mother is the one who cooks and cleans the house." "A father mows the lawn."
2. "Co-residence" - "A family is a group of people who all live together."
3. "Social Factors" - "A father is the one who is supposed to support the family."

School-age children mentioned approximately two dimensions in response to each question (Table II). This mean is twice as high as that obtained with preschool children (Jones, 1979). It appears that school-age children may have more differentiated concepts of what makes a "family," "mother," or "father." These results may also be a reflection of school-age children's increased social cognition as well as their increased expressive language ability.

TABLE II
MEAN NUMBER OF DIMENSIONS MENTIONED IN
DEFINING BASIC FAMILY CONCEPTS

Questions	Total Responses	\bar{X} Dimensions Mentioned
What is a family?	60	2.20
What is a mother?	60	2.01
What is a father?	60	1.98

The differences between the preschool and school-age children with respect to their use of these eight dimensions was qualitative as well as quantitative (Figure 4). One of the most apparent differences was the increase in understanding of "legal factors." There was almost no mention of "legal factors" with the earlier study of preoperational children (Powell et al., 1981). A personal communication with Jones (1979) helped to clarify some of the more subtle qualitative differences between preschool and school-age children's responses related to basic family concepts. School-age children used terms such as "relatives" and "parents" to describe "family," "mother," and "father." These terms were not encountered in the study with preschoolers. The use of this relatively sophisticated language is a reflection of the school-age child's increased social cognition and better understanding of complex interpersonal relationships and kinship ties.

"Guidance" was also mentioned much more often by school-age children. They stated that "mothers" and "fathers" are people who take care

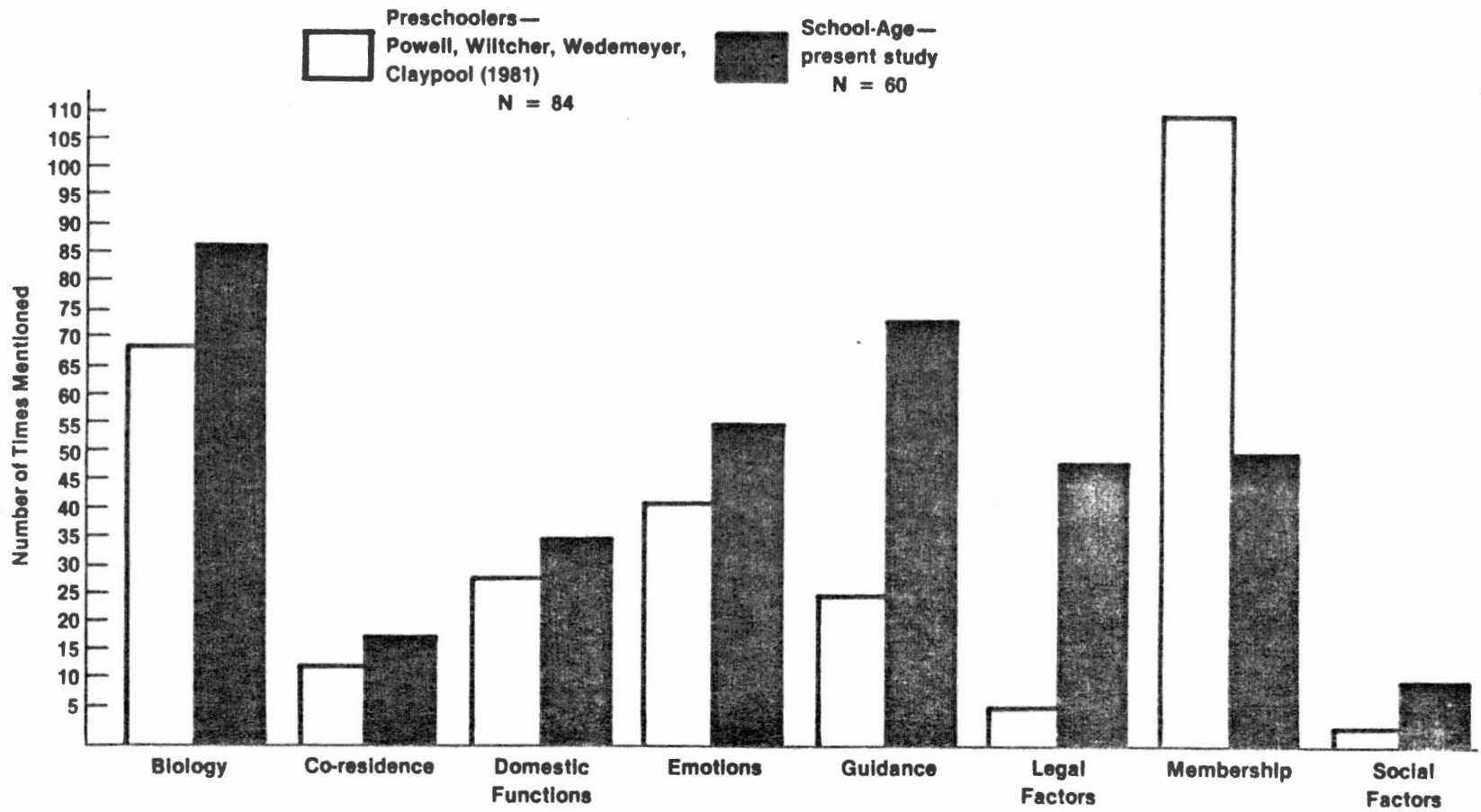


Figure 4. Comparison of Preschool and School-age Use of Dimensions in Basic Family Concept

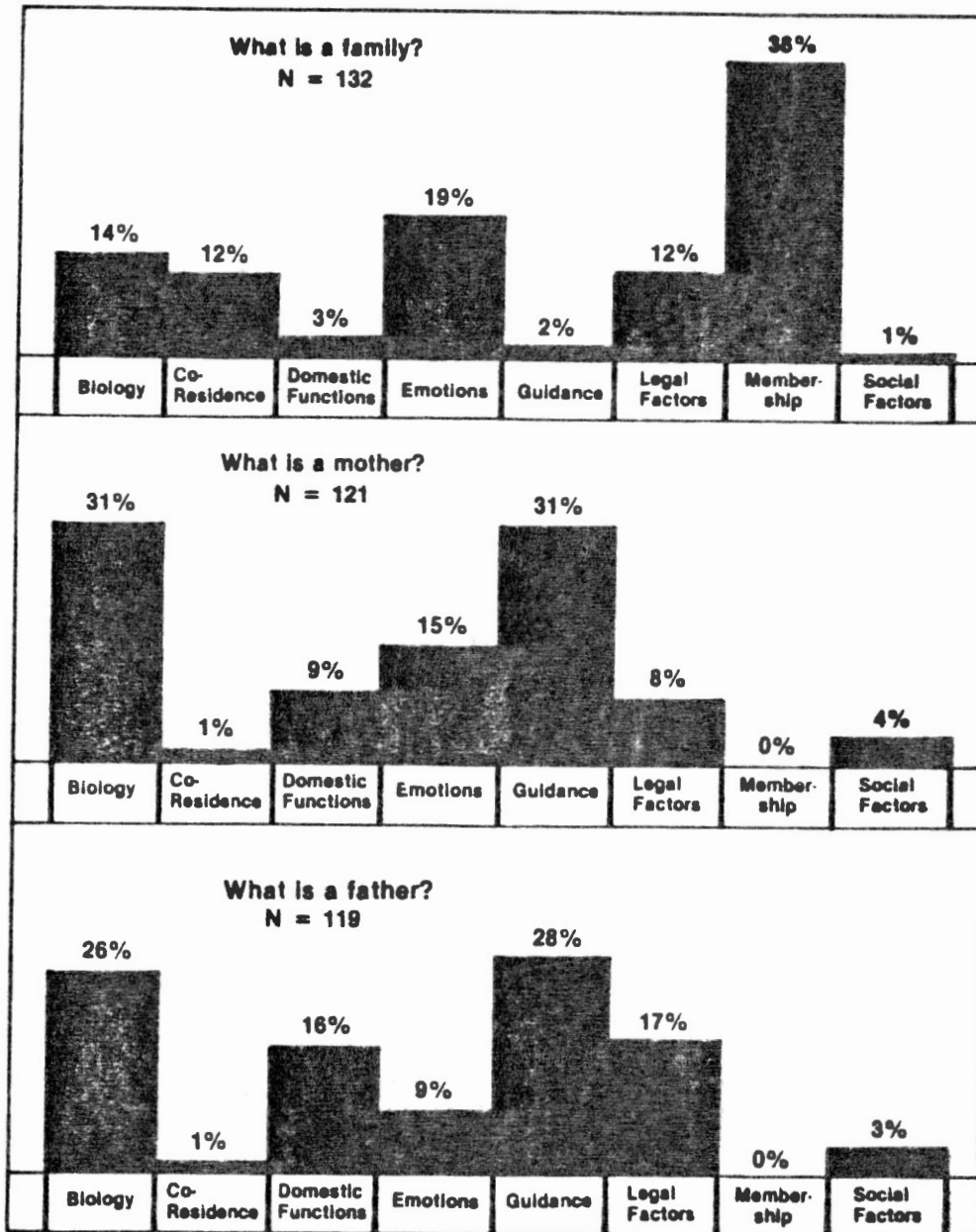
of children. This is consistent with Moore et al. (1977), who found greater salience of the "guidance" dimension with children in the more advanced stages of cognitive thought. In a personal communication with Jones (1979), a difference in the type of "guidance" mentioned was noted. Preschoolers stated that, "The daddy is the one who spansks." Only one school-age child mentioned corporal punishment in describing "mother" or "father."

