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Self Esteem of College Age Adult Children of Alcoholics and Adult Children of Non-Alcoholics

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Self Esteem of College Age
Adult Children of Alcoholics and
Adult Children of Non-Alcoholics

Diana Lynn Grissom B. A.



A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
1998

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my mom Marty, my sister Rita, my brother Glen, and all of my relatives and friends who have encouraged me through this program. Your faith in me finally paid off and I will be able to do something with my life that has true meaning to me: helping others. A special Thanks to my roommate Christene for cooking many dinners while I worked on this paper.

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Abstract

Research is controversial in finding the role that parental alcoholism plays on an individual's self-esteem. Some results have shown that alcoholism directly effects a person's self-esteem whereas, other results have found family dysfunction of an alcoholic to effect self-esteem. The Children of Alcoholics Screening Test and The Self-Esteem Inventory were administered to 52 college students. No significant relationship between parental alcoholism and self-esteem was found. This finding is in agreement with most of the research on adult children of alcoholics.

Chapter I

Introduction

Self-esteem is a type of self-evaluation or self-worth. It is a feeling of confidence and pride. There are many things that effect an individual's self-esteem. Achieving goals, family environment, friends, and job achievement are a few examples that have an effect on a person's self-esteem. Some researchers have suggested that alcoholism effects self-esteem (Birke, 1990) however, other research suggests that alcoholism does not directly effect self-esteem. Alcoholism tends to effect family environment and many aspects of an individual's life and the dysfunctional family environment effects an individual's self-esteem.

There are many people who grow up in an alcoholic family. One out of eight Americans come from an alcoholic home (Rodney & Rodney, 1996; Rodney, 1996). The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACA) stated that an estimated 28 million Americans have at least one alcoholic parent. The environment of alcoholism can cause a child to live a mentally and/or physically abusive life. An alcoholic environment has many effects on children of alcoholics (COAs) and their personalities. These effects can include low self-esteem (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1987), lack of trust (Goodman, 1987), communication problems

(Raymer, 1994), and depression (Bradley & Schneider, 1990). The above mentioned problems may also effect an individual's self-esteem. Some researchers feel that it is wrong to assume that all adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) are members of the "walking wounded" (Goodman, 1987, p. 163). Therefore, there is controversy about the effects that an alcoholic environment has on children and later, as adults.

Kashubeck and Christensen (1995), believe it is not parental alcoholism, but rather the level of family dysfunction, that is related to the psychological functioning in general and self-esteem in particular. Therefore, alcoholism may have an indirect effect on a person's self-esteem.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to examine how parental alcoholism effects a college student's self-esteem. The present research compares adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) to adult children who did not grow up in an alcoholic family (NonACOAs). The research examines the ways that living in an alcoholic environment effect a person and his/her personality. The study compares the self-esteem of college students who have an alcohol abusive parent to the selfesteem of those college students who have parents that do not have an alcohol problem.

Hypothesis

The research hypothesis (H_1) is that parental alcoholism plays a role in the self-esteem of adult children. The Null Hypothesis (H_0) states that parental alcoholism does not have an effect or play a role in the self-esteem of adult children.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Definition of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the feeling of confidence and satisfaction in oneself; self respect or pride. It is a type of self-evaluation, or belief that an individual possesses regarding his/her self-worth, this is usually based on the perceptions of personal experiences and feedback from significant others (McWhirter, 1997). It is how people think of themselves as a whole not as a specific or single dimension of the self.

Bingham (1983) stated that self-esteem:

has been depicted disparately as a need (Maslow, 1954), as an attitude (Rosenberg, 1965; Coopersmith, 1969), as a metadimension (Super, 1963), as a consequence of competence (White, 1964), as a necessary condition for achievement (Maslow, 1954), as an index of mental health (Fitts, 1972), and as a moderator variable (Korman, 1967; Ziller, 1973) (p.18).

According to Swann (1996), self-esteem has two components. One is associated with feelings of lovability and the other is associated with feelings of competence (setting and achieving goals). Sometimes individuals try to raise their self-esteem by focusing on only one component. This may cause them to continue to suffer from feelings of worthlessness associated with the other overlooked component. Other research cited in Menees (1997) stated that there are three variables related to self-esteem, which include perceived social support from the family, the coping styles of family problem solving and

ventilation, and denial of feelings in family communication, regardless of whether or not the subjects were children of alcoholics.

