

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Divorced Parents Versus College Students from Intact
Families

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Divorce is a nationwide problem that affects more and more families and children every day. Because these children of divorce often learn from their parents, there very likely is a greater risk for these children to become divorced themselves as adults. The question is how can we prevent this from happening? One answer is to look at the self-esteem of these children. Self-esteem refers to how an individual views him- or herself. Do these children have an overall positive or negative feeling about themselves and do they feel significant and worthwhile?

This study was designed to examine self-esteem levels of college students of divorced parents versus college students of parents who are still married. Sixty-eight students from a small, midwestern university volunteered to participate in this study. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A) and a demographic questionnaire were used to collect the data. Specifically, it was hypothesized that students from divorced parents would have lower self-esteem than students from parents still married.

To determined significance, a two-way analysis of

variance (ANOVA) was used with family structure (parents married/parents divorced) and gender (male/female) as independent variables and overall CSEI-A scores as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found between college students of divorced parents and college students with married parents. However, the interaction effect of gender and family structure approached significance with an alpha value at .069. Results suggested that males adapt better to the divorce of parents. This may be because of increased responsibility in the home after divorce. Females, on the other hand, scored much lower on self-esteem when coming from divorced families.

COMPARISON OF SELF-ESTEEM IN COLLEGE STUDENTS
FROM DIVORCED PARENTS VERSUS COLLEGE STUDENTS
FROM INTACT FAMILIES

A Thesis

Presented to
the Division of Psychology and Special Education
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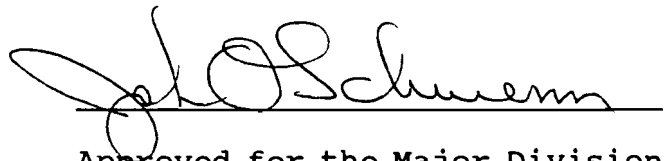
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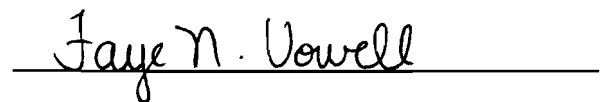
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the next decade, approximately one-third to one-half of all children in the United States will experience parental divorce (Glick, 1988). Children from divorced families are at-risk for significant adjustment problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Emery, 1988) and these children are overrepresented in mental health facilities (Zill & Peterson, 1983). However, there is marked variability in children's responses to divorce (Hetherington, 1989; Sandler, Wolchik & Braver, 1988) and not all children whose parents divorce experience psychological adjustment problems during this family transition. However, the problem is severe enough and deserves attention.

Much research has been conducted on younger children of divorce, but not much has been carried out on college-aged children of divorce. In one study of college students whose parents were divorced, only 18% claimed not to have been stressed at all by the divorce (Luepnitz, 1979). Furthermore, Kulka and Weingarten (1979) contend that divorce might subtly affect psychological well-being in the long run, by having covert influence on an individual's patterns of responding to, evaluating, and ordering adult life roles.

A study conducted by Hetherington, Cox, & Cox (1978) reported that " sleeper effects " might crop up over the years and in Wallerstein's (1984) ten year follow-up study; 30% of

the subjects reported that divorce had remained a central aspect of their lives and that they felt a continual sense of deprivation. So, it does appear the divorce of parents has long-term implications on children. However, research on college individuals is generally lacking.

Because self-esteem and self-concept are vital constructs to this study, it is warranted to include definitions of both terms and to include a little background information. Self-concept and self-esteem are very closely related terms. However, for purposes of clarity, they will be defined separately. Obiakor and Stile (1994) define self-concept as an individual's repertoire of self-descriptive behaviors. It includes self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-ideal. Self-descriptive behavior of most verbal humans is diverse, frequently covert or private, and sometimes changes as the situation or context changes.

Self-esteem is the subset of self-descriptive behaviors that indicates self-valuation (Obiakor and Stile, 1994). The self-valuative statement is to be distinguished from the self-evaluative statement. For example, "I am a good student" or "I act badly in class" are self-evaluative, but are not self-valuative. The individual is evaluating certain self-characteristics relative to an external standard but is not indicating how he values these characteristics. Statements such as "I like my bad behavior" or "I dislike myself because I am a good student" are self-esteem statements. They

indicate valuation of self or self-quality (Obiakor and Stile, 1993).

From these definitions, it is apparent that self-esteem and self-concept are related. The fact is, however, that these terms have been defined many different ways depending upon the particular author. Traditionally, self-concept has been defined as a perceptual phenomenon, as in the way one sees or perceives oneself. For example, Kinch (1963) defined self-concept as the putting together of qualities that the individual attributes to himself. Labenne and Greene (1969) suggested that self-concept can be viewed as a collection of feelings and cognitive processes that are inferred from observed or manifest behavior.