"Membership" was mentioned much less frequently by school-age children. Preschoolers focused on the outward appearances of family structures and used "membership" most often in describing families. School-age children seem to be less interested in the concrete, physical structure of the family, as they used the dimensions of "biology," "guidance," and "emotions" more frequently than "membership." This more differentiated concept of "family" was also noted by Moore et al. (1977). The school-age children's increased social cognition and understanding of complex interpersonal relationships within the family influenced the number and type of dimensions given in response to questions concerning "family," "mother," and "father."

Dimensions Involved in Specific Concepts of "Family," "Mother," and "Father"

The mention of the eight dimensions was recorded and analyzed for each of the three concept questions taken separately (Figure 5). No significant differences by cognitive level or mother's work status were found. There were significant differences by sex, age, and family type.

Boys used "membership" significantly more often than girls in describing "family" ($\chi^2 = 5.43$, 1 df, p < .02). A typical response



N = total number of responses

Figure 5. Dimensions Involved in Specific Concepts of "Family," "Mother," and "Father"

included a list of family members, such as "a mom, a dad, and some kids." Girls tended to use "guidance" and "emotional factors." This is consistent with the conclusions of Moore et al. (1977) that girls are more advanced in their level of family concept. Differences approaching significance were found for girls' mention of "guidance" to describe "mother" ($\chi^2 = 3.51, 1 \text{ df}, p < .06$). A typical response was, "She is the one who takes care of the kids." Of the girls, 74 percent included "guidance" in their description of "mother." Boys responses were more diverse, covering all dimensions. For boys, the most frequently used dimension to describe "mother" was "biology."

Consistent with developmental theory, older children mentioned "emotional factors" more often than younger ones and these differences were significant for "father" ($\chi^2 = 9.77, 1 \text{ df}, p < .001$) and approached significance for "mother" ($\chi^2 = 3.46, 1 \text{ df}, p < .06$). These findings emphasize the increased salience of the emotional factor for children as they develop a more mature view of interpersonal relationships. These results are consistent with those of Moore et al. (1977) which state that "emotional factors" gain salience as the child attains the concrete and formal operational stages of cognitive thought.

Although there were few mentions of "social factors" when describing "father," a significant difference was found in the use of this dimension by family type. Two-parent children used "social factors" to describe "father" more frequently than one-parent children ($\chi^2 = 4.29, 1 \text{ df}, p < .04$). A typical statement of two-parent children was, "The father has to support his family." An interesting finding was, that with this sample of one-parent children living without their fathers in the home, their concept of "father" as reflected by the eight dimensions

was basically the same as the concept held by two-parent children. For one-parent families, the mean years divorced was 4.67. Frequency of current contact with their fathers was reported on a scale of one to five (never to very often) in response to four questions about telephone calls, letters, gifts, and actual visitation. The measure of amount of father contact was the mean score for the responses to all four questions. The mean score for father contact was 3.3, a reflection of "sometimes" contact with their fathers. Even with several years of separation and intermittent contact with their fathers, these children described "father" in the same dimensions as two-parent children. The only differences were related to "social factors" such as "support of the family."

The findings of the present study are not consistent with those of Moore et al. (1977) who found differences in the use of "membership," "emotional factors," and "domestic functions" by family type with a sample of children ranging in age from 3 to 14. They are also not consistent with the findings for preschoolers (Powell et al., 1981). Preschoolers showed a significant difference by family type in their use of "co-residence" and "membership." Further, they are not consistent with those of Camara (1979) who found differences in the use of "co-residence" and "nurturing factors" by family type with a sample of children ranging in age from 9 to 11.

Previous studies did not control for the number of siblings in the family or other demographic characteristics of the sample. The present study controlled for the number of siblings and to some extent, socioeconomic factors. These samples of one- and two-parent children were drawn from the same church or social groups located in the same

neighborhoods in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In this sample of families and children of exactly the same size, and living in the same neighborhoods, there were few differences which could be attributed to family type. The children view "family," "mother," and "father" in very similar ways.

Each basic family concept question appeared to initiate responses in distinctive dimensions (Figure 5). "Family" was described in terms of "membership," "emotions," "biology," "co-residence," and "legal factors." One child stated, "I think a family is love. Two sides of one family join together in marriage. They like each other and they can raise a family. They're your best friends in the whole wide world that you see every day." Another said, "People who love each other and are together in a household."

"Mother" and "father" were described in terms of "biology," "domestic functions," "emotions," "guidance," and "legal factors." One child stated, "A mother is a woman who cares, and loves a child. It doesn't exactly have to be hers, it could be adopted." Another described "father" in this manner, "He's someone who tries to put the boy in you. He shows you things that your mother can't. He's real loving, you have good feelings about him, and you want to be like him." Another stated, "A mom is the one who loves you and teaches you to cook and sew. She fixes dinner, goes shopping, and puts you to sleep at night." In describing "mother" and "father," one child stated, "It's a parent - the boss." Some differentiation occurred between the concepts of "mother" and "father" although no significant differences were found. "Emotions" were mentioned more often for "mother," while "domestic functions" (e.g., work, mow the lawn) and "legal factors" were mentioned most often for "father." This appears to indicate a somewhat stereotypical view of

appropriate sex role behavior. Females are seen as affective while males are described as more work-oriented.

The fact that "legal factors" were mentioned more often for "father" may indicate that school-age children view their fathers in relationship to their mothers, rather than in relationship to themselves. In response to the question "What is a father?" many children stated, "He's the one who is married to the mother." This would appear to reflect an advanced level of interpersonal understanding on the part of the school-age children. Piaget (1928) states that younger, more egocentric children can view other people only in relationship to themselves. More advanced cognitive processes are required for the children to be able to view people in their relationships to other people. On the other hand, the more frequent mention of "legal factors" for "father" could be a function of the order of questioning. Children were asked to respond first to the question "What is a mother?" and second, to the question "What is a father?" In order to determine the relationship between the order of questioning and the use of "legal factors" as a dimension, these questions should be presented in randomized order in future studies.