There are arguments that self-concept and self-esteem are distinct but related, aspects of self-perception (Greene & Reed, 1992). Some researchers have found that self-esteem was associated with dimensions of the self-concept such as achievement, adjustment, & masculinity/ femininity but not others, like sociability (Greene & Reed, 1992). Greene and Reed (1992) found that the importance of distinguishing between self-concept and self-esteem became apparent when they looked at social context. College and non-college youths differed in the two components of self-perception and in the patterns of association that emerged between those components.

Self-esteem, according to Gilberts (1983), is best measured by statements of self-worth, personal competence, and achievement ideals or aspirations of people. Gilberts (1983) believes that there are factors specific to a situation that tend to influence the measurement of self-esteem. Elliott (1996) uses Rosenberg's definition of global self-esteem which is a person's overall evaluation of worthiness as a human being.

Formation of Self-Esteem

Gilberts (1983) believes that self-esteem is formed by physical, social, personal, family, school, peer, and behavioral aspects. As children, individuals thrive when they feel

respected and important, and cared for by others. They falter when they do not have self-pride or self-confidence that comes with such approval and support (Stevenson, 1996). Praise is one source of feedback, but self-esteem usually comes from the awareness that the steps toward a goal have been mastered. Goals set by an individual and the emphasis of importance put on these goals will effect a one's self-esteem upon the accomplishment or failure of these goals and activities. Acquiring the skills and knowledge that help a person to achieve his/her goals are an important basis for developing a healthy and realistic self-esteem. An individual can be happy with his/her personal role or performance in one instance and unhappy with it in another (Gilberts, 1983). Meaningful self-evaluation and a high self-esteem are the results, not the antecedents of accomplishment (Stevenson, 1996).

There are situations that a person encounters every day in life that effect how he/she feels about himself or herself. This relates to Bandura's belief that some chance encounters touch people lightly and others leave more lasting effects. Family and its environment, friends, school, work environment and the success of the individual in their job are some of the daily situations an individual encounters that effect self evaluation, which may also be considered self-esteem. These encounters or situations in turn, form a person's perceived self-efficacy or what the individual thinks he/she is capable of doing. People with relatively high self-regard tend to be

better students, are not bothered with much anxiety, are less depressed, have better physical health, and have better social relationships (Gilberts, 1983). They also value independence, competition, and expect more success in their jobs. People who possess a strong sense of self-worth appear to be adjusted, happy, and competent.

The way someone perceives an individual may have a negative or positive impact on the way that individual may see himself or herself. Bohon, Singer, and Santos (1993) relates a person's self-esteem to his/her social identities. If an individual is categorized by a negative social identity, their self-esteem will be negatively impacted, and they may try a variety of ways to cope with the unpleasant situation. Sterling, Yeisley-Hynes, Little, and Carter (1992) found in their study that individuals high in self-esteem attributed their successes globally and their failures situationally and those low in self-esteem operated in a more evenhanded fashion.

Researchers have shown a strong interest in self-esteem; how it effects a person's life or how a person's life effects the individual's self-esteem. The "self-esteem movement" is guided by the assumption that low self-esteem is the underlying cause of personal and social problems (Swann, 1996, p. 6). Some educators have formed a myth, according to Stevenson (1996), that raising a person's self-esteem is a way to improve his/her levels for achievement, which would help with some of the cultural effects on self-esteem. The values of the family and

the local and national cultural values, along with one's weaknesses, may effect the amount of self-esteem that a person gets from academic and athletic pursuits (Gilberts, 1983). Moore, Laflin, and Weis (1996) believe that people conforming to the cultural norms will tend to evaluate themselves positively.

