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A comparison of academic achievement, attendance and discipline of children from single parent households and those from dual parent households at Lavista Junior High School.

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A COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, ATTENDANCE
AND DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN FROM SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS
AND THOSE FROM DUAL PARENT HOUSEHOLDS
AT LAVISTA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Presented to the
Graduate Faculty
University of Nebraska
at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Dennis Fisher

April, 1983

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for Graduate Faculty, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Specialist in Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Supervisory Committee

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The number of single parent families is on the rise. In 1980 the U. S. Census Bureau reported that 19% of the nations' school children are now living in a single parent household (S.P.H.) This is an increase from "11% in 1970".¹ The Census Bureau has projected that "48% of all children born in 1980 will live a 'considerable' time with only one parent before they reach the age of 18."² Today as many as 12 million children reside in a single parent household (S.P.H.)³

The number of children from S.P.H. is increasingly evident in the Papillion-LaVista Public School District. In 1980-81 there were 121 children from S.P.H. at LaVista Junior High. This was 14.6% of the total enrollment. In 1981-82 there are 137 children from S.P.H. or 16.4% of the student population. This represents a net increase of 8%.

The impact of this social condition on public education is discussed in a recent study by the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A). This 1980 study revealed that school children from single parent households (S.P.H.) have more problems in school than do children from dual parent households (D.P.H.).

The recent study completed by I/D/E/A and statistics projected by the U. S. Census Bureau presents an apparent problem for educational institutions. Many people are concerned that schools are not responsive to the changing family needs. The I/D/E/A study reveals that there may be a need to increase counseling services to children from S.P.H. to

help them through periods of separation, desertion and death. Schools could adjust activity schedules to enable working parents to attend. Increased awareness on the part of teachers and administrators regarding S.P.H. and the situations experienced was also mentioned in the I/D/E/A study. Families are now requesting increased custodial duties by schools in the form of extended day or extended year programs.

However, this report by the I/D/E/A has brought about a rebuttal from a variety of concerned parent organizations. Anne Parks of Parents Without Partners, expressed concern that the study could contribute to a "negative image" of single parents and their children.⁴ Phyllis L. Clay of Single Parents and the Public School Project suggested that single parents are not an oddity and that such "stereotyping and labeling is particularly damaging to the student because we tend to find what we look for even if it's not there."⁵

LaVista Junior High teachers, counselors and administrators are experiencing some of these same problems and concerns. The entire staff at LaVista Junior High School must be knowledgeable and empathic about the situations that are unique to the children and parents in a single parent household.

LaVista Junior High School is part of School District 27 located in Sarpy County in the State of Nebraska. This suburban Omaha school district serves a 24 square mile area with over 25,000 people. This population is primarily located in two areas: Papillion with a census of 6,291 and LaVista with a census of 9,588. In 1960 Papillion had only 2,235 people while LaVista had a population of 1,004. Current

enrollment for the school district is over 5,900 students. This is in contrast to the 1960 enrollment of 691 and the 1966 enrollment of 2,223.⁶ The evidence above indicates a growing school district during the 1960's and early 1970's. Since 1976 enrollment figures have increased at a rate of 1% to 2% a year.

The Papillion-LaVista School District is significantly influenced by Offutt Air Force Base. The Air Force Base is located in Sarpy County just eight miles from the communities of Papillion and LaVista. There are several military housing projects located within the boundaries of the school district. Consequently, 35% of the students are military dependents.⁷ This military influence also contributes to a 25% turnover in student population for any given year.

LaVista Junior High School has an enrollment of 837 students in grades six through nine. Opened in 1976 as an open spaced facility, LaVista Junior High School attracts students from the city of LaVista, surrounding S.I.D.'s and approximately 100 students from the Capehart housing project at Offutt Air Force Base. Thirty percent of the families served by LaVista Junior High School are federally employed. Most of the remaining families are employed in Omaha rather than LaVista or Papillion.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to compare and contrast the students from S.P.H. and students from D.P.H. with respect to academic achievement, school attendance and discipline referrals.

