

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CHILD'S PLACE IN LOUIS CORMAN'S FAMILY DRAWING TEST

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### ABSTRACT

This article highlights the place of the child in his or her family, by deploying a comparative approach between two social groups; on the one hand, children and adolescents in family breakdown and on the other hand, those living in a family (n =120). We opted for a projective method of graphism which aims at soliciting a double psychic work of perception and projection. Corman's family drawing test was presented to children and teenagers from two groups mentioned above. The analysis of our survey focused on three indices of symbolization of the place of the child in the family space: close to the family, absent in the family and away from the family. From the comparative reading of these indices, the symbol "absent" is manifested in the family drawing especially in children and adolescents in family breakdown. While among children and adolescents living in families, the symbol index "close to the family" characterizes more this category of subjects. Two clues "out of the way" and "close to the family" mark the similarity of the symbolic expressions for these two samples.

**Keywords:** family, family drawing, street child, united families, child's place.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### a. Problem

The child has always been at the heart of the concerns of society and the family. According to the point of view of Idzumbuir (1995, p.3), when dealing with the question of children in Africa, it is necessarily important to distinguish between their place in traditional and urban environments. In a traditional environment, the child was an asset for the family, a social and economic force for the clan. His birth was an event for the parents, the family and the entire community. The child was seen as the perpetuation of the clan and society. Hence the adage that "the child is the living force of the nation, the hope of society, the future of a people". Thus, in an urban environment, social life has many requirements that are different from the traditional environment. Life in the urban environment is an accumulation of problems; problems of money, employment, housing, schooling for the children, etc. It is difficult to transpose traditional values into the urban environment. Living in the city requires a substantial income.

This is why, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the observation is that in all the capitals of large cities, the phenomenon of "street children and young people" has taken on worrying dimensions. This reality that we qualify as a social pathology that has its roots in the structure and organization of society. The child's place is in the family and his departure from his family

is the product of a combination of the constraints that push the child towards the street. While the family unit remains the only natural living environment in favor of the child, the place that will facilitate his emotional, intellectual and social development.

Pincent et al. (2011) consider that the phenomenon of "street children" covers very different situations and individual realities.

According to Marguerat (2003) and Pirot (2006), this phenomenon is typically a problem of generational conflict that can be explained by the irresponsibility of adults and the crisis of the parental unit

Pirot, for his part, thinks that in Africa, the accusation of witchcraft in relation to children is a significant factor that precipitates children into the streets.

According to Ignoumba (2016), the "street child" is on the street because of a family impasse. This impasse, like a trauma or a situation that is difficult to resolve, would prevent the child from living with his family.

Children who have broken up with their families have different backgrounds; each one has his or her own unique story. The complexity of this population also makes it impossible to generalize the causes that would explain the departure on the street. Generally speaking, street children are seen as the product of social, family and economic crises. Of course, we are not the first to explore this theme, several studies have been carried out on the analysis of the child's family situation through the projective drawing of Corman's family.

Douieb and Feldman (2004) conducted a study on the representations of separation in children placed in child protection using family drawings. They were specifically interested in drawing the family of two children of latency age placed in a home. These drawings show great difficulties in representation, the people drawn are not very differentiated, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-dialogue-2020-4-page-201.htm>,

A study by Lousot (1988), this author carried out a comparative study on "the representation of his family by the abused child and the non-abused children". The analysis of all the drawings collected has revealed a certain differentiation in the representation of the family between the two groups of children. (Normal) children draw their natural family more frequently, knowing more or less the meaning and notion, and all seem to have integrated a family model and refer to it. Among abused children, only two of them have drawn their biological family, and three do not seem to know the meaning of the notion of family. [www.apbm-free.fr/](http://www.apbm-free.fr/)

Thevenot and Louvet (2020) deal with a question entitled, "What representations of the family in a changing society?" An analysis based on drawings by children and teenagers. Each child, according to his or her own family history and psychological problems, has developed a representation based on the instructions proposed. We can assume that for some, the represented family (real or imaginary) corresponds to their ideal of the ego, and that for others, the superegoic instance probably played the role of censor... Thus, we can ask ourselves to what extent the social landmarks highlighted in our study participate in the construction of children's identity. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02949722>

Morval (1986) studied the possible link between drawing qualities and the features of the child's family. To do this, she compared the drawings of the family of 60 children from separated families with those of 60 children from intact homes. The results obtained showed a relationship between the child's level of anxiety, the increase in aggression towards the father as well as closeness towards the mother, and the separation of the parents.