These findings are very different from those for preschoolers (Powell et al., 1981) (Figure 6). Preschoolers focused on "biology" and "membership" while school-age children have a much more differentiated concept. With this sample of school-age children, the increase in salience of "emotions," "domestic functions," "guidance," and "legal factors" is apparent. "Membership" was not mentioned for "mother" or "father" by school-age children. However, "mother" and "father" were described in similar terms by preschoolers as well as school-age

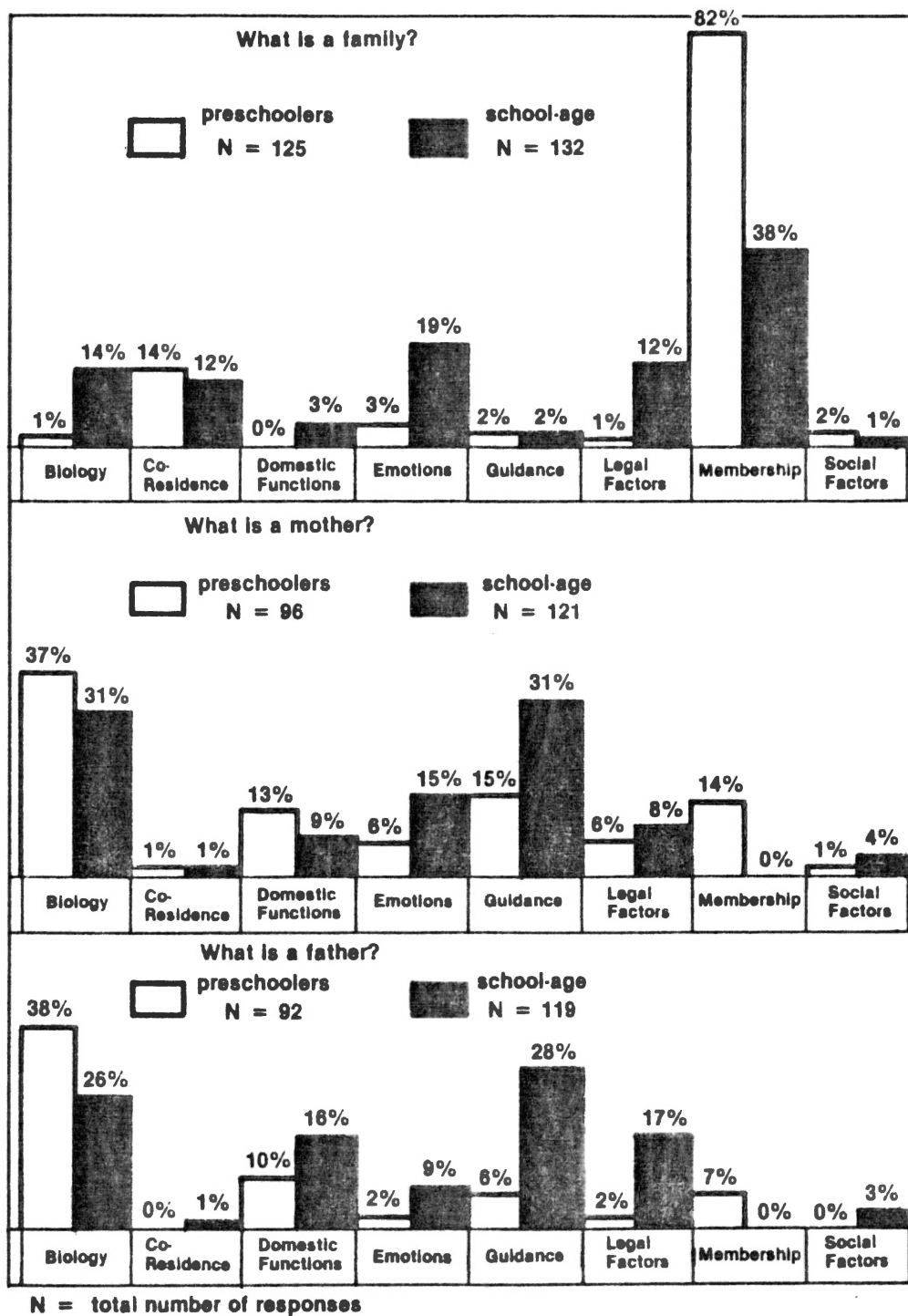


Figure 6. Comparison of Dimensions Involved in Specific Concepts of "Family," "Mother," and "Father" by Pre-school and School-age Children

children. This is also consistent with the findings of Camara (1979). However, "co-residence" was identified as a necessary characteristic of "mother" and "father" by Camara's sample of school-age children, but was almost never mentioned by subjects in the current study.

Further Exploration of the Dimension of "Co-residence"

Questions asked to children concerning co-residence were:

1. Can a family still be a family if they don't live together?
2. Can a mother still be a mother if she doesn't live with her children?
3. Can a father still be a father if he doesn't live with his children?

Children's responses of "yes" and "no" were recorded. For the total sample, 90 percent of the children felt that a family could still be a family if they did not live together (Table III). When questioned about "mother," 85 percent of the children felt that she would still be a mother if she did not live with her children. In regard to "father," 88 percent of the children felt that he would still be a father if he did not live with his children. The perception of "family" appears to be independent of "co-residence." Parents and children do not need to live together in order for children to perceive that they are a family. Many more school-age than preschool children felt that families maintained their relationships to each other and that mothers and fathers maintained their relationships to their children regardless of their place of residence (Powell et al., 1981). This appears to indicate a higher level of understanding of the complexities of familial relationships.

TABLE III
 FURTHER EXPLORATION OF THE DIMENSION
 OF CO-RESIDENCE

Question	Total Responses	Frequency	
		Yes	No
1. Can a family still be a family if they don't live together?			
Total sample	60	54	6
one-parent children	30	29	1
two-parent children	30	25	5
2. Can a mother still be a mother if she doesn't live with her children?			
Total sample	60	51	9
one-parent children	30	26	4
two-parent children	30	25	5
3. Can a father still be a father if he doesn't live with his children?			
Total sample	60	53	7
one-parent children	30	28	2
two-parent children	30	25	5

Children of single-parent families responded "yes" more often on all three questions although no significant differences were found. In previous questions coded for the dimension "co-residence," this dimension was mentioned very few times. It appears that the idea of "living together" may not be a necessary characteristic of "family," "mother," or "father," especially for single-parent children.

Family Sculpture Game

In order to determine the children's perceptions of their present family structure, their desired future family structure, and a second acceptable alternative for their future family structure, the children represented these three structures on a family sculpture board. The children were very thoughtful and enthusiastic regarding this task. A sample score sheet is depicted in Figure 7.

Present Family Sculpture

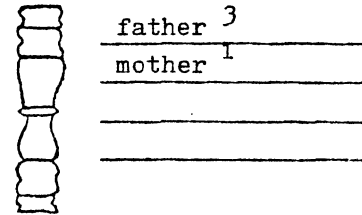
Inclusion of Parents. In sculpting their own "present family," 100% of the children represented the mother, including the one-parent child who lived with his father (Figure 8). All two-parent children included the father, but so did 80 percent of the one-parent children. Of the six children who did not include their fathers in the "present family," one child's father was deceased. For the other five children, the mean number of years divorced was somewhat greater than the whole (5.8 in comparison to 4.67). Their comments on their sculptures were not different from those of children who did include their fathers.

This finding is somewhat different from Camara (1979) who found that nearly 50 percent of one-parent children did not include their

A. Present Family

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A											A
B											B
C											C
D				f ³							D
E					ch ⁴						E
F											F
G							br ²				G
H								m ¹			H
I											I
J											J
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Comments: This single-parent child stated, "My
brother is closer to Mom. I am closer to Dad."



father ³
 mother ¹



brother ²
 self ⁴ (a girl)



Correct _____

Figure 7. A Sample Family Sculpture Score Sheet

	Task 1		Task 2		Task 3	
	Present Family		Future Family		Second Future Family	
	1-parent	2-parent	1-parent	2-parent	1-parent	2-parent
Mother	30	30	29	30	28	29
Father	24	30	28	30	25	30
Boys/Sons	20	24	21	19	17	14
Girls/Daughters	25	22	21	18	12	16
Grandmother	9	9	11	4	7	3
Grandfather	11	9	11	4	6	3
Cousins	5	3	2	1	1	1
Other kin	6	2	6	3	5	3
Other non-kin	0	2	0	2	1	1
Pets	4	5	6	6	5	7
Children/no sex	0	0	7	6	7	5

Figure 8. Number of Children Including Specific Family Members in Their Family Sculptures by Family Type

absent parent in representations of their family. In the present study, only 20 percent of the one-parent children did not include their non-resident parent. These differences may be due, in part, to size of the samples. Camara's sample of one-parent children was 16.

Inclusion of Children. All of the subjects were younger siblings in two-child families, and it was found that they accurately depicted the appropriate sex of themselves and their older peer. One child who was undergoing psychiatric care did not include herself in the sculpture, one omitted herself and her sibling, and one represented a family quite different from her own. All of these children were girls living in single-parent families. All other children correctly represented the two-child composition of their current households. Often, they told the name of their sibling and their relationship to that sibling. One child said, "This is my sister Kelly, and I look up to her like I look up to Mom."

Inclusion of Grandparents and Other Kin. In studying the family sculptures, it was found that 30 percent of the children included a grandmother and 33 percent included a grandfather. There were no differences by sex, age, or family type. Aunts, uncles and cousins were included by eight of the children. Two children included non-kin (friends) in their family sculptures, and nine included pets.

