

**SELF – CONCEPT OF CHILDREN
FROM DIFFERENT FAMILY
STATUSES**

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**SELF-CONCEPT OF CHILDREN FROM DIFFERENT
FAMILY STATUSES**

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SUMMARY

SELF-CONCEPT OF CHILDREN FROM DIFFERENT FAMILY STATUSES

(KEYWORDS: self-concept, intact families, divorced families, children, psychological resilience)

This study forms part of a larger inter-university research project that focuses on psychological resilience and related concepts in children. The title of the overall project is: Psychological resilience in children in the South African context. This particular study falls under the supervision of Mrs E. van Rensburg.

The aim of this study is to establish whether there are any differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. Self-concept is regarded as one of the facets that make up psychological resilience.

Over the years there has been an increasing interest in the effects that divorce has on children. Some of the aspects that have been focused on include social and psychological factors such as school performance, behaviour, self-esteem, and self-concept.

The first part of this study examines the paradigms of self-concept and self-esteem and identifies the differences between the two concepts. This is done by examining some of the theories regarding the development of both self-esteem and self-concept.

The rationale behind this approach is that there are a number of conflicting definitions for both of these terms in the literature and this has led to some confusion in the past.

Self-concept is then examined as a factor of psychological resilience. This is done by providing a brief description of psychological resilience as it is described in the literature. The role which self-concept plays in psychological resilience is then investigated. A number of practical suggestions that can be followed up to enhance

psychological resilience through increasing children's self-concept are then are provided.

The empirical study forms the next part of this investigation.

The sample group consisted of children in their late-middle childhood (9 – 13 years old) who are between grades 4 and 7. The children were chosen by means of an availability sample from various schools in the different provinces of South Africa. Class lists were used to select random samples of children from the different grades. The final figures for the two sample groups - intact and divorced families - were 838 and 88 respectively.

The measuring instrument used - Piers Harris Children's Self-concept Scale (Piers, 1983) was administered after school hours and only once permission had been obtained from both the parents and also the principals of the various schools.

The reliability indices for the various subscales of the measuring instrument were calculated using the Cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient.

Based on the empirical investigation, only three of the subscales reveal statistically significant differences and overall there do not seem to be practically significant differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families, there is a statistically significant difference.

Finally the last section of this investigation provides recommendations for further studies in this area as well as practical suggestions for the implementation of the findings.

OPSOMMING

SELFKONSEP VAN KINDERS VAN VERSKILLENDE GESINSTATUSSE

TREFWOORDE: (selfkonsep, intakte gesinne, geskeide gesinne, kinders)

Die studie vorm 'n onderafdeling van 'n interuniversitêre navorsingsprojek aangaande die psigologiese weerbaarheid van kinders en staan onder die leiding van mev. E. van Rensburg. Die titel van die oorkoepelende projek is soos volg: Psigologiese weerbaarheid by kinders in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

Die doel van die studie wat tans onderneem word, is om vas te stel of enige verskille voorkom in die selfkonsep van kinders van intakte en geskeide gesinne. Selfkonsep word beskou as een van die fasette van psigologiese weerbaarheid.

Gedurende die afgelope aantal jare is heelwat belangstelling getoon in die uitwerking wat egskeiding op kinders het. Van die aspekte waarop tot dusvêr gefokus is, sluit in sosiale en psigologiese faktore soos skoolprestasie, gedrag, selfkonsep en selfesteem.

Die eerste gedeelte van die huidige studie ondersoek die paradigmas van selfkonsep en selfesteem en identifiseer die verskille tussen die twee konsepte. Hiermee word gepoog om raakvlakke te trek met 'n aantal van die teorieë wat betrekking het op die ontwikkeling van selfkonsep en selfesteem. As rede vir sodanige poging om van bogenoemde twee konsepte die ooreenkomste identifiseer en uit te lig, kan aangevoer word dat heelwat botsende en dikwels verwarrende definisies van die twee konsepte in die literatuur voorkom.

In opvolging van die uiteensetting van die bogenoemde paradigmas word selfkonsep as 'n komponent van psigologiese weerbaarheid ondersoek. Dit geskied deur 'n kort literatuurgefundeerde omskrywing van psigologiese weerbaarheid te verwoord.. Die rol van selfkonsep in psigologiese weerbaarheid word ook ondersoek. 'n Aantal praktiese

voorstelle om psigologiese weerbaarheid te verhoog deur die kinders se selfkonsep te versterk, word ook voorsien.

Die empiriese ondersoek vorm die volgende gedeelte van hierdie ondersoek. Die populasie van die studie bestaan uit kinders in hulle laat-middelkinderjaretydperk (9-13 jaar oud). Die skoolvlak van die deelnemers van die groep is tussen grade 4 en 7. Die kinders is deur middel van 'n beskikbaarheidsteekproef uit verskillende skole in die verskeie provinsies van Suid-Afrika gekies, waarna ewekansige steekproefneming deur die gebruik van klaslyste geselekteer is. Die finale getalle vir die twee steekproewe is onderskeidelik 838 kinders uit intakte en 88 uit geskeide gesinne.

As meetinstrument het die studie gebruik gemaak van die Piers Harris Self-Concept for Children (Piers, 1983). Na die verkryging van ingeligte toestemming deur die betrokke skoolhoofde en ouers, is bogenoemde vraelys na skoolure deur leerlinge ingevul.

Die betroubaarheidsindekse vir die verskillende subskale van die meetinstrument was met die gebruik van die Cronbach-alpha betroubaarheidskoëffisiënte bereken.

Slegs drie van die subskale het statisties betekenisvolle resultate gelever. Nieteenstaande die bevinding dat 'n aantal verskille tussen die twee groepe se subskale voorgekom het, kon geen prakties betekenisvolle verskille ten opsigte van selfkonsep tussen die twee groepe gevind word nie.

Ter afsluiting van die ondersoek word aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing op die gebied gemaak, waarna praktiese voorstelle vir die implementering van die bevindings wat verkry is, voorsien word.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND AIMS

1.1 Introduction

This investigation is part of a larger inter-university research project between the Potchefstroom University and the University of the Free State that aims to examine psychological resilience and related concepts. This study focuses on the differences in self-concept between children from intact and divorced families by examining self-concept as a factor of psychological resilience. The sample group consisted of South African children in their late-middle childhood.

1.2 Problem statement and orientation

In the past, most if not all research in the field of psychology tended to focus on psychopathology in both adults and children and this has provided valuable answers to the various aspects of psychopathology in children and adults. However, over the past twenty years, there has been a shift in focus in psychological research. Instead of focusing on the risk aspects for the development of psychopathology, researchers have begun to turn their attention to the factors that play a role in children and adults remaining healthy despite the myriad of stressors that they might face (Emery & Forehand, 1994).

This changed focus on the aspects that keep children and adults healthy has come to be known as resilience (Cowen, 1991; Cowen & Work, 1988). Generally speaking resilience is the property of a material to resume its shape after being bent or stretched. The notion of resilience can also be applied to children in that it is the regarded as the ability to respond to life's barriers and use to them as stepping-stones

to development and success (Pitzer & Meyer, 1999). Emery and Forehand (1994, p.94) are of the opinion that “resilience involves the search for protective factors that lead to successful adaptation”. It has also been defined as an individual’s “highly adaptive way of coping and achieving a sense of mastery over one’s environment and control over fate” (Cowen, 1991, p.404). It can therefore be said that, “resilience involves the search for protective factors that lead to successful adaptation” (Emery & Forehand, 1994, p.65).

Based on these definitions, it is clear that resilience refers to how individuals react towards stressful life events and whether they are able to successfully overcome the stressful events.

In light of this interest in the factors that keep individual’s healthy, researchers have also begun to try and identify specific components that promote resilience in children. These include individual, familial and extra-familial support factors. Individual factors include characteristics such as good intellectual functioning, an easy-going temperament, gender, high self-concept and self-esteem, self-confidence, good interpersonal relationships, humour, empathy and an internal locus of control. Familial factors include factors such as warm supportive parents, a good parent-child relationship and parental harmony, while extra-familial factors include bonds to pro-social adults outside the family, a supportive network (e.g. grandparents, friends) and successful school experiences (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Emery & Forehand, 1994; Cowen & Work, 1988). From this it is clear that psychological resilience is deeply imbedded in a number of constituencies and that each of them plays an important role in both the mediating and moderating variables of risk and resilience.

As parental harmony and high self-concept form part of the constituency of risk and resilience, and as the aim of this research project is to determine whether there is a difference in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families, it is important to focus more specifically on these areas.

The self has been defined as the mental dimension of the personality and is seen as the core of the consciousness. The self plays a vital role in the psychological well-being of an individual and is the driving force behind an individual's thoughts and actions. It consists of a number of different dimensions namely, the self as object, subject, construct, as a process as a single entity and as multiple entities (Faul, 1994). Over the years, definitions and descriptions of the self have undergone an evolution in psychological literature and it has come to have two very distinct meanings. The one meaning grows from what Hamacheck (1987) refers to as the self-as-object (self-concept) while the other is referred to as the self-as-process definition (self-esteem).

The self-as-object or self-concept refers to an individual's ability to stand outside of himself and evaluate his¹ attitudes, feelings and behaviour from a more or less detached point of view. Therefore, from a global perspective, the term self-concept refers to a person's self-perceptions in relation to the important aspects in his life. These perceptions are formed through the person's interactions with the environment and other individuals but are also influenced by biological and cultural factors. Over time a person's self-concept may undergo some changes in response to the environmental and developmental changes isolated. However, these changes do not usually occur rapidly or in response to experiences or interventions.

The self-as-process (self-esteem) refers to the self as a doer, in that it includes a group of activities such as thinking, remembering, perceiving and performing (Hamacheck, 1987).

Pope, McHale and Craighead (1988, p.2) define self-concept as "the constellation of things that an individual uses to describe to himself" and self-esteem as "the information contained in the self-concept and which is derived from a child's feelings about all the things he is".

¹ For grammatical expediency, reference to the terms he, his, him, himself, encompasses both genders.

It can therefore be said that the self is the sum total of everything that a person is. It consists of all of his ideas, values, attitudes and commitments. It is also a very distinctive part of himself, which allows him to distinguish his inner from his outer world that consists of people and things.

Although it is relatively easy to distinguish the various aspects of a child's self-concept in theory, it does not make much sense in reality, for a child is so much more than just the sum of his parts. However, this distinction is being made here in order to focus on the effects that a traumatic event like divorce may have on a child's self-concept.

The self-concept is therefore the cognitive part of an individual's self-perception, while the self-esteem is the affective dimension. This implies that not only does an individual have ideas about who he is, but he also has feelings about who he is.

Pope et al. (1988) make a distinction when describing the formation of an individual's self-esteem. They are of the opinion that the development of self-esteem may be distinguished as, the perceived self-esteem and the ideal self. An individual's perceived self-esteem is the same as the self-concept in that it provides the individual with an objective view of those skills, characteristics and qualities that are either present or absent in his personality. The ideal self is more of an image that an individual has of what he would like to be, not in a frivolous manner but rather as a sincere aspiration to possess certain attributes that the individual finds desirable.

When self-esteem is referred to, it is usually done in the context of describing an individual's view of himself and whether or not that individual has a high or a low self-esteem. A high self-esteem may be defined as a healthy view of oneself. That is, a view that realistically encompasses all the shortcomings that an individual might have but at the same time, not being harshly critical of them. Therefore, it can be said that a person with a high self-esteem will evaluate himself in a positive way.

An individual with a low self-esteem will frequently exhibit an artificially positive attitude towards the world in a desperate attempt to prove to the others and to himself that he is an adequate person. This individual will also fear contact with others, as there is a deep-seated belief that others will eventually reject him if they were to discover any of his weaker points (Pope et al., 1988).

When considering the self-esteem of children, it is useful to consider a child's global self-esteem, which is a general appraisal of the self and which also includes a number of different aspects of the self-esteem, such as the social area, academic area, family area and body image.

In the social area, the child's feelings about himself and the way others perceive him are of importance. Here the child may find himself asking the following questions: "How do I rate as a friend towards my friends?" "Do other children like me, and do they value my ideas?" "Am I satisfied with my interactions and relationships with my peers and elders?" A child, whose needs are being met will feel comfortable with these aspects of himself.

The academic area is usually where most children tend to feel rather inadequate. In that this is one of the major areas where they are able to compete with, and compare themselves to their peers, and obtain the much-desired attention from their parents and peers alike.

The family self-esteem is also vital aspect in that it is through his interactions within the family that a child begins to develop his identity. The family is the one secure group in which the child has an opportunity to experiment with different behaviours and feelings and it is through this experimentation and the acceptance that he gets from his family that he should be able to make his own unique contribution.

Body image is another aspect of self-esteem and it basically refers to the combination of both physical appearance and capabilities.

Divorce has become a common occurrence in society today and this can be seen in the increasing rates of divorce each year (Snowdon, 1999). Divorce is a traumatic time for both parents and children and the fact that children suffer during the divorce process is well documented in a number of studies (Snowdon, 1999; Brooks, 1995; Lefrançois, 1993; Newman & Newman, 1991; Wallace & Wallace, 1989; Glick, 1988; Potgieter, 1986; Cantor & Drake, 1983).

Most if not all of the research done in the area of divorce and its impact on children has tended to focus on the potential emotional damage and the behavioural consequences associated with divorce. These include delinquency, poor school performance and the increased risk of depression and suicide (Portes, Lehman, & Brown, 1999; Shaw, 1991; Kalter, 1987). There has also been a great deal of interest in the effects of divorce on a child's self-concept and self-esteem (Bynum & Durm, 1996; Beer, 1989; Ensink & Carrol, 1989; Hoffmann & Zippco, 1986).

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are differences in the self-concept of children from different family statuses, i.e. intact and divorced families. This will be done by defining self-concept and examining the various theories with regard to the development of self-concept that exist in the literature. The different dimensions of self-concept will also be focused on, and particular attention will be given to self-esteem and the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem. In order to clearly differentiate between these two concepts, theories on the development of self-esteem will also be examined.

As self-concept is a component of psychological resilience, attention will also be given to definitions and theories of resilience, which will be examined in some detail. The relationship between these characteristics will also be examined.

Descriptions of the various types of families that exist in society will be given, with the emphasis on intact and divorced families. Definitions of divorce, the process and the effects that divorce has on the child and parent will also be highlighted. Special attention will be given to the psychological tasks and reactions that children have to the divorce process.

The empirical study will provide descriptions of the sample, measuring instruments and the hypotheses. An analysis and discussion of the data will follow. The final chapter will deal with shortcomings of the present study and recommendations for future studies in this area.

Given the introductory comments provided thus far, the overall research question that this project will focus on is therefore: *Do children from different family statuses differ in terms of their self-concept?*

The specific research questions that will be investigated in this research project are:

1. What is the nature of self-concept?
2. Is the measuring instrument used reliable and valid?
3. Do children from different family statuses differ in terms of self-concept?

1.3 AIMS

The **overall aim** of this investigation is to examine the differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families by means of both a literature and empirical study.

The specific aims are:

1. To determine the nature of self-concept based on statistical analysis.
2. To establish whether the measuring instrument used to determine self-concept is reliable and valid.
3. To determine whether children from different family statuses differ in terms of self-concept.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

1. No hypotheses can be made regarding the first objective, as research in this area is still exploratory.
2. The measuring instrument is reliable and valid.
3. Children from different family statuses differ in terms of self-concept.

1.5 SUMMARY AND PREVIEW

This chapter has outlined the problem statement, aims and the hypothesis of this research project.

Chapter Two will focus on self-concept in children, by specifically examining self-concept from a psychological-resilience framework. The development of self-concept and theories regarding self-concept will also be explored. The third chapter will examine the differences between intact and divorced families and also analyse the effects that divorce has on a child's self-esteem. Chapter Four will centre on the research methodology used, i.e. the empirical investigation. Specific attention will be given to the empirical design, the respondents, the measuring instrument, procedures used and the statistical analysis. The fifth chapter includes the results of the empirical investigation as well as a discussion of these results. The investigation will be

concluded in the sixth chapter by focusing on the conclusions reached and making recommendations for further studies in this area.

CHAPTER 2

SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-ESTEEM

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to determine the role that self-concept plays in resilience and also whether family status has an effect on the self-concept of a child. This will be done by focusing on defining self-concept, the different components of self-concept, namely, self-esteem, body image and self-evaluation.

As self-concept is the focus of this chapter, it is important that the various definitions of self-concept that exist in the literature are examined especially since there is some uncertainty as to whether there are differences between self-concept and self-esteem in the literature. Due to this, an in-depth study of self-concept, its development and theories of self-concept will be carried out. Thereafter, the theories regarding the development of self-esteem, body image and self-evaluation, the factors that play an important role in the development of these aspects, their importance in the overall functioning of a child's self-esteem and the effects that family status may have on a child's self-concept will be explored.

The link between self-concept and resilience will be examined by studying the definitions of resilience and the relationship between self-concept and resilience.

2.2 Self –concept

2.2.1 Defining self-concept

There are a number of different definitions in the literature with regard to self-concept, and for a number of years self-concept has been operationalised as a single global dimension, with the emphasis being on the overall evaluation that a person makes of himself (Greef, 2000). Over the past few years however, a great number of studies regarding self-concept has lead to a change in the way in which self-concept is defined.

One of the most important conceptualisations and descriptions of self-concept is that of Shavelson Hubner and Stanton who define the self-concept as “...a person’s self perceptions formed through experience with and interpretations of his environment. They are influenced especially by the evaluations by significant others reinforcements and attributions for the individuals own behaviour” (Greef, 2000, p.1).

Self-concept has also been defined as “...the general term that is reflected in the description that we would provide if we were asked to describe our personality characteristics for some stranger...” (Lefrançois, 2001, p.425). This view reflects the idea that an individual has about himself and also what he believes others think of him.

Pelham and Swann (1989), Markus and Wurf (1987), and Marsh (1986) as cited by Greef (2000, p.1) believe that the self-concept is a “multi-dimensional aspect that consists of various different but inter-related aspects, all of which play a role in the global evaluation that a person has of himself”.

Hamacheck (1987, p.10) is of the opinion that the self-concept refers to the “particular cluster of ideas and attitudes that a person has about himself at any given moment”.

Based on these definitions it is clear that the self-concept is an organised cognitive structure that an individual has about himself as a person, and is derived from the sum of all of the individual’s experiences. It is only able to operate and manifest itself when the individual comes into contact with others through socialisation (Faul, 1994). It is also clear that the self-concept is not an entity on its own; rather, it consists of a number of interrelated components each of which contribute to the global view that the individual has of himself and his abilities.

For the purpose of this investigation self-concept will be conceptualised as a global system that consists of a number of inter-related facets. These facets or components have an effect on the individual’s perception of himself and also his interaction with others. It is not a dormant entity but is in fact malleable and modifiable and therefore, it can change over time, provided there is richness in the quality and quantity of an individual’s experience.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the notion self-concept and the important role that it plays in an individual’s life, the following sections of this chapter will focus on the theories regarding the development of self-concept, briefly examine the various dimensions of self-concept, and the differentiation that is made between self-concept and self-esteem. Thereafter, an examination of the self-concept as a component of psychological resilience in children from intact and divorced families will follow.