The author also makes the following observations: girls from separated families have a less valued self-image than girls from intact families; it seems that the absence of a father is more harmful to girls' self-image than to boys', in particular because boys often have a regressive identification that allows for a narcissistic revaluation. However, daughters of separated parents have progressive identifications, but appear to be more dependent on the mother. Finally, for all children from separated families, the identifying figure noted in the drawing is not a character of an age equivalent to the subject and the father figure awakens feelings of aggressiveness.

Porcelli. (2010) examined the Fosterage and Resilience in the Bambara Environment (Mali), a constructionist analysis of the trajectories of children in charge using the family drawing test. This study is devoted to the phenomenon of fosterage, which refers to a set of traditional practices that are relatively unknown in psychology involving prolonged separations between a child and biological parents. Her research aimed more specifically to provide an overview of these customs in the Bambara environment, in the light of the constructionist paradigm of resilience. To this end, after deconstructing the representations and the logic underlying these realities as well as the dynamics of psychosocial risk and the vulnerability factors they determine, the author analyzed the trajectories of 15 children and young people entrusted to a rural Malian commune using the family drawing test.

Thus, the results of his study showed analogies with certain values encouraged by the environment to which he belongs, but also with the heterogeneity and creativity of the individual paths of the protagonists. These data confirmed the importance of taking cultural elements into account in the evaluation of these practices in order to promote an integration of resilience models and a recomposition of resilience models and a reconfiguration of representations of kinship and filiation in society.

After an overview of this research on the family drawing test, we note that these studies have a shortcoming because they did not use Louis Corman's family drawing, in order to understand the place of the child and adolescent in family breakdown and those living in the family in his family constellation. In view of this observation, we believe that the social dimension alone is no longer sufficient to understand this variable. The clinical aspect must also be taken into account. As Vandecasteele & Lefebvre (2006) put it.

In addressing such a subject, we asked ourselves the question of whether the children and adolescents in our survey have a place in their representations of the family? In other words, what is the feeling they have of themselves in the family?

In view of the observation of regular relationships among children living in families and irregular relationships among children and adolescents who have broken up with their families. Two hypotheses have been proposed;

- Compared to children and adolescents living in families, those who have broken up with their families do not appear in the family constellation drawn.
- Compared to female children and adolescents living in families, those who have broken up with their families do not appear in the family constellation drawn.

The main objective is to identify the place of the child and adolescent in the graphic space projected by the subjects, by comparing two different situations; those of children and adolescents living in families and those who have broken up with their families.

Our general objective derives from specific objectives;

- ✚ To understand the place of children and adolescents living in families and those of children and adolescents who have broken up with their families.
- ✚ Identify the subjective position of girls in the group of children and adolescents living in families and those who have broken up with their families.

## **b. Theoretical framework**

This article is mainly based on theories from psychoanalysis.

The reality of family ties, the way in which the child situates himself in the family, depend on his emotional states, his singular experience and his experiences in this environment. The main question based on the research concerns the place of children and adolescents in the family;

- The child can be close and immersed in his family constellation when there is love and family cohesion.
- The child may have feelings of being left out when he or she feels less wanted. This is an illustration of relational difficulties as mentioned by Cormann (1970)
- Being absent in the family constellation, a true expression of exclusion which is a real suffering.

## **2.0 METHOD AND TECHNIQUES**

Our methodological approach is supported by six steps, namely the study population, the sample, the variables, the data collection instrument, the course of the administration of the family drawing test, as well as the analysis and processing of the data.

### **2.1 Population and sample**

Our research focuses on two study groups. On the one hand, it is children and adolescents who have broken up with their families. On the other hand, for comparison purposes, it was a question of having a parallel group among the group of children and adolescents living in families.

