The objective of this paper was to ex-
amine some of the issues and research
relevant to male sex-role development in
boys and to show some of the impli-
cations of father absence for counselor,
teachers, and families. Early studies
showed a significant difference between
father-absent and father-present groups
of boys. However, these studies were
later qualified by the work in the area of
surrogate fathers. In addition, the early
studies have recently been attacked on
methodological grounds which cast some
doubt upon their usefulness.

A more recent study which used ex-
cellent control procedures tended to
support the position that differences
between father-absent and father-present
groups would not be found if the groups
were adequately controlled for social
class. Although the study was not
concerned with male sex-role de-
velopment per se, it does suggest impli-
cations that could be useful for furthe
research in this area.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States today, more than
7.2 million families are headed by a
woman who has no husband living with
her, an increase of 1.6 million since 1970.
Such families represented nearly
13 percent of all families in 1975 and 11
percent in 1970 (Current Population Re-
ports 1975).

What of the children of these fami-
ilies? What are the effects, if any, of
growing up without a father? As more
and more children are being put in this
circumstance, the need to answer these
questions increases. This paper will focus
on the effect on boys of growing up
without a father in the home. Particularly,
the development of a masculine sex role will be explored.

As an aid in this exploration, social role theory will be used to help clarify some of the issues and show some application to everyday life.

The basic assumption of role theory (relevant to the position of this paper) is that humans must learn most, if not all, of their behaviors. That is, the infant is mindless and learns how to behave from those around him. Of special importance are parents and family, for they play a major part in teaching the infant to distinguish between socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

Some of the concepts of role theory that are particularly relevant to the present study include: norms (socially prescribed rules), roles (learned ways to behave in given situations), sex role (sex-specific behaviors that are learned), role expectations (preconceived ideas about how someone else should behave in a particular role), role definitions (a person's own ideas of what he/she should do in a role), anticipatory socialization (learning appropriate role behavior before actually being in the role) and roletaking ability (moving from one role to another).

EARLY RESEARCH

The bulk of the early research dealing with the effects of father absence was related to the concern for families in which the fathers had been absent because of military service in World War II (e.g., Bach 1946, Sears 1951, Stolz et al. 1954).

The Searses conducted a pioneer investigation of the effect of father absence on three- to five-year-old children. In this study each child was given an opportunity to play with a standardized set of doll-play equipment, and the investigator recorded the child's behavior. Compared to the father-present boys, the father-absent boys were found to be less aggressive and also seemed to depict less sex-role differentiation in playing with dolls (Sears 1951; Sears, Pintler, & Sears 1946).

Using a similar technique, Bach (1946) studied the effects of father absence on six- to ten-year-old boys. As in the Sears study, father-absent boys were less aggressive in doll play than were father-present boys.

In Santrock's (1970) study of four-and five-year-old disadvantaged black children, father-absent boys were found to exhibit less masculine and more dependent behavior than did father-present boys. In addition, maternal interviews indicated that the father-absent boys were less aggressive, less masculine, and more dependent than the father-present boys.

In a 1954 investigation, Stolz et al. studied four- to eight-year-old boys who, for approximately the first two years of their lives, had been separated from their fathers. They found the boys to be less assertively aggressive and independent in their peer relations than boys who had not been separated from their fathers. In addition they were judged to be more submissive.

In an investigation in 1958, Tiller and later Lynn and Sawrey (1959) studied Norwegian children aged eight to nine and a half, whose fathers were sailors and were absent at least nine months a year. They compared this group with a matched group of children whose fathers had jobs which did not require them to be absent from their families. The boys' responses to projective tests and interviews with their mothers indicated that father absence was associated with "compensatory masculinity" (the boys at times behaved in an exaggerated masculine manner and at times in a highly feminine manner).

There is additional evidence that the effects of father absence have long
range effects. Carlsmith (1964) studied middle-class and upper-middle-class high school males who had experienced early father absence during World War II. Compared to the usual male pattern (on the College Board Aptitude Scores) of math score higher than verbal score, the pattern of the father-absent group more frequently followed the pattern of females-verbal score higher than math score.

On the basis of the assumption that independence and aggressiveness are predominantly masculine characteristics, the studies mentioned seem to suggest that boys in father-absent homes had not learned these characteristics as well as boys in father-present homes. These early studies also suggest that other male sex-role behavior may be learned less well.

