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ABSTRACT

The absence of fathers during World War II had differing effects on the development of identity in boys and girls. Articles and research of the era discussed boys' separation from their fathers but largely failed to address daughters' loss of paternal influence. Evidence suggests that for both boys and girls, the problem was not primarily the separation of children from their fathers but rather, the manner in which the mother dealt with the absence and the father's return. Recent research indicates that girls derive their basic sense of identity from experiencing themselves as being like their mothers. They emulate their mothers' behaviors and continue to identify with their mothers through childhood. There is research that suggests that father absence may increase aggressiveness in girls and perhaps allow them to develop less traditionally feminine sex roles. (LBG)

"'Daddy's Gone to War': Father Absence and Its Differential Effects on America's Homefront Girls and Boys During the Second World War--and After"

(Presented at the Eighth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey, June 9, 1990)

by

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"Dear Mr. Roosevelt," wrote Patsy Fisher," a 12-year-old girl from Racine, Wisconsin. "I am just a common ordinary school girl and so are my friends. But we feel that all the women in the woman[']s army need assistants to help them." The girl assistants would wear uniforms and, after receiving the same training as the WACs, would be shipped to battle stations overseas. "If you say O.K.," Patsy concluded, "and we get shipped across we may be in the same predicament as some of the men but we don't care.... We looked at all the angles. We want to give up everything we have for our country[,] even our lives if we have to."[1]

I had planned to talk this morning about girl warriors on the homefront such as Patsy Fisher, but, like Patsy, I too have a predicament. At this very moment, I am awaiting what I hope will be a deluge of letters from America's homefront girls, who are women now in their late 40s and 50s. I have recently written to a score of women's magazines: "The child's perspective seldom

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[1] Patsy Fisher, Racine, Wisconsin, to "Mr. Roosevelt," November 25, 1942, copy made available to me by Ms. Margaret Baker, Department of German, University of Kansas. During the war girls did attend "Junior WAC Camps" where they were given military ranks. "The youngest girls and the first to come to camp were called buck privates, but as they proved their helpfulness, they were moved up the scale to private first class, corporal, and sergeant." There were also Junior WAFS, WAVES, and SPARS: "Some Wartime Programs for Girls," Recreation, 38 (April 1944), 23, 51.

appears in history. This is especially true for American girls.... This was an important time for American girls-- a time when soldier fathers were absent from the family and when mothers went to work in factories. It was a time when girls supported the war effort both at home and in scrap-collection and bond drives. In my research, an important question has occurred to me: Can you remember ways in which the homefront experiences of girls differed from those of boy, and vice versa?"

As I have said, I hope that readers of these magazines are, even as I speak, placing their poignant homefront recollections in the mail to me. Without the benefit of those letters, however, I will deal with another topic in which gender played a role: father absence.

This is a risky topic because it is speculative as well as so highly personal. Yet it is precisely because this topic is controversial that I wanted to talk about it with this group of feminist scholars. I would like to hear your ideas concerning the impact of a father's wartime absence on a child's identity, particularly on a girl's identity. Although the issue of identity is central to human development, there is a void in the literature. In the father-absence research done on America's homefront children, precious little attention has been paid to girls. During the war years the published cases focused almost exclusively on boys' efforts to deal with father absence. These

articles were entitled "A Boy Needs a Man," "What Shall I Tell Him?" and "Sons of Victory."[2] No article on father absence asked, "What Shall I Tell Her?" Likewise, what little postwar research has been done on the lifespan results of father absence for the homefront children has generally examined boys, but not girls.

This morning, I would, first, like to present primary evidence which I have found about the variety of children's experiences with father absence. This evidence suggests that for many of America's homefront girls and boys, the operative problem was not father absence per se, but rather 1) father return and 2) the manner in which the mother dealt with the absence in the interim. Second, I will explore the psychological research which has been done, almost all of it, as I have said, focusing on the homefront boys. Third, I will take these results, look at them through the insightful lenses provided us by feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, and see if we can arrive at a better understanding of the effects of father absence both then and throughout the life course. Finally, and in lieu of a conclusion regarding the impact of father absence on daughters, I would like to hear your thoughts.

