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Fears and the presence of imaginary companions and personified objects in preschool children

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FEARS AND THE PRESENCE OF IMAGINARY COMPANIONS AND PERSONIFIED OBJECTS IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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FEARS AND THE PRESENCE OF IMAGINARY COMPANIONS AND PERSONIFIED OBJECTS IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between a pre-school child's fears and the child's use of an imaginary companion or personified object. Preschool-aged children (36 To 74 months) were interviewed using a revised version of the FSSC-R fear scale, and an imaginary companion questionnaire. Parents were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. Data analyses revealed that children who did not have an imaginary companion or a personified object had an absolute higher total fear score than children who had this type of figure, although this difference was not significant. Children with the lowest absolute total fear score had an imaginary companion only. No gender differences were found for presence of an imaginary companion or total fear score. But more girls than boys reported having a personified object. Of those children who reported an imaginary companion, over 60% had a companion of the same sex. No age differences were found in the incidence of imaginary companions, personified objects, or total fear score. More first-born and only children reported an imaginary companion. These findings were discussed in relation to previous studies and the use of fantasy to counteract fear.

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CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

The creation of imaginary friends during the preschool years is a fascinating topic and one that has been studied in one form or another since 1934 (Taylor, Cartwright, & Carlson, 1993). Imaginary friends are mental constructions by the child and may take the form of humans, animals, toys, or television characters. The reported incidence of imaginary companions ranges from 13 to 80%, but most estimates have been between 18 and 30% (Seiffge-Krenke, 1997). Many different aspects of this phenomenon have been explored. These include, among others, why some children create pretend friends and others do not, the characteristics of the children who create them, the characteristics of the imaginary companions, family correlates of the children who have imaginary companions, and the effect of having an imaginary companion on development (Taylor, 1999).

Few studies have explored the relationship between a child's fears and the presence of imaginary companions. However, previous studies (Singer & Singer, 1990) have looked at fear and a child's use of fantasy to overcome fears. Children's descriptions of many imaginary companions suggest that their creation was motivated, partly, by the need to master a particular fear. Children may create a ghost who is afraid of the dark because they are afraid of the dark, or a tiger that is afraid of animals (Taylor, 1999). This creation of an imaginary companion, and the fantasy play associated with it, is thought to be a much healthier way to combat fears than avoidance.

The aim of the proposed study was to explore the relationship between a child's fears and whether or not a child has an imaginary companion. Some children did not report having an imaginary companion, but reported having a special toy, blanket, or doll that they name, carry, and/or talk to (i.e., a personified object). The relationship between a child's fears and whether or not they had a personified object, and if children who report having an imaginary companion or personified object use these entities when they are scared, (i.e. talk to the imaginary companion when they are scared, or hold the personified object) was also examined.

Review of the Literature

Fear and children

As children grow and mature they pass through various developmental stages and phases. An anxiety-producing time for both children and parents is when the child begins imagining that fearful events and injury will befall him/her-usually beginning around the age of 3 and continuing to age 5 or beyond (Ollendick, King, & Frary, 1989). What seems perfectly safe to an adult can look dangerous and harmful to small children. A child's own father becomes a monster when shaving cream covers his face. Even mother can become a stranger with a new haircut, style or clothes.

Fear is the state or condition of being afraid or apprehensive when exposed to threatening stimuli (Ollendick & King, 1991). Both fear and anxiety are emotional responses, but fear is more specific to an object or situation whereas anxiety can be more widespread or general. All children experience fear during their development; it is a part of normal development, which serves to ensure children's safety and their survival. For

example, it is easy to see that a "healthy" fear of heights, snakes, or the sight of blood is appropriate and adaptive. Usually, these fears are mild, age-specific, and transitory. Children experience a wide variety of "normal" fears over their development and these fears appear to be related to their level of cognitive development. Many fears are transitory, appear in children of similar age, and generally do not interfere with everyday functioning. Normal developmental fears provide children with a means of adapting to various life stressors (Morris & Kratochwill, 1983). Although fear is a natural part of a child's normal development, sometimes fears may become exaggerated, occur more frequently, and be inappropriate.

Fear is a pattern of three types of reactions to a stimulus of perceived threat, 1) motor reactions, such as avoidance, escape, and tentative approach; 2) subjective reactions, such as verbal reports of discomfort, distress, and terror; and 3) physiological reactions, such as heart palpitations, profuse sweating, and rapid breathing (Mash & Barkley, 1989). Children vary in the exact make-up of their fear and anxiety reactions to a given context, and because of the varying task demands of different contexts; the exact make-up of a given child's fear and anxiety reactions varies from one threatening stimulus to another. Many physical symptoms or responses are associated with fear in children (Mash & Barkley, 1989). These fear and anxiety reactions include uncontrollable crying, nausea, bowel disturbance, headache, fever, insomnia, feelings of terror or panic, changes in respiration, dizziness, palpitations, breathlessness, and complete immobility. For example, bedtime fear might be apparent with an increase in

nightmares. A fear of rejection might result in a withdrawal from activities and people. Fears can be found at a variety of ages, including adulthood.

Over the past 50 years, studies have shown that all children have a large number of fears and anxieties. These fears and anxieties change with age, as does the frequency of experiencing fear-producing stimuli. Bauer (1976) found that the main fear-producing stimuli for pre-schoolers and first graders are animals, darkness, parental separation and abandonment, supernatural beings such as monsters and ghosts, and natural phenomena such as thunder and lightening. Older elementary school children (ages 8-13) continue to fear natural phenomena such as earthquakes, tornadoes, thunder, and lightening; but most of their fears and anxieties, center around school-, health-, and home-related events. School events include test taking, poor grades, rejection by classmates, and reprimand by the principal. Health events include physical injury and illness, death, and medical procedures. Among the home events are parental conflicts and parental punishment (Ollendick, 1983). Two key factors thought to contribute to children's fears are maturity level and emotional susceptibility. According to Ollendick (1983) shows that 25 percent of fears in 2-year-olds were caused by loud noises, while only 3 percent of 12-year-olds had these fears. Children outgrow some fears, but become more emotionally susceptible to others. For example, fear of strangers may decline as a fear of monsters rises. Table A (Gebeke, 1993) shows the most common fears among children ages 6 months to five years.

Table A
Most common early childhood fears

6 months	Stranger anxiety
8 months	Separation from parent, falling
1 year	Separation from parent, noises, animals, bath, doctor
2 years	Separation from parent, toilet training, bath, bedtime, doctor
3 years	Loss of parent, toilet training, bedtime, monsters and ghosts, anyone who looks different than family, e.g., disability, beard, different skin color, etc.
4 years	Noises, animals, bedtime, monsters and ghosts, people who look different than family, loss of parent, death, divorce
5 years	Noises, animals, monsters and ghosts, getting lost, going to daycare, loss of parent, death, injury, divorce

With adolescents, fears and anxieties related to school events, personal adequacy, and physical illness are most salient. Economic, political, and sexual matters are also possible sources of great concern and worry (Kirkpatrick, 1984). Older children begin to show more realistic and specific fears, like fears of failure and criticism. In a study by Bauer (1976), younger children reported that the appearance of the monster itself was sufficient to induce fear, while that older children imputed harmful actions to the monster (e.g., "They wanted to cut off my head").

The fears and anxieties in children vary with gender, socioeconomic status, and age. Girls tend to have more fears and anxieties than boys (Kirkpatrick, 1985), and girls tend to differ in the types of fears and anxieties they experience. Fears of animals and physical injury and illness are more common among girls than boys, and fears of economic and academic failure are more common among boys than girls (Kirkpatrick,

1984). Boys are more concerned about illness and getting good grades, whereas girls are more concerned about getting lost in a strange place and snakes (Ollendick, King, & Frary, 1989). But, it is not clear that girls actually *have* more fears than boys (Ollendick & King, 1991). Boys may be less likely to acknowledge their fears than girls because of the stigma attached to such self-reports. On the other hand, girls may be more likely to report the full extent of their fears than boys.

