

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Adult Children of Divorced Families: Self-esteem and Academic

Achievement

Abstract approved: 

The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of divorce on children's self-esteem and relationship between self-esteem and scholastic achievement, and how the child's age at the time of divorce affects academic achievement. To accomplish this objective the study employed the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory, 2nd Ed. (CFSEI-2), AD Form, developed by James Battle in 1992. The CFSEI-2 has four sub-scales: Total Self-Esteem Score (TSES), General Self-Esteem Score (GSES), Social Self-Esteem Score (SSES), Personal Self-Esteem Score (PSES). Multiple  $t$ -tests were performed to determine the difference in self-esteem for both groups. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out to discover how the age of the children at the time of their parents' divorce affected their academic achievement at post-secondary education level. Results of  $t$ -tests and ANOVA did not reveal any significant difference in self-esteem and academic achievement. However, correlation analyses indicated that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem, particularly TSES and SSES, and educational achievement of adult children of divorced parents.

ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCED FAMILIES:  
SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Division of Psychology and Special Education

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Science

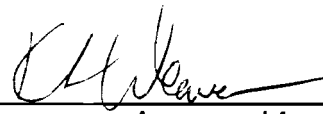
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by

Shahida Shah

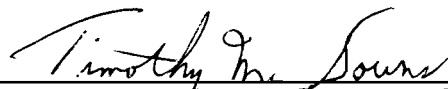
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Psychology and special Education



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have seen a dramatic increase in the divorce rate in the United States. Divorce presents a major disruption in the development of children. Extensive literature exists indicating children who come from divorced families have more behavioral, social, and psychological problems than the children from intact families. Amato (1994) concluded that parental divorce appeared to have significant negative psychological consequences for children's well being. They exhibit not only behavior and conduct problems, they also suffer academically and socially and tend to have lower self-concept. Amato further indicated parental divorce had a stronger impact on the well being of children who were younger at the time of their parent's divorce. Rodger (1996) arrived at a similar conclusion through his research. According to him, parent's divorce is strongly related with many problems, including poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, psychological distress, delinquency, substance abuse, depression and suicidal behavior. The effects of divorce are more upsetting for younger age children (Beer, 1989). Howell, Portes and Brown (1997) pointed out that older children adjust better to their parent's separation than younger age children.

Studies have indicated that children not only suffer emotionally, psychologically and behaviorally, they also suffer academically and they tend to have a low self-concept when compared with children from intact families. A question arises: What can be the reason for the decline in academic achievement? Many investigators have offered a variety of explanations. Forehand, McCombs, and Long (1988) indicated that divorce, combined with on-going conflict between parents, disrupts children's intellectual environment. Emotional upset may cause parents to become negligent toward their child rearing responsibilities. Poor school functioning may be caused by ineffective



parenting, including not enough time devoted to monitoring their children's school assignments, lack of communication with school personnel, behavior problems, etc. Many of these studies were conducted with children of school age. Few studies exist concerning the effect of divorce on the self-esteem of college age children of divorced parents and relation between self-esteem and their academic achievement.

The present study will attempt to determine whether the adult children of divorced parents have lower self-esteem when compared with adult children of intact families and how self-esteem is related to their academic achievement. Also, this study will explore age-related effects of divorce on children's self-esteem and scholastic achievement.

#### Definition of Self-esteem

Since this study is concerned with the effects of divorce on children's self-esteem and its relationships with academic achievement, it becomes necessary to define self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1989), self-esteem is a negative or positive attitude toward oneself and others. Individuals with high self-esteem consider themselves people of worth; they respect themselves for the persons they are. They know their limitations and they know they can improve. These optimistic feelings compel them to work hard and achieve their life goals. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem feel worthless and have low expectations from themselves and perceive they cannot improve their life circumstances; therefore, they don't even make an effort to better themselves. Lall, Jain, and Johnson (1996) observed that Coopersmith (1967) defined self-esteem as a "set of attitudes and beliefs which undergird expectation of success, acceptance and personal strength" (p. 1136). According to Battle (1996), the self emerges and takes shape as the child develops. The self "initially is vague, poorly integrated and somewhat fragmented but becomes increasingly more

differentiated as the youngster matures and interacts with significant others" (p. 3). He stated further that "The self is sum-total of all the person calls his." So the self is a composite of ones feelings, hopes, fears, thoughts and view about oneself, what he/she is, what he/she has been, and what he/she might become. Barber and Chadwick (1996) pointed out that Sullivan (1953) advanced the concept that self develops in social interaction, and significant others play a major role in this process. They further observed that Mead (1939) and Cooley (1902) define the development of self-concept in social relationships with their theoretical concept of "reflected appraisals" and "looking glass." According to Barber and Chadwick, parental supportive behavior is found to be positively related to self-esteem. Once the self-esteem is established, it is quite stable and resistant to change (Battle, 1996).

## Review of Literature

### Parental Divorce and Children's Self-esteem

The family plays a major role in the development of an individual's self-esteem and self-concept. Family is the place where initial self-concept is developed in the interaction of its members. It has been shown that children who experience warmth, encouragement and respect from parents develop a positive self-image (Coopersmith, 1967). He further stated conflict between parents promotes adjustment problems and low self-esteem in children.

According to Pawlak and Klein (1997), "Family conflict is a complex variable....conflict can be a feature of marital relationship itself and can be expressed either as disagreements over numerous daily issues or as personal hostility. Conflict can also be related to joint parenting experienced by a growing child. The parents can share maintenance style characteristics or they can show discrepancies" (p. 303).