2.2.2. Historical conceptualisation self-concept theory

There are a large number of theories in psychological literature regarding the development of the self-concept and also the important role that it plays in the individual's view of himself. A summary of some of these theories will now be provided.

2.2.2.1 René Descartes (1596-1650)

Interest in the self, what it is and how it develops is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, this interest in the self can be traced back to the seventeenth century when the French mathematician, René Descartes (1596-1650) wrote *Principles of Philosophy (1644)* in which he discussed the “cognito” or self as a thinking substance. He also proposed that doubt was a principle tool of disciplined enquiry, yet he could not doubt that he doubted. He reasoned that if he doubted, he was thinking and therefore he must exist. Existence therefore depends on perception (Purkey, 1988).

2.2.2.2 William James (1842-1910)

James also provided an excellent phenomenological description of the self-concept. He defined the self as consisting of more than just the physical body, but also that which an individual calls his own and that with whom and which he shares a bond. He referred to the “I” as the knower and the “Me” as the known or empirical self. The empirical self is basically everything that the person can call his own. James divided the empirical self in order of importance into the:

- Spiritual self
- Material self
- Social self
- Bodily self

The spiritual self is the person's concrete state of consciousness; it is the source of interest, attention effort, will, and choice. The material self is what an individual owns. This includes property, clothes, immediate family, and also one's body. James has linked the social self to social interaction, and he was of the opinion that there is more than just one social self, and that the social *me* grows out of the recognition that an individual receives from others. The bodily self is the least important to him. He simply stated that this is the need to nourish one's body, to clothe it and to have a minimum degree of selfishness in the bodily sense (Lefrançois, 1993; Mussen, Conger, Kagan and Huston, 1990).

2.2.2.3 Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

Freud also contributed to the development of self-concept theory by providing a new understanding of the importance of mental processes. Although he never did make self-concept a primary psychological unit in his theory, he believed that the formation of internal worlds is both innate and intra-psychic, and therefore that individuals tend to distort both consciousness and the internal versions of themselves so as to avoid anxiety. This process of distortion takes place in the context of social life (Purkey, 1988).

2.2.2.4 George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)

Mead systematically theorised the process of the development of the self by hypothesising that infants are born without a self and that the self-concept arises as a result of social experience. Mead was of the opinion that a child takes on the attitudes and values of those significant others, whom the child depends on, and who to a certain degree control the child. He also referred to the "generalised other". This is the social group that gives the child his sense of unity and also against whom the child evaluates himself as a "generalised other". Therefore, Mead's theory rests on

the premise that the groups an individual belongs to serve as a significant frame of reference (Lefrançois, 1993; Wallace & Wallace, 1989).

2.2.2.5 Charles Horton Cooley (1846-1929)

Cooley termed the concept of the “looking glass self” which he used to define the self as a reflection of what individuals think others judgements of them are. In Cooley’s theory, how a mother perceives and treats her child will result in whether the child will have a favourable or unfavourable self-concept (Lefrançois, 1993; Wallace & Wallace, 1989).

While both James and Cooley believed that the individual is consciously aware of the self, neither of them discussed the process by which the self comes into existence (Lefrançois, 1993; Hamacheck, 1987).

2.2.2.6 Carl Rogers (1902-1987)

One of the most discerning voices in self-concept theory is that of Carl Rogers. Rogers was one of the first theorists to introduce an entire system of helping that is built around the self. He believed that the self is the central ingredient in human personality and personal adjustment and that it is a social product, which develops out of interpersonal relationships and which is constantly striving for consistency (Pescitelli, 1996).

According to Rogers, all individuals have a tendency towards self-actualisation and development and as long as this is permitted and encouraged, the individual will be able to maintain or enhance himself, and move towards autonomy. This tendency to towards actualisation is directional and constructive and although it can be suppressed, it may never be destroyed.

When significant others in the individual's person's world (usually parents) provide the child with positive regard that is conditional rather than unconditional, the person introjects the desired values and makes them his own, and through this, makes them his own. The self-concept then becomes based on these standards of value, rather than on the individual's own organismic evaluation. By introjecting these values, he is also disturbing his own "organismic valuing process", whereby experiences are accurately symbolised and valued according to the optimal enhancement of the self. Therefore, the need for positive self-regard leads to selective perception of experience in terms of the conditions of worth that now exist. The experiences that are congruent with the conditions that have been interjected are perceived and symbolised in the awareness, while those that are not tend to be distorted or denied into awareness. This then leads to an incongruency between the self as perceived, and the actual experience of the organism, which then results in confusion, tension and maladaptive behaviours (Pescitelli, 1996; Miell, 1995).

2.2.2.7 Integration of theories

Although all of these different theorists have postulated their theories at different times in history, there is a common thread linking them to each other, namely that the self-concept is not something that can exist in isolation, but rather within a specific context. Therefore, the following basic assumptions about self-concept may be made:

- *Self-concept is something that is learned and it gradually emerges in the early months of life and is continually shaped and re-shaped through repeated perceived experiences, particularly with significant others.*

The fact that a person's self-concept is learnt and is not instinctual has a number of implications. These include the fact that the self-concept possesses a limitless potential for development and actualisation, that previous experiences and present perceptions will have an effect on the way in which individuals perceive themselves

and the way in which others perceive them. Individuals will also tend to perceive different aspects of themselves at different times with varying degrees of clarity. Any experience that is inconsistent with the person's self-concept will also be perceived to be a threat and if there are a large number of these experiences, the self-concept will be organised in a much more rigid manner in order to maintain and protect itself (Purkey, 1988).

➤ *The self-concept is organised, i.e. it has a relatively stable quality that gives a sense of consistency to an individual's personality.*

This also implies that the self-concept requires stability and consistency and that it tends to resist change. Linked to this reluctance to change is the strength of the individual's belief. The more central a particular belief is to an individual, the more resistant one will be to change it. As an individual's basic perceptions are quite stable, change will also tend to take place over time (Purkey, 1988).

➤ *Self-concept is dynamic and is best understood as a continuously active guidance system that not only shapes the ways in which a person views himself, others and the world around him, but it also serves to direct the person to act in a consistent manner in his life.*

The implications that this has is that the individual will perceive his experiences in relation to himself and this will in turn then lead to an assimilation of new ideas and the expulsion of old ideas. Despite this, it must be remembered that a person will strive to behave in ways that are consistent with his self-concept and that there may be times that the self-concept may take precedence over the physical body. The self-concept is however, also always guarding itself against a loss of self-esteem because it is this loss that will produce an anxiety within the person (Purkey, 1988).

2.2.3 The dimensions of self-concept

As with the definitions of self-concept, there are also a large number of views with regard to the different domains or dimensions of self-concept. Some of these views will be briefly examined in this section.

Samuels (1977) identifies the following dimensions of self-concept:

2.2.3.1 The Body Image

Learning to differentiate between what is part of the self and what is not through direct experience and perception without any social mediation is according to Burns (1979) the first step that a child takes in his journey of life. The terms “body image” and body schema are used to convey the concept of the physical body which each individual possesses. The original sense of body refers to the basic identity of the body and it involves the awareness of its locations positions and boundaries that are derived from the sensory and motor cortex of the brain. It is therefore a diagram or map of the body and its constituent parts. This body schema plays a vital role in the development of the image which a person may have of himself as a physical being (Burns, 1979).

A distinction can therefore be made between the body schema which is the knowledge that is obtained from the sensations of the body and its parts and the body image, which is the evaluated picture of the physical self. This differentiation between physical person and the person’s self-concept is somewhat difficult to make in early childhood as a child tends to perceive and evaluate his body and other parts in the same way as he perceives and evaluates any other object.

The “body image” includes the physical and sexual self and it plays a vital role in a child’s psychological growth. An individual’s body image can be defined as a “condensed representation of his current, past, and fantasied experiences of his own body” (Lefrançois, 1993; Perlmutter & Hall, 1992; Samuels, 1977). It is therefore a subjective evaluation which the person uses as a framework from which he functions. The sense of bodily self or the realisation that “this is my body” is one of the first appropriate functions that the child develops and it remains the anchor of an individual’s self-concept throughout his life. Through his experiences, the child gradually begins to distance himself from everything around him (Möller, 1995).

Other researchers are of the opinion that the self-concept is initially a body image, an evaluated picture of the physical self and that the first distinction that a child makes between the self and the non-self is based on his awareness of his own tactile, kinaesthetic and muscular sensations. The body image is the core of the self-concept during the first few years of a child’s life and as the child’s bodily functions become more efficient, he learns to master his external world better and through this, he begins to tend his boundaries of activity which leads to his dealing with significant people in his life so that his self-concept becomes more and more differentiated as a separate entity and this then helps to guide his personal behaviour (Lefrançois, 1993; Perlmutter & Hall, 1992).

2.2.3.2 Social self

From the age of about four years old, the child begins to become aware of the things and people in his environment and he also begins to associate himself with these. This includes aspects such as racial, ethnic, cultural and religious selves. This association leads him to start seeing himself as an extension of the various selves and he sets in motion a process that will continue for the rest of his life as he associates himself with the multitude of values, norms and expectations that society confers onto him. Society therefore plays an important role in the development of the child’s

social self, especially since values and norms are internalised by the child and he is then expected to live by, and to meet the expectations set by society.

In most instances significant people in his life such as parents, siblings, grandparents, other family members and teachers usually convey these expectations to the child. The expectations also serve to form a link between the social structures wherein the child finds himself and his personality. The child's basic social self is internalised and due to this, he responds to specific experiences in specific predetermined ways. However, the social self can also be adapted and modified in order meet the requirements of new situations (Möller, 1995; Perlmutter & Hall, 1992; Samuels 1977).

2.2.3.3 Cognitive self

As children grow, they move towards a greater understanding of, and knowledge of themselves. This process whereby children become more aware of gain meaning from their environment as been identified as the development of the "cognitive self". Sarbin (in Samuels, 1977, p.29) suggests that as children interact with objects and people during their growth and maturation process, various empirical selves or cognitive sub-structures are organised. This process enables the child to move towards a greater understanding of himself in interaction with his environment. It must be noted that a cognitively-processed experience may not be an exact replication of what has occurred; it is in fact, the changes that the child has made to fit his already existent experiences and needs.

2.3 Self-esteem

2.3.1 Defining self-esteem

The term *self-esteem* is derived from the Greek word meaning “reverence for self”. The “self” part of self-esteem pertains to the values, beliefs and attitudes that an individual holds about himself. The “esteem” part of the self-esteem describes the value and self worth that an individual gives to himself. Therefore, in a nutshell, self-esteem may be defined as the acceptance of who and what an individual is at any given time in his life (Anon, 1999).

Self-esteem has been defined in a multitude of ways from Brown’s (1997, p.1) definition that self-esteem is largely a “feeling of affection for oneself that develops largely through irrational though processes to the more cognitive view that self-esteem is a judgement that a person makes about himself, i.e. an assessment of an individuals abilities and attributes”, to Faul’s (1994, p.12) definition that “the self-esteem is the basic frame of reference that an individual has formed through his subjective evaluation of himself and, which influences his actions during interpersonal relations”.

It can therefore be assumed that the subjective evaluation that an individual makes of himself has a relatively large influence on the way in which that the individual perceives the successes and failures in his life.

Based on this it is clear that self-esteem, unlike self-concept, is more of an affective perception, and that these affective perceptions then have a role in certain behaviour patterns which the individual may choose to either exhibit or not when he is interacting with others. This behaviour then also reveals to others the attitude that the individual has about his abilities and his strengths and weaknesses.

Therefore, if an individual believes that the ideal type of family to come from is intact one and he hails from a divorced family, he will be likely to avoid individuals that hail from intact families. This perception will then undoubtedly have an effect on his interpersonal relationships, as he will not be able to deal with those individuals who come from intact families (Anon, 2001).

From this it is apparent that an individual's motivation, behaviour and his reactions depend on his self-esteem and that if he has a low self-esteem, he is not likely to be very motivated and that consequently his behaviour and interpersonal relationships may also be influenced negatively.

Self-esteem is an individual's attitude about himself. It encompasses aspects such as how capable, worthwhile and successful a person may believe himself to be. Self-esteem begins to develop early in life and it has been studied in children as young as 7 years (Anon, 2001). As children learn to describe aspects of themselves, like for example their physical attributes, abilities and preferences, they also begin to evaluate themselves. It is through this process of evaluation and self-awareness that the child is able to develop a pathway towards discovering insights into himself. It was believed that an individual's self-esteem developed early in childhood and generally remained relatively stable throughout his life. However, researchers have found that in many individuals, self-esteem changes dramatically over time and in particular, during times of major transitions, such as divorce.

2.3.2 Theories on the development of self-esteem

The foundations of self-esteem are laid early on in a child's life when an infant begins to develop attachments with the adults who are responsible for him. A baby whose cries and smiles are readily responded to by adults, learns to feel loved and accepted by the people that he looks up to and as he grows, he learns to trust his

parents and others who look after him by taking care of him and by satisfying his basic needs. This then leads the child to feel wanted, valued and loved (Katz, 1999).

Self-esteem develops at different stages of a person's life span and results from interactions with others and from life experiences. It is therefore a growing process and as the child grows, he tends to become increasingly aware of and sensitive to the evaluations of those around him (Katz, 1999).

2.3.2.1 Jean Piaget's (1896-1980) developmental theory

Jean Piaget is considered to be one of the most influential theorists in the description of cognitive development in humans. He refers to his theory as genetic epistemology, which he defines as the study of the acquisition, modification and the growth of abstract ideas and abilities on the basis of an inherited or biological substrate, i.e. an intelligent functioning that makes the growth of abstract thought possible. A central part of his theory is the concept of epigenesis, which is simply that growth and development occurs in a series of stages and that each of these stages requires the successful mastery of the preceding stage. Every one of these stages occurs at a different age, and at each one, the child will show a higher level of thought organisation (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998)

Piaget has identified the following four stages of development as a child assimilates and accommodates new concepts. These stages are:

- The sensori-motor stage (birth to age two)
- Pre-operational stage (age 2-7)
- Concrete operational stage (7-11)
- Formal operational stage (11years onwards)

During the sensori-motor stage, the child's functioning changes from a reflex level to a level where he is able to execute coherent practical actions that are applicable to his immediate surroundings (Lefrançois, 1993; Perlmutter & Hall, 1992; Meyer & van Ede, 1991). The pre-operational stage is a transitional stage between the sensori-motor and the later operational periods. In this stage, the child's cognitive development is concentrated on the development of the ability to represent things mentally or symbolically.

During the concrete operational stage, the child becomes capable of thought processes that are reversible, but only regarding real or concrete things. The formal operational stage is characterised by the child's ability to execute formal operations and to think in an abstract and logical manner and through this make decisions.

The movement from one stage to the other is influenced by four factors:

➤ Physical growth

Piaget was of the opinion that the biological characteristics of the human child place some limits on the order and speed at which particular cognitive competences emerge and that because of this throughout infancy a child's understanding of the world is restricted to the simple reflexes with which he is born. In time, the child's behaviours will become more coordinated and elaborate. Therefore, as a child grows older he will be able to assimilate and accommodate new information (Lefrançois, 1993; Mussen et al., 1990).

➤ Experience with materials to be thought about and manipulated

As people are active, curious and inventive throughout life, Piaget believed that humans spontaneously seek out contact and interaction with the environment. He postulated that a child who is left to his own devices will construct his world by

imposing order on the raw material that is provided by the sights, sounds and smells that he comes into contact with (Mussen et al., 1990).

➤ Social interaction

This plays an important role in the assimilation and accommodation process. All individuals are continuously trying to organise and incorporate new experiences with that which is already a part of them. As children are according to Piaget basically egocentric, social interaction provides the opportunity for the child to learn to understand that other people have different perspectives as compared to their own.

➤ Equilibration

This is the process of building and rebuilding new mental structures that is made possible as a result of maturation, experience and social interaction. A child at this stage is able to assimilate new experiences with those that he already has. He is also able to accommodate the cognitive changes that he has to make in order to function in a socially acceptable manner (Mussen et al., 1990).

Piaget believes that a child cannot learn anything new until he has developed the internal structures that enable him to assimilate new concepts. Once this internal development has occurred, the child is then capable of accommodating or changing his behaviour in order to facilitate growth and move onto the next stage.

Children integrate self-concept by trying on different roles symbolically and verbalising self-feelings in relation to them. Therefore, during this stage of his development, a child's perceptions will tend to dominate his way of thinking. This means that the child is unable to reason back to what was and in order for the child to do this he needs to continue to have active experiences with real objects. It is only

when the child is cognitively ready to accommodate what he has learnt, that he will be able to move onto the next stage (Meyer & van Ede, 1991).

Piaget is also of the opinion that when a child is forced to memorise the “right” answer, before he is cognitively ready to understand it, his cognitive self-concept can be affected negatively (Samuels, 1977; Meyer & van Ede, 1991; Lefrançois, 1993).

2.3.2.2 The developmental theory of Erik Erikson (1902-1994)

Erikson based his theory on Freud and extended his theory by emphasising the psychosocial aspects of development beyond early childhood. He believed that psychosexual and psychosocial growth occur simultaneously and that at each stage of an individual’s life, he faces the task of establishing an equilibrium between himself and his social world.

Erikson further postulated that during each stage of an individual’s development, he faces a number of crises that need to be resolved and that these crises represent turning points in the individual’s life. The individual is faced with the choice of either resolving his conflicts and master the developmental tasks that he confronted with or to regress to an earlier stage in his development (Corey, 1996).

There are eight critical developmental issues in life which Erikson has identified, and which determine the way in which an individual functions. These stages will now be discussed briefly.

➤ Basic trust vs mistrust (first year of life)

This is the first stage in his theory and it is apparent in the first year of life. An infant must initially begin to develop sufficient trust in order to allow his mother to provide him with the sustenance that he needs in order to survive. If the child’s basic needs

for both physical and emotional requirements are not met, the child will develop an attitude of mistrust towards interpersonal relationships.

➤ Autonomy vs shame and doubt (early childhood)

This stage is characterised by the child's having to develop a sense of autonomy. Here the basic struggle that the child is confronted with is between a sense of self-reliance and a sense of self-doubt. It is important that the parents allow their child to explore and experiment, make mistakes and to test the limits as this will give the child the capacity to deal with the world successfully. Promoting dependency will on the other hand lead the child to feel doubt and shame whenever he is faced with failure (Corey, 1996).

➤ Initiative vs guilt (preschool age)

The basic task at this stage is to achieve a sense of competence and initiative. Parents should allow their child to select personally meaningful activities as this leads to the development of a positive view of the self and it also ensures that the child will follow through with the projects that he may undertake. If however, the child is not allowed to make his own decisions, he may develop feelings of guilt over taking initiative, which will then lead to his refraining from taking a leadership position and instead depending on others to make decisions for him (Corey, 1996; Liebert & Spiegler, 1994).

➤ Industry vs inferiority (school age)

In order for a child to emerge as a healthy individual it is important that he applies himself to his learning, begin to feel competent relative to his peers and face his own limitations (Liebert & Spiegler, 1994). This implies that the child needs to expand his understanding of the world and at the same time develop the appropriate sex-role

identity. In order for the child to achieve a sense of industry he must be able to set and attain the personal goals. If he is unable to do this, he may experience a sense of inadequacy.