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[2] Anne Kelton, "A Boy Needs a Man," Parents' Magazine, 18 (April 1943), 31, 96; Peggy Robbins, "What Shall I Tell Him?" Parents' Magazine, 19 (April 1944), 21, 94; Floyd B. Nichols, "Sons of Victory," Hygeia, 22 (October 1944), 748-49, 799.

To begin, one must recognize that father absence is more complicated than it appears. As one psychological expert in the field has written:

> Children growing up in a single-parent home headed by the mother may be affected by any of the following: the altered family structure and consequent differences in maternal role behavior; ... the presence of surrogate caregivers associated with the mother's employment; or qualitatively different maternal behavior vis-a-vis the child because of the emotional meaning the father's absence has to her. There are many other factors which also may operate either singly or in concert with each other, allowing absolutely no possibilty for delineating the "true" causal agents on the child's development.3

Girls' first-person testimony about the war years, which I have garnered from interviews and from letters written to me, not only bears this out, but also validates the contention that often the real problem was not father absence, but the manner in which the mother responded to this absence.4 And here, as one might

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[3] F. A. Pederson, "Does Research on Children Reared in Father-Absent Families Yield Information on Father Influence?" The Family Coordinator, 25 (1976), 459-64; quoted in Ross D. Parke, Fathers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 59-60.

[4] See John A. Clausen, "American Research on the Family and Socialization," Children Today, 46 (1978), 7-10.

expect, the variety was wide. Some wives were happy for the space afforded them. Eleven per cent of the wives in a wartime study of Iowa farm families "welcomed the separation as a release from an intolerable marital situation or as an opportunity to think through an unsatisfactory relationship."[5] But other wives were devastated. One little girl, Leona, born in 1940, recalled that "beginning on the first night Dad left ... my mother had awakened me with her crying. I can remember going into her room and stroking her forehead while telling her every thing would be all right, that Daddy would be home as soon as he could. I became what I was to remain for the rest of my mother's life--her daughter, her best friend and, in a sense, her mother."[6]

Another girl, Lois, born in 1937, remembered her mother not as a woman needing comfort and support, but as a heroic person. Her mother worked on the flight line at an aircraft factory, and her mother's skin was "burned deep tan from the reflection of the summer sun and the aluminum." When Lois's father joined the Army in 1942, her mother had taken a job at the Boeing plant near Atlanta. Eventually Lois and her younger brother went to live with their grandparents on a farm north of Nashville. Every few weeks, their mother would ride the bus to visit. The bus stopped at a nearby town, and Lois recalled that her mother would walk

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[5] Ruth Shonle Cavan, The American Family (New York: Crowell, 1953), 553.

[6] Letter to the author from Leona G., Dayton, Ohio, April 12, 1990.

"out to the farm, about 5-6 miles[,] sometimes late at night." Being "a very pretty woman," she carried a pearl-handled revolver "to discourage persistent types who wanted to give her a ride."7

During the war, many mothers and children moved in with grandparents, who sometimes became surrogate parents while the mothers' influence ceded in importance. Tutti, born in September 1942, was her Grandpa's darling. The little girl's father had been inducted into the army when she was just ten days old, but Grandpa had promised his son-in-law that "he would take care of his baby while he was gone. And that he did!," becoming not only her protector, but also her buddy, bundling her up on Saturday afternoons and, as she recalled, taking "me to town ... to show me off and buy me ice cream." When Tutti's father returned two and a-half years later, "he was sure that I was spoiled and that I needed him to straighten me out."8

Being more aware now of post-stress syndrome because of veterans' suffering after the Vietnam War, we can be more understanding of some of the readjustment problems experienced by the returning fathers. Flashbacks to the battlefield, nightmares, feelings of alienation or anger, depression and loneliness, alcohol problems--all of these also beset the Second

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[7] Letter to the author from Lois B. Heyde, Newtown, Connecticut, April 19, 1990.

