SINGLE AND MARRIED MOTHERS: A COMPARISON OF PARENTING STRESS, PARENTING SKILLS, AND SELF-ESTEEM

DISSERTATION

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This study compared divorced custodial mothers and mothers married to the biological fathers of their children on parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem. The relationship between parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, marital status, and life satisfaction was also examined. A total of 63 subjects, including 31 married mothers and 32 single mothers, was administered the Parenting Stress Index, the Parenting Skills Inventory, and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Subjects also completed a Demographic Data Sheet that included a Likert-type scale designed by the researcher to measure current life satisfaction. All subjects either attended church or lived in a geographic area of North Central Texas that is generally recognized as being somewhat affluent.

No significant differences were found on the t-tests comparing the mean total scores of the married and divorced mothers on levels of parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem. A post hoc t-test revealed, however, that the group of married mothers had significantly higher mean total scores on the life satisfaction measure than the
group of divorced mothers. Additionally, life satisfaction was found to be associated with parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, and marital status. Specifically, (a) as parenting stress increases, life satisfaction decreases, (b) as parenting skills increase, life satisfaction increases, (c) as self-esteem increases, life satisfaction increases, and (d) being married is associated with increased life satisfaction.

The results of this study would seem to indicate that single mothers have no more difficulty in overall coping than their married counterparts although they are less satisfied with their current life circumstances than the group of married mothers. Additional comparisons of the data suggested that neither group of mothers regarded their children as interfering with their social lives in a major way. Like most previous research, the data also indicated that the single mothers worked longer hours and had less money available for their families' use than the married mothers.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized that the birth of children causes major changes in the marital relationship which are in part due to the reorganization of roles and family structure necessary to rear children (Minuchin, 1974). It has further been documented that the presence of children in a marriage has a negative effect on marital happiness (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). Therefore, it is logical to assume that the demands of parenthood are such that stress is many times created between the parents and is also inherent in the parenting role.

When divorce occurs, it is usually the mother who obtains custody of the children and who, therefore, bears the burden of caring for the children. Stress associated with parenting falls into three major categories as identified by Miller and Myers-Walls (1983). These categories are physical, psychological, and financial. In general, the financial status of women drops when divorce occurs and the physical and psychological demands of childrearing increase. To understand the impact of stress on mothers, the marital status of the mothers must be taken into account. It is generally accepted that single mothers
experience a great deal more stress than their married counterparts. Much of the research, however, has been concentrated on lower income groups that concomitantly exhibit lower educational levels, lower paying jobs, severe housing problems and many times few skills associated with adequate parenting. Relatively little has been done to distinguish whether parenting impacts mothers differently when basic survival factors are not so much an issue.

Associated with parenting stress are parenting skills or the competency level of mothers. White (1978) described "competent" parent behavior as a balance between clearly established expectations and allowance of freedom for exploration. The effects of both adequate and poor parenting on child development has been the subject of much research, but little known research has been done regarding differences between single and married mothers' parenting skill levels or whether or not a relationship exists between skill levels and stress levels.

How well one performs various social roles, i.e., wife, mother, friend, is one measure of psychological health (Parsons, 1951), and is also generally thought to be associated with self-esteem. Weisel (1976) found that mothers with high self-esteem have sons who also have high self-esteem. The degree to which the mental health of parents impacts the mental health of offspring has long been a subject of both observation and research. It would
appear that further delineation of factors related to psychological well-being would be beneficial in the treatment of mothers both married and single. Further, it could be expected that the differing life circumstances of single and married mothers would produce differences in reactions to parenting, parenting skill levels, and self-esteem. It is understood that being a parent creates stress, and it is generally accepted that differences exist both in stress levels and types of stress experienced by divorced and married mothers. Information further delineating differences between these two groups is presented to enable more effective planning for services provided for these women.

Statement of the Problem

This investigation was concerned with a comparison of single divorced custodial mothers and mothers married to the biological fathers of their children.

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study was to determine (1) whether divorced and married custodial mothers differ with respect to levels of parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem, and (2) to determine whether a relationship exists between parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, marital status and life satisfaction.
Synthesis of Related Literature

Although there are no known studies that directly compare parenting stress, parenting skills and self-esteem relative to the marital status of mothers, a number of articles exist that are either tangential to these areas or deal directly with some aspect of the identified problem of this study. This body of research is reviewed as it relates to marital status under the following headings: (1) Parenting Stress, (2) Parenting Skills, and (3) Self-Esteem.

Parenting Stress

One source of parenting stress relates to characteristics of children that in some way make the parent role difficult and different from what one would normally anticipate (Abidin, 1982). Mash and Johnson (1982) examined parental perceptions of child behavior, parenting self-esteem and mothers reported stress for 40 families with a hyperactive child and 51 families with normal children. Measures of parental perceptions of child behavior included the Conners Abbreviated Rating Scale, the Werry-Weiss-Peters Activity Scale, and the Child Behavior Checklist. Self-esteem for the parents was assessed using the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale while the Parenting Stress Index provided a measure of the degree of stress in the mother-child relationship. The researchers found that
mothers of hyperactive children experienced higher stress levels associated with both their own feelings regarding the child's problem and with child characteristics. They further found strong, positive relationships between the degree to which the parent assessed the child's behavior as deviant and stress levels in the parents. This relationship was stronger for mothers than for fathers which might be understood in terms of mothers spending more time than fathers with the children. At the same time, it was found that families with a hyperactive child had lower parenting self-esteem and saw themselves as less competent than did parents of normal children.

Additional evidence of the increased stress levels of parents with children with special problems or conditions was found in a study by Griest, Forehand, Wells, and McMahon (1980). These researchers examined differences between nonclinic and behavior-problem clinic-referred children and their mothers. One of the findings of this study was that maternal depression was the best predictor of clinic parents' perceptions of their children. While most researchers are in agreement that the relationship between problem children and measures of emotional well-being in parents is a curvilinear one, this study lends further support to the commonly accepted idea that children whose behavior is in some way abnormal are a source of increased parenting stress and anxiety.
One study was found, however, that yielded results that were counter to this notion. Koegel, Schreibman, O'Neil, and Burke (1983) compared data relative to the personality and family-interactional characteristics of parents of autistic children with established normative data on the MMPI, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and the Family Environment Scale. Their findings indicated no significant differences between the scores of the two groups and further indicated that no higher level of general stress existed for the parents of autistic children than for established normative data. The researchers attributed this finding to the belief that previous investigators have been misled to assume or feel that a higher level of stress exists for these families with little or no empirical evidence to back the assumption. The authors did note that all their subjects' children had just been accepted for participation in a long-term intensive treatment program and that this situation may have caused the parents to feel less stress at the time of testing. Indeed, one could speculate that the sudden hope that may have been encouraged by acceptance into the program may have created temporary euphoria.

McLanahan (1983) examined the relationship between family headship and stress in a longitudinal comparison of two-parent and female-headed families. The data used were taken from the Michigan Pane Study of Income Dynamics and
included data from the years 1969 through 1972. These observations were pooled and treated as a cross-sectional sample. The stressors identified included chronic life strains, the occurrence of major life events, and the absence of social and psychological supports. Analysis of the data indicated the family heads differed markedly in educational levels, race, and family income with female-headed households being more likely than nuclear families to experience the kinds of strains commonly associated with lower educational levels, being black, and being poor. Life event scores indicated that female-headed families are more likely to experience disruption in areas of income change, household composition change, and residence change. Social and psychological supports also differed. Two-parent families were more likely to know their neighbors and participate in clubs and organizations while one-parent families received more free household help from outside the family unit. There were no significant differences with regard to whether or not the families lived near relatives. Examination of psychological resources indicated that the female heads reported much lower self-esteem and efficacy, and they were much less optimistic about the future than the male heads. An additional analysis of the data indicated that some of the stress associated with being a single parent was a temporary state in that recently divorced, separated, and
widowed females were much more likely to experience major life events like income changes than the same group three years after marital disruption. With regard to other stress variables such as social supports and psychological resources, McLanahan (1983) found that the effects of time are insignificant. Lack of social support and psychological resources, then, may be viewed as a function of being unmarried rather than a reaction to marital disruption. In this comparison, for nearly all indicators of stress, the effects of family headship were significant with female headship being positively related to stress.