Thus, we have chosen the following as inclusion criteria; For groups of children and adolescents who have broken up with their families, we have retained the following criteria;

- Being a child in a family breakdown in temporary placement at the Saint Laurent center
- Be between the ages of 7 and 17

- Be male or female

For children and adolescents living in families, the inclusion criteria considered are as follows;

- Belong to a family, having both parental figures, as well as siblings,
- Be between the ages of 7 and 17, Be male or female.

Our sample consists of 120 subjects, including 60 children and adolescents who have broken up with their families and 60 other children and adolescents living in families.

Tables 1 to 2 below show the distribution of subjects by sex, age and group.

**Table 1. Distribution of subjects by sex and group of affiliation**

	Child and youth living in families	Child and adolescent in family breakdown	Total	%
Male	40 (33.3 %)	42(35.0 %)	82	68.3
Female	20 (16.7 %)	18(15.0 %)	38	31.7
Total	60	60	120	-

This table shows that, overall, out of a total of 120 subjects, 82 subjects, or 68.3 per cent, are male, including 40 children and adolescents living in families, i.e. 33.3 per cent, and 42 other subjects, i.e. 35.0 per cent of children and adolescents who have broken up with their families. The female sex represents a total of 38 subjects, or 31.7%, of whom 20 subjects, or 16.7%, are children living in families, and 18 subjects, or 15.0%, are children who have broken up with their families.

**Table 2. Distribution of subjects according to age groups and group of belonging**

Age	Child and youth living in families	Children and adolescents in family breakdown	Total	%
7-12 (Child)	44(36.7 %)	25 (20.8 %)	69	57.7
13-17 (adolescent)	16 (13.3 %)	35(29.2 %)	51	42.5
Total	60	60	120	-

This table shows that 69 subjects, or 57.7%, are aged 7-12 years, of whom 44 subjects, or 36.7%, are from the group of children and adolescents living in families and 25 subjects, or 20.8%, or 20.8% from the group of children and adolescents who have broken up with their families. Finally, 51 subjects, or 42.5%, were in the age range of 13-17 years, including 16 subjects, i.e. 13.5% from subjects living with a family and 35, i.e. 29.2% from children and adolescents who had broken up with their families.

## 2.2 Data collection and processing techniques

To better understand the problem that concerns us, Louis Corman's family drawing test was used with the aim of identifying the subjective position of the child in the family dynamic. It is easy to pass for children and teenagers. With a less expensive material, it is a projective tool widely used in children's clinics.

We consider the Louis Corman family drawing test to be a child-centred analysis of the family situation. Unbeknownst to him, the child provides a lot of information in his drawing about his vision of his place in the family.

When administering the test, it was important to create a climate of trust in order to get the subjects to pass the test correctly. Here, it was a question of explaining the context, that is to say that it was not an immersion in their private lives. This first moment consisted of setting up the subjects well. After an assurance on the working conditions, the calm, the test equipment, the availability of children and teenagers. We put the child in his place and gave him a sheet of white A4 paper, a black pencil, a box of colored pencils (12 pieces) without eraser.

The instruction was pronounced and adapted according to the child's understanding in Lingala as well as in French. It was formulated as follows: "Imagine a family of your invention and draw it", "kanisa mpe yema libota" To each question of the children, we also answered them "do as you want" "sala lolenge olingi" each child taking about 15 to 40 minutes for the scriptural phase. The interview took 5 to 10 minutes for each child. And its main objective was to ask the child to clarify each sign, the different characters and explain the different clues manifest in his graphic space.

During the test, we stayed next to the child and adolescent either to encourage him in the execution of his task, or to clarify the instructions further, to observe if there are certain inhibitions in him and to see which character is blocking him, the order in which the characters are drawn, in the end to observe all the emotional reactions of the child, such as hesitation before starting, postural attitude, mood. In the time following production, the examiner begins the process of understanding on the basis of an interview with the child about his drawing.

Then, the data was compiled to facilitate their processing. Finally, we categorized the elements identified to situate them in the grid designed by the author of the test. It contains the graphic level, the formal level, the content level. As far as we are concerned, we have been interested in the level of content, with a view to identifying the place of the child in the projected family.