Children of lower socioeconomic status report more fears than their higher socioeconomic counterparts. Children from lower-income families are similar to children from middle-income families in the frequency of their fears and anxieties, but dissimilar in the targets of their fears and anxieties (Nalven, 1970). Both groups fear animals. But, lower-income children tend to be frightened of rats and roaches, whereas middle-income children are more frightened of poisonous insects. Both of these groups also fear economic misfortune, but lower-income children fear not having the necessities while middle-income children worry about less essential items.

Ollendick, King, and Frary (1989) examined reported fears in children, and found that eight of the ten most feared objects or situations were the same regardless of age: being hit by a car or truck, unable to breathe, bombing attacks, fire/getting burned, falling from a high place, a burglar breaking into their house, earthquakes, and death. Overall, King, Molloy, Heyne, Murphy, & Ollendick, (1998) found that children and adolescents between 7 and 16 years of age reported realistic and specific fears and that eight of the top ten fears were the same across this age range. Additional fears reported by younger

children were separation and punishment, whereas those of the older children and adolescents were social-evaluative.

Specifically, during the third and fourth years, fears of the dark, being left alone, small animals and insects emerge. Fears of wild animals, ghosts and monsters come to the foreground during the fifth to sixth years; and fears of school, supernatural evens and physical danger emerge in the seventh and eighth years. During the ninth to eleventh years, social fears and fears of war, health, bodily injury, and school performance become more prominent.

Researchers (e.g. Gebeke, 1993) distinguish between two types of fears, fluid and fixed. A fluid fear is one that comes and goes. If the fear changes from week to week or remains for a limited period and begins to fade away, it can be considered normal and fluid. A fixed fear is one that remains or may even intensify. Fixed fears may require a lot of patience to work through, and may even require special attention from a professional. Fixed fears could also be considered phobias.

Childhood fears are often divided into four groups. Some of these fears are integral for the cognitive and affective development of the child. Unless a child carries any of these fears throughout his/her adulthood, his/her parents do not need to be concerned.

1. Specific animal fears.

This fear usually occurs between three to five years of age. Some examples of this fear are ailurophobia (fear of cats), arachnophobia (fear of spiders) and pyrophobia (fear of snakes).

2. Specific situational fears.

During the first six months of infancy, a child fears loud noises. From the onset of the seventh month until before his/her first year, a child is usually afraid of heights (achrophobia) and even unexpected looming objects. Some other examples of this phobia are aichmophobia (fear of sharp and pointed objects), brontophobia (fear of thunder), menophobia (fear of being alone) and nyctophobia (fear of darkness).

3. Social anxieties.

During the eighth month of infancy, a child develops fear of strangers (xenophobia) and even of people in general (anthropophobia). Due to parents' overprotection of their children, some eventually develop a fear of growing up. The most common phobia of this type is the school phobia. Psychologists found that teen-agers who suffer from school phobia are often afraid of leaving their home and being separated from their family.

4. Agoraphobia.

This fear focuses on open places, and it usually happens when a child is between two to four years of age. Children who are afraid to go out of their house

or are afraid to attend parties and other celebrations outside the "security" of their home are manifesting this type of fear.

As a child grows older, his or her fears begin to occur from experiences with the environment. Though certain fears are somewhat realistic (e.g. fear of biting dogs and other ferocious animals), some fears are the product of fantasy (e.g. fear of ghosts or monsters). These fears often appear in the child's dreams, which may explain why most children fear the dark (i.e., it means being alone in their room and forcing themselves to go to sleep). This fear is most likely to occur after watching a horror or scary movie at night. In this situation, a child's imagination becomes so powerful that they believe that what they had just seen is actually real

Overcoming Fear

Specific fears are common in childhood, and most of them are short-lived and dissipate within months. However, in some children, specific fears persist and can become immobilizing in the sense that they interfere with normal functioning (Muris, Merckelbach, de Jong, Ollendick, 2002). In these cases, a diagnosis of specific phobia, from the DSM-IV may be considered. When a child grows up and he/she is not able to cope with his/her fear some action must be taken to alleviate the condition. One way for the child to overcome the fear is through modeling. When the child observes that most people are not afraid of the thing that is feared, they may think about the situation and begin to work out the phobia. Bandura, Grusec, and Menlove (1967), found that two-thirds of their preschoolers who feared dogs and later participated in eight brief sessions

in which they watched an unafraid child play happily with a dog, were able to climb into the playpen with the dog. Another procedure for combating fear is through systematic desensitization. During systematic desensitization, a child is gradually exposed to the feared object in a series of ordered steps.

Morris and Kratochwill (1983), in their book *Treating Children's Fears and Phobias,* found that during these therapeutic treatments, it is assumed that: (1) the fear is not learned, (2) an insight is not necessary to alleviate the phobia because during therapies, the fear is already considered an irrational phobia and so an irrational phobia cannot possibly be "rationalized"), (3) fears and phobias are samples of a child's behavior and are situation-specific, (4) emphasis of treatment is on the present, and (5) the goals of therapy are specific. Because the fear is object/situation-specific, the objective of the treatment must also be focused on the specific unique case. .

A substantial portion (73.3%) of children report having nighttime fears (Muris, Merckelbach, Ollendick, King, & Bogie 2001). This fear can be indicated by reporting fear of intruders, fear of imaginary creatures, or fear of frightening dreams. Children with these fears become highly anxious through the night or when exposed to darkness. It was first thought that only young children fear the dark, but recent research has shown that these fears are also reported frequently by older children (Muris et al, 2001). In fact 58.8% of 4- to 6-year old, 84.7% of 7- to 9-yer-olds, and 79.6% of 10- to 12-year-olds reported having nighttime fears. Muris et al., (2001) found that exposure to negative information was the most prominent pathway to fear. Children report a variety of coping

strategies in response to their nighttime fears consisting of five coping categories: internal self-control, social support, inanimate objects, prayer, and avoidance/escape. Self-control and avoidance/escape were the most commonly used coping strategies. Although some fears are the product of fantasy, children also use fantasy to cope with and overcome their fears. This act can be pretend play, or the use of an imaginary companion. Imaginary companions can be used in many different ways. Their companion may actually combat or confront the fearful device, or they can be a friendly source of support for the child when he or she is afraid.

Imaginary companions

Sometimes children invent imaginary companions to create a sense of security for themselves. An imaginary companion is a normal characteristic of preoperational thought, and may even serve a protective function in stressful situations (Seiffge-Krenke, 1997). An imaginary companion is defined as "an invisible character, named and referred to in conversation with other persons or played with directly for a period of time, at least several months, having an air of reality for the child, but not an apparent objective basis. This imaginative companion activity excludes that type of imaginative play in which an object is personified (i.e. to think of or represent as a person), or in which the child assumes the role of some person in his environment" (Gleason, Sebanc, & Hartup, 2000). Several studies report age differences for the first appearance of companions, ranging 30 months to 10 years (Schilling, 1985). These studies also report an incidence of between 18% and 30%, but the proportion of children who experience this phenomenon is significant. Imaginary companions occur more frequently in only

children than in children with siblings, and in children with limited opportunities for companionship.

Originally more girls than boys were assumed to have imaginary companions. But Taylor (1999) reports that preschool boys and girls reported imaginary companions equally often. Previous gender differences may have been partly due to how children play with the character. Girls' imaginary companions usually function as a companion; whereas boys impersonate imaginary characters instead of treating them as separate entities. Manosevitz, Prentice, and Wilson (1973) reported that males were more likely to have a male imaginary companion, but females showed only a slight tendency to have same-sex imaginary companions. Among males, they found that the same-sex imaginary companion ratio was 3.5 to 1, while for females it was 1.3 to 1. According to Manosevitz et. al, this difference may reflect parental demands in preschool children for stricter compliance to sex-role stereotypes in males in contrast to their greater tolerance of cross-sex preferences and behavior in females.