[8] Letter to the author from Tutti Knowles, Fort Meyers, Florida, March 1990.

World War veterans. Those closest to the veterans knew this; wives, children, other relatives, and friends fully appreciated the trauma as well as the joy in the return of the veterans. Hollywood understood, too. The Academy Award-winning film for 1946 was The Best Years of Our Lives, the painful story of the readjustments of three veterans.

But some of these adjustment problems did not make the front page or the silver screen; instead, they were the subjects of whispered rumors. The topic was illegitimacy. Some of the fathers returned to children of whose presence they had been totally unaware until they returned home from the war. Sometimes these children looked quite unlike their siblings. In one case, a white child was much taller and stockier than his siblings. Likewise, in a black family, the child had facial features that differed from his older sister and brother who had been born prior to the Pearl Harbor attack. In these situations, the father's options were to leave his wife and family; to send the child to an orphanage; to remain in the family but ignore or abuse the child; or to accept the child as his own.

Even if the father stayed, however, other problems arose, such as the birth of another child. Arthur L. Rautman, the clinical psychologist, has written that in such cases, "the family circle will then consist of the father, the mother, and the new baby, with no place for the war baby." The older child

would become, in Rautman's terminology, "an extra-familial child."9

There was another cause of "extra-familial" children; it occurred even when the war-born child was the father's progeny. Rautman, who worked with veterans, reported that, to his surprise, he found that a "recurring difficulty ... when a veteran returned to his war-bride ... was a tormenting doubt that the child he found with her was indeed his own offspring."10

As these examples show, for some families the most traumatic wartime event--though ostensibly the happiest one--was the return home of the soldier or sailor father. Readjustment was difficult for these infants, for example, the "war-born children" who had been born while the fathers were overseas. In these cases, as Lois Meek Stolz explained in her book Father Relations of War-Born Children, the fathers and children had never before laid eyes on each other. According to Stolz, children in these families "showed less tendency to aggression than the children

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9 Anonymous interviews; Arthur L. Rautman, St. Petersburg, Florida, to the author, March 18, 1990; Rautman, "Children of War Marriages," Survey Midmonthly, 80 (July 1944), 198-99; with Edna Brower, "War Themes in Children's Stories," Journal of Psychology, 19 (Janaury 1945), 191-202; with Edna Brower, "War Themes in Children's Stories: II. Six years Later," Journal of Psychology, 31 (January 1951), 263-70. The situation of the "extra-familial child" also occurred when the father left the family, the mother remarried, and the couple had their own child, who was preferred by the stepfather over the war baby.

10 Rautman to the author, March 18, 1990.

whose fathers were at home," the reason being that while father was away, home life had been quieter and less punitive with mother in charge of decorum and discipline.11

Unlike the "war-born" babies who had never before seen their fathers, there was a group of infants who had spent some time with their fathers, but only briefly and under trying circumstances. Called by Arthur Rautman the "Bureau-Drawer-Crib Babies," these tiny children had become "camp followers" along with their mothers, living in bureau drawers in a series of tiny rented rooms until one day the father was shipped overseas. Like other "extra-familial" children, in peacetime they ran the risk of becoming "strangers in their own families, often overworked as kitchen maids or choreboys, called upon to help raise a succession of younger brothers and sisters...."12

School-age children, those homefront girls and boys born during the 1930s, were not immune to the consequences of father absence. George R. Bach, a psychologist who studied children from 6 to 10 years old immediately after the war, found that the child whose soldier father was away constructed an idealized conception of "Daddy," due, in part, to the mother's glowing

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11 Lois Meek Stolz et al., Father Relations of War-Born Children (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954); Stolz, "The Effect of Mobilization and War on Children," Social Casework, 32 (April 1951), 146.