HYPOTHESES

- I. It is hypothesized that there is No significant difference between academic achievement of children from S.P.H. and the academic achievement of children from D.P.H.
- II. It is hypothesized that there is NO significant difference between school attendance of children from S.P.H. and school attendance of children from D.P.H.
- III. It is hypothesized that there is NO significant difference between school discipline referrals of children from S.P.H. and school discipline referrals of children from D.P.H.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will be used to test the hypothesis:

- I. There is No significant difference between academic achievement of children from S.P.H. and academic achievement of children from D.P.H.
 1. Select a random sample consisting of a minimum number of students living in S.P.H.
 2. Select a random sample of students from D.P.H. The sample size will be proportionate to their total representation.
 3. Obtain the National Percentile Ranking of the Total Battery Score from the California Achievement Test for each sample group.

4. Test for significant difference between the S.P.H. sample and the D.P.H. sample.
5. Hypothesis I will be validated on the basis of .05 level of significance.

II. There is NO significant difference between school attendance of children from S.P.H. and school attendance of children from D.P.H.

1. Select a random sample consisting of a minimum number of students living in S.P.H.
2. Select a random sample of students from D.P.H. The sample size will be proportionate to their total representation.
3. Obtain the absentee and tardy reports for each sample group.
4. Test for significant difference between the S.P.H. sample and the D.P.H. sample.
5. Hypothesis II will be validated on the basis of .05 level of significance.

III. There is NO significant difference between the discipline referrals of children from S.P.H. and discipline referrals of children from D.P.H.

1. Obtain the discipline referrals of students during February, March and April, 1982. Make a statistical comparison of students from S.P.H. and students from D.P.H.

2. Obtain the list of suspended students during February, March and April, 1982. Make a statistical comparison of students from S.P.H. and students from D.P.H.
3. Test for significant difference between the students from S.P.H. and students from D.P.H.
4. Hypothesis III will be validated on the basis of .05 level of significance.

DEFINITIONS

Single Parent Household (S.P.H.). A social structure consisting of one parental figure and children below the age of 18. This social organization consists of only one resident adult which need not be the natural parent of the child.

Dual Parent Household (D.P.H.). A social structure consisting of two parental figures and children below the age of 18. This social organization may include any combination of residing step parents, foster parents or natural parents.

National Percentile Rank. This item indicates the percentage of raw scores in a national norm group that fall below a given student's raw score. For example, if a student's raw score converts to a percentile rank of 71, this means that the student scored higher than approximately 71% of the students in the national norm. Thus a score of 50 is the average score.

Total Battery Score. This is the California Achievement Test score

comprising the Total Reading, Spelling, Total Language and Total Mathematics categories. This score does not include the Reference Skills categories administered during the testing period.

Discipline Referral. This shall include any student referred to or disciplined by a principal. The action may take the form of detentions, suspensions, in-house suspension, conferences with teachers and parents, corporal punishment or restitution for damages.

Suspension. Refers to the barring or prohibition of students from attending classes for a specified period of time. Students need not be barred from the building. Thus, in-house suspension is categorized within this definition.

I/D/E/A. The Institute for Development of Educational Activities, a division of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation.

DELIMITATIONS

This study will be limited to the students from S.P.H. at LaVista Junior High School. Students will be studied only in terms of academic achievement, discipline referrals and school attendance.

SIGNIFICANCE

Student records at LaVista Junior High School indicate that 40% of all students have at some time lived in a S.P.H. Currently 16% of the students are living with a single parent. Parents and educators alike need to be aware of possible school problems that may arise with students

from S.P.H. This societal problem must be investigated at the local level to establish if in fact S.P.H. leads to school problems.

The results, conclusions and recommendations of this study will be used for In-Service at LaVista Junior High School. This information will increase awareness and aid educators in their efforts to meet the needs of students.

ORGANIZATION

This project will identify and contrast statistical data of students from S.P.H. and students from D.P.H. to determine if school performance is significantly different.