Little is known about the initial appearance of an imaginary companion in a child's life, but some descriptive information has been obtained (Gleason, Sebanc, & Hartup, 2000). More than half of all imaginary companions have no apparent trigger, and children are rarely able to explain their companion's appearance. Companions are most frequently human, but children also create imaginable animals, aliens, and monsters. Children are emotionally involved with their imaginary companions, and they are projected into space rather than thought of as residing in the child's mind (Taylor,

Cartwright, & Carlson, 1993). Imaginary companions have relatively stable personalities that play a daily role in the child's fantasy life.

The imaginary companion phenomenon has the following characteristics: it is an attempt at "wish fulfillment"; it is ruled by the "pleasure principle"; and it need not fit reality (Schilling, 1985). Feelings of loneliness, neglect, and rejection may motivate a child to create an imaginary companion to offer the child a relationship in which he or she can find love and companionship without the threat of separation. This companion often disappears when the child finds suitable real companions or can cope better with their living conditions. The companion also may pass through different stages of changes over the years, becoming more impersonal over time.

Recent research (Gleason, 2002) has suggested that imaginary companions may be conceptualized much like a real relationship. They may be associated with a particular set of social provisions. Such social provisions can be companionship, compensating for missing family members, or to provide sympathy and understanding. The social forum of an imaginary companion may give children practice in negotiating, conceptualizing, and differentiating relationships. Performing both sides of a relationship gives the child a chance to imagine thoughts, feelings, and actions of others.

Relationships with imaginary companions are not all alike. They differ according to companion type and gender of the children who create them. Invisible friends provide relationships that are described as horizontal; that is, equal in terms of power and competence. Relationships with personified objects, on the other hand, are described as vertical. The objects require care and nurturing from their creators.

Child Characteristics

Some empirical evidence has indicated that children with pretend friends are particularly sociable by nature (Gleason, Sebanc, & Hartup, 2000). The only connection reported between the occurrence of imaginary companions and the child's social environment concerns siblings. Specifically, only-children or first-born children are more likely to report having an imaginary companion. In most research, the creation of an imaginary companion is associated with positive characteristics (Taylor, Cartwright, & Carlson, 1993) Research has also suggested that children who have imaginary companions may be more able to engross themselves in play activities.

Several studies have explored the characteristics of children who report having imaginary companions, and those of children who do not have imaginary companions. Overall, no significant difference between the two groups of children is detected in the incidence of a wide range of behaviors (Taylor, 1999). But, they may be somewhat more advanced in their social understanding, and at younger ages they seem to be a little less shy and more able to focus their attention. Sometimes children with imaginary companions have more positive behaviors than those without. Singer and Singer (1990) found that children with imaginary companions were less fearful and less anxious. When studying college students who report having had an imaginary companion, these students were found to be less neurotic, less introverted, more dominant in face-to-face situations, more self-confident, and more sociable (Wingfield, 1948). Parents reported that children with imaginary companions were less shy (Mauro, 1991-as cited in Taylor,

1999). But these differences in shyness seemed to disappear after the age of 7. And these differences in shyness do not show up in every study (Manosevitz, et. al, 1973).

Some studies (i.e., Singer, 1961) have shown that children with imaginary companions are better able to focus and pay attention. But, again, this association is not found in every study. Early research seemed to lead to the conclusions that children with imaginary companions had higher IQ's and were more intelligent. More recent research (e.g.,Taylor, 1999) reports little evidence for the link between imaginary companions and higher intelligence. Studies (e.g., Manosevitz, Fling, & Prentice, 1977) have looked at creativity in children and whether children with imaginary companions are more creative than those without imaginary companions. It is very difficult to measure creativity, and the differences in the two types of children are not extensive.

Some interesting correlates arise in the area of family structure. First born and only children are significantly more likely to report having imaginary companions. Several explanations have been advanced for this finding. When a child does not have social interaction with siblings, it may be necessary for children to gain developmental experiences through the vehicle of an imaginary companion (Manosevitz, 1973). With this companion the child can practice and develop social and language skills that may otherwise develop more slowly. Many parents report the appearance of an imaginary companion shortly after the birth of a second child (Taylor, 1999). This association would suggest that the child may be inventing a companion to help cope with the reduced access to parents or the general disruption in family life associated with the birth of a new baby.

Overall, some relationship between the number and spacing of children in a family and the inclination to create imaginary companions seems to be present (Taylor, 1999). For example, first children and only children report having an imaginary companion more than children in another birth-order. But, there is mixed evidence concerning any relationship between the inclination to have an imaginary companion and family structure---single parent, divorced, separated, or deceased. Taylor (1999) reports that several studies found the breakup of the nuclear family is not reliably associated with the creation of a pretend friend. But one study, (i.e.,Yawkey & Yawkey, 1983-as cited in Taylor, 1999), did find that children in single-parent families showed more evidence of having active imaginations, including a greater number of imaginary companions. Manosevitz et al (1973) found no difference in the number of hours spent per day with the mother or the father between children who have imaginary companions and those who did not.

When looking at children's play activities, Manosevitz (1973) found that 97% of the children who had imaginary companions were described as those whose home play was self-initiated. Only 86% of children who did not have imaginary companions were described in this way. Play in the homes of the children who had imaginary companions was described as quiet only 18 % of the time, compared to 34% for children who did not have imaginary companions. Perhaps children who have imaginary companions are more able to engross themselves in play activities, possibly due to greater creative or innovative abilities.

Parental Attitude

Parental attitudes toward imaginary companions vary greatly. Some parents encourage their children to invent an imaginary friend. These parents may even suggest the idea or introduce an imaginary friend during pretend play. On the other hand, parents may simply support the idea by allowing the child to set a separate place at the table for the imaginary companion, or by buying the child other toys to go along with the theme of the imaginary companion. Some parents ignore imaginary companions, and some discourage them. The parents who discourage imaginary companions do so for a variety of reasons. They may simply feel it is a nuisance, they may be concerned about the possible implications of having an imaginary companion, or they may be concerned that the child will have trouble differentiating between fantasy and reality, or that the child may have some kind of psychological disturbance.

Parental attitude toward their children having an imaginary companion is also based on culture and socioeconomic status. For example, many mothers in Mexico believe that play has no value in their children's development (Farver & Howes, 1993). Similarly, many American parents believe that fantasy leads to or is equal to deceit and may even lead to habitual lying (Taylor, 1999).

Why children create imaginary companions

Children create imaginary companions for various reasons. The imaginary companion can provide companionship to an only child, or a child who has few opportunities for peer interaction (Taylor, 1999). Children can use the imaginary

companion as a scapegoat; it can be blamed when the child has done something wrong. It is safe to be angry with an imaginary companion and to yell at an imaginary companion. Sometimes the imaginary companion can be used as a bargaining tool with parents. Children may use the imaginary companion to communicate embarrassing or difficult happenings to others. Regardless of why children create these companions, it is clear that imaginary companions meet some psychological need for the children who create them.

Children may create an imaginary companion simply for the fun and companionship, which may reflect the child's idiosyncratic interests (Taylor, 1999). They may create imaginary companions because they are lonely. Usually, this loneliness would need to be profound for a child to create an imaginary companion. When play partners are readily available, children are less likely to create imaginary playmates. Some children probably create imaginary companions to combat competence issues (Harter & Chao, 1992). A child may invent an imaginary friend that is helpless and incompetent; therefore making the child look good. Or a child may create an imaginary companion that is extremely competent. In this way the child acquires a powerful ally, which may help to increase the child's self-esteem. Girls tend to create incompetent imaginary companions, and boys tend to create imaginary friends that are more competent (Taylor, 1999). But, the boys and girls themselves do not differ in competence, and they do not differ in self-concept. The findings, however, reflect sex-role stereotypes because girls like to nurture and help. Therefore, they create imaginary companions that they can help and "mother". Boy's sex-role stereotype is one of strength

and power. They will thus create imaginary companions that are strong and powerful. Boys also tend to impersonate characters, rather than creating new ones.