➤ Identity vs role confusion (adolescence)

Erikson believes that identity refers to the confidence with which others see an individual and the confidence with which he sees himself. This is a time when the child begins to test the limits, breaking dependent ties and establishing a new identity. A failure to achieve a sense of identity leads to role confusion, which may be characterised by an over-identification with popular heroes or cliques (Liebert & Spiegler, 1994).

➤ Intimacy vs isolation (young adulthood)

Intimacy according to Erikson is the capacity to commit to a relationship without losing one's own identity. The crisis that the individual is confronted with at this stage is developing co-operative social and occupational relationships with others. If he is unable to do this, it is likely that he will find himself being alienated and isolated (Corey, 1996).

➤ Generativity vs stagnation (middle age)

Erikson describes a mature person as someone who "needs to be needed" (Liebert & Spiegler, 1994). This implies that this person wants to assist others by providing guidance to the younger generation. This is also a time of adjusting to the discrepancy between one's dreams and actual accomplishments. A failure to achieve a sense of productivity can lead to psychological stagnation (Corey, 1996; Liebert & Spiegler, 1994).

➤ Integrity vs despair (later life)

If an individual is not able to suitably handle the preceding crises, he may feel disgusted with himself. This feeling is compounded by his realising that it is too late to start a new life which leads to a sense of incurable remorse for the rest of his life. If however, the individual has been able to develop healthy and adaptive qualities over the past seven stages, he will be able to achieve a lasting sense of integrity and therefore be a psychologically healthy person.

Erikson's theory is sometimes referred to as a theory of the life cycle as it is largely concerned with the development of a healthy personality. His description of the various developmental stages that an individual has to go through in order to become a healthy individual to a large extent focuses on the development of the self. As the individual moves from one stage to the next, either mastering the specific tasks of that stage or experiencing difficulty resolving these tasks, he can either develop a sense of esteem and confidence in his abilities, or he may be plagued by doubt which then has an overall effect on him for the rest of his life and he will never be able to form a strong sense of identity or self (Corey, 1996; Liebert & Spiegler, 1994).

2.3.2.3 Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) Humanistic theory on the development of self-esteem

The Humanist school describes itself as being, "primarily concerned with those human capacities that have little or no systemic place, either in positivist or behaviourist theory or in the classical psychoanalytical theory: love, creativity, self, growth, organism basic need-gratification, self-actualisation, being, becoming, spontaneity, play and humour are all regarded as important factors in a humanistic theory" (de Vos, 1995, p. 198). The humanists therefore focus their attention on the exploring optimal personal development (self-actualisation) and heightened consciousness (McKee, 2001; de Vos, 1995).

This school of thought has circumscribed its basic tenets by identifying five basic points as a point of departure:

1. The person in his humanity, is more than just the sum of his parts. Therefore a scientific study of the individual functions of the person does not lead to the understanding of the person as a whole.
2. The interpersonal experiences of a person cannot be ignored if there is to be an understanding of the individual.
3. Each individual is not only a spectator of his own existence, but also a creative sculptor of his life and he therefore has the ability to realise his potentials in an independent manner.
4. The individual is always actively involved in attaching meaning to his environment and setting goals because of this, he is a being that is able to give meaning.
5. The person is also a being with self-awareness and therefore the individual will continuously be searching and discovering new things about himself (de Vos, 1995).

Maslow's theory is centred on these aspects. However, the crux of his theory is that man is growth-orientated rather than striving for a tensionless or homeostatic state. Therefore he is of the opinion that individuals are constantly striving towards objectives that make life meaningful and rewarding. Due to this continuous and consistent search for meaning, man never really experiences a state of complete satisfaction or nirvana, because as soon as one need has been satisfied, another need will assert itself. Maslow explains this shifting of needs by means of his Hierarchy of Needs. In this hierarchy, he differentiates between basic needs and meta-needs. These are then divided into five groups according to the urgency involved in satisfying them (Boeree, 1998).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

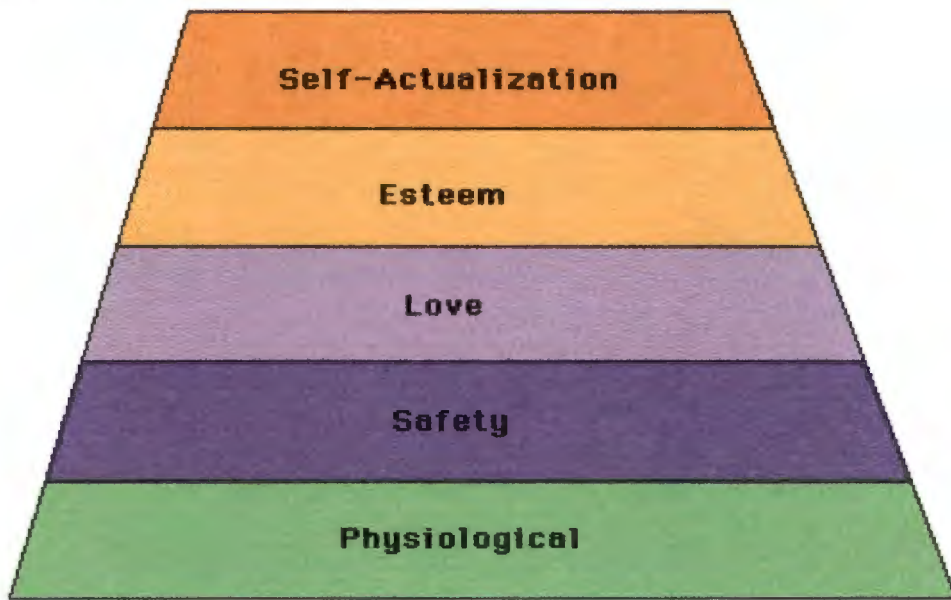


Figure 1

The most basic and powerful need of an individual is the need for survival. The person has a need for water, food, oxygen, sex, sleep, protection against extreme temperatures and sensory stimulation. These physiological needs are directly related to the biological maintenance of the individual and these needs must be satisfied before the human organism is able to move onto the next level. An ideal example of this is a baby. Before the child can move onto the next phase of development, his basic needs for food, protection and nurturance have to be fulfilled. These needs are also, the driving force behind an individual's behaviour. It is clear that gratification plays an important role here, as an individual will only be able to move onto the next level once he is released from the dominating need in his life (Boeree, 1998).

Safety and security needs are on the second level of the hierarchy and these will shift to the foreground as soon as the physiological needs have been satisfied. All individuals have a need for structure, security, order and predictability in their lives. Children especially most affected by these needs due to their relative helplessness and dependence on the adults in their lives. Therefore, if the significant adults in the

child's life are not able to provide the child with these needs as in the case of parents who divorce, the child will feel unsafe, as he will perceive his environment as being unstable and unpredictable (Boeree, 1998).

Love and affiliation needs are also vital and these needs usually become important once the other two needs have been gratified and continue to be so, on a regular basis. Maslow believes that all individuals have a need for warmth, affection and acceptance and if an individual does not receive this kind of gratification, he is likely to become alienated both from himself and from others (Boeree, 1998; de Vos, 1995).

Maslow has made a distinction between the needs for esteem namely, a lower one and a higher one. The lower one is the need for the respect of others, the need for status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation, dignity, even dominance. The higher form involves the need for self-respect, including such feelings as confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, and freedom. Note that this is the "higher" form because, unlike the respect of others, once an individual has self-respect, it's a lot harder to lose (Boeree, 1998).

Maslow identifies the preceding four levels as deficiency needs or "D-motives". These motives function according to the principle of tension reduction. When an individual's physiological needs are not satisfied, he will want restore the equilibrium as quickly as possible in order to reduce the tension that he is experiencing. However, the higher up the hierarchy an individual moves, the less urgent the satisfaction of the needs becomes. This he identifies as the "B motives". The "B" motives' are the growth motives and function as the meta-motives. These motives are all encompassing, adjacent behind or an explanation of something (de Vos, 1995).

Self-actualisation is a "B motive" in that although it holds onto its status of wanting to satisfy its needs, it is more growth and less gratification-oriented. The needs related to self-actualisation are more hetero-static in that they make the individual aware of

his potentialities. As Maslow puts it: “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be he must be. He must be true to his own nature” (de Vos, 1995, p. 206). Self-actualisation is a hetero-static condition whereby an individual allows his uniqueness and creativity to emerge.

2.3.2.4 Susan Harter’s (1940 -) model on the development of self-esteem

Harter believes that self-esteem is the “global evaluative dimension of the self”. She is also of the opinion that general feelings of self-worth are related to two independent factors, namely, the individual’s feelings of competence in the areas of his life, which he considers as being important, and the amount of social support that he receives (Anon, 1999).

She uses a hierarchical structure to explain the development of self-esteem. She believes that the global self-esteem is made up of four second-order dimensions. These dimensions are competence, power, moral worth and acceptance. Each of these dimensions have under them a number of more specific domains that represent how these second-order dimensions are manifested. These domains are:

- Scholastic competence
- Physical appearance
- Behavioural conduct
- Peer social acceptance

Although Harter’s model is hierarchical, she states that it is not sufficient to sum up the second-order dimensions and the domains in order to arrive at an accurate measure of self-esteem. Self-esteem is according to her more than the sum of its parts

and she believes that the global self-esteem of children is measured using the domains (Willoughby, King & Polatajko, 1996).

She is also of the opinion that it is important to be aware of the number of aspects that are involved in the development of self-esteem. This implies the awareness of the fact that the dimensions of competence, power, moral worth and acceptance are expressed differently at each developmental level, that certain domains may be important at specific developmental ages, and that all of these four dimensions and their respective domains interact and influence each other (Willoughby et al.,1996).

2.3.2.5 Integration of theories

It is clear from the above, that self-esteem develops at the various ages in a person's life and that each of these stages requires the individual to master a specific tasks. An inability to master the demands of the specific stage undoubtedly has a negative effect on the person's self-esteem and it therefore has a ripple effect on his abilities to master the stages that follow (Corcoran, 1996).

Family status is also likely to have an effect on the development of a child's self-esteem as self-esteem develops through a child's interactions with others, the behaviours, values and norms that are modelled to him as he internalises all of these as he is growing and confronting the different developmental tasks.

Because of this, it can be postulated that a healthy family climate which is characterised by unselfish love for each other, respect, consistent behaviour by parents and security will allow the child to strive to satisfy his basic needs and through this, eventually become a fully functioning individual who is secure in himself as well as his needs (Corcoran, 1996).

2.4. Factors that play an important role in the development in self-concept in children

As the foundations of self-concept and self-esteem are laid early in a child's life, it is important to examine some of the ways that parents and other significant adults in the child's life can foster and develop the child's sense of self-concept throughout the child's life.

During their early years, a young child's self-concept is based largely on his perceptions of how the important adults in his life judge him. The characteristics that the child believes are important to gain the acceptance and attention of the significant people in his life will have a great impact on the development of the child's self-esteem Katz (1995). Although the criterion on which self-concept is based varies from families, communities and ethnic and cultural groups, there are a number of common factors that serve to promote a child's self-concept.

Katz (1995) believes that it is only when a young child is able to learn trust his parents, and others who care for him and who are able to fulfil his basic needs that he is able to feel wanted, needed, valued, and loved. She has identified the following aspects as being important in the strengthening and supporting a healthy sense of self-esteem.

2.4.1 Socialisation with family, significant others and peers

As a child grows, he becomes increasingly aware of and sensitive to the evaluations of his peers and parents and caregivers, and it is vital that he is provided with ample opportunity to learn to build healthy relationships with his peers.

As he begins to develop stronger ties with his peers at school, he may begin to evaluate himself differently from the way that he was taught at home and it then

becomes important to keep the lines of communication open so that the values that are important to the parents are instilled in the child whilst also taking into consideration the experiences outside the home (Katz, 1995).

2.4.2 Support and acceptance

A child does not acquire self-concept at once and neither will he feel good about himself all the time and in every situation. As a child learns to function in areas outside of the home he may find that there are situations where he feels completely accepted and liked and other situations where he feels inadequate and uncertain of himself. When the child encounters these kinds of situations, it is imperative that the child is reassured of the support and acceptance of the significant people in his life. Peer groups also fulfil an important function as they not only provide companionship and recreation but they also fulfil other needs such as helping the child feel accepted and also allowing the child to think about and redefine values and attitudes (Santrock, 1997; Katz, 1995).

2.4.3 Participating and displaying an interest in the activities of the child

A child's sense of self worth is more likely to increase and deepen when adults around him respond to the child's interests and efforts with appreciation rather than just praise. By responding to a child's interest in a particular area or activity, parents are conveying a message of interest to the child. This in turn gives the child a sense that he is being taken seriously. Praise and flattery will have a contrary effect in that this will lead the child to develop a habit of showing an interest in things just because of the praise that he will receive (Santrock, 1997; Katz, 1995).

2.4.4 Skills and development

A child is more likely to benefit from tasks that offer a real challenge to him rather than something that is simply frivolous or fun.

The development and maintenance of a healthy self-concept in a child can be done by helping the child to cope with the defeats that he may face in his life rather than emphasising his constant successes and triumphs. This is a corollary in a certain aspect as it is important to acknowledge a child's successes. However, a child's self-concept is most at risk when he faces a disappointment or a crisis, and it is at this time that parents and caregivers should strengthen the child's sense of esteem. This can be achieved by letting the child know that despite everything that has gone wrong, the love and support that he has come to depend on remains unchanged. Once the crisis is over, parents can help the child to reflect on what went wrong so that the next time that the child faces a crisis, he will be able cope with it by using the knowledge that he has of previous difficulties (Santrock, 1997; Katz, 1995).

His self-concept is also most likely to be fostered when he is esteemed by the adults who are important to him. This implies that the child is given ample opportunity to express his views and opinions, and also be given meaningful feedback about that which he has expressed.

2.4.5 Coping

Erikson's fourth stage in the human life span, industry versus inferiority, provides the child with an ideal opportunity to strengthen his self-concept and self-esteem. At this age a child is eager to test the limits and to experiment with new ideas and activities.

He also has a strong need to create and accomplish and due to this he is likely to achieve more through challenge and hard work as compared to frivolous activities. It is obvious that the child will at one point or another experience failure, and it is

important that the child is taught to face the challenge and cope constructively when he fails to accomplish that which he wants. Constructive coping allows the child to deal with problems in a realistic, non-defensive and honest way which in turn leads to a favourable view of himself and therefore an increase in self-concept (Santrock, 1997).

2.5 Self-concept as a component of resilience

Self-concept quite obviously plays a major part in ensuring the healthy development of an individual. However, it is not the only factor responsible for the development of a healthy and productive personality. This is where psychological resilience comes into the picture.

2.5.1 Defining resilience

The concept of resilience is not a new one although defining it precisely remains a problem. Over the past five years, there has been an increasing interest in defining the concept of resilience and also understanding the interactions between its various components. The definition of resilience that is used by the International Resilience Project viz. “Resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group, or community to prevent, minimise or overcome the damaging effects of adversity” serves to illuminate one of the most important aspects of resilience, namely, that all humans have the capacity to face, overcome and or be strengthened by the adversities that they may face, and that resilience may be either promoted or inhibited by the environment in which an individual finds himself (Grotberg, 1995, p.1).

Psychological resilience has also been defined as the “glue that keeps an individual functioning when he is confronted with life’s challenges and misfortunes” (Joseph, 1994, p.25). This includes the attitudes, coping behaviours and personal strengths that

are present in an individual and which allows him to manage the adversity and adjust well to the changes demanded of him by his life circumstances.

Masten and Coatsworth (1998) have identified two components that play a role in psychological resilience. These components are a significant threat to the person, and are identifiable by the high-risk status (for example being born in poverty to a single parent who has not completed high school), or exposure to severe hardship or trauma (e.g. family violence, war, and the death of a parent). The second component is that despite these stressors, the quality of adaptation or development is good.

When studying psychological resilience it is vital to take into consideration the role that protective and risk factors play in determining resilience. It is also wise to consider these two aspects as lying on opposite ends of a continuum. An ideal example of this would be divorce and the accompanying parental conflict. If parental conflict is a risk factor then low conflict may be assumed to be a factor that could possibly promote resilience in a child (Emery & Forehand, 1994). While this is a somewhat obvious example, it is important to remember that there are a number of other factors that are also involved in the process of risk and resilience. Due to this, Emery and Forehand, (1994) make a distinction between those factors that moderate risk and those which mediate it. Moderating factors are those variables that simply identify the increased or decreased likelihood of psychological difficulties, whilst mediating variables provide specific developmental or etiological mechanisms that explain how risk or resilience is translated into maladjustment or successful coping.

A good way of understanding the way in which resilience operates is through the following diagram:

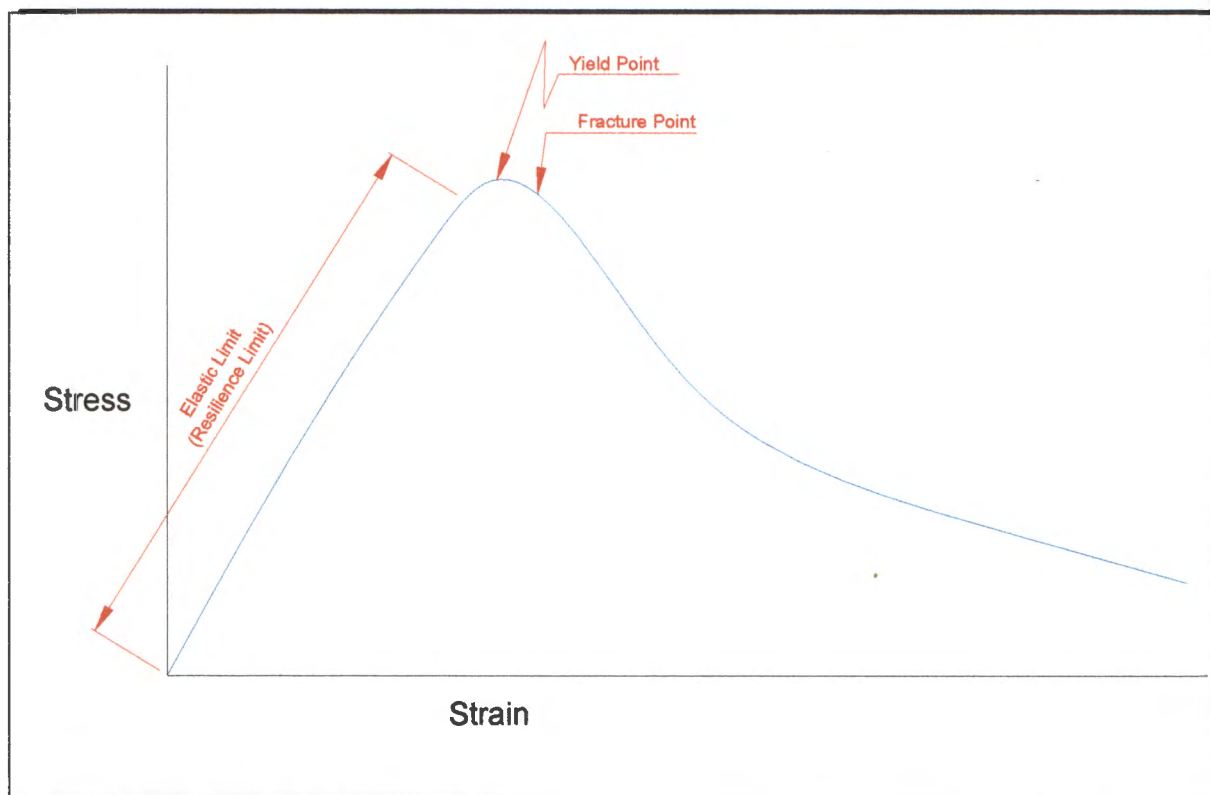


Figure 2

All individuals are able to handle certain levels of stress in their lives and they are also usually able to revert to their normal levels of functioning provided that they do not exceed their capacity to bounce back. If, however, an individual does exceed his capacity to revert to his level of functioning prior to the stress, he will experience difficulty in bouncing back and he is then likely to experience problems in functioning at the level that he used to previously. This will also make him more susceptible to the various stressors in his life (Jay Taylor in e-mail to author on 8/5/2001).