Chapter I serves as the introduction to the increasing numbers of S.P.H. This chapter recognizes the controversy involving the possible problems students from S.P.H. are having at school.

Chapter II reviews related literature pertaining to the educational performance of children from S.P.H.

Chapter III presents the statistical data collected during this study.

Chapter IV includes a summary, conclusions and recommendations to the staff and patrons of LaVista Junior High School regarding the effect of S.P.H. on student performance and how these families may be better served by the school.

REFERENCES

1. "One-Parent Families and Their Children: The Schools Most Significant Minority," Principal, Vol. 60, No. 1 (September, 1980), 31.
2. B. Frank Brown, "A Study of the School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families," Phi Delta Kappan, (April, 1980), 537.
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4. Dan Morgan, "Children from single-parent home have more school problems: Study," Des Moines Sunday Register, September 14, 1980, p. 21.
5. Phyllis L. Clay, "The Schools and Single Parents: Accessibility is the Key," NASSP Bulletin, Vol. 64, No. 432
6. Papillion/LaVista School District, North Central Accreditation Internal Evaluation Report, (March, 1980), 3-4.
7. North Central Accreditation Internal Report, p. 6.

CHAPTER 2

RELATED LITERATURE

Research and literature related to the educational needs of children from single parent households (S.P.H.) is very limited. Little attention has been given to the problems of children from S.P.H. until recent years. The school problems of S.P.H. children have not become a researched topic of concern despite changing family patterns and styles.

Most of the recent concern about the children of S.P.H. refers to their abilities for coping with the family situation as opposed to coping with situations within the educational setting. Research studies by sociologists and psychologists have clearly presented the magnitude and prevalence of the S.P.H. phenomena in our society today. "The trauma¹ of divorce is second only to death" in terms of psychological impact and the resulting period of adjustment that must follow. As this occurrence becomes increasingly prevalent among families with school aged children, it begins to concern educators because such an impact may affect the children's affective and cognitive development. This combination of concern about the S.P.H. and the conjecture that children from S.P.H. have more difficulty in school is contributing to a sense of crisis in the public schools today.

An extensive study on the school behaviors of children from one-parent and two-parent homes was cosponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and The Institute for Development of Education Activities, a division of the Charles F. Kettening Foundation. This report was published in 1980. Twenty-six elementary and secondary

schools in order to represent a cross section of the country as well as a cross section of inner city, suburban, small town, and rural areas. A survey was conducted once each semester during the 1979-80 school year. It identified seventeen items designed to measure school performance in comparing one-parent versus two-parent families.

The findings of the NAESP-I/D/E/A study suggests that "one-parent children show lower achievement and present more discipline problems than do their two-parent peers in both elementary and high school. They are also absent more often, late to school more often, and show more health problems as well." ² The report is not conclusive in determining the extent to which the child's family status is the cause for school problems. Further research is planned by the NAESP to examine this concern. However, the report does state "there is a definite correl-³ ation between school performance and family status."

School behaviors of two-parent and one-parent children are significantly different at the .05 level in forty-nine of the fifty-eight tests made in the NAESP-I/D/E/A study. First, the Wilks Lamber Multi-variates test was performed. If the .05 level criteria was met, a univariate analysis of variance was performed on the means. If the .05 criteria level was not met again, a Tukey's pair wise comparison of all the means was made.

The I/D/E/A study also discussed the implications these findings have for schools. The I/D/E/A study suggests "the school is in an excellent position to offer help. If extra help and reassurance do not come from the school, the child may have difficulty finding them any-

4
 where else." The Consortuim provided suggestions for schools in the areas of record keeping to better identify D.P.H. and become better informed about the family status. I/D/E/A also suggested inservice programs for all staff and some programs extended to the single parent. Curriculum and instructional suggestions were made in the form of materials that present a non-stereotyped family structure. Included in the curricular suggestions were parenting classes, family living classes and discussion formats for the changing family patterns. Emphasis was placed on the importance of available counseling services and counseling sessions for the student of the diminishing family. Special consideration for transportation, after school or extended day options were encouraged for the elementary level.