According to Stolberg and Bush (1985), marital hostility indicates the "emotional tone" of a relationship, and hostility expressed in the presence of children may produce stress and promote in them lack of social skills. Parents who express hostility toward each other in front of children present a poor model for conflict resolution. The parents may be so involved in their own emotional problems that they might not be available to their children to help them understand the causes of marital discord and the reasons for the separation. On the other hand, if the parents handle the situation appropriately, it can be a learning tool to teach the children how to deal with difficult situations and assist them in mastering social developmental tasks. Pawlak and Klein (1997) stated that college students whose parents engaged in a conflictual relationship in their marriage had lower self-perception than those students whose parents were happy in their marriage.

Levin (1989) argued that the mechanism by which marital dissolution might produce stress for children can be explained in three models: The trauma model, the structural model, and the deficiency model.

First of these models states that marital disruption and events leading to it cause stresses and disequilibrium to such an extent that both performance and development in children is affected. Rosenberg (1989) has pointed out several sources of stress for children. First of all, children whose parents have divorced possibly have a disharmonious household environment. It could be possible that the parents' anger toward each other may have been displaced on the children. According to Kurdek (1981), parental conflict which is often present before, during and after the divorce process may be more detrimental to the child's well-being and self-concept than the divorce itself. To support his assertion, he further states that discord in intact families may account for why sometimes there

is no difference between children reared in intact and those reared in non-intact families (Edward, 1987).

Clark and Clifford (1996) indicated family interactions that are abusive verbally and physically hinders the development of self-esteem and diminishes capacity to deal with life stresses effectively. They further indicated that adult children from a divorced family who feel emotionally distant from its members have a lower level of self-esteem and higher level of interpersonal dependency than children from emotionally close families.

Silitsky (1996) conducted a study along similar lines, whereas previously other investigators concentrated on just a few factors at a time that affected the adjustment of children. He investigated many variables, such as the psychosocial adjustment of single parents, type of custody arrangement which affected the parent-child relationship with non-residential parent, demographic characteristics, stressful life events, social support, and family cohesion and adaptability. Four hundred thirty-six New York City students from five high schools located in Brooklyn, Staten Island and Queens participated. The students were between the ages of 15 and 18 years whose parents had been divorced for at least two years. They were administered youth self-report inventories, and their families completed survey instruments. Results indicated that psychosocial adjustment of adolescents was positively related to adjustment of custodial parents. Less adjusted parents displayed anger, made insulting remarks and were physically abusive toward their children. Lengua, Wolchick and Braver (1995) document similar findings regarding the adjustment of the custodial parent and financial hardship and negative effects on children's adjustment and on their self-esteem.

Pawlak and Klein (1997) indicated Baumrind (1971) forwarded three concepts of nurturance and control styles of parenting: Authoritativeness,

permissiveness and authoritarianism. Parental nurturance is expressed in terms of warmth, love, support and concern shown toward their children. Permissive parents place very few demands and restrictions and rarely punish their children. Authoritative parents set firm limits and conflict is resolved in terms of discussion and explanation, whereas authoritarian parents demand "hard work, respect, obedience without discussion of involvement" (p. 303), and they exert considerable control over their children. According to Klein, O'Bryant and Hopkins (1996), authoritative parenting is associated with positive self-perception, and parental nurturance is associated with positive self-concept. Conflict also occurs between the parents when they differ in parenting style, and the conflict between the parents has a negative effect on children's self-esteem.

Pawlak and Klein (1997) investigated the consequences of parental divorce and conflict on children's self-esteem. For this purpose, they selected a sample of 122 students from the required introductory psychology classes of a midwestern metropolitan state university. Age of participants ranged between 18 and 25 years. The data were gathered by administering to students the Rosenberg Self-esteem Questionnaire and the Student Interpersonal Conflict Scale, as well as Parent Nurturance Scale and Parental Authority Questionnaire. Parents of every participant also completed the Parent Interpersonal Conflict Scale, the O'Leary-Porter Overt Hostility Scale, and Modified Parental Authority Questionnaire. Analysis of data indicated nurturance and parenting style was significantly related to adolescent self-esteem.

Bynum and Durm (1996) explored the "temporal relationship" of divorce and its effects on children's self-esteem. According to the authors as the length of time since the divorce increases so does the children's self-esteem. To verify this hypothesis, they conducted a study. The participants of this study consisted of 120 students (60 from divorced parents and 60 from non-divorced parents)

from Northern Alabama's 6th through 9th grades. The age range of participants was between 13-18 with an average age of 14.6. In each group there were 30 girls and 27 boys; 6 individuals (3 from each group) did not identify their gender.

The students were administered Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory, B Form, consisting of four components of self-esteem: General, social, academic and parent-related. Demographic information (students' age, gender, race, type of living arrangements, such as living with both parents, single or remarried, foster or adoptive, etc., and how long they have not been living with both parents) was collected. A Pearson correlational analysis was computed to determine the relationship between the self-esteem scores and elapsed time since parents' divorce for the children of divorced parents. Negative correlation was found between these two factors; however, values were negligible.

Analysis of  $t$ -tests indicated that students who come from divorced families had intermediate and high scores on self-esteem, whereas the majority of students from non-divorced families were classified by high and very high scores. Similarly, in 1992, Brubeck and Beer documented that children from divorced families have lower self-esteem and lower Grade Point Averages (GPA) when compared with children from intact families.