Other authors have included definitions that include greater operational clarity. Helper (1955) viewed self-concept as the product of highly complex verbal learning in which a wide array of symbolic responses comes to be associated with one's identity symbols ("I" statements). Muller (1978) defined self-concept as an individual's repertoire of self-descriptive behaviors. Essentially, Helper and Muller felt self-concept should be taught as descriptive skills (Obiakor and Stile, 1993).

The present study will deal with the construct of self-esteem as defined by Coopersmith (1981). The term "self-esteem" refers to the evaluation a person makes and customarily maintains with regard to him- or herself. "Self-

esteem" expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which a person believes him or herself capable, significant, and successful. In short, a person's self-esteem is a judgment of worthiness that is expressed by the attitudes he or she holds toward the self. Coopersmith notes these attributes can be conscious or unconscious. In other words, a person is not always necessarily aware of all his or her attitudes toward the self, but these attitudes are often expressed verbally, through gestures, or behavioral actions.

Statement of the Problem

One way to look at possible long-term influences of divorce would be to examine self-esteem levels of those college students coming from divorced parents. This study will look at how self-esteem is affected by marital status of parents and also gender of college student. Because self-esteem involves how an individual evaluates the self, it is arguable that self-esteem has an important influence on how an individual interacts in daily life, particularly with family members. If problems arise due to the divorce of parents, they are bound to affect the self-esteem levels of the children of divorced parents. In turn, this is likely to affect other areas of their life as well, such as school and peer relations.

The high rate of divorce leaves many children without two parents to raise them. Instead, a single parent is usually

forced to raise them, provide for them, and give guidance when needed. The process of divorce seems to cause a change in the child's self-esteem level in some individuals. There appears to be an overall tendency for a decrease in self-esteem, but much still remains to be known. For example, are male and female children affected differently and does the recency of the divorce affect the self-esteem levels? These issues are unclear in the literature. There have been few studies conducted involving college children of divorce.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate differences in self-esteem levels of college students whose parents are divorced and college students whose parents are still married. In addition, the relationship that gender has on self-esteem levels of college students from divorced and intact families will be examined.

Statement of Significance

It is hoped that answers to these problems will provide insight into which children of divorce, in particular, are at-risk for future adjustment problems. While previous studies have investigated the self-esteem levels of children from divorced parents versus children with married parents, few studies have been done on college-aged children of divorce. Most important, this area lacks depth insofar as determining which particular children may be at risk for future adjustment problems. For example, if there is a greater risk for female

as compared to male college students, it would be important for parents and other experts in the field to realize this. If at-risk children of divorce can be identified through studies, early prevention of adjustment problems can be attempted.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review will attempt to give information involving the effects divorce can have on children. Groups discussed will range in age from elementary to college students. This chronological presentation will hopefully help to demonstrate the similarities and differences that are present between the self-esteem levels of divorced children and its effects on everyday life.

Elementary School-Aged Children

Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen (1989) conducted and evaluated a preventive intervention study for urban second and third graders coming from divorced families, with the main goal being to mitigate behavioral and emotional problems that occur in the wake of divorce. After pretesting, it was evidenced that the children in the divorce groups had more serious problems than demographically-matched children from intact families on all teacher, parent, and child measures, except child self-ratings of classroom adjustment. However, comparisons after treatment did indicate that significant gains were accomplished in relation to non-treated children from all perspectives and across all measures. Hence, this

suggests that a focused, time-limited, school-based group intervention with young children can enhance adjustment of children at risk following parental divorce.

Results of a study conducted by Nelson and Crawford (1990) indicate that family problems contribute significantly to childhood suicide. When surveyed, 59% of school counselors listed family problems as contributing to suicide attempts. The most common observable suicidal behaviors, according to this study, were depression, suicide threats, and aggressive, rebellious behaviors. When asked to rank issues of concern for elementary school students, counselors chose divorce as the most serious concern.

This suggests the seriousness that the effects of divorce can have on children. If they are willing to commit suicide at such a young age, it is very obvious that self-esteem levels of these children must differ from those children of non-divorced homes. Hence, it seems beneficial to search for characteristics that may predispose these children of divorce to attempt to end their own life.

Children from divorced homes score lower on self-concept than do children from non-divorced homes, although both sets of scores do fall within the expected range. Divorce does affect how children view their behavior, intelligence, physical appearance, and happiness (Beer, 1989a). In a related study by Beer (1989b), it was discovered that self-concept was also significantly lower in fifth and sixth

graders from divorced families as compared to children from intact families. These children scored lower on self-esteem, which is closely related to self-concept. Both scores still fell within the expected range, but mean scores of non-divorced children fell in the upper-quartile (high self-esteem) and the mean scores of divorced children fell in the middle of the semi-interquartile range (average self-esteem).