2.5.2 Components of resilience

Researchers have identified a number specific of components that resilience consists of (Grotberg, 1995). These include factors such as trusting relationships, emotional

support outside the family, self-esteem, encouragement of autonomy, hope, responsible risk-taking, and school-achievement, a belief in God and morality and unconditional love for someone. There is however, insufficient evidence with regards to understanding the dynamic interaction of these factors, their roles in different contexts, their expression and their sources (Grotberg, 1995).

It seems however that resilient children are proactive rather than reactive, and that because of this, these children will tend to take charge of their life situation and react in a self-reliant and independent way.

They are able to construe their experiences in positive and constructive ways, even when these experiences are negative or painful, and are also good-natured and easy to deal with and as a result tend to gain the positive attention of those around them. Resilient children also develop a sense of coherence early in their lives. This sense of coherence may be defined as a basic belief that life makes sense and an individual has some kind of control over it what may happen to him (Joseph, 1994). It is this sense of coherence that keeps children strong during times of confusion and difficulty.

Benard (1995) believes that all individuals are born with an innate capacity for resilience, which allows them to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.

Social competence according to Benard (1995) includes qualities such as the ability to elicit positive responses from others, the ability to move between cultures, empathy communications skills and a sense of humour.

Problem-solving skills include aspects like the ability to plan, think in a critical, creative, and or reflective manner. A reflective awareness of the structures of oppression (e.g. an alcoholic parent, a dysfunctional family, an insensitive school or a

racist society) and the ability to create structures that enable the child to overcome them has been identified as an important key in the development of resilience.

The ability to have a sense of one's own identity to act independently and exert some kind of control over the environment which includes a sense of task mastery, internal locus of control and self-efficacy are also important factors in the development of resilience. An extremely powerful protector of autonomy is the child's ability to distance himself from the dysfunction that he is faced with. An example of this would be when parents quarrel or fight, some children tend to get drawn into the dispute, and become the focus of the disagreement and also the targets of the hostility, while others are able to remain protectively separate and uninvolved (Rutter, 1995). Having a sense of purpose and a belief in the future, including goal direction, educational aspirations and persistence and hopefulness and spiritual connectedness are also a manifestations of resilience.

From the above it is clear that there are some factors that play a role in the child's ability to overcome the adversities that he may face. Some of these factors will be discussed in the following section.

2.5.3 Protective factors

Benard (1995) believes that certain characteristics of the family, school and community environment may alter or even reverse the expected negative outcomes for children who are faced with a multitude of stressors and enable them to manifest resilience despite the risks that they face. These characteristics include:

➤ Caring relationships

A caring relationship with at least one person, whether that person is part of the family or another significant adult in the child's life (e.g. a teacher) who is able to

convey to the child an attitude of compassion and who also accepts the child as is, is able communicate support and also support the child's healthy development.

➤ High expectations

When significant adults in a child's life consistently and clearly communicate their high expectations of the child, the child will learn to believe in himself and his ability to overcome the adversities that he may face in his life. This also leads to the child's development of the critical traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy autonomy, and optimism.

Resilience may therefore be fostered by steps that make it more likely that children will feel more in control of their lives and thus become more effective in shaping the changes in their lives (Rutter, 1995).

➤ Opportunities for participation

Participation like caring and respect is a fundamental human need and the ability to participate and contribute meaningfully to his social environment, provides the child with a sense of belonging and also gives the him an opportunity to ask questions and through this encourage critical thinking and dialogue.

Grotberg (1995) has developed a model whereby she describes the three sources of resilience that children can draw from in order to overcome the adversities that they may face. This model is known as the "I Have, I Am, I Can" model. The sources of resilience that the child can draw are explained under each of these three labels:

➤ I Have

This includes external sources of support and resources that promote resilience. Before a child is able to become aware of whom he is (I Am) and what he can do (I Can) he must first become aware of the external resources that help to develop his feelings of security and safety. These resources lay the foundation that form the core of developing resilience and continue to be important throughout his life. These resources include trusting relationships, structure and rules at home, role models, encouragement to be autonomous, access to health, education, welfare, and security services.

➤ I Am

These are the internal, personal strengths that the child possesses. Included here are aspects such as feelings, attitudes and beliefs that the child has about himself and also about his environment. The “I Am” factors are vital as they enable the child to develop a sense of who he is and also what he is capable of. Self-esteem is already a major resource here as it allows him to face the problems in his life with a sense of confidence and also allows him to recognise the limitation of the control that he has over certain events in his life. Some of the other resources that the child can draw on include the belief that he is lovable and that he has an appealing temperament, that he has the ability to be autonomous and responsible, and that he is filled with hope, faith and trust.

➤ I Can

These are the interpersonal skills that a child learns during his socialisation process. These skills are therefore developed through the interaction that the child has with others as he is growing up. The resilient child will therefore be able to communicate in a way that enables him to express his thoughts and feelings but at the same time be

aware of others and what they are feeling. He is also able to assess and solve problems in a creative and sometimes humorous way, while at the same time realising when he may require help from others.

Each of these factors suggests that there are numerous actions children and their caregivers can take in order to promote resilience in children. A resilient child does not need all of these features to be resilient, but one is also not enough. Therefore, a child may have a lot of self-esteem (I Have) but if he does not know how to communicate with others or solve problems (I Am), or has no one to help him (I Can), there can be no resilience. It is clear therefore clear that the only way that resilience can be promoted in a child is if all of these factors are present.

2.6 Increasing a child's resilience through improving his self-concept

Joseph (1994) has identified the following practical suggestions as to how a child's self-concept may be enhanced.

2.6.1 Accepting the child unconditionally and spending quality time with him

One of the first suggestions that Joseph (1994) makes is that parents and significant adults in the child's life should value the child unconditionally. She goes on to say that the best way to express unconditional acceptance is through spending quality time with the child. She believes that quality time is time that is marked by focused attention and therefore the parent will concentrate solely on the child and not become preoccupied by doing other things while the child is attempting to communicate. She also points out that showering a child with material things does not communicate to the child that he is valued and that the only way to communicate quality attention is by focused and active listening (Joseph, 1994).

Another way in which quality time may be expressed is through the effort that parents make to show the child that they care and value him. This occurs when a parent shows an active interest in the activities and interests of the child.

It must be remembered that it is also virtually impossible to always drop everything that one is doing in order to pay attention to the child and it is therefore vital that the child learns that there may be times that other people's needs may have to come before his own (Joseph, 1994).

2.6.2 Selective attention

Selective attention is another important issue that comes up when discussing quality time. All individuals have different interests and sometimes parents may find that their child's interests are very different from their own. When this does occur, it is considered to be extremely unwise to blatantly ignore the child's interests, for this would then be indicating to the child that his preference has no value and that he is also only capable of gaining conditional acceptance (Grotberg, 1995; Joseph, 1994).

2.6.3 Setting up the child to succeed

This is another way in which a child's self-concept and resilience may be enhanced. Joseph (1994) believes that in order for a child to succeed he must be aware of and accept his strengths and weaknesses. This can only come about when the child's caregivers understand and accept him as an individual. A child who is able to use the environment as a resource is more likely to be able to succeed. This child will also be able to set the stage for success by knowing how to set goals, establishing a plan to reach these goals, and managing these disappointments in a constructive way. By doing all of these things, the child is in actual fact increasing his sense of self-efficacy. Parents can also boost this process by providing the child with positive feedback that is accurate and honest. This information not only enhances the child's

self-esteem but also provides the child with information about how to best manage self and the environment.

2.6.4 Empowering the child

The next factor that Joseph (1994) has identified is empowering the child. She believes that an empowered child is one who considers his destiny to be under his control, that the world can be managed and that goals can be achieved. A child who is able to feel a sense of personal competency is an empowered child, because this child is able to take responsibility for his feelings and actions. This child will also be self-controlled and most importantly be capable of using the skills and resources available to him to manage the everyday tasks that he faces.

The best way in which a parent can empower his child is by allowing the child to own his own feelings. Parents must realise that it is impossible to protect the child from all the negative experiences and emotions in his life. This does not however mean that parents should deliberately frustrate the child, or put him in situations that will traumatize him. What it does mean is that parents should take advantage of naturally occurring situations that may lead to pain and disappointment and refrain from always trying to eliminate that disappointment (Joseph, 1994).

Grotberg (1995) believes that when parents and caregivers promote resilience in a child, they are:

- Providing unconditional love and balancing autonomy with available but not imposed help;
- using limits, calming behaviours and oral reminders to help the child manage and modulate his feelings, especially the negative feelings and impulsive responses;
- communicate about and negotiate the child's growing independence, new challenges and expectations;

- encouraging and modelling flexibility in selecting the different factors in response to an adverse situation; and
- providing the child with opportunities to practice dealing with problems and adversities through exposure to manageable adversities.

From this it is obvious that parents play a crucial role in strengthening a child's self-concept. By treating a child with respect, taking his views seriously and expressing an appreciation of the child, parents are not only developing the child's sense of esteem but also adding to the child's arsenal of resilience.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has focused on defining self-concept and self-esteem by examining the various theories regarding the development of both these concepts and looking at the link between them. As self-concept is being studied as a component of psychological resilience, definitions of resilience and ways to increase resilience have been examined. The relationship between resilience and self-concept has also been investigated and a number of practical suggestions to improve a child's self-concept and through this enhance his resilience have also been provided.

CHAPTER 3

DIVORCED FAMILIES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on defining the family and also examining the differences and similarities between intact and divorced families by doing a thorough literature survey.

A definition of the family as it is understood in society and the many misconceptions and preconceptions of what the family is, will also be studied. The differences between intact and divorced families will be looked at with particular attention being given to the erroneous belief that an intact family necessarily implies a healthy family.

The major part of this chapter will, however, be investigating the dynamics of the divorced family. This investigation will entail the examination of the various definitions of divorced families and the similarities between these definitions. It will also entail exploration of the divorce process and the effects of this process from the child's perspective. The adjustment difficulties faced by children from divorced as identified by a number of researchers, the psychological tasks and finally the discrepancies that are prevalent in the literature regarding the effects that divorce has on a child's self-esteem will also be explored.

3.2 Definition of family

Over the past four decades family life has undergone a number of dramatic changes which has been described as an earthquake that has shuddered through all the beliefs of what a family is. The women's movement all over the world has changed the way

that men and women interact with each other, both inside and outside the home. There has also been a drastic change in the social and sexual rules that were once carved in stone. All of these changes have brought about a society that is a lot more diverse than what it was a generation or two ago (Skolnick & Skolnick, 1992). However, despite all of these changes, the basic definition of the family has not changed, although there has been a divergence in the types of families that exist.

In order to gain a better understanding of the different types of families that can be found in society today, it is prudent to first understand the concept of the family as it is still is to a certain extent understood in society. Muncie and Sapsford (1997, p.25) believe that the family can be defined as “a small unit derived from the relationship between a man and a woman legally bound together through marriage as husband and wife. The nuclear family is created when a child is born to this couple. The unit shares a common residence and is united by ties of affection, common identity and support”.

Based on this definition, the family will consist of a male and a female, who are bound by legal laws and societal norm, and their offspring, and all whom share a common abode. However, as has been pointed out the family unit as it was known as a few decades ago has undergone a number of tremendous changes and, although the type of family that has been defined by Muncie and Sapsford (1997) still exists, there has also been a surge in alternative types of families.

Presently, families can be identified in various ways. This includes some of the following distinctions:

- Intact family;
- single-parent family which is further differentiated into:
 - a. Single parent family due to divorce or death of a partner; and
 - b. single parent family by choice.

- reconstructed family; and
- gay and lesbian families (Muncie & Sapsford, 1997).

As this project has as its special focus whether family status has an effect on the self-concept of a child by examining the differences between the self-concept of children from intact and divorce families, attention will now be given to a description of intact and divorced families and also an examination of the differences between these types of families.

3.2.1 The Intact Family

While Muncie and Sapsford's (1997) definition of the family is somewhat simplistic and also misleading, it has however been used here as it expounds many of the perceptions and misconceptions that are rampant in society today. One of the major misconceptions prevalent in society is that an intact family implies a family that is psychologically healthy. Therefore, many individuals tend to believe that if a couple stay together they cannot be having problems with regard to their marriage or their children. Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000) found that, despite the fact that many of the intact families that they used in their research looked happy and healthy on the surface, there were usually some undercurrents of disturbances within the family structure. Some of these tended to be more serious than others and yet sometimes despite this fact, or even inspite of it, the parents did not divorce.

Wallerstein et al. (2000) found that intact families can also be divided into three different types. At the one end of the spectrum families that are highly dysfunctional, or bordering on the cruel can be found. These families are characterised by children who do not feel safe in their homes and where adults are often out of control. At the other end of the spectrum there are families that really care for each other. These families get along; they genuinely love each other and continue to show their love and respect for one another. Children from these type of families feel as though they

are central to their parents' interests and that the family is the priority to both the adults. It is important to remember that like other families in everyday life, these happy families also face the same kind of setbacks like job loss, illness, and/or death in the family. These families are therefore not immune to these kinds of tragedies, and neither are they blessed by good luck. What differentiates these families from the other types of intact families is that they are able to negotiate the problems that they may face in a way that preserves the foundation of the marriage and the family

The largest group of intact families that exist according to Wallerstein et al. (2000) are what they call the in-between families. These families are characterised by a number of problems ranging from depression, loneliness, infidelity, chronic illness and countless other problems, but despite and sometimes in spite of all the problems, the marriage stays intact. Even though these types of homes may be faced with countless problems, there is a history of love and friendship that serves to bind these couple together regardless of the growing anger and distress that the couple may have towards each other. This history of love and friendship combined with the shared concern and love for the children is usually what keeps these marriages intact.

Therefore, while most intact families tend to be characterised by enduring love and friendship and also a constant commitment to parenting, it is rather naïve to believe that all intact families are healthy. Sometimes intact families may become so enmeshed in their destructive patterns of behaviour that the children are no longer protected (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

This same kind of destructive pattern has been observed in families that are divorced, because the children have not been protected either before or after the divorce. However, just as there are intact families that are characterised by a sense of togetherness, in the same vein, there are a number of divorced families that despite the break-up are able to provide a lasting sense of attachment and commitment to parenting as the intact families.

Before examining the impact that divorce can have on a child's self-concept, it is vital to explore the various definitions of divorce and also the similarities between these definitions.

3.2.2 The single parent family

3.2.2.1 The single parent due to death or divorce

Lone parenthood has always been a major part of family life. In the past, the early death of one's partner was one of the main causes of single parenthood. In the pre-industrial era, widowhood was not an uncommon experience. Nowadays, although adult mortality is still a serious problem, especially in third world countries that face the AIDS epidemic, in general the standards of living have improved and health care services ensure that adults live longer than they did in the past (Boyden, 1993).

However, despite this the number of parents without partners is continuously on the increase and a growing number of adults can expect to spend some time rearing their children on their own. In many of these instances, the single parent is a divorced mother with custody (Perlmutter & Hall, 1992). The rate of divorce has been on an increase and at present, the statistics regarding the divorce rate indicates that the number of couples in South Africa that have divorced between 1996 and 1998 has increased from 643 per 100 000 couples in 1996 to 662 per 100 000 couples in 1998. The number of children that are affected by divorce has also increased from 43 476 children in 1997 to 45 123 children in 1998 (Statistics South Africa, 2000).

Based on these figures it is clear is that divorce becoming a much more common phenomenon in present day society.

3.2.2.2 The single parent family by choice

Although there are a growing number of single parent families due to divorce, there has also been an increase in the number of women who have never been married and who are choosing to have children by choice - either through artificial insemination, applying for adoption, or by asking a friend to father a child. This trend has been growing steadily and there are a number of reasons for this, the main one being that women are progressively becoming more independent and are also now able to make their mark in the business world (Perlmutter & Hall, 1992).

3.2.3 The reconstructed family

The remarriage of divorced adults creates a new kind of family that is known as a reconstituted or reconstructed family. Often in this type of family the partners, due to the fact that they have been married previously, bring in children from their respective marriages to this family. However, this is not always the case and in some instances the man or woman may have never been married or if he or she were married, does not have any children (Muncie & Sapsford, 1997).

Like the divorced family, this family also faces a number of challenges and one of the major ones is the roles that individual has to fulfil in the family. This is because society has not developed clear expectations for the role of the stepparent and in many instances men and women who find themselves in this role have few guidelines to follow (Perlmutter & Hall, 1992). As children usually live with their mothers, the role of the stepfather has received a great deal of attention. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980, p. 237) are of the opinion that “a *stepfather* is like a character that enters a play in the middle of the second act, he may be welcomed as a rescuer, rejected as an alien, loved as a potential provider, resented as an object of envy, or hated as a potential rival”.

The relationships between stepparents and stepchildren are usually the most complicated when each parent has a child from a previous marriage as this then calls for shifts in a multitude of roles and relationships (Perlmutter & Hall, 1992).

3.2.4 Gay families

These families are characterised by the fact that both the partners are of the same sex. These families have been a bone of contention for a number of years as it many individuals still view homosexuality as being deviant and unnatural (Lefrançois, 1993). Gay couples usually have to contend with a number of problems as they cannot use gender as a guideline for the decisions and interactions between them and also between their children. Not much research has been done on the effects that living in a gay family has on a child and it is also interesting to note that up until recently, gay couples in South Africa were not allowed to adopt children.

3.3 Families in divorce

3.3.1 Defining divorce

Before describing the characteristics and the effects of divorce may have on a child, it is prudent to define what is meant by the concept of divorce. Levy (1998, p.1) defines divorce as "...a legislatively created, judicially administered process that legally terminates a marriage no longer considered viable by one or both of the spouses and that permits both to remarry".

This definition is a rather legalistic and clinical one, as it does not take into consideration the social, psychological and economical repercussions that the decision to divorce has on both the partners in the marriage as well as their children.

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1982) believe that divorce can best be defined as an extended transition across time for all family members. Macklin (1980, p. 902) is of the opinion that divorce should be viewed as a “process that involves the reorganisation and redefinition of the family rather than its dissolution”. Morrison and Cherlin (1995, p.800) believe that divorce should be viewed as a “process that is characterised by a sequence of potentially stressful experiences”.

Despite these various definitions, it is clear that there is a general consensus amongst the various researchers that divorce is a process characterised by a sequence of potentially stressful experiences, which spans over a period of time, and which has a lasting effect on all of those involved.