The sculpturing technique appears to be very useful in eliciting children's perceptions of their own family structure. Further, children of school-age can depict their own family with great accuracy, and the majority of one-parent children include their absent parent in the family sculpture.

Future Family Sculpture

Inclusion of Parents. In representing their "desired future family" structures, 98 percent of the children included the mother. One ten-year-old, single-parent boy did not include anyone but himself in his "future family." He made no comment about his sculpture, but when asked specifically about his desire for future marriage, he said, "No, I guess I just hate girls right now." Fathers were included by 97 percent of the children in "future family" sculptures. Two single-parent girls who lived with their mothers did not include a father in their "future family" structures.

Inclusion of Children. In studying the sculptures representing desired number of future children, it was found that 98 percent of the respondents wanted children. Number of desired children ranged from one to nine future children, with a mean of 2.55 future children per family. More than half of the children wanted to have future children of both sexes. Approximately 20 percent placed future children on the board with no specification regarding sex. These children realistically stated, "I don't know if I'll have boys or girls." There were no significant differences in number and sex of desired future children by age, sex or family type.

Inclusion of Grandparents and Other Kin. In the "future family" sculpture, 25 percent of the children included grandmothers and grandfathers. Generally, these children were able to depict themselves in the sculpture as parents and represent their own parents as grandparents. This seems to indicate a mature level of thinking about the human life cycle, as these children realized that their roles and

relationships would evolve as they grew up. They understood that they would eventually assume the relationship to their own children that their parents now have to them. They could also see the possibility of their own parents continuing to be parents while also adding the role of grandparent. Three children did not seem to indicate this change in relationships, but simply added a baby to their "present family." They did not represent themselves with a spouse and did not describe their own parents as grandparents, even though they saw themselves as parents. One of these children was the single-parent child whose father was deceased. The father and mother were represented together in the "future family" structure.

Grandparents were included by 37 percent of the one-parent children and 13 percent of the two-parent children. This difference may reflect the importance of the extended family for single-parent children, even though this difference was not depicted in the "present family" structure. It may also reflect a desire on the part of these children for their parents to reunite as they usually placed the grandmother and grandfather together on the sculpture board.

Three children depicted cousins in the "future family." Nine children included their own present siblings in their "future family." Non-kin were represented by two children and pets were included by twelve. There were no differences in these responses by sex, age, or family type.

Overall, the children represented their "desired future family" structures in the same manner as they perceived their present families. This included single-parent children as they represented their non-resident parent in their "present family" structure. Also, the "future family" sculptures matched the children's general perceptions of

"family" as recorded in response to the pictorial representations of possible family structures presented to them earlier in the interview. Most children depicted a mother, a father and two or three children in their "future family" sculptures confirming the data regarding the children's affirmation of these preferred family structures.

Second Acceptable Future Family Sculpture

After the children completed the sculptures of their first choice for "future family," they were asked to respond to the question, "If you couldn't have this kind of family, what other type of family would be all right with you?" In response to this question most of the children simply removed one or two figures from their sculptures. The figures removed were most often future children, not parents.

Mothers and fathers were represented somewhat less frequently than previously; by 95 percent and 92 percent of the children respectively. The children of one-parent families were still more likely to remove the opposite-sex spouse than were two-parent children. One two-parent boy did remove the mother.

The mean number of "desired future children" dropped from 2.55 to 1.9. This indicates that the respondents were most comfortable removing future children from their sculptures. Six children added future children to their sculptures rather than removing them. Other categories such as grandparents, cousins, other kin, other non-kin and pets remained relatively stable from the "future family" sculpture to the "second acceptable future family" sculpture.

The children represented their "desired future family" structures in the same manner as they perceived their present families. The

sculptures revealed a close match between general perceptions of "family" and a desire for a certain type of family in the future. Single-parent and two-parent children perceived their present families in similar ways and they both had a desire for a future family with two, opposite-sex parents and one or more children.

Specific Responses Concerning Future

Children and Future Marriage

Two specific questions dealing with the desire for future children and future marriage were asked after the children had completed their sculptures. These were:

1. Do you want to have children when you grow up?
2. Do you want to get married when you grow up?

In response to the first question, 94 percent of the subjects said that they would like to have children of their own in the future. Most expressed a desire to have children for companionship reasons. One child stated, "For two reasons: (1) to have somebody to look after and care for besides a wife or pet, (2) so the family could go on for generations." There were no differences in the desire for future children by sex or family type. In response to the second questions, 92 percent of the subjects said that they would like to be married in the future. The 8 percent who did not desire future marriage were all from single-parent families. There were no differences in the responses by sex. One child who did not wish to marry in the future stated, "When I see people get married, I get scared. What's gonna happen later?" Children who did desire future marriage often stated companionship reasons. One child said, "Because I'd be lonely if I didn't."

School-age children of both one- and two-parent families express a strong desire to marry and have children when they grow up. The experience of divorce seems to create some caution concerning marriage, but most children felt that a spouse would be necessary for personal companionship. School-age children desire to establish families of their own with a partner and children regardless of their own family life experience.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Purpose and Methods of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe how school-age children of one- and two-parent families perceive the family. The differences in perceptions of family structure, dimensions involved in basic family concepts, and perceptions of own present and desired future family structures were explored in regard to differences in: (a) sex, (b) family type, and (c) cognitive level. The sample was 60 children, 7 to 11 years of age, equally divided by single-parent and two-parent families. The subjects were white, middle class residents of Tulsa, Oklahoma. They were the younger siblings in two-child families. Children were first classified as either concrete or formal operational using a Piagetian-based Cognitive Developmental Level Test which included techniques previously used by Moore et al. (1977) and Powell et al. (1981). Subjects were then shown 20 pictorial representations of possible family structures and asked to identify which ones depicted a "family." Then they were asked open-ended questions dealing with basic family terms. Finally, the children represented their own present and desired future families using an adaptation of the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (see Appendices A, B, and C).

Results

In the preparation of the study, 10 research questions were formulated. Following are the major results related to the research questions:

1. Which of a number of possible family structures do school-age children most often define as a "family?"

The family structures most often identified as "family" by the largest percentage of both two-parent and single-parent children were those depicting two opposite-sex parents and one or more children. Structures depicting single-parent family groups were affirmed significantly more often by single-parent children than by two-parent children. Structures depicting two adults of the same sex with children and children without parents were not affirmed by subjects of either family type (Figure 1).

2. What are the dimensions which school-age children use to define "mother," "father", and "family?"

The dimensions mentioned most frequently by children were "biology" and "guidance." No significant differences were found by sex, cognitive level, or family type. "Family" was most often described in "membership" terms, while "mother" and "father" elicited responses related to "biology" and "guidance." "Father" was often described in "legal" terms, such as "He is the one who is married to the mother."

3. In further probing, do school-age children identify the dimension of "co-residence" as a necessary criterion for "mother," "father," and "family?"

For the total sample, 90 percent of the children felt that a family could still be a family if they did not live together. For "mother" and

"father," 85 percent and 88 percent of the children respectively felt that parents would remain parents even if they did not live with their children. "Co-residence" is, therefore, not a necessary criterion in these children's basic family concepts.

4. What type of family structure do school-age children depict as the composition of their own families?

Children include both parents, themselves and their siblings in representations of their "present family." Of single-parent children, 80 percent included their non-resident parent in their family sculptures. Approximately 30 percent of the children included grandparents and other kin in their family representations.

5. What type of family structure do school-age children represent as the composition of their desired future families?

Children included two parents, and a mean of 2.55 children in their "desired future family" structure. There were no significant differences by sex, family type, or cognitive level. Approximately 25 percent of the children included grandparents and other kin in their future family representations.

6. If deprived of their first choice for "desired future family" composition, what will school-age children identify as another acceptable alternative?

In order to change their "desired future family" structure, most subjects removed future children from their representations. The mean number of "desired future children" dropped from 2.55 to 1.9. Several single-parent children did remove the opposite-sex spouse in this representation, but only one two-parent child did so.

7. What is the relationship between the children's representation of their own families and their identification of varying structures as "family?"

Children represent their "present family" structure as consistent with their identifications of varying structures as "family." The pictorial structures most often affirmed as "family" included two, opposite-sex parents and one or more children. The subjects consistently represented their own families as two opposite-sex parents and two children, sometimes including other kin. Of single-parent children, 80 percent included their non-resident parent in their representations of "present family" structure.