One event in the life of the family that is generally acknowledged as being particularly stressful is the birth of a child. A study designed to assess the dimensions of stress in early parenting was done by Weinberg and Richardson (1981). The researchers employed an individual differences multi-dimensional scaling method to identify four dimensions of stress for the purpose of investigating the dimensions of stress associated with a particular event in parenting and to determine differences in the salience of these dimensions. Data were analyzed on 38 husband-wife pairs who were between the ages of 27 and 39. All but 11 female participants held masters' degrees. It was found that the manifestation of major problems with a child was the most significant stressor. Also, in assessing salience of particular events, immediate problems with children
(like difficulty getting the child to bed) were judged to be more negative than long-range problems involving financial burdens and in-law difficulties. Parents perceived the dimension involved in evaluating the general restriction of adult activities as being meaningful and challenging while demands on self were judged more negatively. This study illuminated the fact that certain aspects of parenting stress are perceived differently by mothers and fathers. Fathers regard major versus minor child problems as being more important. Additionally, whether or not the mother worked influenced the degree to which a particular event was appraised as being stressful. Working mothers regarded restrictions of self and other adult activities as being substantially greater in importance than did non-working mothers. In particular, this article points to the importance of recognizing that stress related to parenting varies relative to individual perceptions and circumstances.

The stresses experienced by single working mothers in the 12-month period following divorce were identified by Beck (1984) in an effort to help employers deal more effectively with this growing population. The Holmes and Rahe Scale was used to examine the emotional, behavioral, and physiological reactions to stress. Data were obtained from individual interviews with 20 women who were in the process of trying to build a career, rebuild their lives,
and to care for their families. Beck was able to identify immediate pressing problems women encounter including financial and legal problems. Other issues discussed included housing and child care. The quality of child care and adequate housing both depend on adequate income. The women included in this study were all in situations in which income was not a major problem prior to their becoming single but it became a problem after single status was acquired. It appears that stress is at a peak during the first year following a divorce, so the problems experienced by single mothers in this group are not representative of women who have had time to reorganize their lives. For this reason, mothers divorced less than one year were excluded from the present study, to make it possible to take a closer look at chronic problems experienced by this group without the confounding effects of a recent divorce.

Weinraub and Wolf (1983) studied social networks, coping abilities, life stresses, and mother-child interactions in 28 mothers and their children to determine whether differences existed relative to marital status. Fourteen of the mothers were married and 14 had either never been married or had been separated or divorced from the father of their children since shortly after the child's birth. Mothers were matched on a number of variables including age and birth order of children. This
study differed from most other studies in that the sample included older, well-educated women with a mean age of 32 years and an average of 16 years of education. Measurements were obtained utilizing a combination of paper-pencil instruments and a videotaped structured task using cuisinaire rods. Instruments included the Social Network Form, a modified version of the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale, and mothers' rating of their own abilities to cope in five areas as measured by a 5-point scale. Significant differences were found between single and married mothers in that single mothers experienced more stress and had a greater number of life changes than did married mothers. Additionally, the single mothers worked longer hours and received less support from their social network regarding their parenting skills. In general there was greater fragmentation from increased pressures single mothers face in the various roles they have to play than was seen in the married mothers.

Weinraub and Wolf (1983) also found that parenting effectiveness for both single and married mothers was enhanced by the availability of support and diminished by increased stress. Alternately, differential effects on parenting behaviors were noted in other areas. An increase in social contacts for single mothers was associated with less maternal nurturance while no such association existed for married parents. Another variable that differentially
influenced parenting was increased household help. An increase in household help was associated with increased control, better communication, more nurturance, and more child compliance for married but not for single mothers. Increased employment among married mothers was associated with decreased controls while single mothers' employment was related to increased controls and maturity demands. In the overall comparison of the lives of the two groups of mothers, what was most different was the increased pressures single mothers face. This group has far more time constraints on their lives than the married group although they reported no more difficulties in overall coping ability than married mothers reported except in the area of household chores. While the authors pointed out that this particular sample of mothers may be considered unusual because of their age, education, and financial levels, the finding illuminates the importance of maturity, age, vocational competence and resourcefulness in coping with all aspects of being a single parent.

In a study that examined time demands indicative of stress, Sanick and Mauldin (1986) compared both employed and unemployed single and married mothers. Findings were similar to those of Weinraub and Wolf (1983) in that single, employed mothers have the least amount of time to spend on activities including household chores. Brandwein, Brown, and Fox (1974) pointed out that as a consequence of
time, household tasks may have a lower priority than other activities for single mothers because they have little choice. In addition to less time spent on household tasks, Sanik and Mauldin (1986) found that single employed mothers have the least amount of time to spend on child care, personal care, and volunteer work. The necessity to perform a large number of tasks in a small amount of time creates pressures that may have a cumulative effect on the working single mothers. It is, however, the single, unemployed mothers who were found to devote the most time to themselves and their personal care. The 202 mothers who participated in this study represented a random sample from households in both rural and urban areas of California.

Parenting Skills

There is a paucity of research available in the area of parenting skills even though programs are developed to correct apparent deficits in this area. The deficits in all probability do exist and are observable, but until recently there has been no instrument available to quantify objectively the skills that are generally accepted as being basic to good or adequate parenting.

Johnson (1986) identified some of the characteristics of the skilled parent in an article that included three workshops designed to increase parenting skills. According to Johnson, the successful parent is warm, establishes
clear rules, has developed a pattern of verbal give and take, is consistent in expectations, and enforces limits. Heatherington, Cox, and Cox (1977) also identified these factors as contributing to a child's positive adjustment so that the interactive effect is one that contributes to the mutual comfort of parent and child.

One study was found that compared parental attitudes among mothers of nuclear families, stepfamilies, and single-parent families (Miller, 1983). The sample consisted of a total of 409 mothers. Two hundred eighty-nine were from nuclear families, 64 mothers were from stepfamilies, and 56 of the mothers were single parents. The Parenting Questionnaire for Mothers was used to measure Authoritarian Control, Democratic Attitudes, Mutual Understanding, and Confidence in Parental Role. Confounding variables examined included years in current family type, mother's level of education, mother's employment status, income level, and number of children in the home.

Although Miller (1983) found that group means were low in all three groups on Authoritarian Control, single mothers were found to have the lowest level while mothers of stepfamilies had the highest. Group means for Democratic Attitudes, on the other hand, were relatively high for all three groups, with the highest level being expressed by mothers in nuclear families and the lowest by
single mothers. Differences found on this variable appeared to be related to years in current family type, mother's level of education, mother's employment status, and number of children in the home. In the area of Mutual Understanding, mothers of nuclear families expressed the highest level and mothers of stepfamilies expressed the lowest level. This difference seemed to be related to years in current family type and mother's level of education while differences found in Confidence in Parental Role appeared to be related to income level. Mothers of nuclear families were found to have the highest level of Confidence in Parental Role while single mothers had the lowest level. Mean differences found on all four variables were significant. It is obvious from this study that mothers of nuclear families fared better all around, and it could be assumed based on others' research that their children would probably score higher on measures of psychological adjustment.

Landmark studies concerned with the impact of divorce on normal as opposed to atypical or clinical samples of children were carried out by Heatherington, Cox, and Cox (1976; 1978; 1979, in Levitin, 1979). These researchers utilized a longitudinal design in order to assess the effects of divorce over time. The sample included 48 intact families in which the parents were divorced. The goals of the study were not only to study the crisis aspect
of divorce but also to examine the new patterns of family organization. Characteristics of family members that contributed to ways in which the family process varied were also studied as well as the ways in which variations in family structure and functioning affected the children. Approximately 90 hours of data were gathered through such means as interviews with parents, diary records, and observations of parent-child, child-teacher, and child-peer interactions. Other paper-pencil data regarding the child's development were also recorded.