Significant research has also been done by child psychologist, Dr. Lee Salk. In his book, What Every Child Would Like Parents to Know About Divorce, Dr. Salk states that a multitude of physical symptoms may accompany the psychological problems involved in a divorcing family. "Any kind of mental activity is a strain during the turmoil of divorce." 5 It is not uncommon for a concentration problem to develop in the classroom as children become preoccupied with the "unsolvable" problems in their life. This drains their mental energy and is also physically exhausting. In a 1979 study of children of divorce parents, Hetherington also found that "many youngsters, finding it difficult to concentrate at school, suffer at least temporarily in 6 their academic performance."

Dr. Salk reports from discussions with teachers that there seems

to be no clean-cut pattern when observing student's reactions in the classrooms. "Some students seem to work harder and get better grades... while others seem to come apart completely and lose all motivation." The different reactions are due to "variations in personalities, previous experiences, the emotional resources of the family, and the specific circumstances of the divorce."⁸

Dr. Hetherington goes slightly beyond the observations of Dr. Lee Salk. Dr. Hetherington contends that "boys are hit harder by divorce" due to arrangements of the post-divorce custody. The divorce effect on boys is "attributed to the lack of a father to serve as an adequate male model and as a disciplinarian with boys."⁹¹⁰

It should be emphasized that these same types of behaviors and reactions by children of divorce may also be observed in children from D.P.H. Therefore it is inconclusive as to the type and degree of impact divorce may have on the children's performance, behavior and attendance at school. The most conservative conclusion was made by Dr. Hetherington when she said "There is a greater probability of problems in school occurring with children from single-parent families."¹¹

The most significant factor is that such analysis might very well be the ability of the individual to cope with the external distractions while in attendance at school. Intensive research studies may not adequately determine each individual's ability to handle each family situation.

The primary conclusion to be drawn from this related literature and research is that a variety of behaviors can be observed in the

reactions of children of divorce. These reactions appear to have an effect on cognitive performances as well as social interaction of these children which may have an impact on their ability to function in the public school.

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2. "One-Parent Families and Their Children: The School's Most Significant Minority," Principal, Vol. 60, No. 1 (September, 1980), 33.
3. Ibid, p. 33.
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7. Salk, p. 55.
8. Ibid.
9. "The Children of Divorce," , p. 61.
10. E. Mavis Hetherington and Ross D. Parke, Contemporary Readings in Child Psychology (New York, 1977), p. 308.
11. B. Frank Brown, "A Study of the School Needs of Children From One-Parent Families", Phi Delta Kappan, (April, 1980), p. 537.
12. Hetherington, p. 308.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To test the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between academic achievement of children from S.P.H. and the academic achievements of children from D.P.H. the following procedures were used:

1. The records of 30 children from S.P.H. and 140 children from D.P.H. were randomly selected.
2. The National Percentile Ranking of the Total Battery Scores from the California Achievement Tests were obtained for each student in the randomly selected groups.
3. The mean scores of children from S.P.H. and the mean score of children from D.P.H. were then tested to determine a statistical difference at the .05 level by using the student's test.

The data revealed that the mean scores of children from S.P.H. was not significantly different from the mean scores of children from D.P.H. at the .05 level. The hypothesis was accepted. (See Table 1)

TABLE I.

A Comparison of the Total Battery Scores
of the California Achievement Test for
Children of D.P.H. and S.P.H.

	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	DF	Prob (T)
D.P.H.	60.61	24.86	2.10	42.2	.3430
S.P.H.	55.80	24.96	4.56	168.0	.3376

To test the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between school attendance of children from S.P.H. and school attendance of children from D.P.H. the following procedures were used:

1. The records of 30 children from S.P.H. and 140 children from D.P.H. were randomly selected.
2. Daily absentee and daily tardy records were obtained for each student in the randomly selected samples.
3. The means of the daily absences of children from S.P.H. and the means of children from D.P.H. were tested to determine a statistical difference at the .05 level by using the student's test.