8. What is the relationship between the children's representation of their "desired future families" and their identification of varying structures as "family?"

The children's "future family" structures matched their general perceptions of "family" as recorded in response to the pictorial representations of possible family structures. Most children depicted a mother, a father, and children in their "future family" sculptures, confirming the data regarding their affirmation of the drawings of these possible family structures.

9. What is the relationship between the children's representations of their own "present families" and their representations of their "desired future families?"

The children represented their "future family" structures in the same manner as they perceived their present families. This included single-parent children, since they represented their non-resident parent in their "present family" structure.

10. Do school-age children indicate a desire for: (a) future children and (b) future marriage?

A desire for future children was expressed by 94 percent of the subjects. A desire for future marriage was expressed by 92 percent of the subjects. The children who did not desire future marriage were from single-parent families.

Conclusions

It is important to note that these results were obtained on the basis of interviews conducted with non-minority, non-clinical, younger siblings living in two-child families of similar demographic characteristics in Tulsa, Oklahoma. These conclusions should be generalized only to other similar populations.

The experience of divorce, although it is precipitating rapid changes in family structure, does not seem to affect school-age children's macrocosmic or overall view of "family." One possible explanation for this finding has been proposed by Camara (1979). Children may be able to hold simultaneously macrocosmic views of social concepts that are outside their immediate environment or experience, and microcosmic views that represent their own particular experience. The macrocosmic view may be related to sociocultural factors which support the notion of a "family" as consisting of a mother, a father, and children. This notion may be communicated by the larger culture through the media, children's literature, school environment, or other sources outside the children's immediate family experiences. Results of the present study support those of Moore et al. (1977) and Powell et al. (1981) that family composition appears to be defined normatively as at least two, opposite-sex

parents and one or more children. Single-parent children affirmed single-parent family groups significantly more often than two-parent children. Since this difference was not found in earlier studies with preschoolers (Norris, 1981; Powell et al., 1981; Powell & Thompson, 1981), it appears that school-age children are making more use of their own family life experience. Their basic perception of "family," although not drastically altered by the experience of divorce or living in a one-parent family, may actually be more flexible than that of two-parent children. It would appear that two-parent children could use help in developing greater acceptance of family diversity.

A pattern developed in the children's affirmations of the varying family structures. Figures depicting two opposite sex parents and children were accepted most frequently. Those depicting adults with no children were accepted somewhat less frequently. Structures representing single-parent groups were accepted by approximately 50 percent of the children. Drawings depicting same-sex adults and a child or children with no parents were almost never affirmed as families. The presence of two opposite-sex parents and children seem to be the most salient factors in the school-age child's perception of "family."

School-age children view "mother," "father," and "family" in very similar ways regardless of sex, family type, or cognitive level. In classifying children's responses in the eight dimensions of family, it was noted that school-age children used a wide variety of responses and they also described "mother" and "father" in very similar terms. These school-age children used rather sophisticated expressive language such as "relatives," "parents," and "marriage" to describe "family," "mother," and "father." It appears that these children are in the

highest level of social perspective-taking as described by Selman and Byrne (1975). At this level of mutual perspective-taking, children can assume a third party point of view in addition to their own. Specifically, they are able to view family members not only in relationship to themselves but also in relationship one to another without the children's own perspectives being taken into account. This is certainly a reflection of school-age children's higher cognitive level and their better understanding of complex interpersonal relationships.

The Kvebaek Family Sculpturing Technique appears to be a useful method of eliciting children's perceptions of their own present and desired future families. There were no significant differences by sex, family type, or cognitive level in children's representations of their families. Each child depicted traditional family structures consisting of two, opposite-sex parents and one or more children. This would appear to indicate that the single-parent children in this study did not perceive themselves to be members of "broken families." Of all single-parent children, 80 percent included their non-resident parent in their present family sculpture. This appears to support Ahrons' (1979) conception of the binuclear family in which the marital divorce results in the establishment of two active households, maternal and paternal. These two subsystems work together as an organic unit with the mother and father heading two households which are the nuclei of the children's family. In the child's perception, then, the dissolution of the marriage does not result in the dissolution of the family.

In comparing these results with earlier studies involving preschool children (Norris, 1981; Powell et al., 1981; Powell & Thompson, 1981) some interesting differences were found. Responses to the Family

Sculpture Interview revealed that structures containing any combination of one or two adults with or without children were affirmed by between 70 percent and 98 percent of the preschool children. School-age children accepted some of these groupings much less frequently. Specifically, single-parent groupings and structures depicting two same-sex adults were affirmed by only 20 percent to 48 percent of the school-age children (Figure 2). It appears that older children have developed a more differentiated concept of "family." Also, there were no significant differences in the affirmation of any of the structures by family type among preschoolers. However, among school-age children, those who were living in single-parent households affirmed single-parent structures significantly more often than two-parent children. Personal life experience seems to have a greater impact on school-age children's perception of "family."

Some differences were also found between preschoolers and school-age children in their use of the eight dimensions of "family" (Figure 4). School-age children mentioned approximately two dimensions in response to each of the questions concerning "family," "mother" and "father." This mean is twice as high as that obtained with preschoolers. The difference between school-age children with respect to their use of these eight dimensions was qualitative as well as quantitative. There was an increase in salience of all dimensions for school-age children, except for "membership" which was utilized much less frequently. The dimensions of "legal factors" and "guidance" showed the highest increase in mention. Another difference was found when children were asked probing questions about "co-residence." Of preschoolers, 50 percent felt that "co-residence" was a necessary criterion of "family,"

"mother," and "father," while only 10 percent of school-age children felt that "co-residence" was essential. These findings indicate that school-age children have more flexible, differentiated concepts of "family," "mother," and "father." It is also a reflection of their increased social cognition as well as their more advanced expressive language ability.

The use of multiple methods in these interviews resulted in very informative, qualitative data. The children responded verbally to a structured interview using pictorial representations of families and to a non-structured, open-ended question interview dealing with their understandings of "family," "mother," and "father." The third part of the total interview was a non-verbal, concrete representation of the children's own present and desired future families. The children responded to verbal and non-verbal tasks concerning families in general and their own family in particular. Although each approach elicited a different type of response, the results were mutually supportive and non-contradictory.

As this study is part of an on-going investigation of how sex, family type, and cognitive level affect children's perceptions of "family," it is appropriate at this point to summarize what is known about the development of the concept (Table IV).

At an early age, children have a general, rather undifferentiated concept of family. Any group of people containing adults of any sex or number is affirmed as a family by most preschool children. Structures containing two, opposite-sex adults with children are affirmed most frequently while those containing adults without children are affirmed least often. Sex and family type do not seem to affect this concept.

TABLE IV

THE CHILD'S DEVELOPING CONCEPT OF FAMILY

Cognitive Level	Age	Description of the Concept	Source
Pre-operational	Preschool (3-6 years)	<p>Family structures containing a mother, father, and child or grandparents, parents, and child were affirmed by 98 percent of the children. All other structures representing any combination of one or two adults with or without children were affirmed by at least 70 percent of the children. Unrelated animals and objects were not affirmed as families. No significant differences were found by family type.</p> <p>Of the eight dimensions of "family," "membership," and "biology" were most frequently used to describe "mother," "father," and "family."</p>	Norris (1981), Powell and Thompson (1981), Powell, et al. (1981).
Concrete and formal operational	School-age (7-11 years)	<p>Family structures containing a mother, father, and children or grandparents, parents, and children were affirmed by 98 percent of the children. Structures without children were affirmed by 70 percent of the children. Single-parent structures were affirmed by about 50 percent of the children, with single-parent children affirming these structures significantly more often than two-parent children. Structures depicting same-sex adults and children or children without adults were not affirmed as families.</p> <p>Of the eight dimensions of "family," "biology" and "guidance" were used most frequently. "Legal factors" and "emotions" had much more salience for school-age children than for pre-schoolers. All dimensions showed an increase in salience except for "membership" which was used much less frequently.</p>	Present study (1982).

When preschoolers talk about families and parents, they use ideas related to membership within a group (i.e., a family is a mother, a father, and a baby) and biological factors (i.e., a mommy is a girl who has a baby). Co-residence, or living together, is an important characteristic of families for young children.