McWhirter (1997) believes that self-esteem is an important issue for college students because it is related to loneliness. A college student's self-esteem may influence whether or not the student seeks help when they feel lonely. These students may be lonely because they move away from family and friends when they go away to college. A study showed that ten weeks into the first semester, new college friendship satisfaction was not associated with self-esteem. Whereas, other research shows that college adjustment and self-esteem are effected by making new friends. Body image is another effect on a college students self-esteem, which was significantly correlated in Abell and Richard's (1996) study for both males and females. Body image may indirectly effect how confident a student may be when making new friends and therefore, may effect his/her loneliness.

For women employment status, marriage, parenthood, age at birth of first child and body image effect self-esteem (Elliot, 1996). In contrast, regardless of employment status, research showed that women with traditional attitudes have a lower self-esteem than women with non-traditional attitudes

(Elliot, 1996). Women's attitudes toward the appropriate position of women in the family may change the effects of work and family on their self-esteem. Others see a woman's self-esteem as staying fairly stable over early adulthood (Elliot, 1996).

Measuring Self-Esteem

Researchers have different views on measuring self-esteem. Bingham (1983) believes that there are two ways that measuring self-esteem is situational. One way is to instruct the respondents to only think about a specific situation in his/her responses, and the other is to evaluate self-esteem during the situation to be studied. Bingham (1983) also believes that one of the problems in assessing self-esteem is the way it is presented in the measuring devices that have been used. Another difficulty in evaluating self-esteem may be in the inconsistent results regarding gender differences (Bingham, 1983). Hart and Damon (1986) believe that measures of self-esteem try to evaluate feelings a person has about himself/herself without knowing what the person believes the self to be in the first place. The need for social desirability and need for approval may influence the self-reporting on self-esteem scales. People generally give information about themselves that they feel is socially acceptable or desirable rather than share their true feelings and thoughts (Gilberts, 1983).

Definition of Alcoholism

Alcoholism is the consumption of alcohol to the point of interfering with normal functioning (Plescia-Pikus, Long-Suter, & Wilson, 1988). Alcoholism has produced a new class of college students which fall into the category of adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs). Coming from an alcoholic family has been identified as a significant problem in the college population according to Ashby, Mangine, and Slaney (1995). One in five college students acknowledge that at least one parent had an alcohol abuse problem (Jones & Kinnick, 1995; Rodney, 1996). This finding supports research that estimates 18-33% of college students today are ACOAs (Jones & Kinnick, 1995).

Statistics of Alcoholism

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACA) (Jones & Kinnick, 1995) notes that there are an estimated 28 million Americans that have at least one alcoholic parent (Woodside, 1986; Parker & Hartford, 1987; Greenfield, Swartz, Landerman, & George, 1993; Dodd & Roberts, 1994). One out of every eight Americans come from an alcoholic home (Rodney & Rodney, 1996; Rodney, 1996) and seven million of these children face a daily fear of their parent's alcohol abuse (Woodside, 1988). The other 21 million children of alcoholics have now reached adulthood and many continue to have long lasting consequences caused by the effects of living with an alcoholic parent (Greenfield et al., 1993; Woodside, 1988). Being brought

up in a dysfunctional home is a devastating experience and the effects persist for life unless a conscious effort is made by the person that was raised in that environment to change his/her view and feelings on the world (Carney, 1991). Sloboda (1974) feels that alcoholism is one of the most widespread, destructive, and costly health problems in America. Many researchers believe that people who live in alcoholic homes are at risk for a variety of psychological problems (Churchill, Broida, & Nicholson, 1990).

Problems Alcoholism Creates

The psychological problems may not be obvious, which could make a history of alcoholism in a family hard to detect. Jones and Kinnick (1995) believes that many ACOAs do not display problems in childhood or adolescence but are at a higher risk for serious psychological problems as adults. Many adult children of alcoholics suffer psychological and emotional problems. Identifying the children of alcoholics is difficult because many children deny that there are problems at home (Dye, 1993). Only an estimated 5 percent of 12 to 15 million school-age children of alcoholics are identified and treated according to Pilat and Jones (1984/85). Denial is a key feature in an alcoholic family. The confusion of denying the obvious and trying to look good for outsiders bring about many emotional problems in COAs. These include: guilt, anxiety, embarrassment, confusion, inability to trust, anger, and depression. Most alcoholics function reasonably well out in the world, but are

miserably dysfunctional within the family system (Raymer, 1996).