One important aspect of this study was the documentation of the severe distress and disorganization of families during the first year following divorce. It was found that divorce affects parental functioning in a number of important ways. Parents' own feelings regarding their capabilities and competence as parents were diminished. In addition, they reported feeling lonely, alienated, and depressed on almost all measures of parenting behavior. Divorced parents at this point were apt to be inconsistent in their discipline and to make fewer maturity demands on their children. Mothers became more restrictive and gave orders but failed to follow through with appropriate discipline while fathers tended to overindulge and be excessively permissive with the children. This lack of parenting skills during this period following divorce had a number of negative consequences with regard to the
children. It was found that the mother-son relationship was particularly difficult. A decrease in the mother's parenting skills was associated with increased aggression in the son's behavior. Two years following the divorce, the researchers found that negative effects of divorce had disappeared although the mother-son relationship was still a somewhat difficult one.

Other areas of research related to parenting skills dealt with the difficulties that emerged when parents, in effect, lacked effective controls in dealing with their children. Herz (1978) studied the effects of maternal powerlessness and isolation on the adjustment of children in single parent families. Results of her study indicated that maternal powerlessness in the home had significant effects on the child's adjustment as rated by both the mother's and the child's peers, and the effect of powerlessness increased over time. It was found that isolation was related to the child's adjustment only for mothers separated less than three years. Interactional effects were observed between social isolation and powerlessness and peer ratings of the child's adjustment. Additionally, differential effects of both powerlessness and isolation were observed based on the child's sex.

Colletta (1979) identified poverty, the number of children in the family, and the sex of the child as factors capable of affecting maternal child-rearing practices.
Additionally, it was found that divorced mothers under stress from low income were likely to be restrictive and demanding in their child-rearing practices. Krisberg (1970) also found that husbandless mothers were more likely to assert direct control and impose parental will on their children than married mothers. One area of parenting behavior in which this was evident was that of restricting children from playing with household possessions because the mother could not afford to replace them.

One of the features of a study by Bond and McMahon (1984) was to examine through the use of independent observers the parenting behavior of 20 maritally distressed and 20 non-maritally distressed mothers. The purpose of the research was to examine the relationship between marital adjustment and maternal personal adjustment and personality traits, maternal perception of child adjustment, and child and parent behavior. The Beck Depression Inventory, the trait form of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, and the Personality Research Form, were used to assess maternal personal adjustment and maternal personality. Measures of parenting behavior related to parenting skills that were administered included the Parent Attitudes Test, the Patterson and Fagat abridged version of the Becker Adjective Checklist, and the Child Behavior Checklist. Additionally, mother-child interactions were observed in the home during four 40-minute observation
periods. The observed parent behavior included rewards plus attends to the child's needs, and commands given for which there was no opportunity for the child to comply. Analysis of the data indicated that there were no differences between the two groups of parents with respect to maternal personality.

It might be expected that maritally distressed mothers would closely resemble divorced mothers during the first year following their divorce in that both groups are experiencing periods of upheaval and uncertainty that is reflected in parenting behavior and perceptions of their own parenting skills. Although effects of divorce have largely abated after approximately one year, it still appears likely that parenting without a partner would create sufficient stress to diminish parenting skills significantly.

**Self-Esteem**

The third area of research related to this study is that of self-esteem or the value one places upon one's role, one's accomplishments, and one's self as a human being. Positive self-esteem is generally accepted as being related to successful functioning in most areas of life. Many programs for children, in fact, assume this relationship to be so strong that efforts are made to
improve self-esteem in order to improve both academic performance and behavior.

Kohen (1981) approached a study of divorced women in terms of a shift in social roles that involves a transition in self-identity. Women who have been married and who have children have been socially reinforced throughout their lives to identify with the role of wife and mother. Self-esteem is in part a function of how well these women perceive their performance of those roles. According to Kohen, little girls are prepared socially to incorporate as a part of their self-concept the wife/mother role so that the event of a divorce leaves them in a position for which they have had no preparation.

The sample in Kohen's study included 30 Boston area women who were selected from a larger group on the basis of their meeting quotas set for education, religion, income, and ethnicity. Structured interviews lasting for approximately 3-1/2 hours were conducted with each subject. The data were based on a content analysis of the interviews and included answers to questions regarding areas ranging from their teenage fantasies of adult life to how well they felt they were doing as heads of their families and as mothers.

Consistent with other research, the immediate post-divorce period was found to be particularly disorganized and stressful for a majority of the women who
described themselves as nonpeople during this period. Their self-concept was no longer consistent with the reality of their situations. Society no longer offered protection and support for the new role and there was no time to develop needed skills to fill the role. The women who did not experience the first year as a crisis period were those who had themselves initiated the divorce and who had made some advance preparation, both emotionally and financially, for the transition. Other findings indicated that, for many women, what comprised being a good mother (staying home with the children) was in conflict with what was necessary in order to secure the financial future of the family. Women who chose mothering over financial stability received more social approval than women who devoted their time to work outside the home that was necessary to secure financial security of the family. Hence, when women felt their children were doing well, they had a source of self-esteem congruent with social opinion. Further analysis depicted the women who became secure and confident in their roles as head of household as developing a lot of assertiveness and enlarging their social networks while women who never adjusted very well maintained a passive, dependent role and remained isolated.

Brandwein, Brown, and Fox (1974) also pointed out the importance of a strong social network to provide needed emotional support. Glasser and Navarre (1964) emphasized
the idea that children are demanding of the love and support of their parents but cannot in return provide emotional support to their parents. An advantage of the nuclear family is that the parents provide each other psychological support, aid in the decision making process, provide needed relief or replacement at times, and simply share a large part of the responsibility. When looked at in this light, it certainly appears that the self-esteem of divorced women would be subject to the vulnerability of all the inevitable pressures.

While Kohen's research sheds light on the larger social and psychological issues involved in being a divorced mother, Weisel (1976) used another approach. He investigated self-esteem by looking first at offspring with high self-esteem and then identifying the characteristics of their mothers. The sample included 42 single-parent mothers of sons scoring at high and low ends of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The boys participating in the study were all between 7 and 13 years of age. Analysis of the mothers' responses to interviews and paper and pencil tasks indicated that mothers of sons scoring 80 or above on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and 56 and below (Low Group) differed in significant ways. The mothers of sons with high self-esteem also had high scores on self-esteem on paper and pencil tasks while the opposite was true with mothers whose sons scored low on self-esteem.
Additionally, the mothers of the High Group experienced more control over their environment, felt warmer toward their children, had more democratic attitudes toward their children and were more positively reinforcing than were the Low Group mothers. Other differences indicated that the High Group mothers encouraged more intellectual and emotional autonomy and provided more physical supervision than Low Group mothers. On the other hand, Low Group mothers reported more conflictual relationships with their sons and tended toward neglect according to an analysis of the child-rearing data. Other differences between the two groups indicated that the High Group mothers reported significantly more subjective satisfaction with their lifestyles and family structure, had higher status jobs and incomes, and were less socially isolated than the Low Group mothers. The research data show that the subjective sense of confidence, competence, connection to others, and contentment reported by the High Group mothers is in sharp contrast to the data analysis of the Low Group mothers. The subjective differences between the mothers are directly reflected in the self-esteem scores of their sons.

This study points to the interactional effect of the mother-child relationship; i.e., children who are doing well seem to have mothers who are themselves doing well. Additionally, the study illustrates the importance of identifying those characteristics of mothers that are
related to the healthy functioning of children since healthy mothers seem to be a contributing factor to having healthy children. In particular, experiencing a sense of satisfaction with one's life appears to free the mother to deal more positively with the children.

Results similar to Weisel's research were found in a study by Rosenberg (1984) in which the self-esteem of a total of 109 mothers and fathers was investigated. The subjects in the sample were asked to complete a self Q-sort as well as an ideal-self Q-sort. The children participating were assessed according to the California Child Q-set and were also asked to complete both self and ideal-self Q-sorts. Analysis of the data indicated that high self-esteem in mothers and fathers was associated with age appropriate maturity in children, differentiation at adolescence, and ego resiliency. For children ages 4, 7, and 14, father self-esteem was particularly important and found to be more important, in fact, than mother self-esteem for all age children. Parental self-esteem was, according to this research, significantly related to the personality development of the child throughout childhood and adolescence.