Children may create an imaginary friend when there are restrictions in their own lives. They may have a disability or an illness that is restrictive, so they create an imaginary friend that can do things that they cannot. Also, when children are in trouble, it is often convenient to have an imaginary friend that can be blamed. Some adults may equate this behavior with psychopathology, but research (e.g., Taylor, 1999) investigating the relation between having an imaginary companion as a child and later-developing psychopathology shows that patients with borderline personality disorder are less likely to recall having an imaginary companion. Scapegoating of an imaginary companion may be used to develop self-control later on.

Sometimes children use imaginary companions as a way to communicate with others; it is often easier to present a scenario as having happened to someone else. Parents and adults can use this solution to their advantage by asking the imaginary companion about sensitive topics, rather than asking the children directly. Many children use pretend play to help cope with traumatic events that have occurred in their lives, or to help cope with a dysfunctional or chaotic home life. Putnam (1989) reported that 89% of children who are abused have an imaginary companion. In cases of severe and prolonged abuse, some individuals go on to develop dissociative identity disorder (multiple personality disorder).

Personified Objects

Some researchers (Singer & Singer, 1990; Mauro, 1991-as cited in Taylor, 1999) have included in their definitions of imaginary companions objects that children personify and animate, called personified objects. Well-known examples of such personified objects include Winnie the Pooh, and Hobbes from *Calvin and Hobbes* (Gleason, et al, 2000). The origins of personified objects and extensive role-playing refers to activities common to most young children. Stuffed animals, dolls, and blankets are often animated, then later may evolve into full-blown personified objects over time.

Personified objects may originate as *transitional objects* (Singer & Singer, 1990). Donald Winnicott (as cited in Singer & Singer, 1990) originally coined this term as a concrete representation of an external source of comfort. He identified a series of qualities associated with the transitional object; a sense of entitlement, a sense of continuity, and that the object is tangible. It is speculated (Gleason, et al, 2000) that as a child's need for a security object decreases with increasing maturity, a transitional object may take on a personality of its own and become a personified object.

Summary

Normal developmental fears provide children with a means of adapting to various life stressors. Fears and anxieties in children vary with gender, socioeconomic status, and age. Children often use fantasy to cope with and overcome their fears. This act can be pretend play, or the use of an imaginary companion. The first appearance of an imaginary companion in a child's life varies from age 30 months to 10 years, and the incidence is between 18% and 30%. More than half of all imaginary companions have no

apparent trigger, but it is possible that children use their imaginary companions in some way to overcome fear.

Few studies have explored the relationship between a child's fears and the incidence of imaginary companions. Past studies (e.g., Lazurus, 1984) have looked at fear and a child's use of fantasy to overcome fears. The descriptions of many imaginary companions suggest that their creation was motivated partly by the need to master a particular fear. Children may create a ghost who is afraid of the dark because they are afraid of the dark, or a tiger that is afraid of animals. This creation of an imaginary companion, and the fantasy play associated with it, is a much healthier way to combat fears than avoidance.

Study Purpose

The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between a child's fears and the child's use of an imaginary companion. It was assumed that some children would not report having an imaginary companion, but would report having a special toy, blanket, or doll that they name, carry, and/or talk to (i.e., personified object). Therefore the study also explored the relationship between a child's fears and the use of a personified object. A final question that was examined was whether children who report having an imaginary companion or personified object use these entities when they are scared, (i.e. talk to the imaginary companion when they are scared, or hold the personified object.)

Hypotheses

Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses were proposed.

Hypothesis One- Children who reported having an imaginary companion or a personified object would have a higher total fear score. Studies suggested that children use fantasy to cope with fear (Mash & Barkley, 989)

Hypothesis Two- Females would have higher fear scores than males. The data suggested that girls are more likely to acknowledge fear than boys (Ollendick, et. al, 1989).

Hypothesis Three- No significant difference between males and females in reported imaginary companions or personified objects was expected. Previous studies (e.g. Taylor, 1999) found no differences in this area.

Hypothesis Four- Younger children (ages 36-59 months) would have a higher incidence of reported imaginary companions and personified objects than older children (ages 60-80 months). This hypothesis follows from the data showing that young children have more fears (Ollendick, 1983) and engage in more fantasy.

Hypothesis Five- More first born than later born children would report the presence of an imaginary companion. Previous studies have suggested this relationship (Taylor, 1999).

Hypothesis Six- More only children than children with siblings would report the presence of an imaginary companion. Previous studies have suggested this relationship (Taylor, 1999).

CHAPTER 2

Method

Participants

A total of 73 participants, 38 boys and 35 girls, sampled from eight all-day child care centers, participated in the study. These centers were located in various parts of a metropolitan city, and served from 65 to 125 children. One location was a Kindergarten classroom of a parochial school that had 18 students. The families using these centers were mostly middle class, and the majority of the children were Caucasian, but all centers had children from different cultures. The children ranged in age from 37 to 74 months in age (*M* age=56.13, SD=9.30). The only requirement for this study was the age range of 36 to 80 months. This age range was selected based on children's general ability to understand the questions asked. It was assumed that children under age 3 would not be able to respond to the fear questionnaire or the imaginary companion/personified object interview questions. The family structure breakdown was: single parent (n = 14), two parent (n = 58), and other (n = 1) households. Most of the children were first born (n = 29), with 17 second born, 4 third born, and 3 fourth born children; 15 children were an only child, and 5 were a twin. Selection from all ethnic groups was attempted by selecting centers that served children from different ethnic groups, but the sample was predominately Caucasian (93.2%).

Demographic Information Parents were asked to answer a series of seven questions (Appendix A) which accompanied the consent form (Appendix B). These questions included information regarding the child's birth date, birth-order, family

structure (i.e., single-parent, two-parent household or other such as grandparent, step-parent, etc), if the parent thought the child had an imaginary companion or a personified object, and what the child does when he or she is scared.

Measures

FSSC-R The Fear Survey Schedule for Children-Revised is a revision of Scherer and Nakamura's (1968) 80-item fear schedule. Respondents are instructed to indicate their level of fear to various stimuli on a 3-point scale: (1) none, (2) some, or (3) a lot. Total score is determined by summing responses to the 80 items, and the number of fears is calculated by adding the number of items endorsed as producing "a lot" of fear. Pattern of fear is determined by examining responses to five groups of fears arrived at through factor analysis. The FSSC-R contains five factor derived subscales: Fear of the Unknown, Fear of Minor Injury and Small Animals, Fear of Danger and Death, Medical Fears, and Fear of Failure and Criticism. These factors have been shown to have satisfactory internal consistency and to be stable across cultures.

Acceptable test-retest reliability estimates ($r = .82$) for the FSSC-R have been demonstrated across varying intervals of time (King & Ollendick, 1992; Ollendick, 1983), and convergent validity is supported by elevated scores on the schedule associated with heightened levels of anxiety and depression (Dong, Yang, & Ollendick 1994; Ollendick, Yule, & Ollier, 1990). Many of the original 80 questions were aimed at older children (ages 7-18). Therefore, only 35 of the original questions were used with the pre-school age participants (Appendix C). The 35 questions in this study elicit information about experiences that pre-school children would understand and would apply to their

daily lives. An acceptable reliability was obtained, $r = .82$. The minimum score was 35 and the maximum score was 105. The 35 questions were comprised of the following subscales of Failure and Criticism, (n=3/23 original) $r = .33$, The Unknown (10/18 original) $r = .70$, Minor Injury and Small Animals (11/17 original) $r = .72$, Danger and Death (3/12 original) $r = .50$, Medical Fears (3/4 original) $r = .43$, Other (4/6 original). Because the questions chosen for the scale needed to accommodate a young child, the questions did not sample all 5 sub-scales equally.