In 1993, Lawrence, Ganong and Coleman conducted a meta-analysis of 15 published studies and 9,279 subjects. This meta-analytic study compared the self-esteem of children from step-families with nuclear families and single-parent families. Results indicated "generalizeable difference" in self-esteem between step- and nuclear families, but did not find any difference between children of step-families and single-parent families.

Heatherington (1989) pointed out that elementary school-age children often feel responsible for parents' discord and experience guilt and self-blame during the post-divorce period. Kurtz (1994) indicated that children's self-esteem

and self-efficacy may be negatively affected by perceived self-blame and guilt following their parents' divorce. Kurtz conducted a study utilizing 142 participants, ages between 8 and 12. The data were gathered by administering Family Environment Scale which assesses the family's social atmosphere, and Self-Perception Profile for Children which evaluates self-perception in six areas, including cognitive, social, behavioral, athletic functioning, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Results indicated children from divorced families were found to have less cognitive efficacy and lower self-esteem than their counterparts from non-divorced families.

### Effect of Divorce and Education

Hofmann and Zippco (1996) stated that children's attitude toward education and willingness to succeed in school is related to stability they feel at home. If they feel secure and comfortable at home, they will carry these feelings into the school environment. Children who come from a divorced family may not feel comfortable and may consider school unimportant, and therefore do not put forth the effort to perform well academically. Hofmann and Zippco conducted a study to determine whether the children from divorced families differ in scholastic achievement on certain social variables from same-age peers of intact families. They conducted a study consisting of 77 participants, ages between 10 and 12. Sixty children came from a two-parent family, and the remaining 17 belonged to a divorced family. To collect the data, they utilized Coopersmith's Self-esteem Inventory school forms eliciting information about attitude toward school, school motivation, interaction and self-esteem. Academic achievement was measured by Stanford Achievement Test. Results of the study indicated that the greatest effect of divorce upon children's self-esteem and academic achievement occurs within the first two years following the divorce. Many effects disappear after two years.

Smith (1990) conducted a large scale study relating to academic self-concept and academic achievement. He utilized 1,682 students from seventh and ninth grade classes of 14 selected public schools in Columbia, South Carolina's metropolitan area. Design of this study controlled many of the confounding factors such as race, gender, years in school, parental occupation, parental education, number of older and younger siblings, etc. Results indicated that children from divorced parents have lower academic self-concept than children of non-divorced parents.

Hetherington (1989) compared children of divorced and non-divorced families at the time of divorce and again after 1, 2 and 6 years. The studies were comprised of 149 well-educated, middle class white parents and their 4-year-old preschool children. They have found that two years after divorce the families, parents and children had adjusted well. The only difficulty noted by the researchers was adjustment problems of boys with their custodial mother. These boys exhibited more antisocial, non-compliant, coercive and acting out behavior both at school and at home than the boys from intact homes. They had more problems academically and with peers.

At their ten-year follow-up study, Wallerstein (1989) found out that their sample of 30 children who were 2 to 6 years of age at the time of divorce were functioning better than others despite their severe symptomology. Sixty-eight percent of the children who were preschoolers at the time of the divorce were doing well ten years after the divorce compared to 40% of the children who were older at the time of divorce. Children did not have conscious memories of their family breakup, although half of the children fantasized family reunification. The adolescents appeared not to carry fears of repeating their parents' mistake which was evident in the children who were older at the time of divorce.



At this age children are faced with the task of overcoming feelings of inferiority and achieving a sense of competence and industry (Erikson, 1963). Emotional upset due to divorce disrupts the child's learning opportunities in school. Thus, decreased academic achievement is seen as arising from restlessness, difficulty in concentrating, and intrusive thoughts about parents' divorce.

Wallerstein (1987) explored the long-term effect of divorce for the younger elementary school children and early latency-aged children. This study consisted of 30 participants who were 16 to 18 years old and were high school seniors, whose parents were divorced when they were 6 to 8 years old. In regard to school performance, half of these adolescents were successful academically, a quarter of them were earning C grades, and the remaining were doing poorly, including some failures. Several of those who were not doing well were performing below their potential; in fact, several of the boys had been identified as gifted in their early elementary school. Forty percent of the children were not working up to their potential. When aspirations for their career choices were explored, many of the teens expressed intention of seeking semi-skilled jobs. These aspirations did not match their potentials.

In 1993, Hatzichristou compared the psychological well being and academic competence of 5th and 6th grade Greek children. Twenty-six of these children belonged to divorced families and 381 belonged to non-divorced families. This comparison was made through the use of teachers, peers and self-rating instruments. Study revealed that children from divorced families experience serious behavior problems and academic competencies. In a similar study, Mulholland, Watt, Philpott and Sarlin (1991) documented significant adverse effects on children's academic achievement, which was reflected by Grade Point Average (GPA) and academic motivation.

In an Israeli study, Peres and Pasternack (1991) found that children raised by single mothers had lower scholastic achievement and lower popularity than children who were raised by married mothers. However, these differences disappeared when the children spent an extended amount of time in school and participated in extracurricular affairs.

Academic performance of older elementary school students has also been shown to suffer as a result of parental divorce. In a study of 77 children, 30% of their academic performance was found to have declined which persisted three years after divorce (Bisnaire, Firestone, and Raynard, 1990). When comparing children on a basis of academic performance, those children who spent more time with both parents were seen to be doing well.