Beer (1989b) found that children of divorced parents also scored significantly higher on the Children's Depression Inventory, a behavioral measure, than children of intact families, suggesting that their behaviors are more severe. Divorced children were, on average, 11 points above the cutoff point for depression, while non-divorced children were less than 6 points below the cutoff point. In addition, Beer found that children from divorced homes had significantly lower grade point averages than children from non-divorced homes, suggesting the divorce itself may have adverse effects on the child's education and learning.

Guidubaldi, Perry, Clemshaw, and Caven (1983) observed that boys and older children within divorced homes had lower social and adjustment scores. They also noted a gender-effect with boys from divorced homes experiencing greater behavioral, social, and academic difficulties in comparison to both girls from divorced homes and boys from non-divorced homes. It has also been found that the isolation children feel leads them to believe they are the only ones going through a divorce crisis

and they may, at times, be too embarrassed to share anxieties, anger, and feelings of loneliness with friends (Burke & Van de Streek, 1989). As a result, their behavior toward peers often becomes aggressive, which works to alienate the very people they need.

Burke and Van de Streek (1989) have shown that an intervention program may help these children realize other children face similar crises. This intervention program was successful in improving the self-concept of children of divorce. This increased self-concept should help these children in many areas of daily life, such as school, social situations, and future life.

In relation to group counseling, similar results were found by Omizo and Omizo (1987). It was determined that participation in group counseling sessions were beneficial for enhancing some areas of self-concept and an internal locus-of-control among elementary-aged children experiencing divorce. Because divorce influences so many factors associated with success in the schools, counselors need to work with children of divorce by forming divorce counseling groups that focus on divorce issues, expressions of feelings, and development of positive self-concept.

Middle-School and Adolescent Children

As shown previously, research demonstrates the deleterious effects of divorce on elementary school children. These harmful effects often include decreased self-concept,

decreased self-esteem, and lower grades in school. In this section, research will be presented relating to adolescent and middle school children.

Results from Slater and Haber (1984) indicate adolescents from high conflict homes have a greater level of anxiety and less internal control. For the majority of these adolescents (84%), parental separation or divorce had occurred over one year prior to the study. Thus, it was determined that the effects being measured were long-term implications of family dissolution rather than the immediate response to the event.

Slater and Haber (1984) also suggest that ongoing high conflict in non-divorced or divorced homes produces lowered self-esteem, greater anxiety, and less feelings of control. Findings reveal that the low conflict in the home does not differentially affect adjustment even if family dissolution occurs. This indicates that adjustment of teens as determined by their own perceptions is not related to the divorce per se, but to the amount of current conflict in the home environment.

In line with the previous research, Parish (1991) found self-concept to be significantly higher for those from intact families in comparison with those from divorced families. However, it was also discovered that in evaluations of parents, fathers from both divorced remarried and divorced nonremarried, as well as mothers from divorced remarried families were rated more negatively by their children than were their counterparts from intact families. The author of

this research attributed this to the initial trauma of the post-divorce family environment, which often tends to be less cohesive and more stressful. As a result, the children may disparage their parents and hold them partially responsible for any problems associated with family configuration.

Slater (1983) found an interesting effect involving self-concept and gender. Females whose parents were still married had better self-concepts than counterparts in disrupted families. But, males who had experienced divorce had higher self-concept scores than those from intact homes, perhaps attributable to the lack of rivalry with a father. However, it could also be that the level of family conflict is less in the divorced family than in the intact family.

Slater (1983) noted that conflict in the family environment was negatively correlated with all of the subscores on self-esteem. Hence, the lower self-concept for females from disrupted homes could be related to the increased amount of conflict they reported. In summary, male teens experiencing family disruption felt less conflict in the homes and had a better self-image than female counterparts.

Barber and Eccles (1992) point out it is not always better to be raised by both parents, especially because of the negative consequences that can result from being raised in a conflictual family. These researchers also suggest that children in single-parent female-headed families may develop a greater sense of personal responsibility and self-esteem.

Likewise, girls and boys may develop less gender-role stereotyped occupational aspirations and family values.

On the average, children whose parents divorce or separate have more personality problems than those whose parents remain together (Smith, 1990). In addition, academic self-concept, although not actual academic achievement, appears to have been reduced before the actual parental separation, at least it appears so in separations occurring after the child finishes second grade. This reduction in self-concept without a reduction in relevant performance suggests personality difficulties. The effect of the timing of parental separation shown in this study suggests that academic self-concepts are reduced either by pre-divorce marital conflict between parents that did increase damage over the years of the parent's marriage or by separation trauma from which the child recovered over time, or by both of these factors.