Schaeffer (1982) investigated the self-esteem of women relative to their affiliation need and found that for the total group, marital-maternal status significantly affects levels of self-esteem and age significantly affects the
need to affiliate. Married mothers had higher self-esteem than women who were neither married nor mothers (p<.02). The author concluded that women must not only gratify their need to affiliate in order to attain optimal self-esteem but must also gratify their other needs as well.

Brassington (1982) explored self-esteem levels and related social and economic factors in 118 female single parents. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and a personal questionnaire at 6-month intervals over a period of one year were used. All subjects were single parents as a result of divorce. Analysis of the data indicated there were no significant changes in self-esteem throughout the period of the study. Characteristics that were found to significantly discriminate between low, medium and high self-esteem included income, age, education, and length of single-parent status. Other discriminators were children's school progress, achievement behavior, and related amount of discipline. How single parents view themselves seems to depend to a large extent on parenting ability. This conclusion supports the need to further differentiate parenting skills that may enhance self-esteem.
CHAPTER REFERENCES


CHAPTER II

PROCEDURES

This chapter presents the hypotheses for the study, definition of terms, a description of the subjects, instrumentation, and data collection procedures.

Hypotheses

In order to investigate the problem of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. The group of divorced custodial mothers will have a higher mean Total Score on the Parenting Stress Index than the group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children.

2. The group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children will have a higher mean Total Score on the Parenting Skills Inventory than the group of divorced custodial mothers.

3. The group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children will have a higher mean Positive or P Score on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale than the group of divorced custodial mothers.

4. Parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, and marital status will be related to reported life satisfaction on the Demographic Data Sheet.
Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have restricted meaning:

1. **Divorced custodial mothers** refers to those mothers who have been divorced for a minimum of one year, are currently single, and who have been awarded sole custody of their children. All children living in the household are 12 years of age or younger.

2. **Married mothers** refers to mothers who are currently married to the biological fathers of their children and who have children living in the household who are 12 years of age or younger.

3. **Parenting stress** is defined as the score received on the Parenting Stress Index.

4. **Parenting skills** is defined as the score received on the Parenting Skills Inventory.

5. **Self-esteem** is defined as the score received on the self-esteem scales of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale.

6. **Focus child** refers to the child identified by the mothers as the child about whom they have the most concern.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were selected from the same general neighborhood of a large metropolitan area in North Central Texas. The neighborhood could be described as one that is affluent and has both an extremely low
degree of unemployment and few people on public assistance. Announcements were made in Sunday School classes for both singles and couples in order to solicit subjects. All participants were volunteers.

Participation was limited to mothers married to the biological fathers of their children and divorced custodial mothers. Single mothers were single as a result of marriage dissolution and had exclusive (as opposed to joint) custody of their children. Additionally, these mothers were required to have had single-parent status for at least one year. Both groups of mothers had at least one child still living in the household 12 years of age or younger. A total of 63 subjects was selected for the study including 32 single mothers and 31 married mothers.

Instrumentation

The three instruments used in this study were the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) (Abidin, 1983) to quantify levels of stress experienced by mothers, the Parenting Skills Inventory (PSI) (Nash, 1984) as a measure of parenting skills, and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) (Pitts, 1965) as a measure of self-esteem. Additionally, a Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 7 (Very Satisfactory) was included as a part of the Demographic Data Sheet as a subjective measure of satisfaction with current life situation.
The Parenting Stress Index contains 120 items and employs a Likert-type response mode. Subjects are asked to mark answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree that best describe their feelings with regard to parenting. The Parenting Stress Index is divided into two domains designed to identify parent-child systems which are under stress and at risk for the development of dysfunctional parenting behaviors or behavioral problems in the children involved (Abidin, 1983). The Child Domain contains 47 items and measures qualities associated with children that make it difficult for parents to fulfill their parenting role. Included in this domain are the following subscales: Child Adaptability, Acceptability of Child to Parent, Child Demandingness, Child Mood, Child Distractibility, and Child Reinforces Parent. The Parenting Domain includes subscales measuring Parent Depression, Parent Attachment, Restrictions Imposed by Parental Role, Parent Sense of Competence, Social Isolation, Relationship with Spouse, and Parental Health. This domain totals 54 items related to dimensions of parent functioning. The subscales of the Child Domain and Parent Domain indicate sources of stress emanating from one of these two areas and further presents through elevated scores on various subscales a more complete picture of the exact area or areas of the parent-child system that create the stress. Additionally, there is an optional scale that
provides a measure of stress that may exist outside the parenting role or parent-child relationship that is included in the Parent Domain.

Scoring on the Parenting Stress Index yields a total stress score that is obtained by combining the total scores on the Child and Parent Domains. These two domain scores, obtained by adding all the subscale scores in a given domain indicate the magnitude of stress in the parent-child subsystem (Abidin, 1983). A raw Total Score of 260+ indicates a system under stress while a score of 122+ on the Child Domain is associated with children who display qualities that make the parenting role very difficult. On the Parent Domain, a score of 153+ suggests that the sources of stress are related to dimensions of the parent's functioning. The overall experiencing of parents who earn high Parent Domain Scores is that of being overwhelmed and inadequate to the task of parenting (Abidin, 1983). A high score on the optional Life Stress Scale is 17+. High scores on this scale tend to intensify the total stress the parent may be experiencing.

The Parenting Stress Index was normed on 534 parents who visited small group pediatric clinics in central Virginia. The norm group included parents of a wide range of normal children as well as parents of children referred to the clinic for special problems in behavior or health. The educational level of the parents was relatively high.
Approximately one-third of the mothers and fathers had graduated from college, graduate school or professional school. Approximately one-fourth of the families had a total income of less than $10,000, and one-fourth of the families had incomes greater than $20,000. Racially, the group was composed of 92% white and 6% black parents. Mothers' ages ranged from 18 to 61 with a mean age of 29.8. The mean number of children living in the home was 1.9. The children who were the focus for the norm sample ranged in age from 1 month to 19 years, with a mean age of 14 months.

Several criterion measures were used to establish the concurrent and construct validity of the Parenting Stress Index. Lafiosca (1983) compared parents of normal children with parents of children brought to a child development clinic. Significant (p<.001) correlations were found between the Child Domain of the Parenting Stress Index and the Child Behavior Problem Checklist. Additionally, a significant (p<.001) correlation (.68) was found between the Parent Domain and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory.

Two studies were found that support the concurrent validity of the Parenting Stress Index when used as a pre-post measure. Lafferty (cited in Loyd, 1983) reported on the use of the Parenting Stress Index as a pre-post measure of change in two groups of parents seen for parent training. Significant shifts downward in parenting stress
for the Total Stress Score, the Child Domain Score, and the Parent Domain Score were seen as a result of participation in the parent education course.

Zakreski (1983) found Parenting Stress Index scores for the Child Domain, Parent Domain, and Total Stress Score were significantly (p<.001) correlated with the Bayley Infant Development Scales in a population of mothers with full term infants and mothers of premature infants.

Loyd (1983) reported 17 studies that support the discriminant validity of the Parenting Stress Index. Zimmerman (cited in Loyd, 1983) found 10 of the 20 scores on the Parenting Stress Index to differ significantly when he compared a group of mothers of children with cerebral palsy and a matched control group of mothers of children with no known psychological or physical differences. Nearly all of the differences were found in the Child Domain. The only significantly elevated Parent Domain scores were those directly related to the child's problems. Greenberg (cited in Loyd, 1983) found that the Parenting Stress Index discriminated between a clinical sample of parents of mentally retarded children and the normative population. This study was a replication of the study of Zimmerman (1979) in which certain stressors emanating from the Child Domain created a pattern for a sample of physically handicapped children. This suggests that the Parenting Stress Index is sensitive to specific sources of
stressors. Zakreski (1983) studied the relationships between Parenting Stress Index scores, marital status, full-term and pre-term births and infant development at 3 and 6 months using a sample of 54 parents and found that when she examined the parents' marital status and term of birth in relation to the cut-off scores of the 75th or higher percentile for the high-stress group and the 25th percentile or lower for the low-stress group that all of the married full-term mothers were in the low-stress group and all of the single pre-term mothers were in the high-stress group. Predictive validity is supported by the Parenting Stress Index's ability to classify these groups 100% correctly.