3.3.2 The divorce process

At a very basic level, Shaw (1991) believes that it can be stated that all divorces involve changes. While some of these changes may be prior to the parental separation, some may produce improved instead of worsened conditions for the entire family. These changes require that all the individuals in the divorce process adapt to the changes in the family environment.

➤ The emotional stages of divorce that parents experience

The decision to divorce can be quite traumatic and chaotic and usually tends to be filled with contradictory emotions. There are specific emotions and attitudes that the partners experience and the dynamics of the relationship depending on whether the partner is the initiator or the receiver of the decision also has an effect, on the relationship. In many instances the initiator tends to experience feelings of fear, relief, distance, impatience, resentment, doubt and guilt. The partner who has not initiated the divorce may feel shock, betrayal, loss of control, victimization, decreased self-esteem and insecurity and anger (Corcoran, 1996).

Corcoran (1996) has identified the following emotional stages of divorce that parents go through when ending the marriage.

I. Disillusionment of one party (sometimes 1-2 years before verbalised)

One or both the partners may experience the following:

- a. Vague feelings of discontentment, arguments stored resentments, breaches of trust;
- b. denial of the problems although they are real;
- c. greater distance and a lack of mutuality;
- d. a confidential fantasy and consideration of the pros and cons of divorce;
- e. development of a strategy for separation; and
- f. feelings of fear, anxiety, guilt, love, anger depression, and grief.

II. Expressing dissatisfaction (8-12 months before invoking the legal process)

- a. Expressing discontent or ambivalence to the partner;
- b. marital counselling or a possible honeymoon phase (giving the relationship one more try); and
- c. feelings of relief (it's finally out in the open), tension, emotional rollercoaster of guilt, anguish, doubt and grief.

III. Deciding to divorce (6-12 months before invoking the legal process)

- a. Creating emotional distance (characterised by disparaging the other person/situation in order to leave it);
- b. this phase is seldom reversible as it has been considered for a while;
- c. the other person begins at stage one i.e. considering divorce and may experience feelings of denial, depression, low self-esteem and anger;
- d. both partners may feel that they are being victimised by the other; and
- e. feelings of anger, resentment, sadness, guilt and anxiety for the family, the future and with each other are also not uncommon during this phase.

IV. Acting on the decision (beginning the legal process)

- a. Physical separation;
- b. emotional separation which may be complicated by emotional flare-ups;
- c. creating a redefinition of the self;
- d. telling family and friends about the decision to divorce;
- e. setting the tone for the divorce process. This includes getting legal advice and setting the legal precedent regarding children, support and home;
- f. choosing sides and also having to deal with divided loyalties of friends and also family members; and
- g. dealing with children's reactions to the news of the divorce.

V. Growing acceptance (during the legal process or after)

- a. This stage is characterised by the partners having to make both physical and emotional adjustments, which includes:
- b. accepting that the marriage wasn't happy or fulfilling; and
- c. regaining a sense of power and control, creating a plan for the future, creating new identity and discovering new talents and resources.

VI. New beginnings (completing the legal process to four years after)

- a. Both the partners have moves beyond the blame and anger to forgiveness, new respect, new roles; and
- b. some of the experiences that are characteristic of this phase include: insight, acceptance, and integrity.

3.3.3. The effects of divorce on the child

One of the most frequently asked questions over the past decade or two has been whether divorce is harmful to children (Hughes, 1996). That divorce has an effect on children has been proved by a number of researchers (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000; Rotenberg, Kim & Herman-Stahl, 1998; Amato & Keith, 1991;

Kline, Johnston & Tschann, 1991; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox 1982; Wallerstein, 1984). However, despite the fact that most of these researchers believe that divorce does have a negative influence on children, they are also of the opinion that on average, the differences between children from divorced families as compared to children intact families are not as great as they had once believed them to be (Hughes, 1996).

3.3.3.1 The psychological reactions of children to divorce

Corcoran (1996) is of the opinion that children's psychological reactions to their parents divorce depends on three factors:

- a. The quality of the relationship with each parent before the separation.
- b. The intensity and the duration of the parental conflict.
- c. The parent's ability to focus on the needs of the children in the divorce.

Children whose parents are going through a rough divorce will typically engage in behaviours that are designed to help them feel secure. Some of these reactions include:

➤ Denial

This especially occurs among young children and it surfaces as story-telling and fantasies of reconciliation (Corcoran, 1996; Wallerstein, 1983).

➤ Abandonment

When parents separate, the child tends to worry about who will take care of him. He also may be afraid that he is also divorceable and will be abandoned by one or both parents. This problem is sometimes made worse by one or both of the parents who

may take their children into their confidence, talking about the other parent in front of the children and basically blaming the other partner for the divorce (Wells, 1997, Corcoran, 1996).

➤ Preoccupation with information

A child will want details about what is happening and how it affects him and it is vital that the communication from the parents is unified and age appropriate (Corcoran, 1996).

➤ Anger and hostility

Children may also express anger and hostility towards peers, siblings and parents. School performance may also be impaired. The hostility of children may be directed at the parent whom the child perceives as being at fault while sometimes this hostility may be turned inwards, leading to depression in the child (Wells, 1997; Corcoran, 1996). Behaviours such as delinquency, aggression and disobedience are also not uncommon. Children whose parents are divorced are usually judged to be more aggressive than children from two parent families and they are also over-represented among delinquents (Shaw, 1991; Kalter, 1987).

➤ Internalising problems

The relationship between divorce and internalising problems such as low self-concept and low self-esteem has proved to be somewhat more difficult to determine and relatively few investigators have found a relationship between these two factors (Shaw, 1991). However, this is not to say that the internalising factors do not exist. The lack of research in this area may be attributed to the difficulties in operationalising precise meanings for internalising disorders in childhood such as

depression, self-concept and also the lack of observable internalising behaviours as compared to externalising behaviours (Shaw, 1991).

Depression is however, not uncommon in children whose parents have been through a divorce and parents should be on the look out for some of the symptoms, which include, lethargy, sleep and eating disturbances, social withdrawal, and acting out behaviour (Corcoran, 1996).

➤ Immaturity/Hypermaturity

Children may sometimes regress to an earlier developmental stage when they felt assured of both parent's love. "Baby-talk", and bed-wetting is also common.

Some children tend to become "parentified" in that they may want to take charge of the situation especially if they perceive the emotional and physical needs of the parents to be debilitating the parent abilities (Corcoran, 1996).

➤ Blame and guilt

As marital conflict tends to be related to the stress of parenting, children often feel as though they are to blame for their parents' divorce and feel that their behaviour has somehow contributed to it. This is especially true when parents fight during exchanges of the children or in negotiating schedules: children see their parents fighting over them. Children often resort to bargaining their parents back to gather by promises of good behaviour and they may have difficulty with transitions or refuse to go with the other parent (Wells, 1997; Corcoran, 1996).

➤ Parental loss

Divorce often results in the loss of a parent and with this loss of the parent, the child is also losing the knowledge, skills and the resources that that parent has to offer

(Hughes, 1996). The short-term consequences of this separation usually follow, “a three-stage acute distress syndrome of upset/protest, followed by apathy/despair and subsequent loss of interest/detachment” (Shaw, 1991, p.457). Parents are important resources to a child as they provide him with emotional and practical assistance. Parents also serve as role models for children. Unlike children who have lost a parent due to the death of that parent, a child whose parents divorce usually does not have the kind of psychological closure that his counterpart has and studies suggest that a child who has lost a parent through divorce has greater problems than a child whose parent is deceased (Hughes, 1996; Amato & Keith, 1991).

➤ Economic losses

The divorce brings with it a number of drastic changes and one of these is prolonged economic hardship. In many cases, the child’s post-divorce residential arrangement is widely variable and it tends to change over time. Most children usually stay live their mothers. The effects that this factor has on the child are numerous. After the divorce the child may find that he has to move to new and less secure neighbourhood, change schools, lose support networks and or get excluded from activities that may become too expensive for the family’s budget (Maundeni, 2000; Shaw, 1991).

These factors may then also have an effect on the quality and the quantity of the interactions between the custodial parent and the child. MacKinnon, Brody and Stoneman (Shaw, 1991) found that divorced mothers provide less cognitive and social stimulation to their children as compared to both married non-working and married working mothers.

Therefore, it seems as though children may be psychologically affected in two ways by the loss of income:

- a. Indirectly through poorer parenting as the custodial parent has less time and energy to give the children because of the increased demands that are necessitated by the loss of income; and
- b. directly through the changes in the environmental circumstances that are caused by the divorce and the subsequent loss of income, that results in lower-quality schools and neighbourhoods and also the loss of friends (Shaw, 1991).

➤ Cognitive and academic deficits

Children from divorced families appear to have many more cognitive difficulties as compared to children from intact families. There is a vast amount of research that focuses on the cognitive problems which children from divorced family's experience as compared to children from intact families. Most of this research points to the conclusion that children from divorced families perform more poorly in academic areas as compared to children from intact families (Amato & Keith, 1991; Shaw, 1991).

A number of reasons have been postulated as to the reasons surrounding this and researchers believe that the poor academic achievement of these children may be linked to the economic problems, parental absence and family conflict (Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998; Amato & Keith, 1991).

➤ Adapting to a new lifestyle

Seen from a child's perspective, divorce involves the stressful process of adapting to changes in the family lifestyle, family rules and parent-child relationships. In some instances, it also involves taking on roles that are supposed to be fulfilled by adults. Due to the drastic and often traumatic changes that children go through during the period of divorce, it is not surprising that many children suffer from both short-term and long-term effects of divorce (Kurtz, 1994).

Despite all of the above evidence regarding the effects that divorce has on a child, there is still some controversy as to whether divorce has an effect on a child's self-concept and if it does, the extent of that effect is not certain.

Raschke and Raschke (1983), and Slater and Haber (in Shaw, 1991) found no differences in the reported self-concepts of children from divorced and two-parent families. Bynum and Durm (1996) found that although the self-esteem scores of children from divorced families were quite high, the scores obtained by children from divorced families were much lower when compared to that of children living in two parent families. These findings were however discredited by Durm, Giddens and Blankenship (1997) who could find no significant evidence to support the earlier findings of Bynum and Durm (1996) with regard to the differences in self-esteem in children from divorced and intact families.

There is therefore is no conclusive evidence as to whether or not self-concept and self-esteem are negatively affected in children from divorced families (Durm et al., 1997). This leaves a gap in the understanding of the role that self-concept may play in the adjustment of children from divorced families as compared to children from intact families. The research that has been done in this area has also provided conflicting evidence especially with regard to the differences in self-concept of children from divorced and intact families.

These are just a few of the difficulties that children are faced with during their parents divorce and in order to ensure that children are able to work through the divorce process, Wallerstein (1983) has identified six psychological tasks that are faced by children of divorce and which she believes add to the child's developmental tasks. These factors will now be discussed.

3.3.3.2 Six psychological tasks that are faced by children from divorced families

Wallerstein (1983) has identified six inter-related hierarchical psychological tasks which children from divorced families face, and which she believes add to the normal challenges of growing up. These coping tasks are “shaped by threats or perceived threats to the psychic integrity and development which the divorce process poses to the child” (Wallerstein, 1983, p 449.). Each of these tasks falls in a sequence with varying time spans for the accomplishment of each task.

Some of these tasks need to be dealt with immediately at the time of separation and also during the first year thereafter. The other tasks are considered to be unlikely to be resolved over the next two years and instead span over a longer period.

➤ Task one: Acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture

This is one of the simplest tasks that the children face is to acknowledge that their parents are separating and that there will be a number of family and household changes that are going to occur. The way in which the children react to the news of the separation their parents is dependent on the chronological age of the child and also their developmentally related needs.

Wallerstein (1983) found that younger children especially found it difficult to grasp the meaning of divorce and also the course of events following the divorce. This difficulty fostered a greater dependency on fantasy in these children, and thus, further blocked their understanding. A further problem was that these children usually found it rather difficult to separate reality from fantasy and this made them even more vulnerable to intense, frightening fantasies.

The older children also were not immune to the effects and many of the pre-adolescents and young adolescents reacted to the news as though it was a catastrophe

that could be sorted out by running to a neighbour for help. Others reacted by developing acute vomiting and other signs of distress that at times verged on panic.

➤ Task two: Disengaging from the parental conflict and distress and resuming customary pursuits

This task requires the child to return to activities and relationships at school and also at play that the child engaged in before the marital disruption. There is a dual challenge that is linked to this task, as the child has to firstly take the appropriate steps in order to “safeguard his or her individual identity and separate life course” and secondly, “remove the crisis from the central position that it occupies in his inner world” (Wallerstein, 1983, p. 235).

It is only once the child is able to master both these tasks, namely, disengaging from the parental orbit, and also dealing with his feelings of depression and anxiety, that he will be able to make his way back to the other developmental tasks that he is expected to complete (Wallerstein, 1983).

➤ Task three: Resolution of loss

Divorce undoubtedly brings in its wake a number of losses for the child. These include the loss of the familiar daily routines, loss of family traditions, the loss of the parental support and the physical presence of two parents. Some of the other losses include the loss of the family home, school and neighbourhood. This is an extremely difficult task that the child faces as he has to mourn the loss of a number of things and through this learn to deal with the changes that occur in a post-divorce and also a re-married family.

In instances where the child and the other parent were abused, the divorce may come as a relief to the child and to the parent. However, children who do not come from

these types of families generally experience a sense of rejection, unlovability, powerlessness and humiliation.

This task is greatly facilitated by the establishment of a fixed and reliable visiting schedule with the child which enables the non-custodial parent and the child to explore and establish their new roles as part-time parent and child. It also allows for the restoration of a sense of psychic wholeness in the child (Wallerstein, 1983).

Wallerstein (1983) found that the resolution of this task takes a number of years and that many children also fail to negotiate this task. It appears that this task is most easily negotiated when the loss of the parent is partial and the parent and child are able to establish and maintain an ongoing loving relationship within the framework of a reliable visiting schedule. Those children who failed to negotiate this task tended to feel rejected by the non-custodial parent and this made it difficult for them to master their sense of unlovability and unworthiness.

➤ Task four: Resolving anger and self-blame

Unlike the loss experienced by either death or natural disaster, the dissolution of a marriage is entirely a man-woman thing and it usually provokes a wide range of feelings in both the child and the community at large, depending on the reasons behind the decision to divorce.

Wallerstein (1983) found that children do not believe in a no-fault divorce. Most children either tended to blame one or both the parents, or they may blame themselves. Children usually experience a great deal of anger at the parent who has sought the divorce and also at both the parents because of the perceived self-centeredness and selfishness of the parents.

This anger may last for a number of years and it can also remain undiminished despite the passage of time. A greater understanding of the parental relationship however, appears to diminish some of the anger that the child feels and it also provide a path towards forgiveness. The dissipation of the anger allows the child to achieve a sense of relief and closure. There is therefore a close link between the child's ability to forgive himself and his parents. It also appears that greater emotional maturity in the child, leads to a better understanding in the child's ability to recognise the divergent needs and interests of the parents, thus reducing the anger that the child first experiences when the parents divorce.

➤ Task five: Accepting the permanence of the divorce

An aspect that is closely related to the mastering the distress that is associated with the departure of one parent is the child's acceptance that the divorce is permanent and that it is not likely to be undone. Many young children tend to cling to the fantasy of their parents re-uniting. These fantasies may sometimes persist years after the divorce, and the children have grown up.

Wallerstein (1983) believes that children whose parents are divorced have a much more difficult time accepting the permanence of the divorce as compared to children who have lost a parent. This is because despite the intense hope and fantasies that the child has, he knows that the deceased parent will not be able to come back. With the child from the divorced family on the other hand, the living presence and also the availability of the other parent gives continuous credence to the child's fantasies, hopes, and expectations that the parents will get back together again.

It appears that the only time that the child is able to resolve this issue is when he reaches adolescence and he is able to make a final and clear consolidation of the psychological separation between the self and the parent.

➤ Task six: Achieving realistic hope regarding relationships

This task is considered to be the most important one for both the child and society as it involves the resolution of issues regarding relationships so that the child is able to sustain a realistic vision of relationships. It also requires the child to resolve his perceptions of his ability to love and be loved.

Here one is able to compare the child of divorce to his counterpart in bereavement. In both these instances, these children need to learn to take a chance on loving with the full realisation that like life, relationships are also mortal and that not all relationships no matter how loving last forever.

Based on the above it is clear that children from divorced families face a number of developmental and other obstacles and that the successful or unsuccessful resolution of these will have an impact on the child's life as an adult. Wallerstein (1983) is of the opinion that the successful resolution of the six tasks will enable children from divorced families to achieve some kind of closure to the divorce experience, a well earned sense of pride and also an intact capacity to trust and to love.

It is also clear that the divorce process does not have a very desirable outcome for children. That children whose parents divorce suffer long after the actual divorce process has ended has been proven by number of researchers, Wallerstein and her colleagues being the most noted in this area. Other researchers have also concluded and substantiated the findings of Wallerstein et al. (2000).

3.3.3.3 The effects of divorce on parents

As has been pointed out above, it is advisable to consider divorce as a process that spans over a period of time and which has a number of different, but related tasks that need to be achieved. Although it is rather difficult to pinpoint exactly when the

divorce process begins and when it ends, Morrison and Cherlin (1995) are of the opinion that the best method of conceptualising this process is to make a distinction between the pre-disruption and post-disruption phases. Therefore, the divorce process may begin before the parents actually separate and continues for a number of years thereafter (Wallerstein, & Kelly, 1980).

The period immediately following the separation has been identified as the Crisis Period. This period is usually characterised by a “diminished capacity to parent” (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). Many, if not all, custodial parents tend to become overwhelmed with the responsibility of having to deal with a number of changes that occur after the separation. These parents may find that they tend to become less supportive and more inconsistent in disciplining their children; household routines may also be interrupted resulting in irregular mealtimes and bedtimes (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). The decline in the family’s economic stature may also take its toll on both the parent and the child.

Parents may also begin to burden their children with “requests for both emotional support and practical assistance due to the “diminished capacity to parent” (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Kline et al., 1991).

3.3.3.1 The psychological adjustment of the parents

This is a significant factor in the well-being of children, and there have been a number of studies that have examined the relationship between divorced parents psychological well-being and children’s well-being (Hughes, 1996; Amato & Keith, 1991; Block, Block & Gjerde, 1986; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985; Emery, 1984). There are a number of changes that the child and the parent have to face during the divorce process, and one of the most apparent ones being the changes in the relationships that children and parents have following the divorce. These changes are so dramatic that Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) have identified it as a time of

“diminished parenting” because the homeostatic balances in the family are disrupted and new equilibriums have to be reached. These equilibriums have to be reached in the following areas (Shaw, 1991)

➤ Affectional relationships

These relationships may be drawn closer or more distant from each other because of the parent’s own emotional needs, the parent’s perception of the child’s needs or loyalty dilemma’s in the parent-child-parent triad. In their research, Hetherington, et al. (1982) found that divorced mothers tend to be less affectionate with their children. However, two years following the divorce, there was an increase in the maternal nurturant behaviour toward the children.