As with elementary-aged children of divorce, adolescents from divorced families have also taken part in studies of effectiveness of group counseling and with similar results. Sprinthall (1992) demonstrated positive interactive effects of peer counseling. Under these conditions, both the peer helpers (teachers) and the students (children of divorce) benefit from the experience. After the initial period of group formation, the middle-school students were appropriately disclosing of their concerns to the high school peer

counselors. One advantage of the small group format was the opportunity to discover that other peers were experiencing the same issues surrounding divorce that they were. The program enabled adolescents to reflect upon the concerns surrounding the divorce and to improve their ability to see themselves and the changing family environment in greater perspective.

Omizo and Omizo (1988) also conducted a study on group counseling on self-esteem and locus of control among adolescents from divorced families. Results indicated that adolescents who participated in the group sessions were significantly different from the adolescents in the control group (no treatment) on post-test measures. The author attributed this to the fact that the treatment group possessed higher levels of self-esteem and had a more internal perception of locus-of-control on some aspects.

The significant difference on the self-esteem variable is important because the construct is related to other variables that contribute to academic, social, and emotional successes. Individuals with higher levels of self-esteem seem to be at an advantage in most situations. In sum, group counseling sessions seem promising as a way to enhance self-esteem and internal locus-of-control orientation among adolescents from divorced families.

Older Adolescents and Young Adults

The last age group to be covered will include older adolescents and young adults. Thus far, the information

presented has appeared consistent. Divorced children usually possess lower self-concept and self-esteem than children from intact families. However, as studies in this section will show, it is not as clear cut when dealing with the older age group.

Allen, Stoltenberg, and Rosko (1990) obtained support for the hypothesis that adolescents from divorced families would be as well-adjusted to college life as their counterparts in intact families. Support was also obtained for the hypothesis that adolescents from divorced families would demonstrate a heightened sense of self-esteem as indicated by the ability to take more responsibility for good events happening in their lives. Although adolescents from divorced families appear to be more separated from their families than those children from intact families, the evidence from this study suggests they tend to adjust to this situation in a manner that does not limit their academic functioning or self-esteem. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these individuals have had more time to cope with the problem or because of their maturity level, are simply more capable of dealing with the issue of divorce.

Gabardi and Rosen (1992) found there were no significant differences between college students from divorced and intact families on measures of intimacy, relationship beliefs, attitudes toward marriage, or self-esteem. As for gender effects, women tended to experience a greater degree of intimacy and have more positive self-perceptions of their

morality than men.

In a related study, Gabardi and Rosen (1991) found that college students with divorced parents have a significantly more negative attitude toward marriage than students of intact families. For example, these students with divorced parents endorsed more negative statements about the future success of their own marriage and the institution, in general. However, there were no differences between college students from divorced and intact families along the dimensions of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem.

Parish (1981) discovered similar results involving attitudes of college students from divorced families. These students were found to evaluate their parents differently than college students from intact families. Evaluations of both mothers and fathers by students of divorced families, were significantly more negative than were the evaluations of mothers and fathers by students from either intact families or families where fathers had died.

Shook and Jurich (1992) conducted separate regressions on male and female offspring of divorced parents. Results involving females suggest contact with the non-residential father had a significant, but negative impact on self-esteem scores, whereas age at time of parental divorce emerged as a significant and positive predictor of male, but not female self-esteem ratings. It appears that the longer the male offspring are exposed to the positive influence of their

fathers, the greater the self-esteem. By contrast, early father absence does not appear to significantly affect female self-esteem. In fact, females from divorced families in this study actually rated themselves higher in self-esteem than females from intact families.

In a study conducted by Parish and Parish (1991), the results obtained were more consistent with previous research involving younger children. For example, it was found that individuals who experienced divorce are more likely than their intact counterparts to encounter parental hostility and/or lack of care, inadequate supervision when not in school, lack of concern by teachers, and more financial hardship. As a result, the self-concept of these individuals appeared to be lowered as were social skills. This study suggests that attention must be focused on the unmet needs of children and adolescents in various areas in order to prevent negative self-concepts and social incompetence.

Holdnack (1992) examined the more indirect effects of parental divorce on self-concept, via changes in the environment. Results suggested that psychological adjustment of children of divorce is strongly related to family interactions in homes where the parents are divorced. Subjects from divorced families viewed their families as more emotionally distant than children from non-divorced families. Perceived closeness in the family of origin was strongly correlated with subjects self-concept across several domains.

In summary, this study suggests that parental divorce has a long term effect on family relationships, which indirectly affects self-concept of children of divorce.