12 Rautman to the author, March 18, 1990; Rautman, "Children of War Marriages," 199.

accounts of the uniformed man whose photograph adorned the mantle. But, as Bach understood, "The stereotyped, idealistic fantasy picture ... may initially be a handicap in the re-establishment of a realistic father-child relationship." Not only would there be disappointment, but also resentment and anger as "the father's resumption of domination and authority would certainly come in conflict with the child's idealistic expectations."13

Studies of father's perceptions of their familial roles hold that most fathers believe that their primary functions are 1) to discipline the children and 2) to enforce what they consider to be appropriate sex-role behavior.14 For fathers returning after several years in a military environment in which they either gave orders, or promptly and unquestioningly obeyed them, there seemed little doubt that their sons and daughters should respond to them as buck privates had to first sergeants.

So far, the topics which I have discussed are not necessarily gender-specific. While there are germane studies in developmental psychology, these offer clues as to gender's significance only in the lives of boys whose fathers were absent during the war. Girls then, as Anne Scott has written, were

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13 Bach, "Father-Fantasies and Father-Typing in Father-Separated Children," Child Development, 17 (March-June 1946), 78.

14 Parke, Fathers, 56-63.

"invisible."[15] Still, these studies are provocative. Conducted almost 20 years after the war, this research probed the possible outcomes of father absence for the homefront boys. For its data, it analyzed the scores on Scholastic Aptitude Tests taken by these boys, as high school seniors, 14 and 15 years later.

One of these articles, by Lyn Carlsmith, focused on freshmen men of the Harvard classes of 1963 and 1964. The young men in her samples were boys born between 1941 and 1945. Her father-absent group consisted of students whose fathers went away before their sons were six months old and were away for at least two years. A matched sample consisted of students whose fathers were not in the service.[16]

Carlsmith cited contemporary studies on Math and Verbal aptitudes which demonstrated that, on standardized tests, "females are generally superior to males in Verbal areas, while males are superior to females in quantitative pursuits, particularly numerical reasoning." These studies suggested to Carlsmith that there were two styles of conceptualization: "an 'analytical approach' which is characterized by clear discrimination between stiumli, a direct pursuit of solutions,

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[15] Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," Journal of American History, 71 (June 1984), 7-21.

[16] Lyn Carlsmith, "Effect of Early Father Absence on Scholastic Aptitude," Harvard Educational Review, 34 (Winter 1964), 3-21.

and a disregard for extraneous material; a 'global approach,' characterized by less clear discrimination of stimuli and a greater influence from extraneous material. The first approach," Carlsmith wrote, "is more typically used by boys while the second is more typical of girls."17

While Carlsmith did not mention Melanie Klein and "object relations," or Jean Piaget and "moral development," in discussing these analystical styles, scholars writing in the aftermath of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan would definitely want to do so. In recent years, scholars have contrasted mother-daughter bonds with mother-son bonds. According to their insights, girls derive their basic sense of identity from experiencing themselves as like their mothers. Consciously and unconsciously, they emulate their mothers' behavior, and throughout childhood they continue to identify with the same-sex parent who was their first love object. Boys, on the other hand, develop a male-gender identity that depends upon seeing themselves as different from their mothers, and requiring separation from them. Following the thesis that the girl child experiences herself relationally, Chodorow has written: "The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate." Accordingly, males tend to base their identity on ideals of autonomy and individual success, while females tend to base theirs on attachment, intimacy in personal relationships,

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17 Ibid., 17.

and on subordinating their success to the care of others.18

Viewed through the lenses provided by these scholars, I believe that Carlsmith's findings take on fresh meaning. Accordingly, it is noteworthy that in examining these SAT scores, Carlsmith found that while the father-present boys achieved predictably higher Math than Verbal scores, the father-absent boys achieved the opposite result. Their test performance was similar to the pattern typically achieved by girls. Moreover, Carlsmith found that "the relative superiority of Verbal to Math aptitude increases steadily the longer the father is absent and the younger the child is when the father left."19

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18 Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 169; Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Mary Field Belensky et al., Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Mary M. Brabeck, editor, Who Cares? Theory, Research, and Educational Implications of the Ethic of Care (New York: Praeger, 1989).