Imaginary Companion Questionnaire This questionnaire included an introductory question asking children what they do when they are scared (Appendix E). A second question asked the children if they have a "make-believe" friend. This question was taken directly from a study done by J. Mauro (1991-as cited in Taylor, 1999). If the child answered yes to this question, a series of questions followed asking for more specific descriptive information about the imaginary companion, such as "is it a boy or a girl", and " what does your friend look like". If the child answered yes or no, he or she was also asked if they have a personified object (" a special doll, stuffed animal, or blanket"). If they answered yes, they were asked more specifics about this object, such as "does it have a name", and "when do you hold/talk to _____". The investigator wrote down the children's answers verbatim.

To determine if the child had an imaginary companion or a personified object, the primary investigator reviewed the answers for each child-parent pair. If the child stated that he or she had "a pretend or make believe friend", and was able to provide a plausible description of the companion, such as sex, name, and when he/she plays with the friend

or talks to the friend, the primary investigator determined that the child had an imaginary companion, regardless of how the parent answered. If the parent stated that they believed the child had an imaginary companion, but the child did not state that he or she did, the primary investigator determined that the child most likely did not understand the question, and decided that the child did have an imaginary companion. The personified object determination was scored in the same way. Two different independent raters also scored the same 25% of imaginary companion questionnaires. The inter-rater reliability between the raters and the primary investigator was: rater one- 89% agreement regarding an imaginary companion, 94% agreement regarding a personified object, rater two- 94% agreement regarding an imaginary companion, 89% agreement regarding a personified object. The frequencies of children reporting imaginary companions or personified objects are reported in Table I.

Design

The design for this developmental study is cross-sectional and correlational. The major independent variables are age, sex, birth order of the child, and only children versus multiple children. The dependent variables consisted of the total fear score, presence of imaginary companion, and presence of a personified object. The presence of an imaginary companion was also an independent variable when fear score was the dependent variable.

Table 1

Frequencies of imaginary companions and personified objects.

		Imaginary Companion	
		Yes	No
Personified Object	Yes	19 (26%)	8 (11%)
	No	24 (33%)	22 (30%)

Note. $N = 73$.

Procedure

The children were identified as potential participants if they attended one of the participating childcare centers, and if they were between the ages of 36 months and 80 months. The principal investigator had direct contact with the director of the centers to recruit subjects. The directors sent consent forms and letters home with parents of children who qualified (based on age). When the director received the returned consent forms, the principal investigator was given the names of the children. These children were then approached by the principal investigator and asked to participate in the study. They were given an explanation of the study and told what was expected of them. The children were not required to participate.

If they agreed to participate, the investigator showed them a picture of three faces; one representing "not scared", one "kind-of scared", and one "really scared" (Appendix D). They were then asked to point to the face that matches with how they feel about the 35 objects named on the FSSC-R-Revised. These answers were recorded on the FSSC-R-Revised answer sheet. After this questionnaire was completed the child was then asked questions about imaginary companions/personified objects. The investigator recorded the answers to these questions verbatim. After the child finished the interview questions, he or she was thanked for their participation and given a small token of appreciation (a sticker, eraser, etc.).

The parent consent form and letter were paper clipped with the appropriate child's answer sheets and placed in manilla envelopes. Demographic information was gathered from parent questionnaires.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Analysis of Fear Scale Scores

Presence of Imaginary Companion or Personified Object The first hypothesis predicted that children who report having an imaginary companion or a personified object would have a higher total fear score than children who do not have an imaginary companion or a personified object. This hypothesis was tested with a 2 (presence or absence of imaginary companion) by 2 (presence or absence of personified object), between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA), with total fear score as the dependent variable. Table II presents the ANOVA summary. The means and standard deviations for the analysis are shown in Table III. Main effects were non significant for imaginary companion and for personified object. The interaction between imaginary companion and personified object was marginally significant, $p = .060$ (See Figure 1).

Although the interaction between having an imaginary companion and having a personified object was only marginally significant ($p= .06$), the first hypothesis predicted that presence of either an imaginary companion or a personified object would result in a higher fear score in the child. Therefore this interaction was further analyzed with a simple effects analysis. The first analysis examined the effect of the presence of a personified object. The resulting F ratio was $F(1, 69) =8.76, p <.01$. Children with both an imaginary companion and a personified object had higher fear scores than those children with an imaginary companion only (See Table 3). The second analysis examined the effect of having an imaginary companion. The F ratio for this analysis was

Table II

Analysis of Variance Summary for Presence of Imaginary Companion and Personified Object and Fear Score

Source	df	F	p
	Between Subjects		
Imaginary Companion	1	.208	.650
Personified Object	1	.111	.740
IC x PO	1	3.65	.060
Error	69	(118.4)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