Garber (1991) and Oderberg (1986) have come up with very similar interpretations involving the lower self-esteem of some college students from divorced families. It may not be the family structure or divorce per se, that is important for general lack of social self-esteem. Rather, it is the inter-parental conflict and post-divorce family life that may have long term effects on the general and social self-esteem of these individuals.

Parish (1987) suggests that firstborns from divorced families were more negative in evaluations of their parents (but not of themselves), than were those from non-divorced families. Specifically, firstborns from divorced nonremarried families and divorced remarried families evaluated their fathers very negatively, while only those from divorced remarried families were very negative in the ratings of mothers. This suggests that since these firstborns perhaps assumed parent-like roles for younger siblings, perhaps some of their own needs may have gone unmet, thus creating some resentment towards parents, especially fathers.

Masculinity and femininity both contributed to female self-esteem, but only masculinity was associated with male self-esteem. This was discovered in a study by Macdonald, Ebert, & Mason (1987). Divorce was found to be associated

with shifts in gender-role identity, leading to greater masculine (not androgynous) personality traits for both sexes. Intact marriages were associated with higher self-esteem and greater masculinity for both sexes, and greater femininity for women. The greater masculinity for males and females may be a result of basing a marriage along a gender-based division of labor. This would be expected to occur less often in nonmarried individuals, suggesting more androgynous or undifferentiated traits.

Summary

In summarizing the literature concerning self-esteem levels of children of divorce, there appear to be some differences across the different age levels. Elementary school-aged children from divorced families consistently showed lower self-concept levels than their intact counterparts. Grades also appear to suffer, especially in male children. These children also seem to possess greater emotional and behavioral problems than some of the older children of divorce. Perhaps the effects of divorce are more pronounced at this age because the divorce is more likely to have occurred in the not so distant past, during a time when many of these children are strongly attached to parents and thus have a difficult time accepting the fact that one parent is going to leave home.

As for the middle-school children of divorce, self-concept levels do appear to be lower than for children from

intact families. However, children at this age seem to be affected more by the level of conflict in the home, rather than by the divorce per se. Children at this age also seem to harbor more resentment toward divorced parents than do children from intact families, perhaps holding the parents partially responsible for any problems associated with family configuration. Results from this age group also suggest that male children of divorce may have higher self-concept scores than their intact counterparts, with the opposite being true for females. In both elementary and middle-school children, group counseling sessions have appeared to be effective in raising self-esteem levels.

Older adolescents and college children of divorce seem to show some different characteristics than elementary school children of divorce. For example, many show that they are as well-adjusted to college life as are children of intact families. Evidence seems to be somewhat split when comparing self-esteems of college students from divorced parents versus college students from intact families. In fact, some divorced children show a heightened sense of self-concept as indicated by the ability to take the responsibility for more activities in their lives.

In relation to middle-school aged children of divorce, many studies have shown that college children of divorce also rated their parents more negatively than students from intact families. There are also findings suggesting that it may be

the inter-parental conflict and not the divorce per se, that is responsible for lowered self-esteem. In college children of divorce, it has also been shown that divorce may be related to shifts in gender-role identity, leading to greater masculine qualities of personality. Perhaps because these women no longer feel bound or tied down in decision-making, the divorce may bring on a greater sense of independence in them.

In summary, it is apparent that findings relating to college-age children of divorce seem to differ from findings of elementary school children, with more similarities beginning to arise between college children of divorce and adolescent (middle school) children of divorce. In addition, there are far fewer research studies being done on this college age group. Hence, much more information is required if we are to understand possible effects that divorce has on college student's self-esteem.

The hypothesis of this study states that SEI-A scores will be lower for college students coming from divorced families versus college students coming from parents who are still married. As for gender effects, results from the literature are much less clear. There have been no definite trends established in relation to self-esteem and gender, involving a main effect. However, some interaction effects have been suggested involving gender and marital structure (parents married/parents divorced).

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

This chapter will summarize the methods and procedures used to investigate the effects that the divorce of parents has on a college student's level of self-esteem. The relationship between gender and self-esteem was also studied. Included will be descriptions of the sample, instruments, procedures, and the statistical analyses necessary for this study.

Subjects

The subjects for the study were 68 undergraduate student volunteers ranging from freshman to seniors, who were enrolled in Developmental Psychology classes at a midwestern regional, state university. There were 22 freshmen, 26 sophomores, 14 juniors, and 6 seniors. There were 20 males who comprised 29% of the sample. There were 48 females who participated, which consisted of 71% of the sample. There were 49 college students with parents still married, who comprised 72% of the sample. There were 19 college students whose parents had been divorced. These individuals made up 28% of the population.