Alpha reliability coefficients were computed for each subscale, each domain, and the total score on a sample of 534 mothers. Included were mothers of clinic-referred children as well as mothers of normal children as represented in a well-care clinic. The children ranged in age from 1 month to 19 years. These coefficients range in magnitude from .62 to .70 for the subscales of the Child Domain and from .55 to .80 for the subscale of the Parent Domain. The reported reliability coefficients for the two domains are .89 and .93. The reported reliability for the Total Stress Score on the Parenting Stress Index is .95 (Loyd, 1983). Test-retest reliability was investigated by Abidin (1983) on a sample of 30 mothers drawn from the same
population of parents represented in the norm group. The mothers were all seen in a parenting clinic for consultation on child behavior. They were retested 1 to 3 months after the Parenting Stress Index was originally administered. It was found the Pearson correlations between the first and second set of scores were .63 for the Child Domain, .91 for the Parent Domain, and .96 for the Total Stress Score. This indicates good stability of scores across a one to three month interval.

The Parenting Skills Inventory (PSI) was developed as a means of assessing parenting skills. It identifies seven areas of strengths and weaknesses and provides an overall skills score.

The Parenting Skills Inventory is a paper and pencil test containing 86 agree-disagree items developed as a method for assessing parenting skills. It is considered by the author of the inventory to be appropriate for classroom as well as clinical use. Subjects are instructed to mark answers based on whether the responses, agree (mostly true) or disagree (mostly false), apply relative to any of their children. In effect they are instructed to think of the problem child and not of their children in general. The items measure feelings, attitudes, and behaviors descriptive of parenting skills and provide an assessment of skills on seven scales. These include Role Support, Role Image, Objectivity, Expectations, Rapport,
Communication, and Limit-Setting. Also included is a Parenting Skills Inventory Total Score that is derived by summing raw scores for six of the seven scales. The Parenting Skills Inventory Total Score provides an overall assessment of parenting skills. Role support is omitted in calculating the total score since these questions apply only to parents with partners. Responses are weighted and scoring is accomplished by totaling all responses weighted one for each scale. This provides individual raw scores for each scale. Scores are then converted to percentiles or item scores based on tables that are provided. Results are then charted on a profile graph for each subject. Raw Scores are interpreted on the graph in terms of either Good Skills, Satisfactory Skills or Needs Area (Nash, 1984).

The Parenting Skills Inventory was originally standardized on 21 males and 61 females and consisted of 103 items in eight skills areas. The participants represented a non-client parent population. Following an analysis of the responses, one category was eliminated and several items were dropped while some new items were added. This revision resulted in a 101-item inventory containing seven skills areas. The population sample consisted of 58 males and 92 females from a largely non-client population. The sample represented both married and divorced parents whose children ranged from preschool to young adults. The age range of males was 21 to 64 with a mean age of 40.24
while the females ranged from 24 to 60 with a mean age of 36.67. Occupationally, the sample ranged from professionals to skilled laborers. Analysis of the responses from this group resulted in the current form of the Parenting Skills Inventory containing 86 items. Statistical analysis of these 86 items indicates the relative independence of the seven Parenting Skills Inventory scales (Nash, 1984). Although the strength of the correlations is stronger for some items than for others, the study tends to uphold the placement of the items in the seven scales. Separate norms were established for men and women due to predicted differences in responses based on role. Analysis of the responses indicated significant differences (from p<.01 to p<.05) for the two groups on the seven scales.

Items for the Parenting Skills Inventory were constructed from actual presenting complaints of parents and employ the language typically used by parents. Additionally, the items reflect the consensus of 24 pediatricians in Southern California with regard to common, non-medical complaints of parents.

Reliability for the Parenting Skills Inventory was estimated by use of the split-half method. Means and standard deviations were obtained for each half of the seven scales. The resulting Spearman-Brown corrected correlations for the seven scales ranged from .623 to .809.
Means and standard deviations for the Parenting Skills Inventory scales and for the Total Score are also presented. Studies are currently underway utilizing the Parenting Skills Inventory, although final results are not yet available. The Parenting Skills Inventory is the only known inventory available to quantify parenting skills.

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) was developed by William H. Fitts and is available in a Clinical and Research Form as well as a Counseling Form (Form C). The Counseling Form was utilized in this study as a measure of self-esteem. This form contains 100 items that are self-descriptive statements which the subject uses to convey a picture of himself. Form C includes 14 profiled scores including 9 self-esteem scores. These are identity, self satisfaction, behavior, physical self, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self, social self, and a total score. The overall positive or "P" score is considered the most important singular score on Form C. Standardization for the norms was based on responses of 626 people ranging in age from 12 to 68. The sample consisted of both sexes as well as a wide range of social, economic, and educational levels ranging from sixth grade through Ph.D. One of the reasons for selecting the TSCS over other possible measures of self-esteem was its appropriateness for use with an adult population based on the description of the norm groups. Test-retest data with 60 college
students over a 2-week period yielded a reliability coefficient of .92 for the total "P" score. Additional evidence of reliability was demonstrated in profile patterns established for the same subjects a year or more later. The authors found that distinctive features of individual profiles were still present at this time. Reliability coefficients for individual profile segments of the entire test ranged from .64 to .92.

Validation of the TSCS individual scale items was established through the use of seven clinical psychologists. Ninety of the items utilized in the scales were those that had perfect agreement among the judges. Validation procedures also included Pearson product-moment correlations with the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory based on test scores from 102 psychiatric patients (McGee, 1960 in Fitts, 1965). Validation has also been established based on the use of the TSCS to discriminate between groups. Additionally, personality changes as a result of both naturally occurring events and psychotherapy have been noted based on pre- and post-test scores of the TSCS providing further validation of the instrument.

Data Collection

Publicity about the research was begun in church singles and couples classes 3 weeks prior to meetings
scheduled to gather data (Appendix A). Volunteers were contacted by telephone by the investigator in the order in which their names appeared on a sign-up sheet (Appendix B). At this time, assignments to meeting dates were made (Appendix C), general questions were answered, and other details regarding time and location of their scheduled meeting were given. Calls continued until a sample of 63 subjects was secured. The volunteers included 32 divorced custodial mothers and 31 married mothers. Follow-up letters were mailed to participants to remind them of the date, time, and location of the meeting (Appendix D). Two meeting dates were scheduled one week apart to collect data. Membership in the testing groups was determined by the choice of the participants. Groups I and II were composed of both married and divorced mothers. No attempt was made to place quotas based on marital status on group membership.

Envelopes containing materials to be completed and returned to the investigator were distributed to the subjects as they arrived at the meetings. Instructions for completion of the instruments were attached to the outside of the envelope (Appendix E) along with a notice of consent (Appendix F). The notice of consent forms were collected by the investigator at the time the envelopes were distributed. Participants were allowed to leave after the test packets were returned to the investigator. A 3x5 card
was provided for those subjects who wished to leave their names and addresses in order to receive a report of the study.

Subjects assigned to the first meeting who were unable to attend were asked to attend the second meeting. Two additional meetings were provided for participants who missed the second meeting. Individual sessions were then arranged for participants who were unable to attend scheduled data collection meetings. All sessions were conducted in the same manner until a total of 63 packets were completed. All data were collected during a 1-month period.

Prior to scoring the instruments, the demographic data sheets were examined for both the married and divorced mothers for the purpose of noting the gender of the child designated as the focus child. Examination of this data indicated an obvious balance in each group based on the gender of the focus child making any further statistical examination unnecessary.

In preparation for data collection, the investigator placed the Parenting Stress Index, the Parenting Skills Inventory, and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale test booklets and answer sheets in brown envelopes. The materials were placed in random order to avoid or equalize the possibility that responses on one test might influence
responses on the other tests. Demographic Data Sheets (Appendix G) were placed last in the packets.


CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes demographic information, descriptive statistics, analysis of the data, findings, and discussion and conclusions.