Moreover, the symbols identified were coded and subjected to a processing based on SPSS20 software. Percentages were selected to emphasize the presence of symbols. Similarly, the analysis consisted of a return to the totality of drawings in order to compare the two groups in order to look for the presence of convergence, of divergences between the symbols. To then cross-reference and confront the clues collected with each other.

### 3.0 STUDY RESULTS

In this section we present the results of our frequency-based study. With regard to our main objective, we have been content to observe especially the place that the child occupies in the family constellation of our subjects.

**Table 3: Place of children and adolescents within the family according to two groups to which they belong**

Place	Children and adolescents living in families		Children and adolescents in family breakdown		Total	%
	n	%	n	%		
Close	54	90	33	55	87	72.5
Out of the way	6	10	9	15	15	12.5
Absent	0	0	18	30	18	15.0
Total	60	100	60	100	120	100

This table shows that 87 drawing subjects, i.e. 72.5%, are close to the characters of the drawn family (90% of subjects living with a family compared to 55% of those who have broken up with their families); 15 cartoonist subjects, i.e. 12.5%, are away from the characters of the drawn family (15% of subjects with a family breakdown compared to 10% of those living with a family) and finally, the cartoonists absent from the family constellation appear only in the graphic productions of subjects with family breakups, 18 subjects, i.e. 15% overall (30% subjects with a family breakdown).

The following table shows the age groups according to the two groups. The age group was established based on the group of children and adolescents housed at the Saint Laurent Centre.

**Table 4: Place of the cartoonist in family drawings by age group**

Place	Children and adolescents living in families				Children and adolescents in family breakdown			
	7-12 years old		13-17 years old		7-12 years old		13-17 years old	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Close	38	86.4	16	100	14	53.8	19	55.9
The Gap	6	13.6	0	0	3	11.6	6	17.6
Absent	0	0	0	0	9	34.6	9	26.5
Total	44		16		26		34	

This table shows the distribution by age group. Concerning the age group of 7-12 years, that 38 subjects, or 86.4%, living in a family against 14 subjects, or 53.3% of those in family breakup, are close to the other members of their families; 6 subjects, or 13.6%, living with a family compared to 3 subjects, or 11.6% of those who had broken up with their families; 6 subjects, i.e. 17.6% who had broken up with their families, were separated from their family members. On the other hand, 3 subjects, i.e. 26.5% who have broken up with their families, are absent from the drawing. It should be noted that exclusion and absence only concern adolescents living in families.

Table 5 shows the distribution of sex among our subjects

**Table 5: Place of children and adolescents in the family by sex**

families	Children and adolescents living in				Children and adolescents in family breakdown			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
Place	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Close	16	26.7	38	63.3	12	20.0	21	35.0
Out of the way	6	10.0	0	0	3	5.0	6	10.0
Absent	0	0.0	0	0	6	10.0	12	20.0
Total	22		38		21		39	100

It is observed that in girls 16 subjects, or 26.7%, are close in the family constellation, compared to 12 subjects, or 20% in subjects with family breakdowns. It appears that only 6 subjects, or 10%, are on the sidelines among girls living in families, compared to 3 girls or 5% among children and adolescents who have broken up with their families. With regard to the presence of the subject within the family, 6 girls, or only 10%, are absent in the family space among girls who have broken up with their families.

As for boys, the results show that 38 subjects, or 63.3%, are in the family constellation, compared to 21 subjects, 35% in subjects with a family breakdown. It is observed that 6 subjects, i.e. 10% of those who have broken up with their families, are outside the family constellation. Regarding the presence of the subject in the family constellation, it should be noted that 12 subjects, or 20% of those who have broken up with their families, are absent from the family space.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION

Overall, these results show that the analysis of all the graphic expressions examined has made it possible to highlight certain differentiation in the representation of the family between children and adolescents living in families on the one hand and those who have broken up with their families on the other.