Procedures

This section will include all activities that were carried out for this study in chronological order and in complete detail. This will make it possible for other researchers to replicate the study if need arises. Because the main emphasis for conducting this study involved

comparison of self-esteem levels between college students of divorced parents and college students of married parents, it was necessary to include intact groups. Use of intact groups was necessary to ensure that the number of subjects would be sufficient for statistical analysis, especially for the group consisting of college students from divorced parents.

Subjects were tested as a group in their usual classroom setting, at their regular class time. The subjects consisted of students in Developmental Psychology courses at Emporia State University. The experimenter was introduced by the instructor of that class and then the instructor left the classroom until completion of the self-esteem scale and demographic questionnaire. The researcher introduced himself and explained the reason for being in the classroom.

Consent forms, following university policy, were distributed to each student. The experimenter then asked the students to "Please read the consent forms carefully and sign them when the reading is completed." The researcher picked up the consent forms and checked to make sure each one was signed. At this point, anyone who did not wish not to participate in the study, was asked to sit quietly and work on homework or to read, in order to not disturb those who wished to participate. Next, the experimenter said "I will now pass out two sheets stapled together that will need to be filled out carefully and completely. Please leave the two stapled sheets on your desk face down as I pass them out until further

instructions are given."

After all of the stapled sheets were distributed, the researcher returned to the front of the room and gave the following instructions:

"When I tell you to begin, I would like each of you to fill out the two sheets in the order in which they appear starting with the top page. Read the instructions at the top of the page before answering any questions. Please take your time, read each question carefully, and answer as truthfully as possible. When you have finished, please turn the stapled sheets over on your desk and remain in your seat until the rest of the class is finished. Thank you. You may begin."

After students completed the stapled sheets, the experimenter collected the questionnaires from each student. The researcher then thanked the class for their cooperation by saying, "I want to thank all of you for participating in this study. I will be using other Developmental Psychology classes, so please do not discuss this exercise with friends. By discussing this with friends, you could damage the validity of my study."

Subjects were then debriefed as follows:

"This research has been designed to study the self-esteem levels of college students with divorced parents versus college students with married parents. Differences in self-esteem involving gender of college

student was also a focus of the study. Upon completion of this study, I will be glad to share results with you if you are interested by contacting me, Chris Criner, by phone or through Dr. Dungan, my thesis chair. Thanks again for your participation and for not sharing this information with any of your friends."

Instruments

Subjects were asked to fill out an informed consent form, a demographic questionnaire, and a self-esteem scale.

Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A).

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 25 items adapted from the School Short Form. It presents respondents with generally favorable or generally unfavorable statements about the self, that are indicated as "like me" or "unlike me." The Coopersmith Inventories have much to recommend them as measures of self-esteem. They are among the best known and most widely used of the various self-esteem measures.

Johnson, Redfield, Miller, and Simpson (1983) note there is a respectable amount of information bearing on the construct validity of the Coopersmith Inventories, much relating to the original School Form, on which the Adult-Form questions were modeled. Using the SEI short form, concurrent validity studies reveal correlations of .59 and .60 with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and .45 with the California Psychological Inventory Self-Acceptance scale (Taylor & Reitz,

1968). Taylor and Reitz also examined divergent validity by correlating SEI scores with scores on the Edwards and the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scales. Obtained coefficients were .75 and .44 respectively.

Test-retest reliability is reported at .88 at five weeks and .70 over three years for the original School Form of the SEI (Taylor & Reitz, 1968). The correlation of total scores on the School Short Form and the Adult Form exceeds .80 for three samples of high school and college students (N=647) (Coopersmith, 1981). Bedian, Geagud, & Zmud (1977) reported KR 20 reliabilities of .74 for males and .71 for females on the Adult Short Form of the Coopersmith Inventory. Additional support for the stability and internal consistency of this instrument were reported by Bedian, Teague, & Zmud (1977). For 103 college students, they found test-retest reliability at .80 for males and .82 for females. KR 20 reliability coefficients were .75 and .74 for males and .70 and .67 for females.

Demographic Questionnaire A demographic questionnaire was developed by the researcher to gather information such as; gender, age, student classification, marital status of parents, recency of divorce if applicable, and whether divorced parents had remarried. This questionnaire was of great importance in order to answer research questions involved in this study. Because fixed effects are being used, such as divorced and non-divorced parents, a demographic

questionnaire seemed the most practical way to obtain this information (see Appendix A).

Consent Form A consent form was developed by the experimenter to explain the study and the confidentiality within the study. Subjects were asked to sign the consent form before participating in this study. The consent form was approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B).

Statistical Analysis

The independent variables for this particular study include family structure (divorced vs. intact) and gender (male vs. female). Children with deceased biological parents will not be considered in this study. The dependent variable will be the scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form.