A longitudinal study conducted with 56 adolescents after their parent's divorce indicated that these adolescents were functioning less well when compared to the same number of adolescents from intact families (Forehand et al., 1991). These differences were still present two years after the divorce. In looking at school achievement, it was discovered that parents' and adolescents' quality relationships were the key ingredients for school adjustment. A similar study indicated that ineffective parenting after divorce contributed to adolescents' difficulties; particularly parent rejection or withdrawal creates adjustment problems (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Weirson, 1991).

Smith (1990) indicated that Hetherington, Camera and Featherman (1980) reported that children from intact families have higher academic achievement and higher measured mental aptitude when compared to children of non-intact families. A similar finding was reported by many other studies. For example, Kinard and Reinherz (1984) found lower 4th grade language achievement and lower teacher rating of productivity among the children of single mothers. A large national level study collected data on elementary and high school students.

Analysis of data indicated that being a member of a one-parent family reduced the reading and mathematics scores significantly.

### Purpose of the Study

Based on the findings of the studies presented above, it appears that marital breakdown is an important variable when studying the effects of divorce on the children's well-being. As indicated by these studies, children who witnessed their parents' divorce, especially those at elementary age, had enduring behavioral problems which may affect their self-esteem negatively and their academic achievement.

The purpose of the present study is to determine the effect of divorce on children's self-esteem and whether lower self-esteem is related to lower academic achievement, specifically in elementary-age children.

To assess self-esteem, the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventories, 2nd Edition, AD form (CFSEI-2 AD Form) will be used. This instrument is selected because it is completed quickly (10 to 15 minutes) This self-report inventory is designed for the ages between 16 to 65. This inventory, which is intended to measure an individual's perception of self, has been valuable in offering insight in a person's subjective feelings (James Battle, 1992). Also, in order to assess academic achievement, demographic information will be collected including age at the time of parents' divorce, current age and grade point average.

### Research Hypotheses

1. Adult children of divorced parents will score lower on a self-esteem inventory than adult children of non-divorced parents.
2. Adult children whose parents divorced when they were between the ages of 5 to 12 will score lower on self-esteem when compared to adult children from non-divorced families.

3. Adult children whose parents divorced when they were between the ages of 5-12 will have lower academic achievement when compared with adult children who were younger or older at the time of their parent's divorce.
4. Lower self-esteem will be related to lower academic achievement, and higher self-esteem will relate to higher academic achievement of adult children of divorced parents.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

#### Participants

One hundred twenty-five participants, 57 male and 68 female students, ages between 18 to 22 years, who attend introductory sociology and psychology classes at Emporia State University (ESU) and introductory sociology classes at Wichita State University (WSU), participated in this study. Participants consisted of two groups, 72 adult children from intact families and 53 adult children of divorced families. Out of 53 participants of divorced parents, 33 were between the ages of 5 and 12 years at the time of their parents' divorce (target age) and the average age was 7.9 years with 1.73 standard deviation. Male and female in the experimental group were approximately equally divided (27 female, 26 male). However, the control group had 41 female and 31 male participants.

#### Instruments

Demographic sheet. The demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) was completed by the students. It elicited general information about the students including gender, age, parents' marital status, number of siblings, mother's occupation, age at the time of parents' divorce, time since parents' divorce, and grade point average.

Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories, 2nd edition, Adult Form (CFSEI-2) Students' self-esteem was measured by James Battle's (1992) CFSEI-2 AD Form. It is a self-report instrument designed to measure an individual's perception of self-worth (Appendix B). The CFSEI-2 AD Form consists of 40 items to which examinee answered by yes or no responses to a series of questions about his/her thoughts and feelings or behavior. It yields raw scores reflecting total self-esteem as well as subset of general, social and personal self-esteem.

- General self-esteem is the aspect of self-esteem which refers to an individual's overall perception of their worth.
- Social-esteem is the aspect of self-esteem that refers to the individual's perceptions of the quality of the relationship with peers.
- Personal self-esteem refers to the aspect of self-esteem that indicates one's most intimate perception of self-worth.

### Design of Study

The study employed three independent variables. The first independent variable was parents' marital status and had two levels, divorced and non-divorced. The dependent variable for this factor was self-esteem. The second predictor variable was age of the children at the time of their parents' divorce and had three levels. The first level consisted of children ages 1 to 4, the second (and target age) level were children between 5 to 12, the third level were children between 13 to 17, and the criterion variable was self-esteem. The third independent variable was self-esteem consisting of four sub-categories: (1) Total Self-Esteem Score (TSES), (2) General Self-Esteem Score (GSES), (3) Personal Self-Esteem Score (PSES), and (4) Social Self-Esteem Score (SSES). Dependent variable was GPA.

### Procedures

The greater portion of data were collected by asking ESU introductory sociology and psychology students to volunteer for the study. Some of the data were collected from WSU by the instructor after the morning and evening sociology classes.

Prior to administering the CFSEI-2, the following procedures were implemented. First, the participants were asked to read Appendix C, follow the instructions, and sign the Informed Consent Form. Each was given a packet consisting of demographic sheet (Appendix A), CFSEI-2 AD Form (Appendix B),

cover sheet (Appendix C), and Informed Consent Form (Appendix D). The packets were completed within 10 to 15 minutes.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

One hundred twenty-five participants took part in the study. The composition of the sample was 57 males and 68 females. Of the 125 participants, 53 (27 male and 26 female) came from divorced families, and 72 (31 male and 41 female) came from intact families. The age range for the sample was from 18 to 22 years. For the experimental group, age at the time of divorce ranged from 1 to 17, and 33 participants were between 5 to 12 (targeted age). Culture-Free Self-esteem Inventory, 2nd ed., Adult Form, (CFSEI-2, AD) was administered and demographic information was collected from every participant. Several  $t$ -tests were performed in order to determine the difference in total self-esteem scores (TSES), general self-esteem scores (GSES), social self-esteem scores (SSES) and personal self-esteem scores (PSES) for the participants of both groups, adult children of divorced and non-divorced parents. An analysis of variance was performed to ascertain the age-related difference in GPA of children of divorce, and, finally, Pearson correlation analyses were carried out to determine the relationship between the participants' self-esteem and academic performance.