The data revealed that the mean of the daily absences of children from S.P.H. was not significantly different from the mean of the children from D.P.H., however, the mean of the daily tardies of children from S.P.H. was significantly different from the mean of the daily tardies of children from D.P.H. The hypothesis is rejected. (See Tables 2 and 3).

TABLE 2

A Comparison of the Daily Absences of
Children from D.P.H. and S.P.H.

	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	DF	Prob (T)
D.P.H.	3.70	3.97	.33	46.1	.6529
S.P.H.	4.03	3.54	.65	168.0	.6750

TABLE 3

A Comparison of the Daily Tardies of
Children from D.P.H. and S.P.H.

	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	DF	Prob (T)
D.P.H.	.35	.82	.06	31.2	.0047
S.P.H.	1.46	1.96	.35	168.0	.0001

To test the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the discipline referrals of children from S.P.H. and the discipline referrals of children from D.P.H. the following procedures were used:

1. The records of 30 children from S.P.H. and 140 children from D.P.H. were randomly selected.
2. Discipline records were obtained for each student in the randomly selected samples.
3. The mean of discipline referrals of children from S.P.H. and the mean of discipline referrals of children from D.P.H. were tested to determine a statistical difference at the .05 level by using the student's test.
4. The mean of suspension of children from S.P.H. and the mean of suspension of children from D.P.H. were tested to determine a statistical difference at the .05 level by using the student's test.

The data revealed that the mean of the discipline referrals of children from S.P.H. was significantly different from the mean of the

discipline referrals of children from D.P.H. The mean of the suspensions of children from S.P.H. was also significantly different from the means of the suspensions of children from D.P.H. This hypothesis is also rejected. (See Table 4 and 5)

TABLE 4

A Comparison of Discipline Referrals of
Children from D.P.H. and S.P.H.

	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	DF	Prob	(T)
D.P.H.	.45	1.47	.124	30.4	.0332	
S.P.H.	2.35	4.48	.819	168.0	.0001	

TABLE 5

A Comparison of Suspensions Issued To
Children from D.P.H. and S.P.H.

	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	DF	Prob	(T)
D.P.H.	.05	.219	.018	29.5	.0432	
S.P.H.	.46	1.017	.196	167.0	.0001	

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary:

This study was designed to determine if there is a difference in academic achievement, school attendance and discipline between the children from S.P.H. and the children from D.P.H. at LaVista Junior High School. Data were gathered from student accumulative records and administrative discipline records in order to make a statistical analysis. Mean scores of the Total Battery on the California Achievement Test were used for the comparison of academic achievement of children from S.P.H. and children from D.P.H. School attendance was measured in terms of daily attendance and tardies for each group while discipline comparisons were based upon the discipline referrals to administrators and suspension records maintained by the administration at LaVista Junior High School

The data were inconclusive in providing an overall difference in the children from S.P.H. and the children from D.P.H. at LaVista Junior High School. The data did not reveal a significant difference in academic achievement as measured by the California Achievement Test. There was no significant difference found in the area of daily attendance for the two sample groups. However, significant differences were discovered in the school attendance area of tardies as well as school discipline in terms of referrals to the principal and suspensions. Children from S.P.H. were referred to the principal, suspended with

greater frequency and late to school in the morning significantly more often than children from D.P.H.

Conclusions:

1. Evidence presented in this study appears to be in contrast with the findings of the NAESP, I/D/E/A study (discussed in Chapter 2.) The difference may be explained in the academic achievement criteria measured in each study. The I/D/E/A study measured academic achievement in terms of "letter grades of D or F or number grades of 50 to 70"¹ to identify "low achievers and letter grades of A or B or number grades of 80 to 100"² to identify high achievers. In contrast, the LaVista study measured academic achievement in terms of scores on the Total Bettery from the California Achievement Test. The criteria used in each study distinguishes between a short term grade earned by students in the individual classroom (I/D/E/A) study versus accumulated knowledge as measured on the standardized California Achievement Test (LaVista study).