Demographic Information

A total of 63 subjects completed the demographic data sheets and the questionnaires representing 31 mothers married to the biological fathers of their children and 32 divorced custodial mothers. All mothers had children living at home under the age of 13, and all mothers were volunteers from the same general area in North Central Texas. The demographic data related to personal and family characteristics are reported in Table I. No attempt was made to match the groups other than by selecting them out of the same geographic area and on the basis of the age range of their children. The mean age of the target child in the married group was 6.54, with a range of from 1 to 12 years of age. The mean age of the target child in the divorced group was 6.93, with a range from 2 to 12 years of age. An informal inspection of the demographic data indicated no major differences between the two groups in terms of number of children, age of the mothers, age and
sex of the target child, and educational level of the mothers. The mean age of the married group was 34.96 and the mean age of the divorced group was 34.38.

TABLE I

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA RELATED TO PERSONAL AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS FOR MARRIED AND DIVORCED MOTHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married Group N=31</th>
<th>Divorced Group N=32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age of Mothers</td>
<td>34.96</td>
<td>34.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Number of Children in Home</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age of Target Child</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Child by Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Years Married</td>
<td>8.71</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Years Divorced</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further comparison of the demographic data indicated areas that differentiated the two groups of mothers. Demographic features related to financial and educational status are reported in Table II.
TABLE II
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA RELATED TO FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR MARRIED AND DIVORCED MOTHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Married Group N=31</th>
<th>Divorced Group N=32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - $25,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 - $50,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $100,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $100,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the single mothers, 68.75 per cent held undergraduate degrees or higher while 25 per cent reported some college and 6.25 per cent reported having high school diplomas. In the married group, 61.28 per cent held bachelors degrees or higher, 32.25 per cent reported some college, and 6.45 per cent held high school diplomas only.

While the mean educational level of the single group was quite similar to the married group, the reported income
range points to obvious differences between the two groups. One hundred per cent of the single mothers reported income ranges under $50,000 per year with 50 per cent in the 0 to $25,000 range and 50 per cent in the $25,000 to $50,000 range. Over 35 per cent (35.48) of the married mothers reported an annual income ranging between $50,000 and $100,000, and more than 38 per cent (38.70) had an annual income that was over $100,000 per year. Of the married group, approximately 25 per cent (25.81) had an income ranging from 0 to $50,000 per year and over 22 per cent of these (22.58) were in the $25,000 to $50,000 range.

Other differences in life circumstances included reported financial stress and employment status of the mothers. A greater percentage of the single mothers worked than those in the married group: 93.75 per cent versus 35.48 per cent. Of the twenty married mothers who reported that they were unemployed, all twenty indicated that they were unemployed by choice. A total of two divorced mothers indicated unemployed status with one of those reporting that she was unemployed by choice.

The single group also worked a substantial number of hours per week more than the married mothers (41.26 hours versus 21.82 hours).
Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were collected for each group and for the total sample. Table III contains the data collected on the variables of parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

### TABLE III


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married N=31</th>
<th>Divorced N=32</th>
<th>Total Combined N=63</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenting Stress Index</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>225.23</td>
<td>241.94</td>
<td>233.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>47.37</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>51.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenting Skills Index</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>56.77</td>
<td>52.88</td>
<td>54.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>10.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tennessee Self-Concept Scale Score:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>355.71</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>349.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>37.69</td>
<td>40.08</td>
<td>39.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Satisfaction Score:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the Parenting Stress Index, the maximum Total Stress Score earned in the married group was 313 and the
minimum Total Stress Score was 145, creating a range of 168. The maximum Total Stress Score earned in the single group on the Parenting Stress Index was 374 and the minimum was 135, creating a range of 236. On the Parenting Stress Index, a high score indicates high stress and a low score indicates low stress. The single group exhibited a greater variability of overall stress scores (SD = 54.17) than the married group (SD = 47.37).

On the Parenting Skills Inventory, higher scores indicate higher skill levels. The married group of mothers had Total Skills Scores ranging from 37 to 72 resulting in a range of 35. The single group of mothers had Total Skills Scores ranging from 19 to 68 creating a range of 49. The single group again exhibited a greater variability of total skills scores (SD = 11.69) than the married group (SD = 8.33).

The range of scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale for the married group was from a minimum Total Positive Score of 282 to a maximum of 421 resulting in a range of 139. Higher scores on the P-scales indicate higher self-esteem. The single group of mothers had Total P-scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale ranging from a minimum of 263 to a maximum of 418, creating a range of 155. Variability of self-esteem scores was greater for the single group (SD = 40.08) than the married group (SD = 37.69).
Life Satisfaction was measured using a self-report Likert-type scale with scores ranging from 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 7 (Very Satisfactory). A score of 4 would indicate a middle score on life satisfaction. The married group had scores ranging from 3 to 7 resulting in a range of 4. The single group of mothers also had a range of 4, but the score was computed from a minimum score of 2 and a maximum score of 6. Although both groups had the same range, the standard deviation for the divorced group (SD = 1.39) is somewhat higher than the married group (SD = 1.02) indicating slightly greater variability in the divorced group.

Analysis of Data

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested by a t-test for independent samples. Significance was determined at the .05 level. A one-tailed test was used since the direction of the difference between the sample means was predicted. In each of the three hypotheses, the test scores represent the dependent variables while the marital status of the mothers represents the independent variables.

The correlations between parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem and life satisfaction in Hypothesis 4 were tested by the Pearson product-moment correlation procedure. Since marital status is a dichotomous dependent variable in Hypothesis 4, a point-biserial procedure was
used to determine the relationship between marital status and the independent variable, life satisfaction. Significance was determined at the .05 level.

Findings

Hypothesis 1 stated that the group of divorced custodial mothers would have a higher mean Total Score on the Parenting Stress Index than the group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children. Table IV contains the means, standard deviations, and results of the t-test for the two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>225.23</td>
<td>47.37</td>
<td>1.302</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>241.94</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the comparison of means for married and divorced mothers, the t-value of 1.302 was below the level required for significance at the .05 level, so Hypothesis 1 is not supported. The mean Total Score of the Parenting Stress Index for divorced mothers is higher than that for married mothers.
Index was not significantly higher for the group of divorced custodial mothers.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children would have a higher mean Total Score on the Parenting Skills Inventory than the group of divorced custodial mothers. Table V contains the means, standard deviations, and t-values for these two groups.

### TABLE V

**t-TESTS OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR TOTAL SCORE MEANS ON THE PARENTING SKILLS INVENTORY FOR MARRIED AND DIVORCED MOTHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56.77</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>1.521</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52.88</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated that the t-value of 1.521 was not significant at the .05 level, so Hypothesis 2 is not supported. The group of married mothers did not have a significantly higher mean Total Score on the Parenting Skills Inventory than the group of divorced mothers.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children would have a higher mean Positive or P-Score on the Tennessee...
Self-Concept Scale than the group of divorced custodial mothers. Table V contains the means, standard deviations, and t-values for these two groups.

TABLE VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>355.71</td>
<td>37.69</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>0.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>40.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The .05 level of significance set for differences between groups was not met; therefore, Hypothesis 3 is not supported. The group of married mothers did not have significantly higher Total Positive or P-Scores than the group of divorced mothers.

Hypothesis 4 stated that parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, and marital status would be related to life satisfaction. This hypothesis was tested in 4 parts. Pearson product-moment correlations were found to determine the relationships between (1) parenting stress, (2) parenting skills, (3) self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Table VII contains the results of the Pearson product-moment correlations and the probabilities
that the correlations are significantly different from zero.

TABLE VII

PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEASURES OF PARENTING STRESS, PARENTING SKILLS, AND SELF-ESTEEM AND A MEASURE OF LIFE SATISFACTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Stress/ Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-0.533</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Skills/ Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem/ Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a correlation of -0.533 between parenting stress and life satisfaction indicating a negative correlation between high Total Scores on the Parenting Stress Index and low scale scores on the Life Satisfaction measure. Part 1 of Hypothesis 4 is supported. A correlation significantly different from |r| = 0 does exist between measures of parenting stress and measures of life satisfaction for the combined groups.