Some feminist scholars have been critical of Gilligan's scholarship and its implications and have warned others to be circumspect in applying its insights to other fields: Linda K. Kerber et al., "On In a Different Voice: An Interdisciplinary Forum," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 11 (Winter 1986), 304-33; Eleanor Maccoby, "Gender and Relationships: A Developmental Account," American Psychologist, 45 (April 1990), 513-20. For historians, a most helpful article is Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review, 91 (December 1986), 1061-63, 1065.

19 Carlsmith, "Effect of Early Father Absence on Scholastic Aptitude," 10.

Carlsmith explained that the purpose of her research was to "provide evidence relevant to any general theory of identification by showing certain strong effects of father absence at various ages." As a premise, she argued that "Theories of identification, whatever their form, usually agree on two points: for the boy to identify successfully with the father, the father must be present during at least some portion of the boy's childhood; development of an appropriate masculine identity or self-concept is predicated upon the success of this early identification with the father." Carlsmith borrowed her explanatory framework from John W. M Whiting's theory of cross-sex identification.20

There is no doubt, I think, that standardized national tests, including the SAT, have historically been culture-bound, having been written essentially for white, middle-class males. In the 1960 SAT test booklet itself, the one used by these 17 and 18-year-old men, it stated: "In general girls do less well than boys on the Mathematical parts of the test and should not be surprised if their Mathematical scores are noticeably lower than their Verbal." Clearly, this attitude was not a scientific fact, but a social and cultural construct, which in turn was in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. As proof of this, in recent years the gaps between men and women on the mathematical problems and between women and men on the verbal

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20 Ibid., 3-4.

problems have been disappearing. In 1989 Marcia C. Linn and Janet S. Hyde argued that gender differences reported in 1974 in Math "now are so small as to be negligible."21

Still, there is no denying Carlsmith's statistical finding that the among father-absent boys in her sample of these home-front children, "early and long separation from the father results in relatively greater ability in Verbal areas than in Mathematics."22 Moreover, when updated by feminist insights,

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21 Ibid., 16; Gita Z. Wilder and Kristin Powell, Sex Differences in Test Performance: A Survey of the Literature (New York: College Entrance Examination Board [Report No. 89-3], 1989); "In Math Ability, Differences Between Sexes Disappearing" and Jean Evangelauf, "Critics and Defenders of Admission Tests Eye Court's Limit on Use," both in Chronicle of Higher Education, 35 (February 15, 1989), A1, A10, A32; Jean Evangelauf, "SAT Called a 'Defective Product' That Is Biased Against Women," Chronicle of Higer Education, 35 (May 3, 1989), A3; Laura Mansnerus, "The S.A.T. Puzzle," New York Times, August 6, 1989. For another perspective, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Self-Defeating Feminism: Silly Charges Against the Scholatic Aptitude Test," New York Times, May 9, 1989.

22 Carlsmith, "Effect of Early Father Absence on Scholastic Aptitude," 16.

A related article, written by Edward A. Nelsen and Eleanor E. Maccoby, reported on males entering Stanford University in 1959 and 1960--that is, the classes of 1963 and 1964. Their findings reinforced those of Carlsmith, including that, for boys, "it was found that a high-verbal, low-mathematics pattern was associated with reports of father absence, punishment exclusively by the mother, fear of father, and reports of having been a "mamma's boy" or "daddy's boy": Nelsen and Maccoby, "The Relationship between Social Development and Differential Abilities on the Scholastic Aptitude Test," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 12 (October 1966), 269-84.