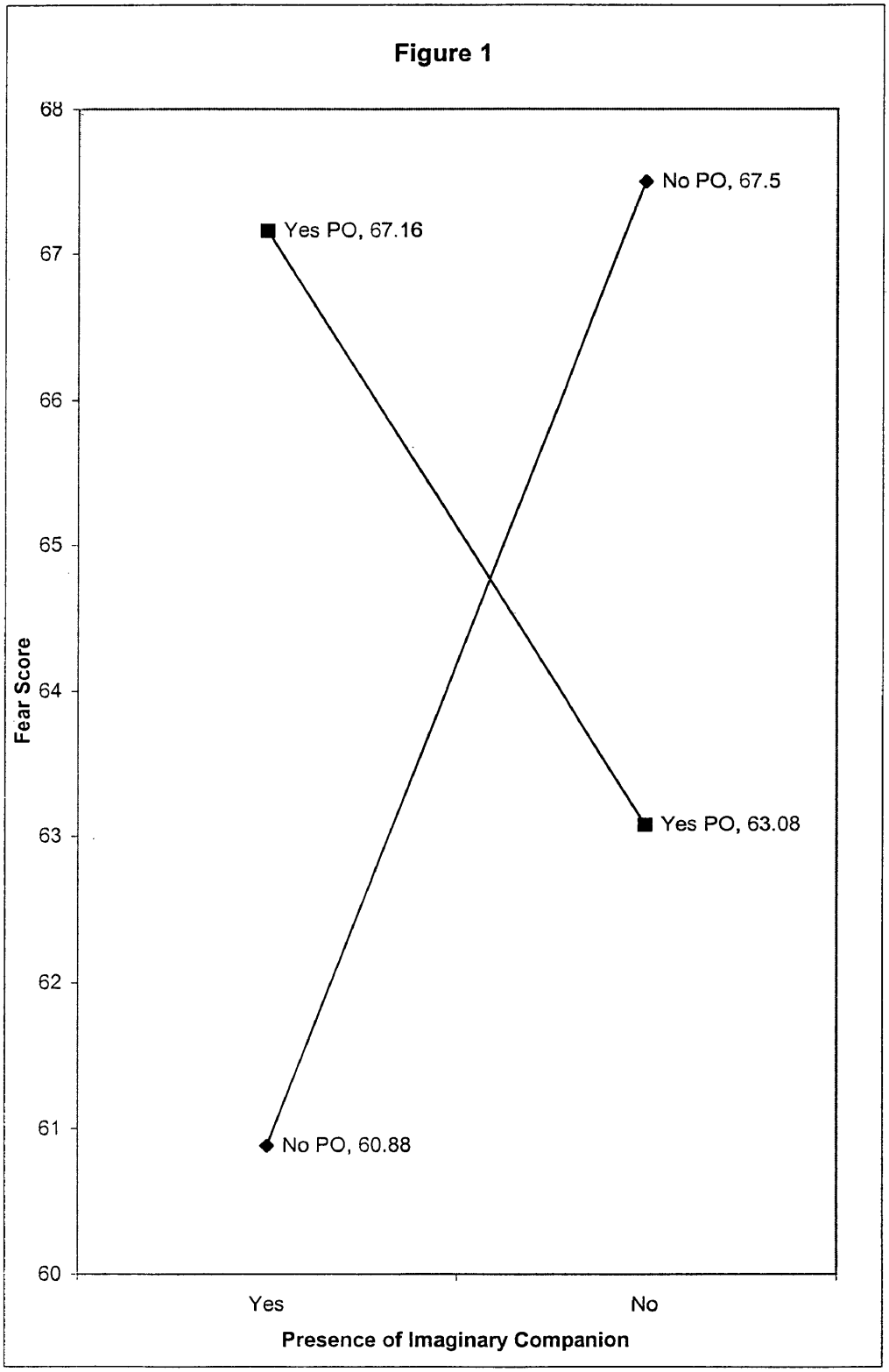
Table III

Fear Score Means and Standard Deviations For Children with/without Imaginary Companions and Children with/without Personified Objects.

		Personified Object		
		Yes	No	Total
Imaginary Companion	Yes	67.16 (10.10)[a]	60.88 (8.48)[b]	64.02
	No	63.08 (12.11)[c]	67.5 (10.8)[d]	65.29
	Total	65.12	64.19	64.66

Note. Scores in ( ) represent Standard Deviation.

Figure 1


68
67
66
65
64
63
62
61
60
Fear Score
No PO, 67.5
Yes PO, 67.16
Yes PO, 63.08
No PO, 60.88
Yes
No
Presence of Imaginary Companion

$F(1,69) = 5.55, p < .05$. Children with neither an imaginary companion nor a personified object had higher fear scores than children with an imaginary companion (See Table III). The results of these analyses show that higher fear scores were associated with either the presence or absence of an imaginary companion and a personified object. Presence or absence of only one fantasy figure did not result in higher fear scores. Given this pattern of results, the hypothesis was not supported.

Sex. Hypothesis two predicted that females would have higher fear scores than males. This hypothesis was tested using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), with fear score as the dependent variable. Table IV shows the ANOVA summary. The means and standard deviations for the analysis are shown in Table V. No significant difference was found between the fear scores of boys and girls. The results of this analysis failed to support the hypothesis.

A second ANOVA was run on fear score using sex and imaginary companion as the between subjects variables. The main effects and interaction were not significant, showing that sex of the child and presence or absence of an imaginary companion do not significantly predict fear score. A third ANOVA was run on fear score using sex and personified object as the between subjects variable. The main effects and interaction were not significant, showing that the sex of the child and presence or absence of a personified object do not significantly predict fear score.

Birth Order. A 2 (first born or later born) by 2 (presence or absence of imaginary companion) ANOVA was run on fear score using birth order and presence of an

Table IV

Analysis of Variance Summary for Sex by Fear Score

Source	df	F	p
Sex	1	2.49	.119
Error	71	(117.21)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square error.

Table V

Mean Fear Scores for Sex

	Total Fear Score	
Sex	Mean	SD
Males	63.32	10.15
Females	67.31	11.52

Note. SD (standard deviation).

imaginary companion as the between subjects variable. The main effects and interaction were not significant. The ANOVA summary table is in Table VI.

Age. A one-way, between subjects ANOVA was run on total fear score using age as the independent variable. Children were divided into two groups, younger (36-59 months) and older (60-80 months). The mean total fear score for the younger children was 65.94, and the mean total fear score for the older children was 64.62; the younger and the older children did not significantly differ in total fear score, $p = .264$. The results are shown in Table VII.

Imaginary Companion and Personified Object Reports

Sex Differences Hypothesis three predicted that there would be no significant difference in the number of boys and girls in reporting imaginary companions or personified objects. This hypothesis was tested using a 2 (gender) x 2 (presence or absence) chi square analysis. No significant difference was found between the number of boys and girls reporting an imaginary companion, X^2 (1, N = 73) = 2.20, $p > .05$. A significant difference was found between boys and girls in reporting a personified object, X^2 (1, N = 73) = 4.36, $p < .05$ (.037). More girls than boys reported having a personified object. The frequencies for this analysis are shown in Table VIII. The hypothesis for personified objects was not supported, but the hypothesis for imaginary companions was supported.

Table VI

Analysis of Variance Summary for Presence of Imaginary Companion, Birth Order, and Fear Score

Source	df	F	p
	Between Subjects		
Imaginary Companion	1	.006	.940
Birth Order	2	.218	.805
IC x BO	2	1.63	.204
Error	67	(121.6)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

Table VII

Analysis of Variance Summary for Age and Fear Score

Source	df	F	p
	Between Subjects		
Age	1	.264	.609
Error	71	(120.9)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

Table VIII

Frequencies for Sex and Imaginary Companions and Personified Objects

	Imaginary Companion		Personified Object	
Sex	Present	Absent	Present	Absent
Males	11 (15%)	27	18 (25%)	20
Females	16 (22%)	19	25 (34%)	10

Age of the Child and Imaginary Companion/Personified Object

Hypothesis four predicted that younger children (ages 36-59 months) would have a higher incidence of reported imaginary companions and personified objects than older children (ages 60-80 months). This hypothesis was evaluated with an age by imaginary companion chi-square. The resulting chi-square, X^2 (1, N − 73) − .078, p > .05, indicated no difference between younger children and older children in reporting an imaginary companion. No age difference was found relating to personified object, X^2 (1, N = 73) = .000, p > .05. The number of children reporting an imaginary companion/personified object is presented in Table IX. The results of these analyses do not support the hypothesis.

Birth Order and Imaginary Companion

Hypothesis five predicted that more first born than later born children would report the presence of an imaginary companion. For this analysis only 52 of the original 73 participants were used. The children that were an only child or a twin were deleted from the analysis because a child that is an only child is not considered "first born" and a child that is a twin is also not considered "first born" or "later born". This hypothesis was tested using a birth order by imaginary companion chi square analysis. More first born than later born children reported the presence of an imaginary companion, X^2 (1, N = 52) = 6.94, p < .05 (.008). . Table X shows the frequencies for this analysis. The hypothesis was supported

Table IX

Numbers of Younger and Older Children Reporting an Imaginary Companion and/or Personified Object

	Imaginary Companion		Personified Object	
Age	Present	Absent	Present	Absent
Younger (36-59months)	12 (16%)	22	20 (27%)	14
Older (60-83 months)	15 (21%)	24	23 (32%)	16

Table X

Number of Children Reporting an Imaginary Companion by Birth Order

Birth Order	Imaginary Companion Present	Absent
First born	12 (23%)	17 (74%)
Later born	2 (4%)	21 (40%)

Note. N=52

Hypothesis Six predicted that more only children than children with siblings would report the presence of an imaginary companion. This hypothesis was assessed using a sibling by imaginary companion chi square analysis. More only children reported the presence of an imaginary companion, X^2 (1, N = 73) = 7.14, $p < .05$ (.008). The frequencies for this analysis appear in Table XI. The hypothesis was supported.

Parent agreement with Child Report of an Imaginary Companion

Parent agreement with the child in reported imaginary companion was 70%. When the parents and children were asked about the child response when scared, children and parents used the same four answers, "cry/scream", "run/hide", "find mom/dad", or some combination of those three. No child or parent stated that the child talked to an imaginary companion when scared.