#### Hypothesis 1

Adult children of divorced parents will score lower on the self-esteem inventory than adult children of non-divorced parents.

Multiple  $t$ -tests were carried out to test this hypothesis. The predictor variable was parental marital status which had two levels, divorced and non-divorced. The criterion variable was self-esteem and had four categories: TSES, GSES, SSES and PSES. No significant difference was found between adult children from divorced and non-divorced families in their TSES,  $t(124) = -1.04$ ,  $p > .05$ ; GSES,  $t(124) = .12$ ,  $p > .05$ ; SSES,  $t(124) = -.66$ ,  $p > .05$ ; and PSES,



$t(124) = -1.50, p > .05$  (see Table 1). Since none of these values were significant, results of the tests failed to support Hypothesis 1.

### Hypothesis 2

Adult children whose parents divorce when they were between ages 5 and 12 will have lower self-esteem when compared to adult children from non-divorced families.

To test this hypothesis, adult children who were 5 to 12 years old at the time of their parent's divorce were compared with adult children of non-divorced parents. The criterion variable was self-esteem including TSES, GSES, SSES and PSES. Again, results found no difference between the two groups: TSES,  $t(102) = 1.27, p > .05$ ; GSES,  $t(102) = 1.31, p > .05$ ; SSES,  $t(102) = 1.26, p > .05$ ; PSES,  $t(102) = 1.14, p > .05$ . Therefore, the results did not support Hypothesis 2 (see Table 2).

### Hypothesis 3

Adult children of divorced parents whose parents' divorce when they were between the ages of 5 to 12 will have lower GPA when compared with children who were younger or older at the time of their parents' divorce.

For the purpose of testing this hypothesis, an analysis of variance was performed. The predictor variable was AAD which had three levels: Ages between 1 and 4, 5 and 12 and 13 and 17. The criterion variable was GPA. Results of analysis did not reveal any difference in GPA when the children who were between 5 and 12 years at the time of their parents' divorce were compared with younger or older age children from divorced families,  $F(2, 48) = 1.79, p < .05$  (see Table 3). The results of this analysis did not support Hypothesis 3.

Table 1

t-test: Children of Divorced Parents vs Non-divorced Parents on Self-esteem

	Parents' Marital Status	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>
TSES	Divorced	53	23.77	5.29	-1.04
	Non-divorced	72	24.79	4.84	
GSES	Divorced	53	12.81	4.97	.12
	Non-divorced	72	12.71	2.82	
SSES	Divorced	53	6.96	1.19	-.66
	Non-divorced	72	7.11	1.28	
PSES	Divorced	53	9.62	2.41	-1.50
	Non-divorced	72	5.24	2.04	

NOTE. TSES = Total Self-Esteem Scores; GSES = General Self-Esteem Scores; SSES = Social Self-Esteem Scores; PSES = Personal Self-Esteem Scores.

Table 2

t-test: Children Age 5 to 12 when Parents Divorced vs Non-divorced Parents on Self-esteem

	Parents' Marital Status	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>
TSES	Divorced	32	23.71	5.76	1.27
	Non-divorced	72	24.79	4.84	
GSES	Divorced	32	11.91	3.19	1.31
	Non-divorced	72	12.72	2.82	
SSES	Divorced	32	6.81	1.20	1.26
	Non-divorced	72	7.11	1.28	
PSES	Divorced	32	4.60	2.46	1.14
	Non-divorced	72	5.24	2.04	

Note. TSES = Total Self-Esteem Scores; GSES = General Self-Esteem

Scores; SSES = Social Self-Esteem Scores; PSES = Personal Self-Esteem

Scores.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance: Predictor Variable, Age at Time of Divorce,  
and Criterion Variable, Grade Point Average

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Between groups	2	.80	.40	1.79
Within groups	48	10.71	.22	
Total	50	11.50		

#### Hypothesis 4

Lower self-esteem will relate to lower academic achievement, and higher self-esteem will relate to higher academic achievement of adult children of divorced parents.

For the purpose of testing this hypothesis, Pearson correlational analyses were performed for the children of divorced and non-divorced parents. The predictor variable included TSES, GSES, SSES, PSES, and the criterion variable was GPA (see Table 4). Results indicated that TSES ( $r = .30$ ,  $p < .05$ ), SSES ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly related to GPA for the adult children of divorced parents (see Table 4). The results of the correlation analyses did support Hypothesis 4.

#### Summary of Results

A variety of statistical techniques were used to test the four hypotheses. It was proposed that adult children who come from divorced families would have lower self-esteem when compared to adult children of non-divorced families. Also, they would have low academic achievement, particularly participants who were 5 to 12 years old at the time of their parents' divorce.

First of all, several  $t$ -tests were computed to determine the difference between the two groups in TSES, GSES, SSES, and PSES. Results of these tests indicated no significant difference in the self-esteem of both groups.