Other psychological studies done of father absence buttress the points made by Carlsmith and others. For example, David B. Lynn provided validation when he stated that "the process of identification" followed the "laws of learning." While both

Carlsmith's research is helpful to historians of gender and gender relations. If one posits the hypothesis that cross-sex typing is a result of learning by imitation, one can test this view by looking at research in the other social sciences. A heart-rending example can be found in an observational study, reported by a sociologist, of a girl and a boy playing house in a front yard:

> The little girl was very busy sweeping up the play area, rearranging furniture, moving dishes about, and caring for baby dolls. The boy, on the other hand, would leave the play area on his tricycle, disappear to

female and male infants learned to identify with the mothers, "Boys, but not girls, must shift from this initital identification with the mother to masculine identification." Lynn thus provided a helpful explanation for children's adoption of sex roles when he stated: "Males tend to identify with the cultural stereotypes of the masculine role, whereas females tend to identify with aspects of their own mothers' role specifically": Lynn, "A Note on Sex Differences in the Development of Masculine and Feminine Identification," Psychological Review, 66 (March 1959), 126-35.

Beatrice B. Whiting has written that in some cases father absence produces "protest masculinity" (compulsive reaction formation), explaining that violent and aggressive behavior plus concern over masculinity validates the status-envy hypothesis of identification: "Sex Identity Conflict and Physical Violence: A Comparative Study," American Anthropologist, 67 (December 1965), 123-40.

Perhaps learned gender differences have narrowed in recent years because of changes in family structure. Marybeth Shinn, who conducted a study in the late 1970s of single-parent families in which, usually, the father was absent, found that among the children, sex-role identification did not play an important role in cognitive development: Marybeth Shinn, "Father Absence and Children's Cognitive Development," Psychological Bulletin, 85 (1978), 295-324.

> the back of the (real) house, remain for a brief while, reappear in the play area, and lie down in a feigned sleep. The little girl had a rather extensive knowledge of the mother role, but, for the boy, a father was one who disappeared, reappeared, and slept, ad infinitum![23]

Now if the little boy got wise, he would park his tricycle and come inside the house--to join his mother and enjoy her company, to learn some household tasks and quite possibly be rewarded with cookies and milk. This might eventually lead to cross-sex typing, for a little boy.

But what about the little girl, the one who is already in the kitchen with her same-sex parent? How did father absence affect daughters? Did they engage in cross-sex typing and identify with an idealized father? Or, if boys identified with the feminine side of mother, did the father-absent girls tend to identify with her more "masculine" side: independent, self-possessed, and capably running the family on her own? Or, yet

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[23] Gregory P. Stone, "The Play of Little Children," in R. E. Herron and Brian Sutton-Smith, eds., Child's Play (New York: John Wiley, 1971), 11. The same scenario is now the basis of a popular television advertisment for Allstate Insurance. The little boy, wearing a man's fedora even, leaves his home made of cardboard boxes and peddles his toy car around the block for hours before Dad finally pulls the family car into the driveway after a long day at the office. When Dad parks his car and walks toward his son, the boy says--echoing what he has doubtless heard many times from his father--"What a day!"

again, perhaps with a mother who felt victimized and was isolated and lonely in the absence of her husband?[24]

This has been a difficult paper for me to write, since I was a father-absent boy myself during the war. One finding on which the psychologists, not to mention the psychoanalysts, agree is that age or stage of development, whether called preschool age or oedipal stage, is the crucial factor mediating the effects of

[24] There has been some psychological and pop-psychologcal speculation based on the supposed "feminization" of these father-absent boys and the decline of paternal authority in their lives.

The historian--if operating prudently and with full recognition of the limitations of her or his data--can make good use of psychological research. At the same time, the use of this literature to illuminate historical change can be highly frustrating. First, some developmentalists are hostile to such an approach. They contend--quite correctly--that historians--especially psychohistorians--leave the evidence far behind in positing unprovable--and sometimes ridiculous--theses. Such theses are ahistorical as well. An example related to father absence during the Second World War was published in 1986 (Donald B. Rinsley, "The Adolescent, the Family, and the Culture of Narcissism: A Psychosocial Commentary," Adolescent Psychiatry, 13 [1986], 24). Its author wrote:

> I relate the social upheavals of the 1960s in substantial measure to the attainment of adolescence and young adulthood of the damaged offspring of wartime families, antecedent to which had been the more extended erosion of masculine authority and leadership during the Depression years. The various rights 'movements' of the last quarter-century symbolized challenges to the attenuated authority of the white male, the symbolic plantation owner, by assorted minority subgroups who perceived opportunities to get for themselves what they believed the symbolic Simon Legrees had long denied them. The associated vacuum of national leadership found graphic expression in the nation's post-World War II military opertations: the ill-starred ... "police action" in Korea, the failed action at the Cuban Bay of Pigs, and, last and most horrendous, the debacle of Vietnam...."

father absence. Ross Parke has described these findings in his book Fathers. "Boys who had been separated from their fathers before the age of 5 were more dependent on their peers and less assertive. They played fewer rough physical contact sports.... Instead they chose reading, drawing, or working on puzzles.... In contrast, if the father was available until 6 years of age, his later departure did not have this effect." These boys, Parke explained, "behaved in these areas the same as boys raised in intact homes."25

Because of the variable of age--a variable which, by the way, has been terribly overlooked by historians of social change--the topic of father absence is one to which I feel very close. In early 1943, my father left home to join the Army. He was 38 at the time. I was 5 and 1/2. My siblings were a sister 8 1/2 and a brother who was 2 1/2 at time. The variation in ages of the children in my family, when combined with my father's 2 1/2-year absence from home, have, I believe, resulted in very different outcomes for the three of us, a major difference between my younger brother and me being that he is gay and I am straight. In other words, it is important not only what happens in a child's life, but at what age these events occur.

At this point, the historian needs to ask herself a question: In the absence of research done on the homefront

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25 Parke, Fathers, 57.

girls, can one, legitimately, turn to the research done in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s on father absence's effects on daughters? Can one extrapolate or infer about an earlier historical period based on research done at a later time? At the very least, can the historian gain insights which will broaden and deepen our understanding of social change and individual development? The answer, I believe, is "Yes," but again there is the problem that most of the research has been done on the father-son relationship, followed by studies of the mother-son and mother-daughter relationships. "The role of the father in the development of his daughter," a psychologist has written, "seems to have received the least attention."[26]

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[26] Marshall L. Hamilton, Father's Influence on Children (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), 79. Another problem is that the studies that have been done of father-daughter relations contradict each other. Some studies contend that the fathers of highly feminine girls were more masculine than the fathers of less feminine girls, since the masculine fathers encouraged what they presumed to be sex-appropriate behavior. Another concludes that "fathers who are highly nurturant enhance masculinity in sons and feminity in daughters." Yet other studies assert the opposite, contending that girls who described themselves as self-confident identified with the "instrumental" side of the father whereas "the expressive mother-identified females" described themselves "as considerate, fearful, gentle, silent, submissive, and trusting." Female homosexuality also has been a subject of conflicting interpretations. At one time, psychologists asserted that lesbianism resulted from a girls' overly strong identification with the father. But an English study comparing homosexual and heterosexual women found that gay women, in referring to their fathers, "used the items expressing love and approval less often, and used items expressing hostility and disapproval more often, saw the father as more frightening and described the father as lower in competence and strength of personality" than the mother: Paul Mussen and E. Rutherford, "Parent-Child Relations and Parental Personality in Relation to Young Children's Sex-Role Preferences," Child Development, 34 (1963), 589-607; E. Bene, "On the Genesis of Female Homosexuality," British Journal of Psychiatry, 111 (1965), 815-

But there are helpful tidbits, to be sure. I have been able to find one study involving the homefront girls. Done in early 1945, the research focused on doll play as an indicator of aggression. The children were three, four, and five years old, and all were enrolled in child-care centers. Half were girls, half boys; half of the children lived in father-present households, the other half in father-absent families, in most cases with the father serving in the armed services. "Boys from father-absent homes," the study concluded, "portrayed much less fantasy aggression than boys from father-present homes." But the reverse was true for girls, with those from father-absent homes portraying slightly "more aggression than girls from father-present homes."27