➤ Family authority structure

During the first year of divorce, many children find themselves having to take on more responsibilities and a greater degree of independence. Hetherington (1982) and a number of other researchers found that many custodial mothers tend to make fewer maturity demands on their children, communicate less well and generally display more negative and inconsistent parenting practices as compared to married mothers. However, at the 2-year follow-up done in 1984, Hetherington et al. (1998) found that these mother’s had become more consistent and were better able to control their children, although overall, children from two-parent families remained more compliant than those from divorced families.

➤ Over-dependence on children

Problems may also occur on the opposite end of the continuum where mothers may become over-permissive, rigid, or emotionally dependent on their children. When parents lack another supportive adult in their lives, they may tend to compromise the

discipline policies and because of the increased emotional dependence on the child, the parent-child relationship may change to one where the parent and the child are confidantes (Shaw, 1991). In the same vein, other parents may become extremely rigid and dictatorial in their parenting style.

➤ Decrease in living standards

This is one of the most obvious aspects that are faced by parents who divorce. Often, there is a decrease in the living standards especially in female-headed homes (Felner, Terre, & Rowlinson, 1988). This lowering in the standards of living may be attributed to the distribution of material assets as well as the division of the joint income of both partners. In many instances, the custodial parent may also decide to move into a smaller house due to the increased financial difficulties.

The custodial parent who in many instances is the mother may have to deal with having to either find other employment or re-enter the work-force after a long absence or never having been part of it. Morgan (1989) (in Demo & Ganong, 1994) found that one fourth of divorced women fall into poverty during the five years following the divorce. It also appears as though the economic costs of divorce tend to be a lot greater for women as compared to men. Demo and Ganong (1994) postulates the following reasons for this discrepancy:

- a. Most marriages and divorces involve children and mothers continue to devote substantially more time than fathers in caring for their children;
- b. the time that most women have invested in child care and other unpaid family labour restricts their educational and occupational opportunities as well as their income;
- c. women are also less likely to work if they have young children and family demands may also prompt many employed women to reduce the time spent in paid work;

- d. most children tend to reside with their mothers post-divorce; and
- e. although child support is awarded in most divorce cases, full compliance by fathers is rare.

➤ Social consequences

There are a number of aspects that can be included here. Some of these are the redefinition and re-establishment of relationships with family and friends. This is sometimes complicated by the differentiation between “his” and “my” friends.

Divorce also implies a number of role changes, and the most important of which is undoubtedly redefining oneself as a single parent and also a divorced person. Many custodial parents find that they have less time to spend with their children after the divorce as they attempt to adjust to the changes that the divorce has brought about, particularly in the financial sense.

➤ Self-blame

As has been stated above, self-blame and guilt are not uncommon, particularly in the person who has initiated the divorce. These feelings usually occur when the parent becomes aware of the trauma the decision to divorce has on the children.

➤ Loneliness

Divorce is usually associated with loneliness in that in most cases the custodial parent will tend to isolate herself from others. This social isolation may sometimes be intentional; however it can also be that the demands that single parenthood places on the custodial parent do not allow the parent to pursue social contact with others (Eory, 2001; Rich, 2000; Corcoran, 1996).

It has also been demonstrated empirically that mothers who are depressed tend to cut themselves off from family and friendship support networks, suffer more severe economic difficulties or have a number of young children are more likely to have parenting difficulties (Shaw, 1991).

From this it is clear that the divorce process is an extremely stressful one, and that family's experience a number of critical transitions during this period. Family members find that they continually have to negotiate, reorganise and redefine previously circumscribed familial roles (Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1995). The long-term disturbances in parenting appear to be mediated by a number of factors which include the mother's emotional well-being, the social-economic support available to her, and the number, ages, and sex of the children (Shaw, 1991).

From the above it appears as though all children that come from divorced families are faced with a life of gloom. However, recently there has been an increasing number of researchers who have begun focusing on children and parents who have been able to successfully negotiate the obstacles that they faced after the divorce. The next section will examine this new paradigm in psychology that is known as psychological resilience, by focusing on the relationship between divorce, self-concept and resilience.

3.4 Resilience and divorce - effects of divorce on a child's self-concept

Thus far, it appears as though most of the research done on the effects that divorce has on children has tended to focus specifically on the negative aspects. However, despite the acknowledgement and the proof that divorce does have serious negative effects on children, there has been increasing curiosity with regard to children who are able to overcome many of the obstacles that they face, despite hailing from divorced families. This interest has sprung up at a time when research in the field of psychology has been undergoing a paradigm shift. Now, instead of focusing the

primary attention on sickness and dysfunction, more and more researchers (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) have begun to turn their attention to the aspects that keep individuals healthy. It is in this light that researchers (Coontz, 2001) have begun to question some of the findings of Wallerstein and her colleagues. These researchers (Coontz, 2001; Horin, 2000) believe that although many of the conclusions that Wallerstein et al. (2000) reached are valid, there is a major gap in the research with regard to children who are able to survive the divorce experience with relatively few scars.

Amongst the issues that Coontz (2001) has with the findings of Wallerstein et al. (2000) is the fact that many of the samples were drawn from families that were already experiencing problems. Half the parents in the study had chronic depression, severe neurotic difficulties or long-standing problems in controlling rage or sexual impulses. Coontz (2001) also points out that in the review of the quantitative analysis done by Amato and Keith (1991) that although there is a clear association between divorce and a child's overall well being, the effects are on average not as large a first postulated by Wallerstein.

There are number of reasons for this discrepancy. It is interesting to note that children whose parents have divorced in more recent generations, tend to experience less severe problems than children whose parents divorced when the laws and social stigma attached to divorce were a lot more stricter.

Brennan (1997) found that while a number of children had a slightly lower than average mental health a few months after the divorce, the overall mental health tended to rebound to average levels after eighteen months. These findings are also consistent with the findings of Hetherington (1982) who also reported that the large majority of children from divorced families used in her study grew up to be socially and psychologically well adjusted.

In a longitudinal study that was conducted that aimed to identify whether there is any difference in risk, resilience, and self-esteem of children from mother custody and to parent families, Nelson (1993) found that the family income level rather than the family type plays an important role in the child's self-esteem as these families have higher stress levels. However, he also discovered that the measure of the mother's life strains is concurrently related to all the dimensions of a child's self-esteem. This implies that high levels of stress on the mother, places the child at greater risk for low self-esteem. He was however not able to shed light on how this occurs. One of his other findings serves to strengthen the belief that social support plays an important role in increasing a child's self-esteem. He found that children's perceptions of satisfaction of the types of support provided by network members appears to be quite important for children's self-esteem, therefore emphasising the importance of friendships for children. He believes that it may be possible for supportive friends to boost children's self-esteem in domains outside the family environment.

In comparison to the findings of Nelson (1993), Kurtz and Derevensky (1994) found that children from mother custody families who were employed after the divorce, had an increase in recreational orientation within the family context and therefore, these children also displayed an increased sense of self-esteem. These researchers believe that this may be attributed to an increased need for these mothers to participate in social and recreational activities with their children as a means of compensation as these mothers frequently view themselves as the psychological parents of their children. Another reason that has been postulated as to why these children display a increased sense of self-esteem is that the maternally-employed divorced families may in some cases be better off socio-economically as compared to their non-employed counterparts, therefore maximising the opportunities that the children have to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Due to the inconsistent findings of researchers and also the interest in the aspects that allow children from divorced families to grow up psychologically and socially well

adjusted, it makes sense to examine the differences that divorce has on children from intact families as compared to children from divorced families.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has examined the different types of families that exist in present day society with particular attention being placed on defining intact and divorced families. Attention has also been focused on the various aspects of divorce and the effects that divorce has on both children and parents. The relationship between self-concept, divorce and resilience has also been investigated. Based on all of the above it can be concluded that divorce is a traumatic experience for both parents and children alike and that it requires mastering a number of different tasks. It is also clear that there is no definite answer as to whether the divorce has purely negative and lasting effects on a child's self-concept.

The conflicting research results make it salient to investigate whether there are differences and if these differences do exist, which areas of a child's self-concept is most affected.

This will be discussed in the following chapter where the empirical findings will be evaluated in relation to the hypotheses made.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the method used for the empirical investigation. It will include a detailed explanation of the research design, the research population, measuring instruments and also the procedures used in the analysis of the data.

4.2 Method of investigation

4.2.1 Research design

In this research project, a single cross-sectional design was used. This implies that the data have been collected at a specific time, therefore having the advantage of obtaining the maximum amount of information in a relatively short period of time. Unlike longitudinal studies (wherein data is collected over different periods of time), the advantage of this kind of data collection is that it is less time-consuming and also less labour intensive (Leeuwner, 2001).

4.2.2 Research population

4.2.2.1 Population

This population consisted of children in their late-middle ages (9-13 years), who were chosen from an availability sample of schools in the Vaalpark (Free State), Potchefstroom (North-West), Johannesburg (Gauteng), Bloemfontein (Free State), Kroonstad (Free State), and Badplaas (Mpumalanga). The reason for choosing such

wide-ranging locations is so that the sample is as diverse possible. The selection of the available schools was done with the aim of representing the various socio-economic substrata, language and population groups. Out of the identified, available schools, 1000 children were selected and 925 questionnaires were used in the final sample, due to the fact that some of the questionnaires were not completed correctly and also because some of the questionnaires were incomplete. From the 925 children 837 children were from intact families and 88 children from divorced families.

Due to the scale of the project a number of researchers participated in the data collection and because of this factor as well as the practical problems that were encountered, the sample size varies as a number of different tests were administered. In this particular study, only the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale (Piers, 1984) was used.

4.2.2.2 Sample

Class lists were used to select pupils from Grade four to seven. The number of children that were chosen from each grade is proportional to the weight that each group carries with regard to the population that is being studied. Therefore a random sample of the children was used. Once the group had been identified letters of consent were sent out to their parents and the children were then included in the study based on their parents' consent and their willingness to participate (c.f. Appendix).

4.3 Measuring instruments

Both English and Afrikaans versions of the following tests were used:

4.3.1 Test battery for children

This battery consisted of the following:

- I. Biographical questionnaire
- II. Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale

4.3.1.1 Biographical questionnaire

➤ Rationale

Biographical information that was required for the investigation was gathered by using a biographical questionnaire. For this study, it was important to ascertain whether the children in the sample came from divorced or intact families.

➤ Nature, administration and the interpretation of the questionnaire

The questionnaire includes questions regarding age, sex, ethnic group, language, scholastic career, and family circumstances. It consists of twelve questions, and the children were required to tick the appropriate alternative in the space next to the question. The questions were coded in order to facilitate the scoring and the data processing.

➤ Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity indices were not identified for this questionnaire as it is only going to be used in the present study to obtain specific biographical information.

➤ Motivation for the choice of questionnaire

The present study required that a differentiation be made between children from intact families and children from divorced families and therefore, the above questionnaire was used in order to provide the researcher with a finer analysis of this aspect.

4.3.1.2 Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale – PH (Piers, 1984)

➤ Rationale

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (subtitled: "The way that I feel about myself") has been developed as a resource in the evaluation of self-concept in children and adolescents (Piers, 1984). Self-concept as it is measured by this instrument has been defined as "...a relatively stable set of self-attitudes reflecting both a description and an evaluation of one's own behaviour and attributes" (Piers, 1984, p.1). The construction and use of this scale is based on Piers' belief that the evaluation of children's self-concepts can be significantly related to other aspects of their personality and through this, it can also be used to predict their future behaviour as well as help in the development and implementation of early intervention programs (Piers, 1984).

➤ Nature, administration and interpretation

The Piers-Harris is an 80 item self-report questionnaire. In order to obtain a more detailed clinical interpretation, the test is divided into 6 sub-scales:

- Behaviour

This scale reflects the degree to which the child admits or denies problem behaviour.

- Intellectual and school status

This scale includes:

- a) Self-evaluation of the child's abilities with regard to intellectual and academic tasks
- b) Overall satisfaction with school and expectations for the future.

- Physical appearance and attributes

This scale gives an indication of the child's attitude or perceptions related to his physical features and characteristics such as leadership, and the ability to express his ideas.

- Anxiety

Overall emotional disturbances and dysphoric moods are measured here. The individual items present an indication of the presence of emotions like worry, shyness, heart-ache, fear, and a general feeling of alienation.

- Popularity

The child's evaluation of his peers in his peer group is reflected here. Low scores on this scale may be an indication of shyness, poor inter-personal skills or personality traits that may isolate the child.

- Happiness and satisfaction

This scale highlights the child's general satisfaction with life. Low scores on this scale have been associated with overall dissatisfaction, feelings of negative self-worth, and awareness that things should be different.

The above-mentioned sub-scales include a maximum of 80 items. An overall evaluation of self-concept is obtained in 3 summarising totals, which are then added together to give the total raw score, percentile score and also a summarising stanine score.

This scale has been developed for use for children between the ages of 8 -18 years. It can be administered in an individual or group basis and takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. In the present study, the Pier-Harris was administered to a group of children between the ages of 9 and 13 (late-middle childhood).

Although the Pier-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale can be scored by computer, it was scored by hand in this project. Both the total raw score and the raw scores for each of the subscales are used here. As the items are scored with the aim of identifying positive self-concept, a high score on the total raw score and the subscales implies a positive self-concept and vice versa (Piers, 1984).

➤ Reliability and validity

Piers (1984) reports test-retest reliability indices that vary between 0.42 and 0.96, and indices of internal consistency, which vary between 0.88 and 0.93. These reliability scores appear to compare favourably with the reliability of other measuring instruments of personality in children and adolescents. In the implementation of the "Self Description Questionnaire" which evaluates self-concept, Piers obtained a score of 0.61 for the stability and internal consistency, and a score of 0.92 for the evaluation of self-concept. Based on these figures, it can therefore be concluded that

the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale has acceptable levels of temporal stability and internal consistency (Piers, 1984).

Measures of the content-, criteria and construct validity of the Piers-Harris have been accumulated by utilising a number of empirical studies. These studies have made use of various approaches, including item-analysis, inter-correlations between the various items, as well as a comparison of the responses of the various group criteria.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale has also been compared to other instruments that measure similar constructs. The results of these studies are divergent and vary from acceptable to less acceptable reliability. Piers (1984) attributes the discrepancies in the reliability to moderating variables such as age, sex, intelligence and socio-economic status.

➤ Motivation and reason for use

A number of researchers have identified a positive self-concept as one of the constitutional strong points that psychologically resilient children appear to possess (Grotberg, 1995; Thompson & Rudolph, 1996; Joseph, 1994; Cowen & Work 1988). Wengler and Rosen (in Leeuwner, 2001) are also of the opinion that individuals who display a high degree of psychofortology², have a high esteem (i.e. positive self-concept) which makes them less vulnerable to stressful live events. It is therefore essential for the child's psychological well-being that a poor self-concept is identified early so that the appropriate steps can be taken to remedy the situation.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale was chosen as the instrument that would be used to measure self-concept as it has a standard questionnaire for children and adolescents and also because it has more than satisfactory psychometric characteristics. It also provides the opportunity for a more detailed interpretation as it allows for the assessment of the individual's attitude of the self (in the form of the

² Study of the origin, nature, & manifestation of psychological strengths(Wissing & Van Eeden, 1996)

subscales). This aspect also includes the possible provision of specific interventions that aim to improve the self-concept.

4.4 Research procedure

4.4.1 Orientation

The present study forms part of a larger inter-university research project which involves the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the University of the Free State. The project co-ordinators are Mrs E.van Rensburg and Dr. R. Beukes. A number of planning sessions were held between the participants in the project and the measuring instruments were also jointly obtained. Each participant identified a specific area and school in order to make the study as comprehensive and representative as possible. Both urban and rural areas as well as the various race and language groups were included in the study.

4.4.2 Phases in the research process

The project was undertaken as follows:

1. The principals of the identified schools were approached in order to obtain their assistance. The children in the sample group from the available, identified schools were identified by means of a random sample. Letters (c.f **Appendix A**) were then sent out to the parents in order to provide them with more information regarding the research project, and also to obtain their consent to participate in the project.
2. The test battery was administered to small groups of children under the supervision of a psychometrist and with the help of an assistant.
3. The questionnaires were then scored by the test administrator.
4. The results were statistically processed.

4.5 Aims and hypothesis

4.5.1 The first aim and research hypothesis is to determine the nature of self-concept. The hypothesis here is:

HYPOTHESIS ONE
What is the nature of self-concept?

As the research in this area is still exploratory, a statistical hypothesis cannot be made regarding the first aim.

4.5.2 The second aim is to determine if the measuring instrument used is reliable and valid. The hypothesis here is:

HYPOTHESIS TWO
The selected measuring instrument provides a reliable and valid measurement of self-concept in children from intact and divorced families.

4.5.3 The third aim is to ascertain whether there are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. The hypotheses are as follows:

NULL HYPOTHESIS

There is no difference in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families.

ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

There are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families.

The statistical hypothesis may be presented as follows in terms of the population means of self-concept:

$$H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$$

vs

$$H_1: \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$$

Where the symbols have the following meanings:

H₀: The null hypothesis

H₁: The non-directional alternative hypothesis

μ_1 : The mean scores obtained on the instrument that measures self-concept in children from intact families.

μ_2 : The mean score obtained on the instrument that measures self-concept in children from divorced families.

4.6 Statistical processing of data

4.6.1 Aim 1: Determine the nature of self-concept.

Means, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis have been used to describe the distribution of self-concept. The results of the questionnaire and the scales were compared between the two groups by using the t-test and the nonparametric Wilcoxon two-sample test with effects sizes in order to determine statistical and practical significance. Cohen's technique to determine the practical significance of the results obtained was also used (Steyn, 2000).

4.6.1.1 Means

The mean which is also known as the arithmetic average is calculated by adding up all of the scores and then dividing the total by the number of scores (Neuman,1997). The mean is represented in the following way:

The arithmetic mean (or average) of a set of observations X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n is defined by:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{x_1 + x_2 + \dots + x_n}{n}$$
$$= \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

Where:

\bar{x} : is the mean or the average

x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n : are the set of observations

n : is the total number of observations

4.6.1.2 Rank orders

The following prerequisites have to be met in order for the observations to be ranked:

- All individuals or measurements in a particular category manifest the same or approximately the same in terms of the particular characteristic being investigated; and
- the individuals, objects or conditions in each consecutive category have progressively more or less of the characteristic that is being investigated.

Numbers are then used to identify the consecutive categories, for example, rank classification according to age or years of service (Smit, 1996, p.10).

4.6.1.3 Kurtosis and Skewness

Steyn et al. (1996, p.96) believe that the first step in data analysis is compiling a frequency table and graphic representation of the observed data. This provides an overall picture of the data set. However, this overall picture only provides an approximate indication of the specific properties such as the midpoint and spread of the data. When analysing data, there are four properties of shape that provide important information about the data set. These are the location, spread, symmetry and kurtosis of the graph. Each one of these properties of shape can be described by a single numerical value which is known as a descriptive measure:

- Descriptive measures of location: these give an indication of the “midpoint” or general size of the distribution – here the mean is used.
- Descriptive measures of spread: measures the inherent variation of the observations in a data set – here the standard deviation is used.
- Descriptive measures of symmetry: a distribution is said to be symmetrical if a vertical line divides it into two equal parts so that each part is the mirror of the other - here the skewness is used.

- Descriptive measures of kurtosis: a measure of kurtosis indicates the measure of peakedness of a distribution.