Homes with an alcoholic environment are characterized by poverty, divorce, marital discord, unemployment, and chaos, low levels of parent-child interaction, and high levels of conflict between parent and child (Greenfield et al., 1993). As alcoholism progresses, family members may repress his/her pain and learn to react with "survival" behavior with more vigor (Raymer, 1996, p. 53). Problems of most children of alcoholics remain invisible because their coping behavior seeks approval and is socially acceptable. The lack of behavioral problems can be attributed to the survival roles assumed by children in alcoholic homes. The survival in the family may have severely negative consequences in the larger environment (Crawford & Phyfer, 1988). Werner and Broida (1991) stated that parental alcoholism affects children while they are living with the family, but they are not certain that the influence of familial alcoholism on children continues into adulthood.

Alcoholic Family Behavior

There is not a typical or set pattern of behavior in an alcoholic family (Raymer, 1996). Five main issues that ACOAs face are control, mistrust, ignoring personal needs, denying of feelings, and being unable to define or limit feelings of responsibility (Tweed & Ryff, 1991; Goodman, 1987). Tweed and Ryff (1991) describe ACOAs as usually failing to identify their own strengths and assets, and instead perceiving only their

weaknesses, leading to decreased self-esteem. Studies of social functioning of adults raised in an alcoholic family report that these individuals have patterns of withdrawal from conflict and difficulties with intimacy and self-esteem. ACOAs may experience interpersonal discomfort, role confusion, decreased competence in communication, poor verbal ability, and have impulsive behavior. In contrast, Churchill, Broida, and Nicholson (1990) stated that personality characteristics are not a direct result of being raised in an alcoholic home. These individuals may also experience dissatisfaction with their social support networks, have a greater likelihood of marital disruption, marry more than once, and have an alcoholic spouse (Greenfield et al., 1993).

Dye (1993) stated that 50 percent of children of alcoholics marry an alcoholic, and others have stated that they are also at high risk of developing alcoholism (Bradley & Schneider, 1990; Rodney & Rodney, 1996). Children of alcoholics are three to four times more likely to become alcoholics than the general population (Birke, 1990; Dye, 1993). Rodney (1996) stated that as many as 52% of males and 18% of females who had an alcoholic parent may be expected to become alcoholic by the age of 20. Studies on ACOAs have suggested increased difficulties with alcohol (Harmon, Armsworth, Hwang, Vincent, & Preston, 1995) and difficulties with the law (Harmon et al., 1995). Studies of college age people, cited in Hill, Nord, and Blow (1992), did not find that family history had an effect on the quantity

or frequency of alcohol consumption.

Studies also show that ACOAs report more dysfunction in their families than do nonACOAs (Rodney & Rodney, 1996). Goodman (1987) believes that COAs experience inconsistencies, double-bind messages, hidden feelings, incomplete information, shame, uncertainty, mistrust and roles that stifle development and identity. These experiences have been found in nonalcoholic families as well. Families can be dysfunctional or functional in many ways for many reasons, which may create the potential for the kinds of experiences described earlier for children of alcoholics (Goodman, 1987).

The alcoholic household can leave emotional scars that can last a lifetime (Dye, 1996; Plescia-Pikus et al., 1988). Some ACOAs develop severe emotional and behavioral problems, others have no problems, and some repress feelings (Pilat & Jones, 1984/85). Parental alcoholism has been associated with adjustment problems and the psychology of their children (Bradley & Schneider, 1990). Some COAs continue to carry these emotional scars and adjustment problems into adulthood. Research has found that only one in five adults from such families develop disorders that require counseling (Crawford & Phyfer, 1988). Many COAs emerge unscathed.

Characteristics of ACOAs

Many experimenters have indicated that ACOAs are at greater risk than non-ACOAs for problems with depression (Ashby et al.,

1995; Bradley & Schneider, 1990; Harmon et al., 1995; Senchak et al., 1996; Tweed & Ryff, 1991), anxiety (Dodds & Roberts, 1990), lowered self-esteem (Ashby et al., 1995; Berkowitz & Perkins, 1988; Birke, 1990; Harmon et al., 1995; Senchak et al., 1996; Tweed & Ryff, 1991), mistrust of people (Raymer, 1996), intimacy problems, and poor communication skills (Raymer, 1994; Raymer, 1996), role confusion, loneliness, aggression, irrationality and lack a sense of being (Kashubeck, 1994).