Sex of the Child and Sex of the Imaginary Companion

A sex of child by sex of the imaginary companion chi-square was used to examine this relationship. (4 of the 27 children did not give an answer to this question or the answer did not apply, i.e. "a witch", "a dog"). The sex of the child does not predict the sex of the imaginary companion, X^2 = (3, N=23) = 4.39, $p > .05$. Of the children that reported having an imaginary companion, 61% reported imaginary companions that were the same sex and, 39% reported an imaginary companion that was of the opposite sex. Of the 9 boys that reported the gender of their imaginary companion, 3 reported male imaginary companions and 4 reported females (2 were "other"). Of the 14 girls that identified gender, 3 reported males and 11 reported females.

Table XI

Number of Only Children versus Children with Siblings Reporting an Imaginary Companion

Sibling Number	Imaginary Companion Present	Absent
Only Child	10 (14%)	5 (7%)
All others	17 (23%)	41 (56%)

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

To summarize, the data analyses revealed that children who report having an imaginary companion or a personified object do not have a higher fear score than children who do not report having either type of figure. Girls did not have higher fear scores than boys, and no gender differences were found for total fear score. Also, no gender differences were found in reported imaginary companions. However, more girls than boys reported having a personified object. Sex of the child did not predict sex of the imaginary companion, but a majority of the children (61%) reported a same-sex imaginary companion. No age differences were found between younger children and older children in the incidence of imaginary companion, personified object, or total fear score. More first-born children than later born children reported an imaginary companion, and more only children reported the presence of an imaginary companion than children with siblings. Parent-child agreement on the presence of an imaginary companion or personified object was relatively good at 70%.

Fear Score and Presence of Imaginary Companion/Personified Object

Few studies have explored the relationship between a child's fears and the incidence of imaginary companions, but fantasy play of various types can play a powerful role in children's ability to overcome fear (Taylor, 1999). Children often invent imaginary playmates when they experience fear. Past studies (Singer & Singer, 1990) have looked at fear and a child's use of fantasy to overcome fears. The descriptions of

many imaginary companions suggest that their creation was motivated partly by the need to master a particular fear. Creation of an imaginary companion, and the fantasy play associated with it, is a psychologically healthy way to combat fears. Thus, it was predicted that children who scored high on the fear scale would be more likely to have an imaginary companion or a personified object than children who had lower fear scores, but an inverse relationship was found. The results of simple effects analyses of the marginally significant imaginary companion by personified object interaction showed that children who reported both an imaginary companion and a personified object, and children who reported neither had significantly higher fear scores than children who reported an imaginary companion. Although the findings were not significant, children who reported having a personified object tended to have a lower absolute mean fear score than children who reported the presence of both or neither. The lowest mean fear score was found for children who had an imaginary companion but no personified object. According to these results, use of an imaginary companion may be an effective way to combat fears.

It is believed that children use fantasy, particularly they create imaginary companions, to combat fears. The children in the current study who did not report using any fantasy had higher absolute fear scores than children who reported greater use of fantasy. This finding suggests that children seem to be able to combat fears more effectively when they have a personified object or an imaginary companion (i.e., use fantasy). But, they are not able to combat fear more effectively when they have both. Perhaps children who have both an imaginary companion and a personified object

experience many fear-invoking events in their lives, leading to the creation of these "beings". But the creation of these "beings" may not be strong enough to control a child's fears.

Gender Differences

In previous studies (e.g.,Ollendick & King, 1991), girls have been shown to report more fears than boys. However, it is not clear that girls actually *have* more fears than boys. Boys may be less likely to acknowledge their fears than girls because of the stigma attached to such self-reports, or their socialization. Contrary to previous research, the current study found that girls did not have a higher fear score than boys.

Originally more girls than boys were assumed to have imaginary companions. But Taylor (1999) reports that preschool boys and girls reported imaginary companions equally often. This finding was also present in the present study. Boys and girls did not differ in their report of an imaginary companion. However, more girls than boys reported having a personified object. This difference may be a function of the nature of girls' pre-school play. The act of "playing dolls" may lead to more frequent personification of the objects that they are playing with (i.e., naming the object, talking to the object).

Manosevitz, Prentice, and Wilson (1973) reported that males were more likely to have a male imaginary companion, but females showed only a slight tendency to have same-sex imaginary companions. For the current study, boys were found to have a slight tendency to report a same-sex imaginary companion, and girls had a greater tendency to have a same-sex companion, although this difference was not significant.

Age Differences

No differences were found between younger children (36-59 months) and older children (60-80 months) in their frequency of reporting imaginary companions, personified objects, or their total fear score. A general developmental trend in children's cognitive ability enables them to distinguish between reality (what can really hurt them) and fantasy (ghosts and monsters). Therefore, it was assumed that the younger children would have a higher fear score and would use imaginary companions and personified objects more frequently, but this assumption was not supported. The relatively small age range that was sampled (actual, 37-74 months) may be a factor. More age differences may emerge if the age range of children interviewed increased.

Birth Order and Sibling Differences

When a child does not have social interaction with siblings, it may be necessary for the child to gain developmental experiences through the creation of an imaginary companion (Manosevitz, 1973). Overall, some relationship between the number and spacing of children in a family and the inclination to create imaginary companions seems to be present (Taylor, 1999). Like previous research (e.g., Manosevitz et. al, 1973), more first born and only children in the current study reported an imaginary companion than later born children or children with no siblings. Taylor (1999) suggested that the creation of an imaginary companion might help the child cope with the reduced access to parent or general upheaval that accompanies a new birth, or may occur when other playmates are not available, such as in the case of only children.

Accuracy of Parent Reports of an Imaginary Companion

In general, parents are not thought to be a particularly good source of information about imaginary companions (Taylor, 1999), especially when they are asked to describe the imaginary companion. In the current study, the parents were only asked if they thought their child had an imaginary companion. The parent-child agreement was relatively high (70%), indicating that parents may be a good source in simply identifying if their children have imaginary companions.

Limitations

The ability of children, especially the younger ones, to understand the question asking if they have a "make-believe or pretend" friend may have been a limitation in this study. Some of the children needed many prompts to help them answer the question. If the child said that they did have an imaginary companion, descriptive questions were always asked, and sometimes the imaginary companion would end up being a friend in the class, or a neighbor.

The children were given 3 choices (3 different fear face pictures) to choose from on the fear questionnaire (See Appendix D). Children had a tendency to pick the happy face or the really scared face, not the face in the middle representing "some fear". This selection may have lead to a slightly higher or lower fear score than expected.

The parents were asked if the child had an object that he/she was attached to, but they were not asked to identify the object (See Appendix A). This information would have been helpful to determine if the child and the parent were talking about the same object. In general, more descriptive questions could have been asked about the "special

object", helping clarify if the child had a personified object by definition. However, the attention span of this particular age may have prevented obtaining this information.

Another limitation of this study was that frequently the children were interviewed, often times, in the actual classroom with all of the other children present. This setting was used so that parents would feel more comfortable letting their children participate, but this setting created a chaotic environment, and sometimes made it difficult for the children to pay attention.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should further examine the role that fear plays in a child's invention of an imaginary companion. Specifically, researchers should more thoroughly investigate if children turn to their imaginary companion in times of fear, or if/how the imaginary companion is used to combat fear. Researchers could also examine the role of a personified object in combating fear. Researchers could also examine how the use of different types of fantasy objects effect children's level of fear; specifically looking at children who have both an imaginary companion and a personified object and why their fear scores are higher.

Conclusions

The findings in this study suggest that children's use of fantasy in the form of an imaginary companion only was associated with lower fear scores. Previous research has shown that children use fantasy play to act out forthcoming events such as hospitalization or visit to a doctor to control their fear. Of the fantasy figures examined in the current study, use of an imaginary companion only was associated with lower fear scores than

other fantasy objects. One can confidently conclude that children who have both an imaginary companion and a personified object have higher fear scores than children who only have an imaginary companion; and children who do not have any fantasy object have a higher fear score than children who only have an imaginary companion. This finding would lead one to suspect that type of fantasy object may make a difference. Contrary to other research on related topics, few sex differences were found, but in support of previous studies, first- and only-born children were more likely to report the presence of an imaginary companion. This latter finding may reflect the reduced access later born have with parents or only born's lack of a playmate. Overall, these findings tend to suggest that use of fantasy figures may be a useful tool for children when confronting fearful situations.