As children reach school-age, they develop a more differentiated concept of family and their own life experience seems to have more impact on their way of thinking. A pattern develops in their affirmation of specific family groups. Structures depicting two opposite-sex adults with children are affirmed most frequently, as they are by preschoolers. However, groupings of adults without children are affirmed fairly often, with single-parent groups being affirmed much less frequently than by preschoolers. Single-parent children affirmed single-parent structures significantly more often than two-parent children. This difference by family type indicates that school-age children may be making more use of their own family experience. Two-parent children of school-age reject structures which do not resemble their own families more often than preschoolers. School-age children of both sexes and family types reject structures containing children alone or with parents of the same sex. In discussing families and parents, school-age children use a wide variety of dimensions from "biology" and "guidance of children" to "legal factors" and "emotions." They are very verbal and use expressive language to describe what they think about families. In representing their own present and desired future families, school-age children generally include two opposite-sex parents with children. Even children in divorced families represent their non-resident parents as members of their families.

It appears that the experience of divorce does not change children's notions of family. These findings should be reassuring to parents and teachers who must help children to deal with the experience of divorce. In the intervening years between childhood and adulthood, many experiences will happen to these children which will affect their ultimate feelings about family life and what type of families they will themselves establish, but, for now, results of this study indicate that hopes of single-parent and two-parent children for the future are more alike than they are different.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was an attempt to further identify and describe children's perceptions of "family" using the basic social framework suggested by Moore et al. (1977). It was an extension of the work done by Powell et al. (1981) with preschoolers. Further research in the following areas is suggested by questions raised through the present study:

1. The pictorial representations of possible family structures were of a greater number and variety than those used by Powell et al. (1981). These structures could be presented to preschool children, adolescents, and even adults in order to better identify a progression in the development of the perception of "family." Intercultural studies are also of importance in order to identify any differences which may exist with regard to societal diversity.
2. Difficulty was experienced in classifying certain responses into the eight dimensions of "family." When children responded that a family was a "group of relatives"

and that mothers and fathers were "parents," were they using these terms as "legal," "biological," or "social role factors?" Further probing of what children mean by the terms "relatives" and "parents" would assist in the classification of these terms. Another response which created difficulties in classification was: "A mother (or father) is someone who takes care of you." This has previously been utilized as an example of "guidance," but it is not the same type of "guidance" as discipline. A new category such as "nurturing" may be more appropriate and might include many of the responses now considered to be "guidance" or "emotions."

3. The questions "What is a mother?" and "What is a father?" could be randomized in future studies to determine if the order of the questions had any impact on the fact that children more often described "father" in legal terms, e.g., "The one who is married to the mother."
4. Since it appears to be relatively easy to identify samples of mother/child single-parent families with a male adult of non-legal relationship living in the home, a sample of these family types, as well as samples of other non-traditional family forms, should be included in further research.
5. The data collected in the Family Sculpturing portion of the interview could be submitted for further clinical analysis. Studying distances between family members, order of placement, and size of figures used, may reveal

other factors related to children's concepts of family.

Hopefully, this study will not only add to the body of knowledge available on children's perceptions of "family," but will also encourage future research in this area. Parents, teachers, counselors, and others who care for and about children need access to this knowledge in order to help children grow and develop to their fullest potentials in these rapidly changing times.

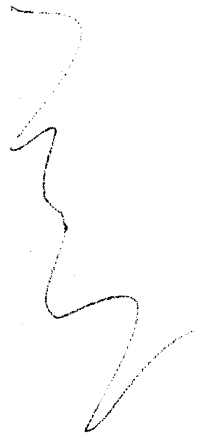
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APPENDIXES



APPENDIX A

CHILDREN'S FAMILY CONCEPT INTERVIEW

INSTRUCTIONS

CHILDREN'S FAMILY CONCEPT INTERVIEW

Introduction

N _____, my name is _____. I'd like to tell you a little about this study and why we asked you to help us tonight. Our study is about families that have children your age. We want to know what kids think about parents and families.

Before we begin, I'd like to tell you that everything we talk about will be just between you and me. I'll write some things down in this notebook and sometimes we'll use a tape recorder, but I won't put your name on any of the things I use to help me remember. Do you have any questions about this? . . .

Our interview has several parts. Before we begin talking about families, let's play some thinking games.

Part I. Cognitive Developmental Level Test

(The materials in the kit which are related to these tasks are: two balls of clay, four red disks, four blue disks, two short cups, one taller cup, and one metal weight. Place these materials in a convenient spot before beginning. Remember to fill the two short cups with equal amounts of water.)

(Four Piagetian Tasks follow. Complete each of these tasks with each child.)

A. Conservation of Mass

Investigator: "I have two balls of clay for you to look at." Place before the child two balls of clay of equal size. Ask the child, "Are the balls of clay the same size?" If the child does not feel that the balls are equal, ask the child, "Which one is bigger?" Take a little off the bigger one and place it on the smaller one until the child agrees that they are the same. Then, in front of the child, roll one of the balls out into a sausage shape. Now ask the child, "Are they still the same size?" Yes, "How do you know?" No, "Which one is bigger? Why?"

Scoring: To pass, the child should say that the two pieces of clay are still equal. Record the child's response on the score sheet.

B. Conservation of Number

Investigator: Place before the child four red disks in a row. Just below that row, in one-to-one correspondence, place another row of four blue disks. Ask the child, "Do these two rows have the same number of disks?" Then the investigator will take the red row of disks and put them into a pile in front of the child. Now ask the child, "Do they still have the same number?" Yes, "How do you know?" No, "Which has more? Why?"

Scoring: To pass, the child should say that they are the same even after the shape has changed. Record the child's response on the score sheet.

C. Conservation of Volume

Investigator: Place before the child two cups of water, the same size cups and the same amount of water in each. Ask the child, "Do these two cups have the same amount of water?" If the child doesn't think they are equal ask the child, "Which one has more?" Adjust the cups until the child agrees that they are the same. In front of the child pour one cup of water into a taller and smaller cylinder type container, then ask the child, "Do they still have the same amount of water?" Yes, "How do you know?" No, "Which one has more? Why?"

Scoring: To pass the child should agree that they are still equal even after the shape has been changed.

D. Hypothesis Testing

Investigator: Place before the child two cups of water, the same size cups and the same amount of water in each. Present the child with a small metal weight and a ball of clay of equal weight but greater mass. Ask the child, "Does this weight weigh the same as this ball of clay?" If the child doesn't think the weights are equal, adjust the weight of the clay until the child agrees that they are the same. Ask the child, "What would happen to the water in these cups if I put this ball of clay in one and this weight in the other?" Do not demonstrate for the child. The object is to let the child hypothesize about an abstract situation.

Scoring: To pass, the child should state that the water level will rise more in the cup which receives the clay because the clay is bigger, it has more mass. The child should indicate that water displacement is a function of mass, not weight.

Part II. Family Structure and Dimensions of "Family" Interview

(Twenty pictures of various family structures are needed for this part of the interview. Have them available before starting this section.)

Now, N_____, I'd like to talk with you about families. We'll be using the tape recorder for this section.

Let's test it to be sure that it works.

A. What is a family?

What do you have to have to have a family?

(Record the child's response verbatim on the appropriate score sheet.)

Can a family still be a family if they don't live together? (Record the child's response and the rationale for the response.)

(Place the family structure pictures face down in front of the child. Let the child determine the order of viewing. Record the subject's response on the corresponding score sheet by checking the appropriate box. Then write the child's rationale for the answer verbatim in the space provided. The numbers on the back of the pictures are to facilitate the scoring procedure.)

Here are some pictures which I'd like for you to look at and tell me if you think that they are pictures of families. I'll let you decide which pictures we will look at. Which picture should we look at first?

B. Is this a family? Why is this a family? or Why is this not a family?

1. Mother, Father, Child, Grandmother, Grandfather
2. Grandmother, Grandfather
3. Mother, Father
4. Mother, Father, Child
5. Mother, Father, Large Child, Medium Child
6. Mother, Father, Large Child, Medium Child, Small Child
7. Mother, Father, Two Large Children, Two Medium Children, Two Small Children
8. Mother, Child, Grandmother
9. Father, Child, Grandfather
10. Child, Two Same Age Adult Females
11. Child, Two Same Age Adult Males
12. Mother, Child
13. Mother, Large Child, Medium Child
14. Mother, Large Child, Medium Child, Small Child
15. Father, Child
16. Father, Large Child, Medium Child
17. Father, Large Child, Medium Child, Small Child
18. Large Child, Medium Child
19. Large Child, Medium Child, Small Child
20. Two Large Children, Two Medium Children, Two Small Children

Now I'd like for you to answer two more questions by telling me what you think.