4.6.2 Aim 2: Determine if the measuring instrument is reliable and valid.

The reliability and construct validity of the measuring instrument was established using the Cronbach-alpha reliability indices and first order factor analysis.

4.6.2.1 Cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient as an indication of internal consistency

The Cronbach-alpha was developed by Cronbach in 1951 and is derived from the correlations of each item with each other item. It ranges from 0 – 1, where 0 indicates complete unreliability and 1 perfect reliability (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991, p.52).

The formula that he developed to represent the internal validity of an item is represented as follows:

$$(\alpha) = \left\{ \frac{J}{J-1} \right\} \left\{ 1 - \frac{\text{sum of the item variances}}{\text{variance of the total test}} \right\}$$

Where J represents the total number of items in the test

Huysamen (1983) believes that the Cronbach-alpha can be used for:

- Dichotomous items: items that can be allocated a score of either 0 or 1 for example, correct or incorrect.
- Multi-point items: items where more than two values maybe allocated for example in the case of rating scales.

The alpha coefficient represents a coefficient of internal consistency so, instead of being determined by a single split, the alpha coefficient is based on all possible splits. Therefore, the alpha coefficient reflects the degree to which all possible splits measure the same thing, that is, the internal consistency of the test. This also implies that in the case of a test with different groups which measure different attributes, the coefficient will be reduced. Thus, the alpha coefficient will be higher for a test that consists only of self-esteem items as compared to a test that comprises of self-esteem items and resilience items (Huysamen, 1983).

4.6.2.2 First-order factor-analysis as an indicator of construct validity

Factor analysis was used in this project as an inter-test method to determine the construct validity of the test.

Factor analysis can be described as “...a statistical technique for identifying a relatively small number of theoretical constructs (factors) which account for the correlations among a larger number of variables” (Smit, 1991, p.97). A factor is a “...construct or dimension which can account for the relationship between variables” (Smit, 1994, p.54).

Thus, factor analysis is aimed at identifying communalities, determining whether the tests measure the same construct and evaluating the inter-correlations of a large number of tests simultaneously.

Through the use of factor analysis, the following information may be obtained:

- The number of common factors that the inter-correlations have;
- which factors determine achievement in each of the tests; and
- the percentage variation in the test scores that is explained by the factors (Smit, 1991).

Factor analysis of the test items may be done, in order to construct a test that provides a relatively pure measure of a theoretical construct. Smit (1991) believes that by using this method, the maximum homogeneity with regards to a specific construct may be obtained.

Due to the fact that construct validity is determined by the accumulation and integration of the findings of various studies and as it is situation bound, it cannot be expressed in terms of a single reliability coefficient and this is why factor analysis is a good method to determine the construct validity of a test (Smit, 1991; Huysamen, 1983).

4.6.3 Aim 3: Determine if there is a difference in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families

4.6.3.1 The t-test method to determine if there are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families

As this project aims to determine whether there are differences in self-concept in children from two different groups (i.e. intact and divorced), the **t-test for independent groups** as a statistical technique was used.

With the use of this technique, attention has been focused on the differences between the means of the two populations namely, $\mu_1 - \mu_2$ (Coetzee, Visser, Van Lill, Van Niekerk, & Van Staden, 1990 as quoted by Leeuwner, 2001). It is also assumed that the above populations have a normal distribution.

Coetzee et al. (1990) (as cited by Leeuwner, 2001), believe that the mean of the sample of the differences between the means should be 0. These differences in scores are then converted to test statistical values. If it is accepted that the variations (or standards deviations) of the two populations are unknown, it then becomes necessary

to calculate the standard fault of the differences in the means (c.f. Steyn, Smit, du Toit & Strasheim (1996) for formula)

Coetzee et al. (1990) as cited by Leeuwner (2001, p. 85) specify the following steps to determine the value of t:

STEP 1:

State the statistical hypothesis:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

$$(H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0)$$

$$H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

$$(H_1: \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0)$$

Where the symbols have the following meanings:

H₀: The null hypothesis

H₁: The non-directional alternative hypothesis

μ_1 : The mean scores obtained on the instrument that measures self-concept by children from intact families.

μ_2 : The mean score obtained on the instrument that measures self-concept by children from divorced families.

STEP 2:

Determine the calculated value of t by using the calculation formula to described

STEP 3:

Determine the degree of freedom:

$$N-2 = n_1 - n_2 - 2$$

The value of critical value of t can be determine by reading it off from the t-table

STEP 4:

The following decisive rule is accepted under normal circumstances:

$\alpha = 0.05$ (where α represents the level of significance). Only $p < 0.05$ is regarded as being statistically significant under these circumstances and therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected or the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

p – values are reported in the present study.

4.6.3.2 Cohen’s technique to determine practical significance of the differences in self-concept in children from intact and divorced families.

Steyn (2000) suggests the use of a standardised difference in order to simplify the expression of significance (statistical). The standardised difference has been defined as “...the difference between means that is divided by a common standard deviation” (Steyn, 2000, p.1).

Let μ_1 and μ_2 represent the means of two populations while σ (the common) standard deviation, then the standardised difference (d):

$$d = \frac{\mu_1 - \mu_2}{\sigma}$$

σ

d is also known as the effect size of the difference in population. Cohen, (in Steyn, 2000) calls it the d and also provides the following guidelines for the evaluation of d:

- $|d| = 0.2$: small effect, which means that if this occurs in new research, the experiment or survey ought to be replicated to determine whether there is an effect or whether the result is practically significant.
- $|d| = 0.5$: medium effect, which could possibly indicate practical significance.
- $|d| = 0.8$: large effect which means that the result is practically significant and therefore of practical importance (Steyn, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, the effect sizes that indicate a medium or large effect will be used.

4.7 Practical problems experienced during the investigation

The present researcher was part of the first group that used the data collected. Due to this, there were a number of problems that were experienced:

1. The co-ordination of time schedules caused a number of problems as some researchers were able to collect the data much faster than others and therefore this data was processed earlier. The distance between the various researchers also compounded this problem.
2. Some of questionnaires were incompletely photocopied and some of the participants also did not complete the questionnaires fully and this has resulted in the data being incomplete and the sample size is also very inconsistent.
3. A number of problems were experienced with the scoring of the data:
 - Not all of the researchers used the same computer program;
 - the format of the data varied despite the clearly stated guidelines; and
 - some of the researchers only indicated the total scores and not the original raw scores.

However, the greatest advantage of this research project is that the large pool of information (literature and data) that has been gathered in this way has provided the researcher with access to a broader range of information and a wider spectrum of data as compared to what would have been collected had this been a single study.

4.8 Ethical aspects

The following ethical aspects were taken into consideration during the research process:

1. Informed consent was obtained from both the parents and the school principles.
2. Participation in the research project was optional.
3. The test was administered by registered psychologists, intern psychologists and psychometrists.
4. In order to protect the identity of the participants, all of the participants were treated anonymously.
5. There are no risks involved or associated with participation in the project.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has focused on the empirical investigation by examining the research design, the sample group, measuring instruments, procedures and the steps involved in the statistical analysis of the data. The next chapter will be an examination and explanation of the results.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND INTEPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results obtained in the empirical investigation will be explained. The biographical information of the total group, the descriptive statistics and the Cronbach-alpha for the measuring instrument (Piers-Harris) and its various sub-scales will be described, clarified and interpreted. Factor analysis will then be applied and interpreted in order to determine the validity of the Piers-Harris. Finally, the t-test with effect sizes will be used to determine the statistical and practical significance of the differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families.

5.2 Biographical information

From an analysis of the data, 90.44 % of the children are from intact families and 9.56% of the children are from divorced families.

5.3 Evaluation of aims and hypotheses

5.3.1 The nature of self-concept

The aim here was to identify the nature of self-concept.

No hypothesis could be made regarding this objective as research in this area is still exploratory.

The nature of self-concept has been determined using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale. Table 1 provides a statistical description of the findings and Table 2 compares the results obtained by the sample group with those obtained by the normative sample. A discussion of the results obtained follows.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale

Variable	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variation Coefficient	Skewness	Kurtosis	Category
PH1	923	12.16	3.06	25.16	-0.99	0.92	Mean
PH2	923	12.33	3.44	27.90	-0.85	0.43	Mean
PH3	925	8.96	2.73	31.41	-0.67	0.03	Mean
PH4	925	9.14	3.07	33.59	-0.45	-0.44	Mean
PH5	925	7.66	2.53	33.02	-0.55	-0.29	Mean
PH6	921	7.98	2.01	25.18	-0.27	1.58	Mean
PHT	925	56.60	12.99	22.99	-0.82	0.78	Mean

<p>PH1 – PHT: variables of sample size n: size of the sample V: variation coefficient = the standard deviation as a % of the mean. Category: the category in which the specific mean falls</p>	<p>PH1: Behaviour PH2: Intellectual and school status PH3: Physical appearance and attributes PH4: Anxiety PH5: Popularity PH6: Happiness and satisfaction PHT: Total</p>
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Table 2: Comparison with normative sample on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale

Variable	Mean	Raw Score	T-score*	Description
PH1	12.16	12	47	Mean
PH2	12.33	12	50	Mean
PH3	8.96	9	53	Mean
PH4	9.14	9	49	Mean
PH5	7.66	8	47	Mean
PH6	7.98	8	52	Mean
PHT	56.60	57	52	Mean

PH1: Behaviour
 PH2: Intellectual and school status
 PH3: Physical appearance and attributes
 PH4: Anxiety
 PH5: Popularity
 PH6: Happiness and satisfaction
 PHT: Total
 *T Score obtained from norm table

With regard to the normative comparisons, the sample group is being compared to a group of 1183 school children from Pennsylvania. The children range from grades 4 – 12 (Piers, 1984). As there is not a great difference in the age and sex between the sample and the normative group, only the norm table is being used. It must however be remembered that as the sample group is only being compared to the normative group, the interpretations should be handled with care.

➤ PH1: Behaviour

Based on the figures obtained in table 3, the mean obtained by the sample group is 12.16 which can be rounded off to 12. The variable appears to have a similar spread, ($V = 25.16$) a negative skewness of -0.99 , and almost normal kurtosis of 0.92 .

Based on the results in table 3 it appears as though the children have attained an average score in terms of behaviour. This indicates that the children in the sample group do acknowledge behavioural difficulties and are able to assume responsibility for these problems.

➤ PH2: Intellectual and school status

Once again the mean score of 12.33 attained on this subscale which gives an indication of the intellectual and school status may be rounded off to 12. The variation coefficient is 27.90 and falls within the similar range as the other coefficients on the other subscales. There is a negative skewness and kurtosis is almost normal at 0.43.

A mean score has been attained by the children once again and this indicates that overall, the children from the sample group do not really experience any problems with regard to intellectual and school achievement.

➤ PH3: Physical appearance and attributes

The score obtained on this subscale (8.93) may be rounded off to 9. The variation coefficient here is 31.41, and there is once again negative skewness and a kurtosis of 0.03 which is lower as compared to the previous two subscales.

The mean score on this subscale indicates that the children in the sample group have a balanced view with regard to their physical appearance and attributes. This could also mean that they possess mean attributes towards leadership and they are also not likely to have problems with their body image.

➤ PH4: Anxiety

The sample group attained a score of 9.14 which can be rounded off to 9. The spread on here is the largest ($V=33.59$) which means that there is a large difference. The skewness is negative (-0.45) with a kurtosis of -0.44 which is flat.

This subscale provides a measure of not only anxiety but also other specific emotions that include worry, nervousness, shyness, fear, and a general feeling of being left out of things. The mean t-score indicates that these children are not overwhelmingly experiencing these problems but it must be remembered that these emotions tend to be situation-bound and therefore, although the overall score does not indicate an excessive degree of anxiety, it could be possible that there may have been a few children who could have been slightly more anxious than their peers.

➤ PH5: Popularity

The mean here is 7.66 and this has been rounded off to 8. This score represents the mean score that each participant has obtained on this subscale. There is once again a similar kind of spread in that the variation coefficient is 33.02, the skewness is negative and the kurtosis is also negative (-0.29).

This subscale measures the degree to which children feel part of their peer group and also their abilities to make friends. The mean score indicates that the sample group do not consider themselves to be extremely shy or less popular as compared to their peers. It also indicates that they have relatively good interpersonal skills.

➤ PH6: Happiness and satisfaction

The rounded off score on this subtest is 8 (7.98) and the variation coefficient is 25.18. skewness is once again negative -0.27 and kurtosis is 1.58.

The extent to which children feel happy, the degree of being generally easy to get along with and the feeling of being generally being generally satisfied with life is measured here. The sample group has once again attained a mean score on this subscale indicating that they do not really experience feelings of negative self-worth, and a longing for things to be different.

➤ PHT: Total

The mean of 56.60 has been rounded off to 57 and it has the least amount of spread (22.99) as compared to the variation coefficients of the other subscales. It is also negatively skewed (-0.82) with kurtosis being 0.78.

The mean total score that has been attained suggests that the sample group has a average self-concept. This implies that the children in this group do not regard themselves as being better or worse off than any other person in their peer group.

Piers (1984) believes that this is the most important scale and therefore, a great deal of value can be attributed to this score, especially since it has being intensely researched. Due to this it can therefore be concluded that the scale is valid.

It can therefore be concluded that the sample group compared well to the normative group in terms of self-concept and its related concepts. It must also be remembered that the sample group is exposed to a wide range of risks that the normative group is not and due to this it can be said that the sample group compares very well to the normative group.

5.3.2 Reliability and validity

The aim here was to establish whether the measuring instrument used provides a reliable and valid measurement of the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families.

HYPOTHESIS

The selected measuring instrument provides a reliable and valid measurement of self-concept in children from intact and divorced families.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale has been found to be a reliable and valid measuring instrument in the determination of self-concept of South African children during the present study.

Table 3: Cronbach-alpha coefficients and results of the factor analysis of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale (Piers, 1984)

Variable	Cronbach-alpha	% Variation explained	Number of factors	Highest communality	Lowest communality
PH1	0.68	46.73%	5	0.63	0.31
PH2	0.72	53.47%	6	0.64	0.45
PH3	0.70	49.11%	4	0.60	0.34
PH4	0.72	42.49%	3	0.59	0.30
PH5	0.66	57.96%	5	0.87	0.30
PH6	0.61	36.39%	2	0.54	0.20
PHT	0.88	58.35%	21	0.63	0.47

PH1: Behaviour
PH2: Intellectual and school status
PH3: Physical appearance and attributes
PH4: Anxiety
PH5: Popularity
PH6: Happiness and satisfaction
PHT: Total

Piers (1984) reports indices of internal consistency for the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale that vary between 0.88 and 0.93. During the present study, Cronbach-alpha's that ranged between 0.61 and 0.88 were found. As these are above the cut-off point of 0.5, it can be concluded that the variables are reliable. Repeated testing will lead to the same kind of results on the various subscales of the measuring instrument. All of these findings compare well to the findings of Piers (1984).

The factor analysis revealed the following information. The percentage explained by five factors retained for PH1 (behaviour) is 46.73% and the communalities vary between 0.31 and 0.63. This indicates that the items to a large degree correlate with

the factors that were extracted. Therefore, this variable does provide an adequate indication of behaviour.

The percentage variation explained by six factors for PH2 (intellectual and school status) is 53.47% and the communalities vary between 0.64 and 0.45. This indicates that most of the variants are represented by the factors that have been retained and therefore, intellectual and school status is well represented by this sub-test on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale.

PH3 (physical appearance and attributes) indicate a variation of 49.11% that is explained by four factors and communalities that range between 0.60 and 0.34. Like PH1 and PH2, this variable also appears to provide a reliable measure of the child's attitude towards his physical attributes and his appearance.

PH4 (anxiety) explained the following percentage variation 42.49% which is explained by three factors and communalities between 0.59 and 0.30. The extracted factors here represent approximately a quarter of the variants in the data and the degree of correlation between the factors that have been retained and items indicate that this variant provides a relatively good indication of the degree of anxiety that this subscale measures.

A percentage variation of 57.96% that is explained by five factors and communalities of between 0.87 and 0.30 have been explained on PH5 (popularity), implying that this variable represents a large component of the construct of popularity.

The percentage explained by two factors on PH6 (happiness and satisfaction) is 36.39% and the communalities are between 0.54 and 0.20. This means that the retained factors represent about just over a half of the variations in the data, implying that the concept that is being measured provides a good indication of the degree of happiness and satisfaction that the child feels.

The total provides an indication of the child's overall self-concept. The variation explained here by twenty one factors is 58.35% and the communalities range between 0.63 and 0.47 indicating that the concept that is measured by this test is represented quite adequately by this test.

5.3.3. Differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families

NULL HYPOTHESIS

There is no difference in the self-esteem of children from intact and divorced families.

ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

There are differences in self-esteem in children from intact and divorced families.

Grotberg (1997) has identified self-concept as one of the characteristics that promote psychological resilience in children and it appears overall as though the children in the sample group have relatively good self-concepts.

However, it now becomes pertinent to examine whether there are any differences in self-concept in children from intact and divorced families. This will be done using the standard deviations and the p-values.

Table 4: Comparison of differences in self-concept of children from divorced and intact families.

Variable	n	Children – Intact families		Children – Divorced families		p-Values	Cohen's d-Effect	
		Mean	Std Deviation	n	Mean			Std Deviation
PH1	835	12.20	3.05	88	11.74	3.10	0.19	0.15
PH2	837	12.39	3.48	88	11.74	2.95	0.05*	0.19
PH3	838	8.73	2.70	87	8.28	2.99	0.18	0.15
PH4	837	9.24	3.04	88	8.27	3.28	0.01**	0.29
PH5	838	7.72	2.50	87	7.05	2.70	0.03	0.25
PH6	832	8.00	1.96	88	7.69	2.42	0.25	0.13
PHT	837	56.93	12.98	88	53.4	12.71	0.01**	0.27

*Statistically significant on 5% level

**Statistically significant on a 1% level

***Medium or large effect

PH1: Behaviour
PH2: Intellectual and school status
PH3: Physical appearance and attributes
PH4: Anxiety
PH5: Popularity
PH6: Happiness and satisfaction
PHT: Total

Based on the results obtained in the present study, there does not appear to be a practically significant difference in the overall self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. These findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Durm et al., 1997; Amato & Keith, 1991; Raschke & Raschke, 1983).

It does however appear that there is a statistically significant difference on some of the subscales on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale, indicating that there

are some differences - albeit small, between children from intact and divorced families with regard to specific aspects.

The first of these differences is found on PH2 (intellectual and school status) where it appears as though the children from intact families have a slightly better view of their intellectual and academic abilities as compared to children from divorced families ($p = 0.05$).

This finding is consistent with that of Wells (1997) who found that children from divorced families usually display signs of mental disorientation in their school work and that they also exhibit lowered concentration and daydreaming. Practical problems such as having to change homes and moving from one parent to another also make it difficult for children to do their homework. Rich (2000) believes that the child's lowered achievement can also be attributed to the lack of parental involvement, particularly immediately after the divorce and if the single parent has to work.

PH4 (anxiety) is statistically significant on a 1% level indicating that children from divorced families may tend to experience a slightly higher degree of anxiety as compared to children from intact families. This score should however be interpreted with care as it has only proven statistically significant and not practically significant.

