

FATHER IDENTIFICATION AS A FUNCTION OF MOTHER-FATHER RELATIONSHIP

JAMES C. BAXTER, DAVID L. HORTON AND RONALD E. WILEY
*University of Houston*¹ *University of Kentucky* *University of Kentucky*

The concept of identification has gained wide acceptance as a central construct in describing personality development (10, 13). While the initial explication of the concept is attributable to Freud (7, 8) it has been adopted and elaborated by a number of theorists (4).

Adler has placed considerable reliance on the concept, arguing that the process bears a close relationship to the individual's development of social interest. He proposes that identification must be trained in the child, and that this can occur "only if one grows up in relation to others and feels a part of the whole" (1, p. 136). He also proposes that the child's mother is the focal agent in the development of identification and later social interest. She is said to be the "bridge to social life" (1, p. 372), serving as the child's connection with others. According to Adler, "After she has succeeded in connecting the child with herself, her next task is to spread his interest towards the father and this task will prove almost impossible if she herself is not interested in the father" (1, p. 373).

The present investigation was undertaken to study the effects of differences in mother-father relationships on the process of identification in the child. If the degree of father identification a child develops is related to the extent to which the mother sanctions the relationship, then father identification should be adversely affected by interparental conflict.

Degree of father identification may also be expected to vary with sex of the child and his ordinal position in the family. Thus, the relationships of these characteristics to father identification were also investigated.

METHOD

A biographical data questionnaire of items concerning the variables of the present study was given to all students enrolled in introductory psychology classes at the University of Kentucky during the spring semester, 1963. The classes were roughly balanced for sex and were composed of approximately 34% freshmen. All subjects (*Ss*) included in the sample were from intact homes, i.e. with both natural parents alive and living together.

Sibling position was ascertained through three items in the questionnaire requiring *S* to indicate whether or not he was: (a) an only child; (b) a first born child in a family of two or more children; or (c) a member of a family of two or more children, but not first born. While no predictions were made concerning differences between first borns and later borns, the differentiation seemed of

¹At the time of this study, University of Kentucky.

interest in view of theoretical (1, pp 376-382) and behavioral differences which have been reported (2, 3, 12, 14).

Inter-parental conflict was assessed by *Ss'* answers to three items: (a) "Did your parents tend to disagree among themselves often?" (b) "Did they tend to disagree among themselves more often than other parents you know?" (c) "Can you recall overhearing your parents argue heatedly or angrily between themselves?" An affirmative response to any of these three items was assumed to reflect a significant degree of perceived parental conflict, sufficient to classify the *S* as coming from a conflictful rather than a harmonious home.

Father identification was measured by perceived similarity between *S* and the father. This was assessed by a forced-choice procedure requiring *S* to indicate which parent he is "most like" in the following ten general attributes: temperament, appearance, interests, personality, attitudes, verbal facility, emotional responsiveness, activity level, sense of humor, and over-all mood. A count of the attributes perceived as similar to the father was taken as the measure of identification.

RESULTS

Initial Study

Subjects were differentiated into 12 groups on the basis of their sex, sibling position, and degree of perceived interparental conflict. Five *Ss* were randomly selected from within each group, making a total sample of 60. Cell frequencies actually available before selection ranged from 5 in five cells to 11 in one cell; they were all reduced to 5 to preserve orthogonality of the analysis.

Father identification scores were analyzed by a 2 x 2 x 3 analysis of variance. A summary of the analysis is provided by in Table 1 and the group means are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 1. FATHER IDENTIFICATION AS A FUNCTION OF SEX OF THE CHILD, SIBLING POSITION AND INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT (INITIAL AND REPLICATION STUDIES)

Source	<i>df</i>	Initial study			Replication study			
		<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between	11				11			
Sex (<i>S</i>)	1	70.42	14.14	.001	1	120.00	23.03	.001
Position (<i>P</i>)	2	2.07	<1.00	—	2	7.72	1.48	—
Conflict (<i>C</i>)	1	28.02	5.62	.025	1	28.03	5.38	.025
<i>S</i> × <i>P</i>	2	15.26	3.06	.10	2	6.47	1.24	—
<i>S</i> × <i>C</i>	1	2.81	<1.00	—	1	.30	<1.00	—
<i>P</i> × <i>C</i>	2	4.86	<1.00	—	2	1.11	<1.00	—
<i>S</i> × <i>P</i> × <i>C</i>	2	.07	<1.00	—	2	2.32	<1.00	—
Error	48	4.98			108	5.21		

Table 1 shows that a *sex* difference in degree of father identification occurred with high reliability ($p < .001$), i.e., there was greater perceived similarity between the male *Ss* and their fathers than for the females.