C. What is a mother? What do you have to do to be a mother?

(Record the child's response verbatim on the appropriate score sheet.)

Can a mother still be a mother if she doesn't live with her children? (Record the child's response and the rationale for it.)

D. What is a father? What do you have to do to be a father?

(Record the child's response verbatim as before.) Can a father still be a father if he doesn't live with his children? (Record as before.)

Part III. Family Sculpture Game

(Use the tape recorder for the rest of the interview.)

Now, N_____, I'd like to talk with you about your own family. Here are some figures and a board. First, let's use this tape to label the figures as the members of your family. You choose the figures you want.

(Help the child label the figures.) Now, take these figures and place them on the board to show me your own family. (Alternate: However you see your family.)

When the child has apparently finished ask, "Is that everyone?" "Tell me again who is in your family and point them out to me on the board." Have the child help you with the score sheet so that you will be sure you have the correct family members in their spaces. Sit on the same side of the grid as the child does so that you are recording the child's perceptions. To record the responses on the grid, place the

abbreviation for each family member represented by a figure in its corresponding square on the score sheet.

The list of abbreviations is as follows:

m - mother

gm - grandmother

f - father

gf - grandfather

br - brother

p - pet

sis - sister

other - specify on the line following the type of figure

ch - self

Also, place a number in each square according to the order in which the child placed the figures. For instance, if Father was placed first, his square would include an f and a number 1. Then write the names of the family members represented by each of the pieces used on a line after the corresponding drawing to the right of the sculpture grid. For the present family, indicate whether the child's perception of his family is accurate by writing yes or no in the space provided for correctness. Put extra comments in the space provided.)

(Remove the figures from the board and take off the present labels.)

Now, let's play the game a different way. This time, take any of these figures and place them on the board to show me the kind of family you'd like to have when you grow up.

(After the child has apparently finished, continue.)

Is this the kind of family you'd like to have when you grow up? Let's label the people in it. What would you like to tell me about this family?

(Record the child's responses as before, this time using the Future Family Score Sheet. The abbreviations will now be:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| m - mother | gm - grandmother |
| f - father | gf - grandfather |
| s - son | p - pet |
| d - daughter | other - specify on line by figure used) |

If you couldn't have this family, what other type of family would be all right with you?

(Record the child's response as before, this time using the Future Family second alternative score sheet.)

Would you like to have children when you grow up? Why do you think you'd like to have children? or Why do you think you wouldn't like to have children?

(Record the child's response verbatim on the appropriate score sheet.)

Would you like to get married some day? Why do you think you'd like to get married? or Why do you think you wouldn't like to get married?

(Record the child's response verbatim on the appropriate score sheet.)

Final Questions

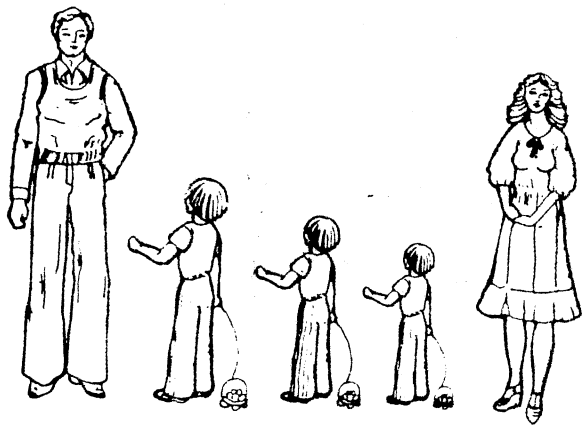
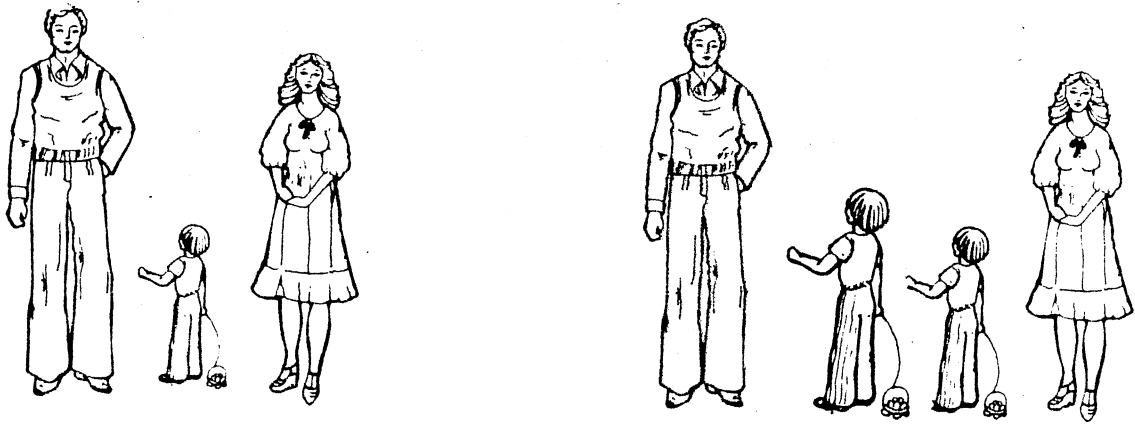
We've reached the end of our interview. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

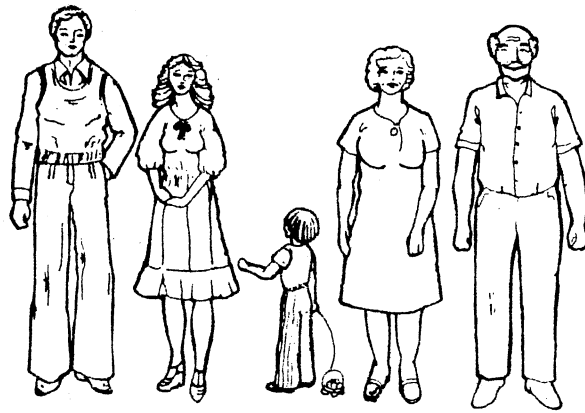
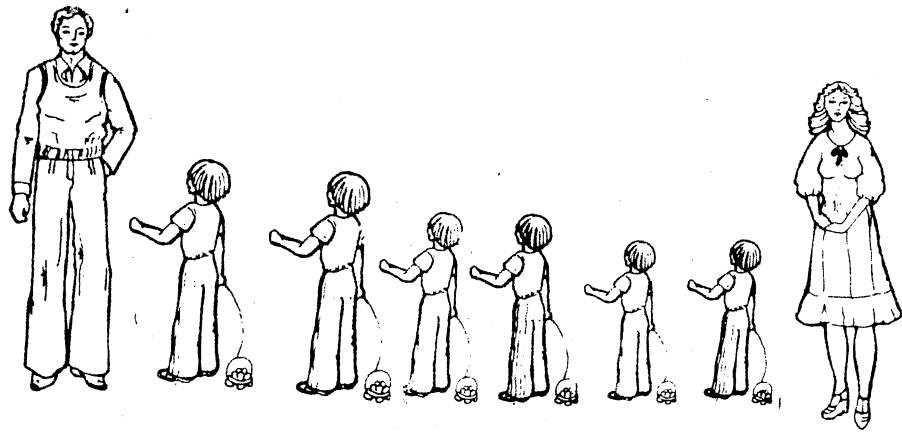
(Record the child's response verbatim on the appropriate score sheet.)

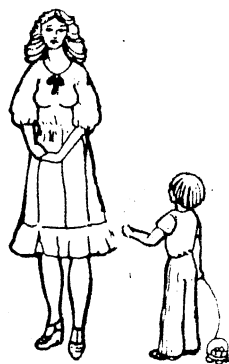
Thank you so much for helping me, N. You've shared some good ideas with me, and I appreciate your help.