Previous studies indicated that elementary age children (5 through 12) are trying to overcome feelings of inferiority and striving to achieve a sense of competence and industry. Parental divorce at this time has a detrimental effect on their academic achievement. Analysis of variance was performed to determine the age-related effect of divorce on children's academic performance. To achieve this purpose, three groups (ages between 1 and 4, 5 and 12, 13 and 17) of children from divorced families were compared with each other. The

Table 4

Pearson Correlation between Predictor Variables and Criterion Variables for Children of Divorced Parents

Variables	TSES	GSES	SSES	PSES
GPA	.30*	.01	.29**	-.01

Note. TSES = Total Self-Esteem Scores; GSES = General Self-Esteem Scores; SSES = Social Self-Esteem Scores; PSES = Personal Self-Esteem Scores.

\*  $p < .05$ .      \*\*  $p < .01$ .

results of this comparison indicated that the target group (ages 5 to 12) did not differ significantly from the other two groups. Finally, multiple correlation analyses were performed to determine the relationship between self-esteem and GPA, TSES and SSES were positively related to GPA for the participants who came from divorced families.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

Results obtained from this study did not reveal any significant difference in self-esteem among adult children of divorced and non-divorced families. According to Rosenberg (1989), self-esteem is a negative or positive attitude toward one's self or others. People with high self-esteem consider themselves worthwhile human beings. They have a realistic understanding of their limitations and strive to improve themselves. Their optimistic feelings urge them to work hard and achieve their life goals. On the other hand, people with low self-esteem feel worthless and have very little expectations from themselves. They have difficulty perceiving that they can change their circumstances and hence do not even make an effort to improve themselves. Barber and Chadwick (1996) noted that self-concept develops in social interaction and significant others play a major role. Battle (1996) pointed out that once self-esteem is established it is quite stable and resistant to change.

Marital conflict and dissolution generate low self-concept and low self-esteem in children. Stolberg and Bush (1985) observed that college students whose parents displayed hostility toward each other in their presence at a young age had a lower self-concept than those students whose parents were happy. Similarly, Billingham and Abrahams (1988) stated that lower self-concept found in children of divorced parents has long lasting effects. Whereas many studies supported these findings, Bynum and Durm have found contradictory results. In 1996, they studied the temporal relationship between parental divorce and its effects on children's self-esteem. According to their study, passage of time after the divorce has a healing effect on children's self-esteem. As time elapses after the divorce, the self-esteem improves commensurately. Similar conclusions were derived from the study presently under consideration. In fact, it was found



that participants from divorced families scored slightly higher on PSES inventory, the portion of self-esteem indicating perception of self-worth, than participants from non-divorced families. It may be that overcoming the difficulties connected with the divorce gives young adults confidence in their capabilities, hence better self-perception. Also, younger age children are dependent on their parents for financial and emotional support. When they reach high school, they usually get a job which gives them some financial independence, and they reach the age when they can drive a car which increases their social circle, all of which lessens their dependence on family. Job-related activities, if performed well, give them a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence. Also, at this stage, young adults develop intimate and stable relationships with the opposite sex which can provide a sense of belonging and emotional support, and hence a potentially better self-image.

The results of this study did not show any difference in self-esteem between adult children of divorced parents and adult children of intact families. However, the study did indicate that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem, particularly total self-esteem and social self-esteem, and scholastic achievement among the children of divorced parents. Many of the previous studies have documented similar findings. Wayman et al., (1985) observed that the children from divorced families had "diminished cognitive competence." According to Hofmann and Zippco (1996), a stable home environment motivates children to succeed in school; children from divorced families lack this motivation. They do not find school important. Smith (1990) noted that the children from divorced families had lower self-esteem, lower self-concept and lower GPA. According to the analyses of self-esteem inventories, higher total self-esteem leads to higher academic achievement, and this relationship is even stronger for social self-esteem. Total self-esteem relates to overall perception of one's

capabilities and worthiness. Confidence in one's ability motivates the person to establish goals and make an effort to achieve them. Social self-esteem is the portion of self-esteem related to perception of quality of relationship with peers. "Children's social interactions are frequently affected by the quality of family relationships, most importantly of their parents" (Hofmann & Zippco, 1996, p. 398). Positive interaction between the parents observed by the child will help the child feel secure and relate with others successfully. Children who witness negative relationships between their parents due to divorce or family conflict may feel unsure how to relate to others. This may cause rejection by peers. Research has shown lack of friendship may promote feelings of loneliness and unworthiness, which can lead to low self-esteem (Armistead, Forehand, Beach, Steven & Brody, 1995).

Wallerstein (1987) and Hatzichristou (1993) advanced the idea that children whose parents divorce during elementary school age suffer long lasting negative effects on their school performance. According to Erikson (1963), at this stage children are faced with overcoming feelings of inferiority and trying to achieve a sense of competence and industry. Emotional upset during this stage disrupts the process. The child may be so occupied with feelings of loss that efforts to achieve competence and industry fall by the wayside. This can lead to low self-esteem and academic failure. Most of the previous studies were conducted with school-age children. The present study was conducted with college-age children from divorced and non-divorced families. This study did not find a similar result. It is possible that as time passed since the divorce the children's emotional upset was lessened and they were able to concentrate more on their educational endeavors.

## Limitations

The two sample groups were selected from Introductory Sociology and Psychology classes from Wichita State University (WSU) and Emporia State University (ESU). One hundred and thirty-two participants were asked to complete the survey including Self-Esteem Inventory and Demographic information. Seven participants completed only the demographic information and did not complete the Self-Esteem Inventory, so those seven were dropped from the study.