A correlation of 0.506 was found between parenting skills and life satisfaction indicating a positive
correlation between Total Scores on the Parenting Skills Inventory and the self-report measure of Life Satisfaction. Part 2 of Hypothesis 4 is supported. A correlation significantly different from $|r| = 0$ does exist between measures of parenting skills and measures of life satisfaction for the combined groups.

There is a correlation of 0.5556 between self-esteem scores and life satisfaction scores again indicating that a correlation exists between the Total P-Scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and the self-report measure of Life Satisfaction. Part 3 of Hypothesis 4 is supported. A correlation significantly different from $|r| = 0$ does exist between measures of self-esteem and measures of life satisfaction for the combined groups.

Hypothesis 4 also stated that marital status would be related to life satisfaction. A point biserial correlation procedure was used to test this relationship because of the dichotomous variable, marital status compared to the continuous variable, life satisfaction (Ferguson, 1981). The formula used to calculate the point biserial correlation was:

$$r_{pbi} = \frac{\bar{X}_p - \bar{X}_q}{s_x} \sqrt{pq}$$
The standard deviation of the scores on the continuous variable, life satisfaction, is represented by $s_x$. The proportions of mothers in the two categories of the dichotomous variable (married versus single) are represented by $p$ and $q$. In either the married or the divorced group, $\bar{x}_p$ and $\bar{x}_q$ are the mean scores on the life satisfaction variable. Calculation of this data yielded the point biserial coefficient of .5038. To test the significance of $r_{pbi}$ from 0, the formula

$$t = r_{pbi} \sqrt{\frac{N - 2}{1 - r^2_{pbi}}}$$

was used. This calculation resulted in a $t$-value of 4.5544. Hypothesis 4 relating marital status to life satisfaction is, therefore, supported. A correlation significantly different from 0 does exist between marital status and measures of life satisfaction. There is a significant positive correlation between the married group and greater life satisfaction ($p < .0001$).

Related Findings

Overall, married mothers did not differ from divorced custodial mothers with regard to parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem. There was, however, no hypothesis that specified that the group of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children would have significantly higher mean Total Scores on the Life
Satisfaction measure than the group of divorced custodial mothers. A post hoc t-test was done to compare these two group means. Table VIII indicates the means, standard deviations, and t-values for these two groups.

TABLE VIII

T-TESTS OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR TOTAL SCORE MEANS ON THE SELF-REPORT LIFE SATISFACTION MEASURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.605</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the .05 level of significance, the t-value of 4.605 is highly significant. The group of married mothers had a mean Total Score on the Life Satisfaction measure that was significantly higher than the group of divorced mothers. This finding supported earlier data obtained in the point-biserial correlation relating life satisfaction to marital status.

A Likert-type scale on the Demographic Data Sheet provided a measure of the degree to which children interfered with social life. The possible range of answers was from 1 (Very Little) to 7 (A Lot) with a middle score of 4 indicating that children interfere somewhat with
social life. Although there was no statistical treatment of the resulting data, both the married and the divorced groups had means below 4. The mean for the divorced group was, however, somewhat higher than the mean for the married group (3.94 versus 2.84). Neither group apparently viewed their children as interfering with their lives in a major way.

On the Parenting Stress Index, total scores of 250 and above indicate critically high levels of stress while scores at or above 300 represent crisis levels (Abidin, 1983). Table IX contains scores above the critical and crisis range for married and divorced mothers as well as characteristics of the target child in each group.

**TABLE IX**
TARGET CHILD CHARACTERISTICS AND TOTAL SCORES OVER THE CRITICAL AND CRISIS RANGE ON THE PARENTING STRESS INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married Group N=31</th>
<th>Single Group N=32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSI Total Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Range = 250</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Range = 300</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>06%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Child Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child with Sibling(s)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 29 per cent of the married mothers had Total Stress Scores at either critical or crisis levels. Of the divorced mothers, 44 per cent earned scores indicating critical or crisis levels. In the married group, 7 of the mothers or 23 per cent showed critical levels of stress and 2 mothers or .06 per cent earned scores in the crisis range.

In the divorced group, 9 of the mothers or 28 per cent had Total Stress Scores at or above the critical stress level and 5 of the mothers or 16 per cent earned scores in the crisis range.

Target child characteristics for those scores that were at or above critical and crisis levels were examined for both the group of married mothers and the group of divorced mothers to see whether the percentages of child characteristics were different for the two groups. The data indicate that 33 per cent of the target children in the married group were only children, and 67 per cent had siblings. Forty-three per cent of the children in the divorced group were only children and 57 per cent had siblings. This could suggest that the number of children in the family may be associated with higher levels of stress for married mothers than for single mothers, although a much larger group of critical and crisis level scores would be needed to make any kind of meaningful comparison.
With regard to the gender of the target child, an almost equal number of males and females was selected as target children for the total sample of married and single mothers. The gender of the target child was not, however, indicated equally in systems under stress. In the married group, 67 per cent of the systems under stress had males as the target child. In the divorced group, 71 per cent of the target children were males. The greater representation of males as target children may indicate that a relationship exists between the presence of male children in the household and higher levels of parenting stress.

Total Scores at or below 47 on the Parenting Skills Inventory indicate that parenting skills need to be improved (Nash, 1984). In examining the scores for both groups, 9 or 28 per cent of the single group of mothers had a total score at or below 47. In the married group, 3 or 10 per cent scored in the needs improvement area of 47 or below. Of the 12 mothers in the combined groups with Total Scores on the Parenting Skills Inventory at or below 47, a total of 11 of the 12 also showed parenting stress levels on the Parenting Stress Index at either critical or crisis levels. The 12th mother had a Total Score of 47, a cut-off score, on the Parenting Skills Inventory.

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale Test Manual indicates a norm group mean of 345.57 for the Total P-Score (Fitts, 1965). Although group means for the married and divorced
groups were not significantly different and differed little from the norm group, a total of 50 per cent of the divorced group had P-Scores below 345.57. In the married group, 39 per cent of the mothers had scores below the norm group. A closer inspection of the scores again indicated that 11 of the 12 mothers with scores on the Parenting Skills Index that were within the needs area range (47 or below) also scored below the norm group of the TSCS. The picture that emerged was that mothers with lower parenting skills also had stress levels in the critical or crisis range and P-Scores that reflected lower levels of self-esteem. The reverse, however, was not indicated. That is, mothers with lower self-esteem did not necessarily show critically higher levels of stress or parenting skills that indicated a need for improvement.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem were examined in this study as they relate to mothers married to the biological fathers of their children and to divorced custodial mothers. Additionally, the researcher sought to determine whether or not a relationship existed between reported satisfaction with current life circumstances and marital status, and levels of parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem and life satisfaction.
The following conclusions, based on the results of this study and limited to populations similar to the population from which the samples of this study were selected, are drawn:

1. Married and divorced mothers do not differ with respect to parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem.

2. Life satisfaction is associated with parenting stress, parenting skills, self-esteem, and marital status. Specifically, (a) as parenting stress increases, life satisfaction decreases, (b) as parenting skills increase, life satisfaction increases, (c) as self-esteem increases, life satisfaction increases, and (d) being married is associated with increased life satisfaction.

In support of the research of Weinraub and Wolf (1983), this study would seem to indicate that single mothers have no more difficulty in overall coping than their married counterparts, since no significant differences were found between the two groups on scores measuring parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem. However, like the sample of Weinraub and Wolf (1983), the subjects in the present study had unusual characteristics in that both married and divorced mothers were older, better educated, and had higher financial levels than subjects studied in much of the literature. These characteristics likely explain differences between
observations of demographic data for this study and the findings of McLanahan (1983) who found associations between being single and being poor and being poorly educated. Also in McLanahan's study was the finding that being single is positively related to stress. Of interest in the same study was the finding that single mothers reported lower self-esteem and efficacy and were less optimistic about the future than male heads-of-household. Although the sample in the present study is obviously different from McLanahan's, it might be enlightening to compare another sample of divorced custodial mothers to the husbands of mothers married to the biological fathers of their children. If differences do exist in levels of parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem between the husband group and the divorced mother group, factors might be investigated contributing to those differences.