**SURROGATE FATHERS**

Given the hypothesis that boys in father-absent homes learned male sex-role behavior less well than their counterparts in father-present homes, how did they acquire the knowledge of sex-role behavior that they do have? The explanation may well lie in their ability to learn appropriate male roles from "surrogate fathers" (Biller 1971). Biller points out the possibility that

*The absent father can still have an ongoing psychological impact on his child. The child may have memories of past interactions and/or develop a perception of his father from what others tell him. In this way the absent father can function as a model for the child.* [p.15]

He then adds:

*Paternal absence or paternal inadequacy does not rule out the possible presence of other male models. A brother, uncle, grandfather, or male boarder may provide the boy with much adult male contact. An important role can be played by male neighbors and teachers. The child may even learn some masculine behaviors by patterning himself after a movie or television star, an athlete, or a fictional hero.* [pp. 15-16]

Such models can facilitate the boy's learning of the norms associated with male sex role. He may learn to give appropriate meaning to the behaviors of other males because he is more familiar with the norms. His role-taking ability in marriage should be facilitated, thus causing less role conflict with his spouse because his role behavior would be more congruent with her role expectations. The presence of these models would also help in the process of anticipatory socialization in which he may learn the appropriate behaviors necessary for a new role by watching nearby models.

Indeed some investigators have found that masculinity is related to the general amount of contact a boy has with adult males. Nash (1965) studied a group of Scottish orphans and found that boys raised where a male sex model was present were more masculine than a group of boys brought up entirely by women. In another investigation Santrock (1970) found that father-absent boys with a father role model were significantly less dependent than father-absent boys with no father substitute.

Another possible sex-role model is an older brother. Kock (1955) showed that young boys with older brothers are more likely to be exposed to male group influence and tend to exhibit more masculine behavior than boys with
In summary, they conclude that older sisters. Also in another similar study, Santrock (1970) found father-absent boys scored higher on a maternal interview measure when they had older brothers than when they had only older sisters. These two studies would tend to support the hypothesis that boys can and do learn male sex-role behavior from their older male siblings.

Peer groups may also be an important place for father-absent boys to learn male sex-role behavior. According to Miller (1958),

For boys reared in female-based households the corner group provides the first real opportunity to learn essential aspects of the male role in the context of peers facing similar problems of sex-role identification. [p. 14]

In sum, there would appear to be a relationship between father-absence and boys' sex-role development. However, it seems evident that there are other models from which paternally deprived boys may learn appropriate sex-role behaviors.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Herzog and Sudia

Recently, another attack on the early studies has been launched. In an article by Herzog and Sudia (1972), the authors criticize most of the studies on methodological grounds. They make an excellent case by asserting that

1. Most of the studies lack adequate controls (especially social class).
2. They often are not replicable. 3. They often use samples that are too small.
4. The popular M-F scales, most often used to differentiate between boys and girls, "add up to dubious definitions of adequate masculinity and femininity" (p, 177). In summary, they conclude that

Critical analysis of available studies [they examined over 400] does not provide solid support for the thesis-implicit in much current writing-that a resident father is the only source of masculine identification, and that absence of a father from the home necessarily impairs a boy's masculine identity. [po 178]

Feldman and Feldman

In another recent study of the effect of father-absence on boys, Feldman and Feldman (1975) found no difference between father-absent and father-present boys in three dimensions. Although they did not study masculine sex role per se, they did use an excellent sampling procedure with adequate controls for social class. Their study gives support to the hypothesis of Herzog and Sudia that the differences between "the father-absent (FA) and father-present (FP) types of homes might disappear if the studies were well controlled for social class" (Feldman & Feldman 1975:5-6).

The Feldman study did, however, develop one very interesting hypothesis to explain the lack of difference between the father-absent and father-present groups. Their hypothesis was that the low level of father participation in the father-present families may account for it. Father participation was measured on such variables as level of communication, parenting, homework help, and selection of the father as a significant other by his children. In order to test this hypothesis, a comparison was made between the children of highly interactive and less interactive fathers. It was found that the children of highly interactive fathers were more positively oriented to school and
toward their siblings, peers, and parents. In concluding their work, the Feldmans noted:

An average father did not seem to have a significant impact on children, but a more highly interactive father did make a positive difference. [pp. 3-4]

Although the study did not deal directly with sex-role development, it does suggest an exciting area for further study. It may well be that a father who is physically absent is not any more detrimental to a boy's sex-role development than a psychologically absent father. For if the father doesn't spend time interacting with his son, it may be impossible for the boy to learn the norms associated with the male sex role except from another source.

IMPLICATIONS

The studies reviewed in this paper have some important implications for counselors, educators, and families. First, although the early studies have been criticized on methodological grounds, the information that they present should be considered important for father-absent (physically and/or psychologically) families. They present evidence that boys in this situation do develop a somewhat different sex-role identification than boys with active male sex role models. One way to compensate for any possible ill effects of father absence is to make sure that the boy interacts with an older male whom he can copy. Programs like Big Brothers, Boy Scouts, and church activities can be of particular help in this area.

It is also important for other adults to assist the absent father to be psychologically present for the boy. This help would be particularly important for fathers who are dead or who are absent on a temporary basis (e.g., merchant seamen, armed forces personnel, traveling salesmen).

The second major implication has to do with the psychologically absent fathers. The importance of high quality interaction with their sons needs to be stressed in educational and counseling programs. As was shown in the Feldman (1975) study, there was no difference between father-absent and father-present boys if the father was not involved in interacting with them. The close, active association of a father with his son is much more positively effective in that son's life than is his mere physical presence.

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