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Appendix A

Dear Parent,

My name is Jill Ramet, I am a mother of 3, and the Coordinator of the SAFE Program at the Child Saving Institute. I am in the process of doing a research project to complete my MA in Developmental Psychology. I would like you permission to sit down with you child, while he/she is at childcare, and ask them some questions about what he/she is afraid of (spiders, snakes, etc), and if they have an imaginary friend. If you agree to let you child participate, please read over and sign the attached consent form. I will then ask you child if he/she wants to participate. I will be able to talk to them in their regular classroom. If he/she does not want to, that is fine. Please take a moment to answer the attached questions as well.

If you have any questions about this project, please call me at 553-6000 x175.

Thank you so much for your consideration,

Jill Ramet

Child's name _____

_____
Child's birth date (to obtain age in months)

Does you child live in a 1 or 2 parent household or other? 1 parent 2 parent other

List ages of child's siblings (in months) _____
_____
_____
_____

Do you think you child has, or has had, an imaginary friend? _____

Does you child have an object (blanket, doll, etc.) that he/she is attached to? _____

If so, does your child talk to this object? _____

What does your child do when he/she is scared?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix B

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
IRB# 424-00-EP

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

Fears and the Incidence of Imaginary Companions and Personified Objects in Preschool Children

REGARDING _____
PARTCIPANT NAME

INVITATION

The above named child is invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to allow this child to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

WHY IS THIS CHILD ELIGIBLE?

This child is eligible to participate because he/she is attending one of the participating child care centers.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to examine children's fears and if they have imaginary companions or have a special toy or object that they are attached to.

WHAT DOES THIS STUDY INVOLVE?

Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes of the child's time and will be performed on-site. During the study the child will meet with the principal investigator one-on-one and will be asked if they are afraid of certain things, i.e. snakes, loud noises, bears, etc. They will answer by pointing to one of three pictures. The pictures are of faces with expressions that correspond to "not scared", "kind of scared", and "really scared". Then the principal investigator will ask the child a series of questions pertaining to if they have an imaginary friend or not. If they do, they will be asked to describe the friend.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS THIS CHILD COULD EXPERIENCE?

There are no known risks associated with this research.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENFITS TO THIS CHILD?

There may not be any direct benefits to this child other than the opportunity to see how a research project is conducted. The child will also receive a small token for participating (candy, toy).

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SOCIETY?

The potential benefit to society is an increased understanding of how children's fears may correlate with the presence of an imaginary companion.

HOW WILL THIS CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

All information obtained will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for this research project. The participating centers may receive a summary of information, but will not receive specific information regarding a specific child's answers. The information obtained may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings.

WHAT ARE THIS CHILD'S RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

The child's rights as a research participant are explained in the pamphlet *The Rights of Research Participants* that you have been given. If you have any questions concerning your child's rights, you may contact the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB), telephone 402/559-6463.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO ALLOW THIS CHILD TO PARTICIPATE?

You are free to decided not to let this child participate in this study or to withdraw him/her at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, or the participating child care center. Your decision will not result in the loss of any privileges or benefits for this child.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARIYL MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO ALLOW THIS CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE CERTIFIES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO ALLOW THIS CHILD TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE

INFORMATION PRESENTED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

_____ _____

SIGNATURE OF GUARDIAN **DATE**

I CERTIFY THAT ALL THE ELEMENTS OF INFORMED CONSENT DESCRIBED ON THIS CONSENT FORM HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED FULLY TO THE LEGALLY AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE LEGALLY AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE IS VOLUNTARILY AND KNOWINGLY GIVING INFORMED CONSENT AND POSSESSES THE LEGAL CAPACITY TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT FOR THIS CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT.

_____ _____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR **DATE**

AUTHORIZED STUDY PERSONNEL:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Jill R. Ramet Office: (402) 55-6000 x175
SECONDARY INVESTIGATOR:

Joseph C. Lavoie, Ph.D. Office: (402) 554-2592

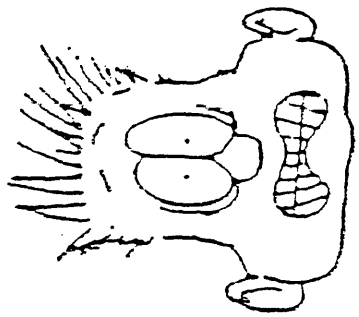
Appendix C

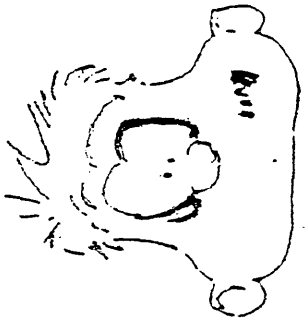
FEAR QUESTIONNAIRE (FSSC-R-R)
Thomas H. Ollendick
Jill R. Ramet

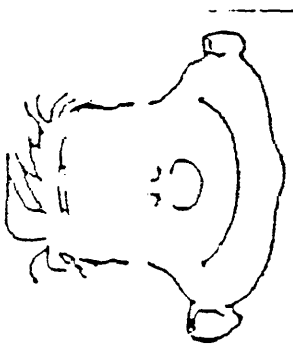
Participant Name _____ **Age** _____
Gender_____ **Race** _____ **Center** _____

1. Riding in a car or bus	None	Some	A lot
2. Lizards	None	Some	A lot
3. Ghosts or spooky things	None	Some	A lot
4. Getting lost in a strange place	None	Some	A lot
5. Snakes	None	Some	A lot
6. Talking on the phone	None	Some	A lot
7. Being left at home with a sitter	None	Some	A lot
8. Bears	None	Some	A lot
9. Getting a shot	None	Some	A lot
10. Going to the dentist	None	Some	A lot
11. Spiders	None	Some	A lot
12. Flying in a plane	None	Some	A lot
13. Bats	None	Some	A lot
14. Fire-getting burned	None	Some	A lot
15. Getting a cut	None	Some	A lot
16. Thunderstorms	None	Some	A lot
17. Having to eat food I don't like	None	Some	A lot
18. Cats	None	Some	A lot
19. Having to go to school	None	Some	A lot
20. When my parents argue	None	Some	A lot
21. Dark rooms or closets	None	Some	A lot
22. Bugs	None	Some	A lot
23. Going to the doctor	None	Some	A lot
24. Mean looking dogs	None	Some	A lot
25. Getting a haircut	None	Some	A lot
26. Deep water	None	Some	A lot
27. Bad dreams	None	Some	A lot
28. Falling from a high place	None	Some	A lot
29. Going to be in the dark	None	Some	A lot
30. Being alone	None	Some	A lot
31. Loud sirens	None	Some	A lot
32. Dark places	None	Some	A lot
33. Getting a bee sting	None	Some	A lot
34. Worms	None	Some	A lot
35. Rats	None	Some	A lot

Appendix D







Appendix E

What do you do when you are scared?

Imaginary Companion Questionnaire

1. Some friends are real, you can touch them-like the friends you play with here at daycare. Some are pretend. These are friends that you can't touch, they are make-believe. Do you have a make-believe or pretend friend? Yes no

If yes:

2. What does your friend look like? Female or Male?
3. What is your friends name?
4. When do you play with your friend?
5. When do you talk with your friend?

If yes or no:
2. Do you have a special doll, stuffed animal, or blanket that you like?
3. Does it have a name?
4. When do you hold your doll/stuffed animal/ or blanket?