Although Beck (1984) did not find income to be a problem for women prior to their divorces, there is good evidence in the current study to suggest that what is perceived as financial stress is relative to current circumstances. As was previously noted, 45 per cent of the married mothers studied reported experiencing financial stress. This percentage is somewhat misleading because 12 subjects in the married group reported no financial stress and incomes over $100,000 per year. The remaining 19 married subjects (if the top 12 are ignored) account for
100 per cent of the financial stress for the married group. Of the remaining 19 subjects, 74 per cent reported financial stress. Additionally, 6 of the 14 subjects in the total married group who indicated financial stress reported income levels between $50,000 and $100,000 per year. All reported incomes in the single group were under $50,000 per year. The probable explanation is that the financial stress of single mothers may be more closely related to basic needs while the stress reported in the married group could be related to a life style very different from that of the single mothers. The stress experienced by these two groups may be the same, but the root of the stress is probably quite different. In order to make any kind of statement comparing the two groups on this issue, areas of financial stress would have to be delineated to insure that all subjects are responding to the same issue. Any interpretation of a possible statistical treatment of the data would be risking a Type II error.

It was the consensus of Beck (1984), McLanahan (1983), Heatherington, Cox, and Cox (1976; 1978; 1979, in Levitin, 1979), and Kohen (1981) that at least a year is needed following a divorce to allow for reorganization to occur and to allow stress levels to drop to levels more representative of the life situation. The lack of differences found in the present study between the group of
married and the group of divorced mothers on parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem may mean that when subjects are fairly well matched on age and educational levels and have had time to reorganize their lives following divorce that differences on these variables are simply negligible. It could also mean that levels of parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem are fairly stable over time and not likely to be appreciably altered by virtue of being married or single.

Although the present study made no formal assessment of child characteristics related to inadequate parenting skills, this is an area that needs more research. Heatherington, Cox, and Cox (1976; 1978, 1979, in Levitin, 1979) found the mother-son relationship to be a difficult one even two years following a divorce. This should indicate that males would more frequently be indicated as the target child than females. The present study, however, contradicts this assumption. Of the divorced parents with low skills scores, only 56 per cent of the children indicated as the target child were males, and only 58 per cent of the target children in the combined group were males. Although gender of the target child did appear to be an issue when parenting stress was high, it was not an issue in this study when parenting skills were low. A much larger sample would be needed in order to make more definitive statements.
The relationship found in this study between self-esteem and life satisfaction is in agreement with the research of Weisel (1976) who found that mothers with high self-esteem reported significantly more subjective life satisfaction than mothers low on self-esteem.

In considering that no significant differences were found between the groups of married and divorced mothers on parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem, it may be that being active in a church singles group may have made them different from other single parents with similar demographic characteristics. The religious affiliation possibly provides not only a framework for their family life but support in terms of being with others with similar values and problems. It may also explain the relationship found between life satisfaction and marital status. During interactions of the researcher with the singles classes, it became very evident that those who attended these classes did so (at least partially) in the hope of meeting a future spouse. It could be that this was the primary motivation for attending a singles church group. In future research, male custodial parents in singles church groups could be included to find out not only how they compare to the groups included in the present research, but to find out how they compare to married fathers.

The findings of this study indicate a need for more finely tuned research for single parents. The fact that no
differences were found on the first three hypotheses is perhaps as important as the differences that emerged on Hypothesis 4 that related life satisfaction to marital status, and parenting stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem.

On the whole, the group of single parents studied here are functioning quite well as parents when compared to their married counterparts in spite of lower income levels and decreased personal life satisfaction. The implications of these findings for the children of the divorced group are that they should be functioning in a comparable manner to children in intact families.

The divorced group of mothers in this study was enthusiastic about being a part of the research because they expressed the belief that the problems of single parents are overlooked. There seemed to be a great deal of anxiety for these mothers with regard to whether or not they were being good parents. Additionally, considerable conflict seemed to be present with regard to meeting their own needs for socialization away from their children. In view of these observations and the findings in this study, it may be that a more appropriate method of studying this group might be to do case studies to learn more about single parent concerns that would be useful either in treating single families or in planning services for this group.
CHAPTER REFERENCES


ANNOUNCEMENT AND EXPLANATION OF STUDY

We are currently in the process of trying to better understand how the process of parenting impacts mothers. In particular, we are interested in increasing our knowledge regarding parent stress, parenting skills, and self-esteem as they relate to married as well as single mothers.

Your participation in this study would help us better understand some of the difficulties of parenting from a mother's point of view and will ultimately benefit mothers as well as children.

The only requirements for participation are that you have at least one child living at home under the age of 13 and that you be either a divorced custodial mother or married to the biological father of your children. If you agree to be a part of this research, you will be asked to fill out some questionnaires that will require approximately one hour of your time. Your responses will be completely anonymous in order to protect your identity and to satisfy research requirements.

Two groups that will be scheduled to meet approximately one week apart will be formed from the list of applicants. Assignments to the groups will be based on the preference of dates indicated on the sign-up sheet as long as space allows.
We will meet on __date__ and __date__ at __time__ to complete the questionnaires. At this time, sign-up sheets will be passed out. If you wish to be a part of this research project, please fill in the required information so that I may contact you to confirm your group assignment. You will also be mailed a reminder of the meeting a few days prior to the scheduled date.
Sign-up Sheets

NAME ____________________________________________

ADDRESS ____________________________________________

TELEPHONE ____________________________________________

MARITAL STATUS ____________________________________________

PREFERRED MEETING DATE ____________________________________________
Notification of Meeting

Telephone Communication:

I'm calling to thank you for agreeing to participate in our research on married and single mothers. You indicated on your sign-up sheet that you preferred to meet on ___date___ at ___time___ at ___location__. A place in that group has been reserved for you.

Thank you again for participating in an area of research that is greatly needed. I will look forward to seeing you on ___date__.
APPENDIX D
Reminder of Meeting

Dear ______________,

Please remember the meeting at ___time___ on ___day___, ___date___, at ___location___ for the purpose of collecting information concerning married and single mothers and the impact of parenting.

I look forward to seeing you again and appreciate your willingness to participate in this effort to better understand the issues of women who are mothers.

Sincerely,
Directions for Completing Questionnaire

This envelope contains three instruments for you to complete. There are no right or wrong answers; only answers that reflect your feelings and perceptions. This information will assist us in better understanding the life situation of divorced and married mothers. Each questionnaire includes a test administration booklet and an answer sheet. If you have questions or need assistance, please ask me.

PLEASE BE SURE TO:

1. Fill out all answer sheets completely.
2. Complete all three questionnaires.
3. Complete the short demographic data sheet.
4. Place all answer sheets, test booklets, and information sheets back in the envelope.
5. Return the envelope to the investigator.

If you wish to receive the results of the complete study, please place your name and address on the 3 by 5 card provided and return it to the investigator.
APPENDIX F
Notice of Consent

I understand that I am voluntarily participating in a research project and give my permission for the collection and use of the information. I understand that this information will be used for no other purposes than has been explained to me and I further understand that my responses to the questionnaires will be completely anonymous.

Name: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

Please complete the following information:

1. Marital Status ________; Length of current marital status ___ yr(s).

2. Please list the sex and ages of all children living at home:
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Age and sex of child about whom you have the most concern: Sex____ Age____

4. Employment Status:
   
   A. Employed____ If yes, approximate number of hours per week ____.
   
   B. Unemployed____ If yes, is this by choice?____
   
   C. Please check the income range which best describes the total income available for your family's use.
      $0-$25,000____; $25,000-$50,000____; $50,000-$100,000____; over $100,000____.
   
   D. I/we are currently experiencing financial stress. Yes____ No____

5. Present age of mother ________.

6. Educational Status:
   Your highest level of education:
   High School____; Some College____; B.A./B.S.____; M.A./M.S.____; Ph.D.____.

7. Please circle the degree to which you would rate your satisfaction with your current life situation.
   Unsatisfactory____ Satisfactory____ Very Satisfactory____
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. To what extent do your children interfere with your social life:
   Very Little____ Somewhat____ A Lot____
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
REFERENCES