This design involved the use of a two-way Analysis of Variance, in order to determine any main effects for family structure or gender occurring in parents of college students. More importantly, possible interaction effects between family structure and gender were examined.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

The assessment of self-esteem levels for undergraduates was examined through the use of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A). The SEI-A is a shortened version of the original School Form. A single overall self-esteem score is totalled for each individual. Subjects completed an informed consent form, a demographic questionnaire, and the SEI-A. Subjects who volunteered to participate in the present study consisted of 68 undergraduate students from a small, midwestern university.

Data Analysis

Scores were computed for the 68 self-esteem inventories. To arrive at a Total Self Score, sum the number of the 25 self-esteem items answered correctly, according to Coopersmith's norms. Then multiply this total raw score by four. This results in a maximum possible score of 100, so results of different forms are readily comparable (Coopersmith, 1981).

For the SEI-A, high scores indicate high self-esteem. In most studies, the distributions of SEI scores have been in the direction of high self-esteem (negatively skewed). The means have generally been in the range of 70 to 80 with a standard deviation among college students ranging from 19 to 21. (Coopersmith, 1981). For the entire sample of this study (N=68), the mean self-esteem score was 75.18 (SD= 21.6).

Hence, the overall self-esteem and standard deviation of this group appears within normal limits.

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data. Marital structure (married parents/divorced parents) and gender (male/female) were the independent variables, with the overall self-esteem score from the Coopersmith SEI-A being used as the dependent variable. The hypothesis of this study states significant differences would be found between college students of divorced parents and college students of still-married parents on SEI-A scores. All analyses were conducted at an .05 alpha level. Cell means and standard deviations were calculated for each variable level (Table 1). No significant main effects or interactions were found (see Tables 2-4).

Table 1

Table of Cell Means and Standard Deviations

	<u>Divorced Parents</u>	<u>Married Parents</u>
Male	83.5 (SD=15.03)	70.3 (SD=22.0)
Female	67.6 (SD=26.86)	77.2 (SD=20.8)
Entire Sample	75.2 (SD=21.60)	

Table 2

Analysis of VarianceTests of Significance of Overall Scores of the SEI-A

Source of Variation	<u>SS</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Within Cells	29,670.89	64	463.61		
Married / Intact	40.03	1	40.03	.09	.770
Gender	248.69	1	248.69	.54	.467
Mar/Int by Gender	1,582.05	1	1,582.05	3.41	.069

Table 3

Analysis of VarianceTests of Main Effects of Gender on SEI-A

Source of Variation	<u>SS</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Within Cells	29,670.89	64	463.61		
Male	711.25	1	711.25	1.53	.220
Female	575.47	1	575.47	1.24	.269

Table 4

Analysis of VarianceTests of Main Effects of Marital Structure on SEI-A

Source of Variation	<u>SS</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Within Cells	29,670.89	64	463.61		
Married Parents	385.92	1	385.92	.83	.365
Divorced Parents	1,124.37	1	1,129.37	2.44	.124

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

This project was chosen to examine self-esteem levels of undergraduate students from divorced parents compared to students from married parents. It was hypothesized that college students with divorced parents would have lower self-esteem scores than college students with married parents, as measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A). However, SEI-A scores between college students of divorced parents and college students of married parents were not significant at the .05 level. This finding supports studies conducted by Allen, Stoltenberg, and Rosko (1990) and Gabardi and Rosen (1991;1992), who also discovered no significant differences between college students of divorced parents and college students from still-married parents.

Speculation concerning these results has been given by Garber (1991) and Oderberg (1986). They reason it is not simply the divorce itself that may result in lower self-esteem of these individuals. Rather, perhaps it is the level of inter-parental conflict or post-divorce family life that determines a high or low self-esteem. This could possibly explain why there were no significant differences between college students of divorced parents and college students of intact parents. Perhaps the level of conflict in the post-divorce family life of this sample of college students is not as severe as in other cases of divorce involving college

students. Hence, there were no significant differences found between the two groups of college students.

As for gender differences in self-esteem, the means between males and females differed by only .6 points on the Coopersmith SEI-A. The author would like to point out, however, that of the total sample (N=68), only 20 were males. This small number of males may not be a representative sample, considering one would expect an approximately equal number of males and females in a study of 68 individuals.

The interaction effect of marital structure (married parents/divorced parents) and gender (male/female) approached significance at the .05 level. This hints that males and females may differ on self-esteem, depending on whether their parents are divorced or married. Among students from intact families, the females scored seven points higher on the SEI-A than did their male counterparts, however both groups were within average self-esteem range, according to Coopersmith's (1981) guidelines.