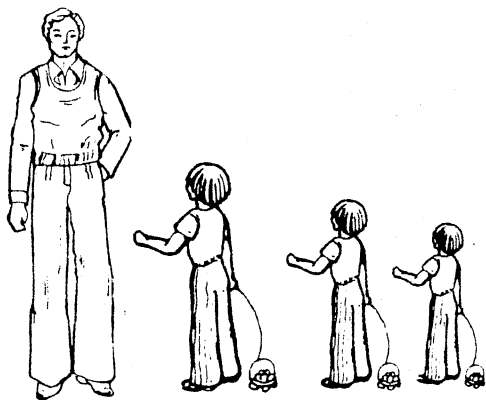
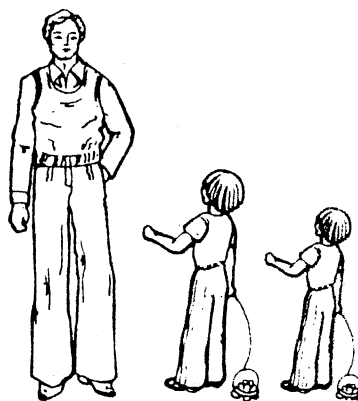
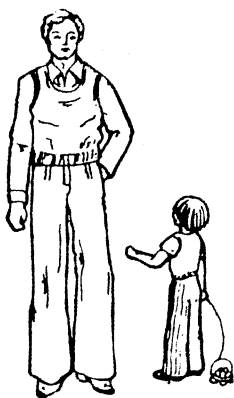
APPENDIX B

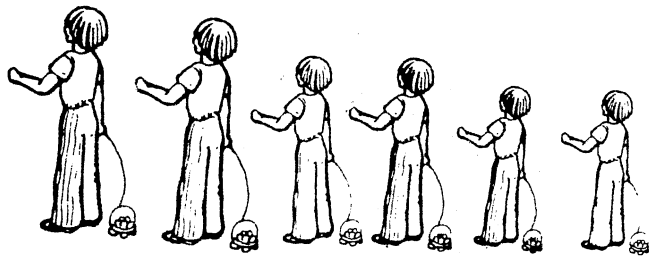
FAMILY STRUCTURES

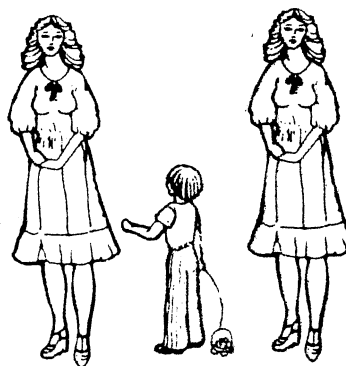
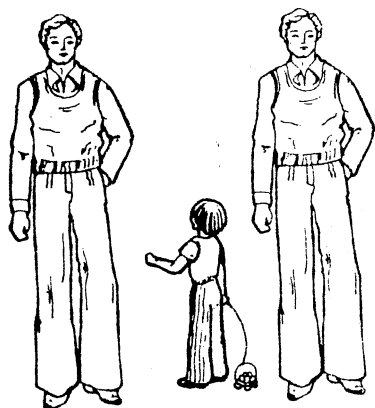
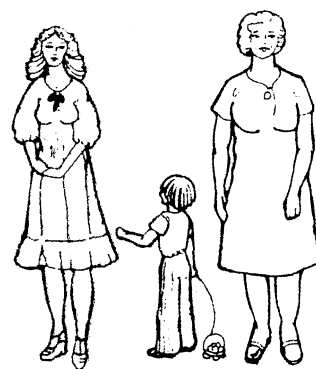
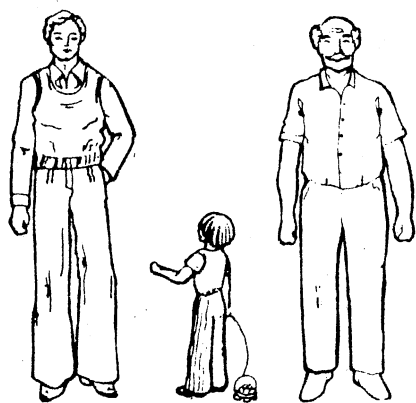


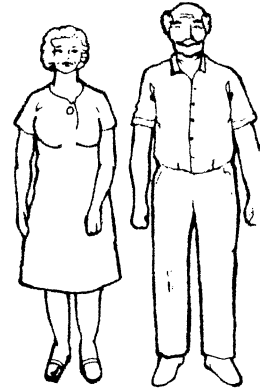
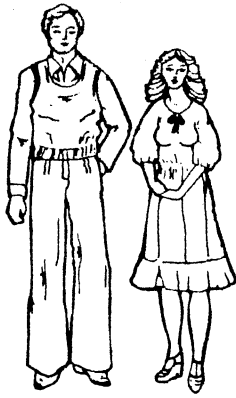












APPENDIX C

CHILDREN'S FAMILY CONCEPT INTERVIEW

SCORE SHEETS

Subject Number _____ Age _____ Sex _____

Part I. Piagetian Tasks

A. Conservation of Mass

Passed _____ Did Not Pass _____
(if not, describe _____
child's response) _____

B. Conservation of Number

Passed _____ Did Not Pass _____
(if not, describe _____
child's response) _____

C. Conservation of Volume

Passed _____ Did Not Pass _____
(if not, describe _____
child's response) _____

D. Hypothesis Testing

Passed _____ Did Not Pass _____
(if not, describe _____
child's response) _____

Part II. Family Concepts

A. What is a family? (enter response verbatim) _____

Can a family still be a family if they don't live together? _____

C. What is a mother? (enter response verbatim) _____

Can a mother still be a mother if she doesn't live with her children? _____

D. What is a father? (enter verbatim response) _____

Can a father still be a father if he doesn't live with his children? _____

B. Is this a family? (drawings)	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>DON'T KNOW</u>	<u>WHY? OR WHY NOT?</u>
1. Mother, Father, Child Grandmother, Grandfather				
2. Grandmother, Grandfather				
3. Mother, Father				
4. Mother, Father, Child				
5. Mother, Father, Lrg Child, Md Child				
6. Mother, Father, Lrg Child, Md Child, Sm Child				
7. Mother, Father, 2 Lrg Chld, 2 Md Chld, 2 Sm Chld				
8. Mother, Child, Grandmother				
9. Father, Child, Grandfather				
10. Child, Two Same Age Adult Females				

	YES	NO	D K	WHY? OR WHY NOT?
11. Child, Two Same Age Adult Males				
12. Mother, Child				
13. Mother, Lrg child, Md Child				
14. Mother, Lrg Child, Md Child, Sm Child				
15. Father, Child				
16. Father, Lrg Child, Md Child				
17. Father, Lrg Child, Md Child, Sm Child				
18. Lrg Child, Md Child				
19. Lrg Child, Md Child, Sm Child				
20. 2 Lrg Chld, 2 Md Chld, 2 Sm Chld				

Part III. Family Sculpturing

A. Present Family

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A											A
B											B
C											C
D											D
E											E
F											F
G											G
H											H
I											I
J											J
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Comments: _____







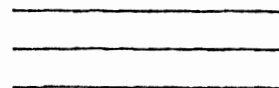
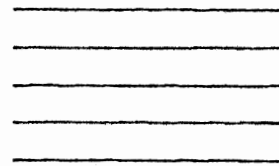
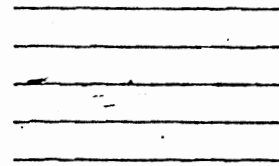
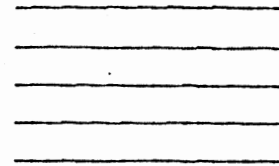


Correct _____

B. Future Family

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A											A
B											B
C											C
D											D
E											E
F											F
G											G
H											H
I											I
J											J
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Comments: _____



C. Future Family (second acceptable alternative)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A											A
B											B
C											C
D											D
E											E
F											F
G											G
H											H
I											I
J											J
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Comments: _____









D. Questions concerning future family (enter the child's response verbatim)

Would you like to have children when you grow up? _____
Why do you think you'd like to have children? or Why do you think you
wouldn't like to have children? _____

Would you like to get married? _____
Why or why not? _____

Part IV: Final Questions (enter child's response verbatim)

A. Do you have anything else you'd like to tell me? _____

VITA

Margaret Rose Armbruster

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: DIVORCE AND THE SCHOOL-AGE CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF FAMILY

Major Field: Family Relations and Child Development

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Westover A.F.B., Massachusetts, May 7, 1958, daughter of Lt. Col. Owen and Mrs. Mary Lou Armbruster.

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Professional Organizations: Phi Kappa Phi, Omicron Nu, Oklahoma Association for Children Under Six.