Differences in father identification as a function of *sibling position*, as differentiated here, failed to attain significance. When the sibling-position groups are differentiated for sex, however, differences in perceived similarity to the father approach significance ($p < .10$). Inspection of Table 2 reveals that this tendency is mainly attributable

TABLE 2. MEAN FATHER IDENTIFICATION SCORES, FOR MALES AND FEMALES OF VARIOUS SIBLING POSITIONS, FROM HARMONIOUS AND CONFLICTFUL HOMES (INITIAL STUDY)

		Home	Sibling position			Mean
			only	first	later	
Males	Harmonious	7.80	5.60	6.80	6.73	
	Conflictful	7.40	5.20	4.80	5.80	
	H - C	.40	.40	2.00	.93	
Females	Harmonious	4.00	5.40	5.60	5.00	
	Conflictful	3.00	4.00	2.60	3.20	
	H - C	1.00	1.40	3.00	1.80	

to the male groups. Paired comparisons of the males indicate that the only children differed significantly from the first borns ($t = 2.22$; $df = 18$; $p < .05$)² and tended to differ from the later borns ($t = 1.81$; $df = 18$; $p < .10$). All other differences in ordinal position for both males and females were not significant (p 's $> .10$).

The expected difference in father identification as a function of *interparental conflict* attained significance at the .025 level of confidence ($F = 5.62$; $df = 1/48$). Mean identification scores of 5.86 for children reared in harmonious homes, as compared to 4.50 for children reared in conflictful homes are in the predicted direction. This result provides strong support for the hypothesized interference with father identification of the mother's failure to sanction emulation of the father, as one would expect in conflictful homes. The data also indicate that the extent of this interference is unrelated to the sex or sibling position of the child (interaction F 's < 1.00).

Replication Study

To substantiate the results obtained in the initial study, a replication was undertaken. The same questionnaire was given, for other purposes, to all entering freshmen at the University of Kentucky during the fall orientation and testing period, 1963. A total of 1809 students completed questionnaires. From this pool, 120 Ss who re-

²Two-tailed tests of significance are reported throughout this paper.

ported having been reared in an intact home were chosen on a random basis to provide 10 Ss in each of the 12 groups previously defined. An analysis of father identification scores as a function of sex, sibling position and parental conflict was done.

Table 1 provides a summary of this analysis also. It can be seen that the *sex* difference in father identification scores was again highly significant. (Mean values of 3.78 and 2.58 were obtained for males and females, respectively.) Differences in father identification as a function of the *ordinal position* of the S in his family, or as a function of combinations of the independent variables failed to appear.

The difference in identification as a function of perceived *inter-parental conflict* again attained significance ($F = 5.38$; $df = 1/108$; $p < .025$). The replication of this result from the initial study provides further support for the hypothesized adverse effect of mother-father conflict on father identification.

DISCUSSION

The above results provide compelling support for Adler's contention that the degree of father identification attained by a child is a function of the mother's encouragement of a "connection" between the child and the father. This hypothesis had in fact been previously corroborated by Helper (9) although he conducted his study within a different theoretical framework. With high school boys and girls and their parents as subjects, Helper found that the amount of father identification reported by boys (on a perceived similarity rating) varied significantly as a function of the degree to which the mother was presumed (by her ratings of the father) to sanction the emulation. In addition, there was "some suggestion that daughters' [identification with] their fathers . . . also related to indicated reward for such dependency by their mothers" (9, p. 187). This last result, however, did not reach statistical significance. But our results strengthen the "tendency" in females, reported by Helper.

While the influence of mother-father relationship on father identification appears to be unaffected by the sex of the child and his ordinal position in the family, differences in the overall degree of father identification do occur as a function of the sex of the child. This result was clearly to be expected from previous studies (5, 6, 11) and emphasizes the importance of controlling sex in studying father identification. There is less identification with the father, less "connection" with him, less imitation of him as a specific model, for girls than for boys.

Regarding the inconclusive results on the relationship of ordinal position to father identification, perhaps our tripartite differentiation of *S*s was inadequate. A more complete differentiation, at least into the five classical positions, would seem to be warranted in further research on the matter.

SUMMARY

Identification with the father was measured by a forced-choice procedure in which the subject was required to indicate on each of 10 attributes whether he considered himself more like the father or the mother. 180 male and female college students were the subjects. The relationship of sex, sibling position and perception of parental conflict to father identification were investigated. It was found that males identify significantly more with the father than females do. The relationship of sibling position to father identification was unclear. Perception of parental conflict was significantly related. The latter offers support to Adler's view that father identification in the child is a function of the mother's encouragement of such development, which would be absent in situations of parental discord.

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