In fact, among children and adolescents living in families, they are found to be close, a sign of a sense of belonging in the family context, apart from or far from the family, an indication that reflects a feeling of unease in the family constellation. On the other hand, in the graphic productions of children who have broken up with their families, we have collected, the clues expressing the absent position in the family is very pronounced. We could link this reality among children and adolescents who have broken up with their families to the feeling of exclusion and trauma linked to family violence and emotional deprivation. Emotional trauma related to separation, deprivation, or loss of something good, which has been positive in the child's experience up to a certain date and has been withdrawn, Winnicott argues (1956, p.301).

Our results have the same resonance with those of Douieb and Fieldman (2004), who have shown great difficulties in representation, the people drawn are not very differentiated. And also our results are in line with the point of view of Sandra (1988) who found that normal (non-maltreated) children draw their natural family more frequently and all seem to have internalized a family model. Whereas among abused children, the majority do not seem to know the

meaning of the notion of the family. Our results confirm those of Morval (1986) by the fact that it is true that, in view of the destruction of the family unit, the well-being of the child is undermined. This reality could be linked to the child's psychological balance and self-esteem.

In view of these results, we say that this variable of absence in the family context is a denunciation of a feeling of being excluded which reflects a serious violation of the right of the child mentioned in international legislation (Convention on the Rights of the Child) as well as national legislation (Law on the Protection of the Child). However, it is clear that we are in an era where respect for the person of the child is gaining ground. If the question initially asked must be answered, the point of view of the street child in these drawings reflects the symbol of absence in the family constellation.

These results bring us closer to Bowlby, J. (1960), in his basic principle of attachment theory that a young child, in order to experience normal social and emotional development, needs to develop an attachment relationship with at least one person who cares for him or her in a coherent and continuous way. Our results confirm those of Dileo, H (1973) pointing out that children who do not identify themselves in their families demonstrate that they do not feel they belong to their families.

In the same vein, we think that it would be a greater horror for a child not to be recognized as human by the members of his family, yet in the developmental journey of the child, affectivity should be an imperative acquisition. Consequently, affective failure promotes psychopathology and can at the same time produce a depressive state.

Following these analyses, we answer the research questions posed in this study. Do the teenagers in our survey have a place in their representations of the family? In other words, what is the feeling they have of themselves in the family? Overall, children and adolescents living in families feel that they belong in their families despite some problematic indicators, while those who have broken up with their families feel that they are not wanted in their families.

#### **4.1 Limitations of the study**

During the taking of the exam, in the group of children and adolescents living in families, there were sometimes curious neighboring children who observed the activity. Lack of complete information on subjects living in families.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

In approaching this study, we asked ourselves the question of whether the children and adolescents in our survey have a place in their representations of the family? In other words, what is the feeling they have of themselves in the family?

The objective of this research was to carry out a comparative study of the place of the child in Louis Corman's family drawing. From this general objective, two specific objectives have been pursued, firstly to grasp the place of children and adolescents living in families and those in family breakdown. Second, identify the subjective position of girls in the group of children and adolescents living in families and those who have broken up with their families. Two hypotheses have been studied;

- Compared to children and adolescents living in families, those who have broken up with their families do not appear in the family constellation drawn.
- Compared to female children and adolescents living in families, those who have broken up with their families do not appear in the family constellation drawn.

Our objectives have been achieved. The comparison allowed us to highlight a certain differentiation in the representation of the place of the child according to children living in families and those in family breakdown. As far as the analysis of the results is concerned, three symbolic expressions emerged from this study: close, absent and away from the family. By making a comparison, it turns out that the index at the gap is typical of the group of children and adolescents who have broken up with their families, so the indices at the distance and close to the family are found in both samples. The results of this study confirmed our hypotheses.

One criticism that can be made of this research is the use of a single test. However, in addition, other tests and techniques, for example, Corman's black paw, as well, life stories could have been retained to complete the interpretations. We also point out that the variables Age and sex are not exactly matched.

We suggest that researchers who think they are measuring themselves on this line should evaluate the place of the child after the reintegration process in the future. In the clinic, diagnosis calls for therapy. What can be done to provide help to this category of children and adolescents who encounter this difficulty of emotional deprivation, in other words how can we counter this psychological vulnerability linked to exclusion? Much needs to be done in this context. Systemic work, with several approaches; legal, sociological, economic and psychological ..., would be important in the search for a solution adapted to the

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