Since both samples were drawn from an accessible population rather than a target population, the sample may not be representative of all the divorced families as to their levels of self-esteem. Another concern was the number of participants in divorced group. There were 53 participants, of which only 33 were in the target group (5 to 12). Ten participants were between 1 to 4 years of age, and the remaining 10 were from 13 to 17. The control group had 72 participants. The cell size was not equal, which may affect the results of the study.

The participants from Emporia State University who were involved in the study were given the incentive to earn a credit point for their participation. It is possible students wanted to earn the credit point even though they did not have the qualifications to become a part of the group. Also, students were asked to volunteer the information about their GPA. It is possible that subjects gave an inflated GPA.

Another, and probably the most important limitation, was that this study did not take into consideration the participant's socioeconomic status, mother's occupation, number of siblings, years since the divorce, gender, the custodial parent's marital status, frequency of visitations from the non-custodial parent, and social support. Also, this study did not take into account whether the participants

are holding a job and have a stable, intimate relationship with the opposite gender.

The last limitation concern is related to the issue of social desirability. When self-reported measures are used, the participant may alter the level of self-esteem in order to appear socially desirable. The actual level of self-esteem may be different from what the person is presenting.

### Suggestions for Future Research

A number of studies exist concerning the negative effects of divorce on children's well being. Forehand et al. (1988) pointed out that divorce and conflict between the parents could disrupt children's intellectual environment. Parents' emotional upset may cause them to become negligent of their child-rearing responsibilities. Divorce disrupts the stability of the family environment. Children not only lose one of their parents, they also suffer financially. To offset the financial loss, many families headed by a single mother may have to relocate to a less expensive neighborhood. This can disrupt the children's social environment.

Divorce-related complications can lead to low self-esteem and low academic aspirations in children, but this can be countered if the parents instill in them a sense of accomplishment. It is the responsibility of parents to provide an environment for their children which will help them feel successful, and establish for them a frame of reference in which honor for oneself and honor and respect for authority, etc., become a natural part of their development. One way this can be achieved is by assigning day-to-day responsibilities, according to the child's age and capabilities, encouraging them to do their best, and appreciating them for their efforts. For young children, the assignment can be as simple as keeping their room clean. If the children meet the responsibility well, they will gain a sense of accomplishment and confidence and will demonstrate honor for themselves and respect for authority. Confidence in one's abilities and a sense

of honor enhances self-esteem. Future studies should investigate the child-rearing practices of divorced families, whether children are made responsible for their day-to-day living, are encouraged to do their best, and appreciated for their efforts.

### Conclusions

Previous studies have indicated that parental divorce has detrimental effects on children's well being. They not only suffer emotionally and behaviorally, they also suffer academically and they tend to have low self-esteem. Most of the previous studies were conducted on school-age children, whereas recent studies have concentrated on adult children of divorced families. According to earlier studies, divorce has a lasting effect on children's academic achievement and self-esteem. This study did not find any differences in scholastic achievement and self-esteem among the children of divorced and non-divorced parents. However, results of the study indicated that SSES and TSES were significantly related to academic achievement of the children of divorced parents, and SSES has an even stronger relationship with GPA than TSES.

Many of the past studies have provided a variety of explanations for low academic achievement and low self-esteem among the children of divorced families. According to these studies, parental divorce disrupts the stability of the family environment. Children face many difficulties, such as loss of one parent and financial support, reduced contact with peer group due to relocation of residence, reduced nurturing, etc. Divorce can create many problems in children's environment which can lead to low academic achievement and low self-esteem. This probably can be countered by instilling in children a sense of accomplishment, responsibility and respect for oneself and authority. One way to achieve this is to assign the responsibilities of daily living to children according to their age. If these assignments are performed successfully and are appreciated,

the children will gain a sense of accomplishment and confidence in their ability which can lead to higher self-esteem and higher academic achievement.

Therefore, the suggestion has been made for future studies to look into the parenting style of divorced families, whether the children have been given day-to-day assignments and taught to honor themselves and respect authority.

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Appendix A  
Demographic Sheet

## APPENDIX A

Please respond to the following questions by filling in the blanks.

1. Gender:                      Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:                              \_\_\_\_\_
3. Classification:              Fr\_\_\_\_ So\_\_\_\_ Jr\_\_\_\_ Sr\_\_\_\_ Grad\_\_\_\_
4. Race:                          African-American        \_\_\_\_\_  
    Caucasian                              \_\_\_\_\_  
    Hispanic                                \_\_\_\_\_  
    Native American            \_\_\_\_\_  
    Indian                                    \_\_\_\_\_  
    Asian                                     \_\_\_\_\_  
    Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_
5. Were your parents divorced?      Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_
6. If yes, how long has it been?        \_\_\_\_\_
7. How old were you at the time of divorce? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Mother's occupation. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Number of siblings:              Full\_\_\_\_\_ Half\_\_\_\_\_ Step\_\_\_\_\_
10. Grade Point Average (GPA) \_\_\_\_\_

Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory (CFSEI)