However, among students with divorced parents, the males scored almost 16 points higher than females. While there is practical significance suggested from this discovery, statistical findings did not prove significant. In a study of 199 female, undergraduate, offspring of divorce, Long (1986) attributed lower feminine self-esteem to parental discord, moreso than from the separation of parents.

This does not seem to be the case for males. In fact,

a trend in the opposite direction is possible. Among males, the scores on the SEI-A were 13 points higher in the group with divorced parents as opposed to those students with parents still married. However, statistical significance was not found at the .05 level, perhaps due to the small, male sample (N=20). Surprisingly, this male group from divorced parents had the highest mean score of self-esteem (83.5), surpassing not only females with divorced parents (67.6), but also males from intact families (70.3) and females from intact families (77.2). A plausible reason for this seemingly unusual finding is given by Gately and Schwebel (1992) and agreed upon by the author of this study. They reason that the higher self-esteem among boys from divorced parents is due to the fact that they are more heavily relied upon by custodial parents (most of whom are women) than are the girls of the family. As a result, they may gain a new position of increased responsibility and status.

Returning to the original hypothesis of this study, the overall self-esteem scores were not significantly different for students of divorced parents and students of intact families. The fact that the sample (N=68) was so small may have affected this possible significance. In addition, there were only 19 (28%) college students from divorced families in this sample, which seems to be an unusually low percentage by today's standards. It is possible this sample was not representative of college students, in general.

As for gender differences, this study found a general trend (not significantly statistically) among students of divorced parents for higher male self-esteem scores when compared to females from divorced parents. This raises concern in divorced families with female offspring. Following Gately and Schwebel's (1992) reasoning, perhaps the custodial parents in divorced families should divide the added responsibilities between both the male and female children, instead of relying more heavily upon just the male children.

Future studies might focus on the fact that much of the literature seems to point to the possibility that it may not be the divorce per se that is resulting in the lowered self-esteem of some divorced children. Rather, it may be the situational variables of post-divorce family life. For example, the inter-parental conflict that occurs between parents during and after the divorce itself. This suggests that these situational variables should be researched further. Likewise, research on female college students should be advanced since there is literature suggesting that this group is at-risk for lowered self-esteem.

Because there are many different definitions of self-esteem, it is not an easy task to measure this construct, especially when it is measured through self-report instruments. Since this study relied solely on self-report measures, there is the possibility of inaccurate reporting or simply a lack of genuine concern involving the study itself.

Likewise, people may vary in their moods from time to time. For many of these reasons the reliability and validity coefficients of many self-esteem instruments are not as high as other instruments which have more agreed upon, measurable constructs.

In addition, this sample may not be very representative of college students in general. The small sample of males and students from divorced families suggests that the results may generalize to a limited population until further research is performed.

This discussion chapter has integrated the results and the implications of these results. Also included were study limitations and suggestions for future research. The specific hypothesis of this study was not confirmed statistically. Likewise, although not statistically significant, this study suggested that there may be some gender differences in self-esteem of college students from divorced parents and college students from married parents, suggesting research should be advanced in this area.

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please circle the correct answer as it pertains to you.

1. Male Female

2. Age _____

3. Student Classification

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Graduate Student Non-degree seeking

4. What is the marital status of your parents?

Married Divorced Parents deceased

5. If your parents are divorced, have either of them remarried?

Mother Yes No

Father Yes No

6. If your parents have divorced, how old were you at the time of the divorce? _____

APPENDIX B
Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Read this consent form. If you have any questions ask the experimenter and he will answer the question.

This study is to assess the attitudes of students in a midwestern university. Strict confidentiality will be used throughout the study. Names will not be used in any description or discussion of this study or in the results found. Only the experimenter will have access to the initial data collected.

This study is not a mandatory part of your curriculum. If you agree to participate you will be asked to fill out two questionnaires. If at any time you choose to discontinue this study you may do so. If you choose not to participate in this study, there will be no negative recourse taken by the experimenter or the instructor of this course.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. It will not contain any harmful events to the subjects either physically or emotionally. If you agree to participate in this study please sign the form.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, feel free to contact the experimenter. Any additional questions will require you to contact Michael Murphy, Division of Psychology and Special Education, 301 Visser Hall, 341-5804.

Thank you for your participation.

I, _____, have read the above information and have decided to participate. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should I choose to discontinue participation in this study.

(signature of participant)

(date)

(signature of experimenter)

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.

I, Christopher J. Criner, hereby submit this thesis to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available for use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching), and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

Christopher J. Criner
Signature of Author

July 14, 1994
Date

Comparison of Self-Esteem in College
Students From Divorced Parents Versus
College Students From Intact Families
Title

Doug Cooper
Signature of Graduate
Office Staff Member

July 14, 1994
Date Received