The above characteristics were cited by Dodd and Roberts (1990) to be the norm of the ACOA population. McKenna and Pickens (1983) stated that a single "alcoholic personality" (p.688) has not been shown. The greater dissatisfaction of oneself found in female ACOAs may be related to their proneness for depression in comparison with their male counterparts (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1988).

NACA also states that COAs often develop characteristics that continue into adulthood: inability to trust (Bradley & Schneider, 1990; Harmon et al., 1995; Rodney, 1996), extreme need to control (Bradley & Schneider, 1990; Goodman, 1987; Rodney, 1996), excessive sense of responsibility (Rodney, 1996), and denial of feelings (Rodney, 1996). Research has found that COAs have lower self-esteem and are more external in locus of control (Churchill et al., 1990). However, only few of the ideas have been substantiated with empirical research. Whereas, Churchill et al. (1990) cited research that shows self-esteem and locus of control as relatively stable from childhood on

to adulthood. Other researchers found no differences in levels of self-esteem between ACOA and non-ACOA college students (Churchill et al., 1990). Tweed and Ryff (1991) found that ACOAs did not feel less happy, have less purpose in life or lower self-esteem than their same-aged counterparts from nonalcoholic families. Werner and Broida (1991) found no significant differences in measures of self-esteem between groups of ACOA and non-ACOA young adults, although the quality of the family environment and perceived emotional support helped with overall adjustment levels which varied among ACOA subjects.

Fox and Gilbert (1994) believed that childhood physical abuse, incest, and parental alcoholism have short and long-term detrimental outcomes such as depression, low self-esteem, childhood psychopathology, adult emotional and behavior problems, and promote conflictual or violent adult relationships. Dye (1993) reported that 55 percent of all family violence occurs in alcoholic families. Fox and Gilbert's (1994) study on assessing childhood physical abuse (CPA), childhood incest (CI), and parental alcoholism was consistent with other studies. It was hypothesized by Fox and Gilbert (1994) that women who experienced CPA, CI, and parental alcoholism would exhibit higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem compared to women who have not had these experiences. Higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem were general outcomes found for all three traumas.

In contrast, some researchers view the literature on ACOAs as "something of a hoax" because it trivializes this horrific childhood experience (Carney, 1991, p. 115). It is an error, to say or assume that all ACOAs are members of the "walking wounded" and that they are "still in denial" if they are not taking part in a recovery program (Goodman, 1987, p. 163). Berkowitz and Perkins (1988) suggest that ACOAs are more resilient than previous studies have shown. Harmon et al. (1995) cited a study that looked at the resilient characteristics of children of alcoholics and found that only 41% of ACOAs had been identified with difficulties at home, school, work, or in the community by age 18.

Alcoholism, Family Dysfunction, and Self-Esteem

Research by Plescia-Pikus et al. (1988) shows that ACOAs with high self-esteem were no different than nonACOAs. Werner and Broida (1991) believed that being raised in an alcoholic family did not predict lower self-esteem (Rodney & Rodney, 1996). Dodd and Roberts (1994) agree with Werner and Broida in that their research showed that parental alcoholism was not a major part of the variability, it was family dysfunction. Therefore, family dysfunction was found to predict self-esteem. Senchak et al. (1996) stated that in many alcoholic families there are multiple stressors where the magnitude of dysfunction among ACOAs, limits the extent to which findings of dysfunction can be attributed specifically to parental alcoholism. Research

stated that adults from dysfunctional families, including but not limited to ACOAs, were significantly more fearful of negative evaluation than those of functional families, but were not significantly different in lack of trust or potential for addiction. Goodman (1987) also stated that the reasons for ACOAs characteristics cannot be attributed to ones childhood with an alcoholic, but perhaps to some other sort of dysfunctional family unit. This shows that while parental alcoholism alone cannot account for personality differences found in adult children, family dysfunction usually associated with parental alcoholism can have a persistent effect on self-esteem (Werner & Broida, 1991).