APPENDIX B

	Yes	No
1. Do you have only a few friends? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are you happy most of the time? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Can you do most things as well as others?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do you like everyone you know?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Do you spend most of your free time alone?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do you like being a male? / Do you like being a female? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Do most people you know like you? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are you usually successful when you attempt important tasks or assignments?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Have you ever taken anything that did not belong to you?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Are you as intelligent as most people?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Do you feel you are as important as most people?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Are you easily depressed? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Would you change many things about yourself if you could?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Do you always tell the truth?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Are you as nice looking as most people?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Do many people dislike you?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Are you usually tense or anxious?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Are you lacking in self-confidence? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Do you gossip at times? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Do you often feel that you are no good at all? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Are you as strong and healthy as most people? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Are your feelings easily hurt? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Is it difficult for you to express your views or feelings? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Do you ever get angry? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Do you often feel ashamed of yourself? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Are other people generally more successful than you are?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Do you feel uneasy much of the time without knowing why?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Would you like to be as happy as others appear to be?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Are you ever shy?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Are you a failure? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Do people like your ideas?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Is it hard for you to meet new people?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Do you ever lie? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Are you often upset about something? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Do most people respect your views?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. Are you more sensitive than most people? .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. Are you as happy as most people?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. Are you ever sad?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Are you definitely lacking in initiative?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Do you worry a lot?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C  
Cover Sheet

## APPENDIX C

### General direction for completion

Please sign in with the last four numbers of your social security number, name, time, and instructor's name on this sheet. This study pertains to young adults' self-esteem. Please fill out this questionnaire and return it to me when you are finished. You may leave after signing out on this sheet.



Appendix D  
Informed Consent Form

## APPENDIX D

## Informed Consent Document

The Division of Psychology/Special Education supports the practice of protection of human subjects participating in research and related activities. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study, and you will not be reprimanded or reproached.

In order to determine self-esteem levels, you are being asked to complete a questionnaire. All responses made to this questionnaire will be kept confidential and anonymous.

"I have read the above statement and have been fully advised of the procedures to be used in this research. I have been given sufficient opportunity to ask any questions I had concerning the procedures and possible risks involved. I understand the potential risks involved and I assume them voluntarily. I likewise understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without being subjected to reproach."

---

Participant's signature

---

Date

---

Signature of administrator

Appendix E

Application for Approval to Use Human Subjects

## APPENDIX E

## APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS

This application should be submitted, along with the Informed Consent Document, to the Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects, Research and Grants Center, Campus Box 4048.

1. Name of Principal Investigator(s) or Responsible Individuals:

Shahida Shah

2. Departmental Affiliation: Psychology and Special Education

3. Person to whom notification should be sent: Shahida Shah

Address: 1402 Hickory Stick Circle, Wichita, Kansas 67230

4. Title of Project: Adult Children of Divorced Families: Achievement and Self-esteem

5. Funding Agency (if applicable): Not applicable

6. Project Purpose(s):

Previous studies conducted with school age children indicated that children who came from divorced family have lower self-esteem and lower academic achievement. Purpose of the present study is to determine whether the adult children of divorce have lower self-esteem when compared with adult children of non-divorced families.

7. Describe the proposed subjects: (age, sex, race, or other special characteristics, such as students in a specific class, etc.)

The proposed subjects are students who have been enrolled in Introductory Psychology classes.

8. Describe how the subjects are to be selected:

After receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board to use human subjects, the professors of Introductory Psychology classes will be contacted to obtain permission to use their students as subjects for the study. Student will be asked to volunteer for the project. Study will be conducted on only those who agree to participate, and those who did not volunteer will be acknowledged to indicate the degree of bias that may be present in results.

9. Describe the proposed procedures in the project. Any proposed experimental activities that are included in evaluation, research, development, demonstration, instruction, study, treatments, debriefing, questionnaires, and similar projects must be described here. Copies of questionnaires, survey instruments, or tests should be attached. (Use additional page if necessary.)

Participants will be asked to complete Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory along with demographic information.

10. Will questionnaires, tests, or related research instruments not explained in question #9 be used?

Yes  No (If yes, attach a copy to this application.)

11. Will electrical or mechanical devices be used?

Yes  No (If yes, attach a detailed description of device(s).)

12. Do the benefits of the research outweigh the risks to human subjects?

Yes  No This information should be outlined here.

This research is not expected to incur any harm to the participant. In fact, the potential benefits are great. This study will be conducted to see whether the children of divorced parents have low self-esteem. The researcher is assuming that divorce causes low self-esteem, which in turn promotes a variety of adjustment problems. If it becomes clear that offspring of divorced parents to have low self-esteem, the next step is to develop strategies to enhance their self-esteem to prevent future problems.

13. Are there any possible emergencies which might arise in utilization of human subjects in this project?

Yes  No Details of these emergencies should be provided here.

14. What provisions will you take for keeping research data private?

Individual participants will not be identified with their Social Security numbers or student identification numbers assigned by Emporia state University. Names of the subjects will not be used. Additionally, data collected by the investigator will remain in a locked cabinet in researcher's home for a certain length of time, after which it will be shredded and disposed of carefully.

15. Attach a copy of the informed consent document, as it will be used for your subjects.

**STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT:** I have acquainted myself with the Federal Regulations and University policy regarding the use of human subjects in research and related activities and will conduct this project in accordance with those requirements. Any changes in procedures will be cleared through the Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of responsible individual  
(faculty advisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Permission to Copy Page

I, Shahida M. Shah, 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.

Shahida M. Shah  
Shahida M. Shah

8. 3. 99  
Date

Adult Children of Divorced Families:  
Self-esteem and Academic Achievement  
Title of Thesis

[Signature]  
Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

August 5, 1999  
Date Received

*[Handwritten mark]*