Helpful too is research done in the 1970s pointing out that "girls whose mothers work (contrary to the feminine sex-role stereotype) develop less traditionally feminine sex roles

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21; A. B. Heilbrun, "Sex Differences in Identification Learning," Journal of Genetic Psychology, 106 (1965), 185-93; Heilbrun, "Sex Role, Instrumental-Expressive Behavior, and Psychopathology in Females,"Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 73 (1968), 131-36; Heilbrun, "Sex-Role Identity in Adolescent Females: A Theoretical Paradox," Adolescence, 3 (1968), 79-88; D. B. Lynn, "Fathers and Sex-Role Development," The Family Coordinator, 25 (1976), 403-10; Michael E. Lamb, "Paternal Influences and the Father's Role: A Personal Perspective," American Psychologist, 34 (October 1979), 938-43.

[27] Robert R. Sears et al., "Effect of Father Separation on Preschool Children's Doll Play Aggression," Child Development, 17 (December 1946), 242; Robert R. Sears, Stanford University, to the author, April 19, 1989.

themselves."[28] I have never doubted that this was also true for the daughters of "Rosie the Riveter." I have wondered how many of them became activists in the rebirth of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970 it seemed that Gerda Lerner might have had these homefront girls in mind, too, when she wrote: "It was left to the college-age daughters born of the World War II generation to furnish the womanpower for the new feminist revolution.... They felt personally cheated by the unfulfilled promises of legal and economic equality." Many were Baby-Boomers, but many too were born in the later 1930s and during the war years; perhaps homefront events involving father absence and mother working first awakened their questioning of sex roles.[29]

At this point--and in conclusion--I would like to single out the experiences of one father-absent girl. You will be interested in her experiences, I think, because when she grew up she became an important historian, not to mention a committed person who has acted on her progressive political beliefs both in her life and through her scholarship and teaching. In fact, she is here with us in New Brunswick at the Berks.

Born in 1943, she has talked with me about her father:

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[28] Edward F. Zigler et al., Socialization and Personality Development (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 60.

[29] Lerner, "The Feminists: A Second Look," Columbia Forum, (Fall 1970), 26.

There was this kind of thing between us that I have always thought as having started almost from the moment that he saw me. The way that he conceived the issue, I think, all along and still does was that my mother loved us kids more than she loved him. We were his rivals for her attention and she was a good mother, but a bad wife. That is what he perceived.

As a baby during the war she was in danger of becoming an "extra-familial child" when her father--a serviceman--asked her mother "to come and be with him and live with him on the base where he was and leave me behind. She did not want to do that," so mother and daughter followed him to his duty station.

When her father was reassigned, she and her mother moved in with her grandparents, who were "really loving" and adored her. (She, like several other father-absent girls who have shared their memories with me, recalled this as a very happy time in her life.)

But then the war was over, and then:

He came home and he thought I was a spoiled brat. He thought that children should be seen and not heard. He thought you should not pick children up when they cried. It was a big thing. This tension started between my mother and

father that only increased over the years....

There were disagreements, too, over food and crying:

> He just could not understand that little children don't understand. He thought you could just tell them to behave.... There would always be some crisis over me. I wouldn't eat all my food or something. He would leave. I would be crying. My mother would be crying. We would lie down on the bed together and cry.

The relationship between father and daughter became a test of wills. Years later, when as a graduate student she read Erik Erikson on the life cycle, she recalled thinking "that at age two you assert yourself. My father could not stand it."

And what was the legacy for this girl turned historian? For one thing, in her writings she has focused on tests of will, on women's struggles against racism and on families' struggles to maintain their way of life in the face of brutalizing capitalism and industrialization.

"It seemed to me," she said, "that it was this [matter of] will. I thought of this as definitely in my work. I feel like my work almost always revolves around women asserting their will against the effort" to suppress it.

Do her experiences resonate with any of you here?

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my paper.