While the I/D/E/A study found a difference in academic achievement based on short term performance measured by grades, the LaVista study did not find a difference in academic achievement based on long term standardized test scores.

2. Another explanation as to why the results differ is that the average S.P.H. remains a single parent household for only "3.2 years"³. During these years, intelligence as measured by the California Achievement Test is less likely to be affected than the grades earned by students as measured in the I/D/E/A study.

3. In the LaVista study, there was an actual difference of 4.8 percentile points between the scores of children from D.P.H. and the scores of children from S.P.H. Although not statistically different, the lower mean scores obtained by the children of S.P.H. could be an indication of recent problems in school performance. Recent problems could have subtle effects on a standardized test such as the CAT.

4. Two criteria were used to test for a difference between school attendance of children from S.P.H. and the children from D.P.H. In terms of average daily attendance, there was no significant difference in the samples. Implied from this data is that the children from S.P.H. are equally as healthy as the children from D.P.H. and that children from S.P.H. have a similar value for regular school attendance.

5. The LaVista study found a significant difference in tardies between the samples. The children from S.P.H. were tardy an average of 1.46 times compared to .35 times for the children of D.P.H. This could very likely indicate an absence of the adult parent in the household to supervise morning preparations for school. The working parent is often required to be at work well before school starts. This leaves the junior high age student at home unsupervised. Adolescents are often not able to adequately handle all of the responsibilities necessary to arrive at school on time.

6. The third hypothesis on student behavior was found to be correct by the data in this study. Overwhelmingly, children from S.P.H. were referred to the principal more often and suspended from classes

more often than the children from D.P.H. The S.P.H. sample was referred for discipline problems five times more often and suspended nine times more often than the D.P.H. sample.

The related literature presented in Chapter Two lends support for the disruptive aspects of divorce and the affects it has on the children. Supporting evidence in the LaVista study allows one to conclude that the disruptive aspects of a single parent household and the affect it has on the family setting carries over to the student's behavior at school. The more disruptive a student becomes in school the more likely it is that he or she will also be suspended.

7. Through this investigation, it became evident that many of the factors affecting the children of S.P.H. and their successes at school are beyond a complete empirical analysis. Each individual student handles individual relationships in a different manner. The multitude of variables affecting school performance is so great that trying to distinguish differences based on family structure is unfair in terms of the specific home environment.

Recommendations:

As a result of this study, the following recommendations have been developed and submitted to the staff at LaVista Junior High School as proposed in organization sector of Chapter 1.

1. Records: Every attempt must be made to identify the current family status for all students. Professional and confidential monitoring should be conducted of children from S.P.H. in terms of behavior,

performance and attendance. Students' records must accurately identify proper procedure for emergency notification during the school day as well as identification of child care obligations for siblings before or after school. School officials must also be aware of proper authorization for the release of information and/or custody of the student.

2. In-Service: Specific information pertaining to current research on the impact of changing parent patterns must be made available to staff. This is necessary to develop a better understanding of the complexities of S.P.H. and help the staff overcome stereotypes concerning S.P.H. Staff members should also be alerted to specific personality and behavior changes that may signal more deeply rooted problems. Teachers should also be informed of the groups and organizations that are available for assistance to single parents and dual parent families.

3. Counseling: The counseling staff at LaVista Junior High School must continue to provide a wide range of services to students in coping with disruptive family circumstances. The counseling staff should continue their leadership in establishing appropriate in-service programs. They must also assist local social service agencies in working with students and their families. Counselors may also facilitate the development of adult education programs to deal with the ever changing family patterns.

4. Research: More research is needed to understand the impact of a single parent household on the successes or failures a student may experience at school. Fortunately, there appears to be a trend towards this specific topic as evidenced by the commitment of the I/D/E/A.

Once specific and conclusive evidence is derived, then local school services can more accurately deal with the dilemma of the child from a single parent household.

CHAPTER IV

REFERENCES

1. "One-Parent Families and Their Children: The Schools Most Significant Minority." Principal, Vol. 60, No. 1 (September, 1980), 33.
2. Ibid., p.33.
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