PHT (0.01) indicate that these scores are statistically significant on a 1% level. This implies that very small percentage of children from divorced families do display some differences in self-concept as compared to children from intact families. However, due to the fact that it is such a small number, no definitive comment can be delivered.

Beer (1989) obtained the following results in his study of the relationship between divorce self-concept and the grade point mean of boys and girls in grades five and six. Children from divorced families scored significantly lower than children from

However, due to the fact that it is such a small number, no definitive comment can be delivered.

Beer (1989) obtained the following results in his study of the relationship between divorce self-concept and the grade point mean of boys and girls in grades five and six. Children from divorced families scored significantly lower than children from intact homes. The boys from divorced homes scored a total mean of 49.72 with a standard deviation of 18.64 the girls attained a mean of 53.20 and a standard deviation of 18.64. The boys from the intact families had a mean of 58.56 and a standard deviation of 67.23. All of these scores fall within the mean range as compared to the normative data for grades four to seven.

These findings are substantiated by the findings of Durm et al. (1997), Ensink and Carroll (1989), Parish and Parish (1983), and Beer (1989), all of whom found significantly small differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. It must be noted that none of the above researchers used the *d*-value. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that although a small difference in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families does exist, there are a number of other mitigating factors that also play a role. A number of these factors have been highlighted and discussed in the previous chapters.

With regard to the scores obtained on the other subscales, there do not appear to be any significant differences in the behaviour (PH1) of children from intact and divorced families. It may therefore be assumed that children from intact and divorced families are equally likely to admit their mistakes and also take responsibility for their actions.

This is a somewhat contradictory finding in that a number of researchers have found that children from divorced families are usually under a great deal of pressure to assume more responsibility as compared to children from intact families (Rich, 2000;

Wells, 1997; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). However, there are also instances where mothers who have custody tend to become over-permissive and less disciplinarian in their parenting styles out of fear of losing their children (Shaw, 1991). This factor may play a vital role in these children's unwillingness to take responsibility for their actions.

PH3 which is a measure of the child's view of his physical appearance and attributes indicate that there are few differences in the perceptions of children from intact and divorced families with regard to their body image, leadership, and the ability to express ideas.

However, Maundeni (2000) believes that children from divorced families usually tend to view themselves more negatively as compared to their peers from intact families. He is of the opinion that these children regard themselves as being materially unequal to their peers and that this then has an effect on the child's overall self-concept.

The lowered economic circumstances play a large role here as most children tend to measure their popularity with material assets and the lack of these assets has a negative impact on the child.

Although only a statistically significant difference has been found on some of the subscales of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale, practical significance could not be established. However this does indicate the rejection of the null hypothesis and an acceptance of the alternative hypothesis as the results are statistically significant.

In her studies, Piers has not examined whether there are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. She does however focus on the child's perception of parental attitudes and child-rearing practices (Piers, 1984).

Cox as quoted by Piers (1984) investigated a network of relationships that include family background and social variables, parental child-rearing attitudes and practices, and the characteristics of the child including the self-concept of the child as measured by the Piers-Harris Self-concept Scale for Children.

Although no causal statements were made by Cox, Piers found that parental attitudes play a significant role in the satisfaction of the child and by extension his self-concept (Piers, 1984).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on reporting, interpreting, and discussing the results that were obtained in the empirical investigation. The reliability indices as found in the sample group have been reported and compared to a normative sample of previous research. The construct validity of the measuring instrument has been determined using first-order factor analysis.

The differences in the self – concept in children from intact and divorced families was then examined by means of t-tests as a measure of statistical significance, and Cohen's effect-sizes determine practical significance of the results obtained.

The following chapter will provide a summary and conclusions with regard to the current study. The limitations in the present study will also be highlighted along with recommendations for further studies.

Suggestions for ways in which the findings of the current study can be implemented practically will also be given.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the literature study, of the empirical investigation as well as the deductions that can be made based on the statistical findings in the empirical study.

The shortcomings of the present study and the implications that these have had on the findings will also be examined.

6.2 Summary and conclusion

A brief summary of the findings of this research study will be made by focusing on the conclusions reached in the survey and the empirical investigation. The shortfalls of the research project, as well recommendations regarding the practical implementation of these findings, and suggestions for further research in this area will also be provided.

6.2.1 Conclusions reached based on the literature survey

Most early research on the subject of divorce is based on two commonly held assumptions. The first of these is that that a two-parent family structure is necessary for the successful socialisation of a child and that the absence of a father would have serious adverse consequences. The second is that divorce is a traumatic event that has severe and enduring negative effects on a child's adjustment (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

That divorce is a traumatic event for both the parents and children alike cannot be disputed and there are a number of studies that provide ample proof of this fact. One of the most prominent of these is the research conducted by Wallerstein and her colleagues (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000). This 25 year-long study of the deleterious effects that divorce has on children began in 1971 and examined the way divorce affects children. These researchers discovered that 25 years after the divorce, children from divorced families were still having to deal with the trauma of the divorce. One of the most important discoveries that was made during this time is that “divorce has entered the lives an entire generation and has changed the way they think and we think about marriage and commitment” (Wallerstein et al., 2000, p. xx). However, in spite the findings of Wallerstein and her colleagues and most other early research and despite the in-depth examination of these effects, an increasing number of researchers have begun to question the findings of Wallerstein (Coontz, 2001; Hetherington & Stanley - Hagan, 1999; Durm et al., 1997; Bynum & Durm, 1996; Amato & Keith, 1991).

These conflicting opinions combined with the paradigm shift in psychology has lead researchers to focus more closely on specific aspects of children’s functioning that were previously thought to be negatively affected by divorce. One of these is the self-concept of children and the effects that divorce has on a child’s self-concept.

Due to the conflicting evidence regarding the negative consequences of divorce on a child’s self-concept, the present study has been inspired by the tremendous amount of literature and conflicting views regarding the effects of divorce on a child’s self-concept (Durm et al., 1997; Bynum & Durm, 1996; Beer, 1989). The current project has investigated whether there are any differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families.

In this study, self-concept has been defined as *a global system that consists of a number of inter-related facets. These facets or components have an effect on the individual's perception of himself and his interaction with others. It is not a dormant entity but is in fact malleable and modifiable and therefore, it can change over time, provided there is richness in the quality and quantity of an individual's experience.*

The first chapter looks at defining what the construct family, and specifically what the terms "intact" and "divorced families" denote in this investigation. A brief overview of some of the other types of families that exist in present day society have also been examined.

As this study aims to determine if there are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families, the next chapter examined self-concept and some of the theories regarding the development of self-concept and the different components of self-concept. Once again, there are a number of conflicting views regarding whether the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families differ and these views have also been highlighted (Coontz, 2001; Durm et al., 1997; Bynum, & Durm, 1996; Amato & Keith, 1991; Beer, 1989; Ensink & Carroll, 1989).

Self-esteem has also been studied in some detail in this chapter, as there is some confusion as to whether there are differences between these terms (Lefrançois, 2001; Greef, 2000; Pope et al., 1988; Hamacheck, 1987). The importance of self-concept, the factors that influence self-concept and the relationship between self-concept and resilience have also been examined.

Based on the literature survey, it has become clear that there are a number of conflicting opinions about whether the self-concept of children from intact and divorced differs. What is clear, however, is that self-concept plays an important role

in promoting resilience in the overall resilience in a child (Snowdon, 2000; Grotberg, 1995; Joseph, 1994 Emery & Forehand, 1994).

6.2.2 Conclusions reached based on the empirical investigation

The most important conclusions that are related to this study will now be summarised:

1. *The first aim of this study was to determine the nature of self-concept. As the research in this area is still exploratory, hypothesis could no be formulated for this aim.*

A comparison of the results obtained by the children from the normative sample and those of the sample group indicate that the sample group compares well to the normative group. This indicates that the definition of self-concept can be accepted.

2. *The second aim of the empirical study was to determine whether the measuring instrument used provided a reliable and valid indication of the self-concept of South African children between the ages of 9 and 12.*

➤ Reliability

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale provides good reliability indices which indicate that the results obtained on this test are reliable.

➤ Validity

The empirical study indicates that the Piers-Harris Self-concept Scale for Children provides a valid measurement of self-concept and the related factors.

3. *The third aim of the empirical study was to determine whether there are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families.*

Based on the results obtained from the measuring instrument, it is clear that there are differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. Although these differences are not practically significant, statistical significance has been established on some of the subtests of the measuring instrument and a small difference was also found in the overall self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. This finding is concurrent with the findings of other researchers (Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, & McRae, 1998; Amato & Keith, 1991; Durm, et al., 1997).

6.3 Recommendations

The shortfalls of the current research project as well as recommendations for future research in this area are highlighted in the next section.

6.3.1 Shortcomings of present research and recommendations for future research in this area

- a. Although self-concept has been measured as a component of psychological resilience, a measuring instrument that measures how self-concept influences the psychological resilience of children had not yet been developed at the time that this project was undertaken.
- b. As this project forms part of a larger inter-university project, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale was not the only test that was administered to the sample group and this factors such as fatigue and motivation could have played a role and therefore may have had an influence on the validity of the test.

6.3.2 Recommendations for the practical implementation of the findings of this study

The main objective of this investigation has been to determine if there are any differences in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. Based on the statistical analysis of the data, a statistically significant difference has been found in the self-concept of children from intact and divorced families. The practical significance of these findings could not however, be established. Despite this fact, the following recommendation for the development and implementation of a program that aims to increase the self-concept of children from divorced families is proposed. Although there are a large number of programs of this nature, the author believes that a program that focuses on the self-concept of children from divorced families and through this fosters resilience in children particularly in the South African context needs to be developed.

When considering the development and implementation of a program of this nature it is useful to consider the success rate of other programs that deal with the same or similar subject matter. Over the years, a number of these programs have been developed internationally. Some of these programs will briefly be discussed before focusing on suggestions for a program that can be implemented in the South African context.

6.3.2.1 Overview of programs for children from divorced families

A brief overview of a number of programs that have been developed to help children cope with their parents divorce will now be provided. Many of these programs have been successfully implemented in countries such as the Canada and the United States and also in South Africa.

➤ **Rollercoasters**

The Rollercoasters program was designed by the staff at Families First in Atlanta, Georgia and it aims to address the needs of children from divorced families. This is done by drawing on the experiences the staff have had with divorcing families in family counselling and eight years of delivering Children Cope With Divorce, (CCWD) a program that was developed in consultation with Dr Judith Wallerstein (Fischer, 1999).

The Rollercoasters program was designed to be conducted as a group experience for children between the ages of 9 and 12 years. It consists of eight themes which are addressed through a structured discussion and a set of complementary activities. The program was in part developed around Wallerstein's (1983) six psychological tasks that children from divorced families face. These six tasks are:

- a) Acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture;
- b) disengaging from parental conflict and distress and resuming customary pursuits;
- c) resolution of loss;
- d) resolving anger and self-blame;
- e) accepting the permanence of divorce; and
- f) achieving realistic hope regarding relationships (Wallerstein, 1983).

These tasks have been used as a theoretical framework within which the curriculum of the program has been developed. The curriculum is designed to help children begin to acknowledge, understand and accept the various dimensions of the process of family change. It also focuses on helping children to learn to look for skills to help to deal with their anger and confusion and look for positive aspects of change and through this prepare for the future (Fischer, 1999).

Hands-on activities include:

- Making “stress-balls” from balloons and birdseed as an aid to anger management;
- the construction of a “loss box” in which children symbolically lay to rest some of the hurtful feelings they have about the divorce; and
- participation in a ceremonial “chain of lights” in which the children observe how the changes in their lives may lead to a broader support network (Fischer, 1999).

The results that have been obtained from a pilot study of this program indicate that parents observed meaningful changes in their children’s willingness to express feelings and opinions. A significant improvement in the self-concept of these children was also revealed. This program also appeared to have the greatest impact on children with the least self-expression, lowest self-esteem and most behaviour problems prior to the program (Fischer, 1999).

➤ Caught in the Middle

This program was developed in Canada in response to the lack of research on the implications of divorce that existed programs that country (Hett, 1997).

The goals of this program are to assist children with:

- Realising that they are not alone in the issues and concerns that they face regarding the divorce;
- dispelling the notion that children are somehow responsible for their parents divorce;
- acquiring effective communication and assertiveness skills that will allow them to express their concerns and needs in a clear and objective manner;
- mastering problem solving strategies;
- reducing stress and anxiety through the use of muscle reaction; and

- controlling anger.

A set of vignettes that display some of the typical problems that faced by children of divorce form part of this program. These vignettes are designed to be helpful in stimulating and promoting the discussion of the sensitive issues that these children are faced with and provide them with valuable problem solving skills (Hett, 1997).

The results from the studies conducted on the efficacy of this program indicate that it was successful in improving the school behaviour of these children, increase their sense of well-being, improve their vocabulary and ability to talk about their feelings and share their feelings with their parents.

➤ **Sandcastles Program**

The Sandcastles Program was developed by Gary Neuman in Florida in the United States and has been implemented successfully in a number of countries including South Africa (Fuchs & Liebenberg, 2001).

Aimed at children between the ages of 6 and 17, the program consists of a once off four-hour workshop that assists children to cope with their parents' divorce. The program uses a number of creative, interactive activities that allows the children to express their reactions to issues arising out of the divorce.

Through meeting with peers who are going to the similar experiences, children are able to emerge with a new-found sense of confidence, hope and community. Children realise that they are not alone and that it is normal to feel angry, anxious, confused, and sad. By using an innovative range of techniques, the Sandcastles Program aims to help children to:

- Develop self-expression and problem-solving skills;
- learn appropriate ways of expressing anger;
- reach a better understanding of the reality of divorce; and
- recognise their own unique qualities and strengths.

The program is implemented in the following way:

The children are separated into age-related groups and are all given an age-appropriate workbook, which they then fill out anonymously. They are invited to draw pictures, write poems, compose letters to their parents, and answer questions with regard to their divorce experience. In addition to this, the children are guided in activities such as role-playing, discussion and interviewing fellow group members. In the last half-hour parents are invited to join the group and together with their children they learn techniques for interacting and expressing their feelings about the divorce. At the end of the session, the children and the parents are required to complete a written evaluation of their Sandcastles experience (Anon, 2001).

6.3.2.2 Recommendations based on the current research findings

A number of parallels exist between the three programs described above. One of the most clear is that each one of these programs allows the children to express their emotions regarding their feelings about the divorce in an atmosphere of acceptance and caring. This, combined with the peer support undoubtedly has a lasting effect on the children as they are able to reflect and gain insight into their emotions.

The following recommendations for the development and the implementation of a program which not only ameliorates the effects of divorce on a child, but also serves to increase the child's self-concept can be made:

- When considering implementing a program aimed at improving self-concept, it is vital that parents and children are equally involved in the group process. This will serve to strengthen a child's belief that his parents love and care about him in spite of the divorce and the negativity that may be present in the parental relationship.
- The divorce process is a traumatic time for all involved and it is vital that children do not view it as something that they will never be able to overcome. The program should highlight the strengths and resources that the children have in order to overcome the traumatic consequences of the divorce. When children are able to identify and utilise the resources within themselves those outside, they will begin to realise that they do have a say in what happens in their lives.
- Constructive ways in which to express emotions is another aspect that should be focused on. Children often feel completely powerless in the divorce process and this sometimes leads them to react in an unconstructive manner. By teaching these children to express their emotions in a positive manner, they will be able to accept their negative emotions such as anger and sadness, and at the same time share these feelings with their parents.
- Children should also be encouraged to find a positive role model, someone whom they look up to and on whom they will be able to model their own behaviour on.

Many of these recommendations are in fact, covered by the programs described above. However, apart for Sandcastles for Children, the author could find no information regarding other programs that presented in South Africa for children from divorced families. There are two drawbacks of the Sandcastles program: the first is that it is presented only in specific areas of the country (Johannesburg, Cape Town) and that the costs involved do not make it accessible to all parents and children (R300 a child and thereafter R180 for every child from the immediate family).

In addition to these suggestions, it is also recommended that parents who are in the process of divorce, be legally bound to enrol their children in a program such as Sandcastles for children as it can only benefit the child.

To conclude, it can be said that it is of the utmost importance that the social, emotional and the psychological processes should all be taken into account when dealing with children from both intact and divorced families and that it should also be remembered that in spite of the stressors that children face, they have within them the ability to go through stressful transitions and become empowered.

6.4 Conclusion

Based on the above, it is clear that divorce is an extremely stressful time for both parents and their children. It is also clear that despite research findings that children are negatively influenced by the divorce experience and process, they are usually able to work through the negative aspects. Provided, however, that they have a supportive network of family members, peers, and teachers. The self-concept plays a vital role in their ability to function and combined with these external factors, children should also have a realistic and positive view of themselves and their abilities to function as members of society i.e. a good self-concept.

Self-concept appears to play a vital role in determining how a child will react to his parents divorce. In this research, project self-concept has been defined as *...a global system consisting of the individual's perception of himself and his interaction with others...* it is obvious that the manner in which the child perceives the divorce and its effect on him will determine his reactions and ability to deal with the process.

The fact that there has been a shift in the focus of research in the field of psychology is also a positive aspect. Researchers, therapists, parents, and everyone else that is affected by divorce either directly or indirectly, can now focus on strengthening the

aspects of the child's personality that will empower him to better deal with the divorce process and the most logical aspect of his personality to enhance, is his self-concept.

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APPENDIX



Potchefstroomse Universiteit

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**School for Psycho-Social
Behavioural Sciences:
Psychology**
Tel (018) 299-1722
E-mail
PSGAJV@PUKNET.PUK.AC.ZA
7 June 2000

Dear Parent

Your child has been selected to take part in a national research project of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the University of the Free State. Approximately 1000 children from different parts of South Africa will take part in this study.

The South African child is currently in a phase of history of dramatic change and adjustment. This study is on children's ability to cope, their self images, communication skills, physical health and ability to handle stress. This information will be used in therapeutic context, but also where lifeskill programmes has to be compiled.

This study is undertaken with strict confidentiality. Your child's name is on the questionnaires, but it is only to ensure that the correct questionnaire reaches the correct parent.

Your child will complete a few questionnaires on 13 June 2000. We will be finished by 11:00 and we will appreciate it if you fetch your child from school and make arrangements according to that.

If you **DO NOT** give consent, please complete the attached form and send it back to the school. If we don't receive the form, we accept that it is in order.

If you are willing to participate, you will within a few days also receive a questionnaire to complete, which you must send back to the school.

We really need your help and co-operation. The findings of this project will be made available to you if you are interested in the outcome.

Thank you for your help! If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Harsha Kalanjee
MA. Student
Tel.: 296 0624

Mrs E van Rensburg
Senior Lecturer and Project Leader

LETTER OF PERMISSION

I, Mr/Mrs/Ms (name & surname) _____

Hereby grant permission to my child (name & surname) _____

_____ to participate in the
above-mentioned research project into Psychological Resilience.

Signature

Date

I Mr/Mrs/Ms (name & surname) _____

Hereby **DO NOT** grant permission to my child (name & surname) _____

_____ To participate in the above-mentioned research project into Psychological
Resilience.

Signature

Date

Address: _____ Tel no: (H) _____

_____ Tel no: (W) _____

_____ Cell: _____

NB: if this form is not returned to the school within two days, it will be accepted that permission has been granted to your child to participate in the project.