Senchak et al. (1996) judged COAs to be less socially skilled than children of divorce but not less skilled than the controls in their study. The problems express themselves in areas such as locus of control, low self-esteem, depression, hostility, obsessive-compulsive style, identity, guilt, and disturbed interpersonal relationships (Jones & Kinnick, 1995; Fisher, Jenkins, Harrison, & Jesch, 1992; Greenfield et al., 1993). Senchak et al. (1996) performed a study that found male and female COAs to be more anxious when interacting with an opposite-sex partner than with a same-sex partner.

Studies on ACOAs

Rodney (1994) found that ACOAs and nonACOAs on a black campus showed that ACOAs reported less healthy environments

in their families but hardly any difference in social support from that of nonACOAs. This is a contradiction to other findings where ACOAs described their families as more dysfunctional than nonACOAs and reported less guidance from others. This might suggest that black ACOAs are not as isolated as their white counterparts.

Berkowitz and Perkins (1988) conducted a study at a liberal arts college using first and second year students in the research. In the study, self-identified ACOAs were more often similar to their peers than different. It also showed that within the eight personality measures, the ACOAs and their peers only differed in self-depreciation and independence/autonomy. These results show that parental alcoholism effects some aspects of personality and not others. The female ACOAs were set apart from female peers on the self-depreciation scale and the male ACOAs approached statistical significance on self-depreciation from their peers. Male ACOAs scored significantly higher on independence/autonomy than their male peers, whereas the difference between female ACOAs and their peers was very small and was not statistically significant. Also a study cited in Rodney and Rodney (1996) stated that women ACOAs reported greater self-depreciation than their nonACOA peers. The adjustment of female college students was found to be significantly related (negatively) to functional, emotional, and attitudinal independence (Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1986).

Rodney and Rodney (1996) noted a study that reported higher

levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem in ACOAs. Werner and Broida (1991) presented a study that found no significant differences in measures of self-esteem between groups of ACOA and nonACOA young adults, although the quality of the family environment and perceived emotional support helped with overall adjustment levels which varied among ACOA subjects. Instead, it was the dysfunction in the family of origin that reflected differences in self-esteem. Menees (1997) found no significant relationship between parental alcoholism and self-esteem whereas, previous literature has shown a relationship. This suggests that parental alcoholism is not related to adult children's self-esteem. Instead of thinking of self-esteem as an outcome variable, Menees (1997) suggested that it could be more worthwhile to look at its role as a potential vulnerability or protective factor. ACOAs seem more similar than different from adults who have experienced stressful events other than parental alcoholism in their childhood (Fisher et al., 1992).

Gender and Alcoholism

Rodney and Rodney (1996) found that there were not many differences in personality characteristics among male and female collegiate ACOAs and nonACOAAs. There were also no significant differences between male ACOAs and nonACOAAs or female ACOAs and nonACOAAs with regard to self-esteem and self-concept. In their study it appeared that as the health in the family improves

and the level of social support from the mother increases, so does the level of self-esteem of the ACOA. McKenna and Pickens (1983) stated that it was possible that the gender of the alcoholic parent contributes to the psychopathology in children, either directly or by the interaction with the gender of the child. Children who had an alcoholic father but found emotional satisfaction in their relationship with their mother showed positive social behavior and appeared to compensate for home troubles by high achievement in school (El-Guebaly & Offord, 1977). Individuals with alcoholic mothers are considered to be less trustful (Bradley & Schneider, 1990). Birke (1990) also reports that when a mother is alcoholic, the children seem to suffer more than when dad is. She also states that problems are heightened when both parents are alcoholic. The Berkowitz and Perkins (1988) study found that women with alcoholic fathers were more likely than women with alcoholic mothers to report self-depreciation or negative feelings about themselves. Daughters of alcoholic mothers were equal to the self-depreciation mean score of daughters from nonalcoholic (non-ACOA) families. Male ACOAs with alcoholic fathers reported higher self-depreciation than male ACOAs with alcoholic mothers but was not statistically significant. It was also found that ACOA women have reported higher levels of involvement with chemically-dependent partners. Sons of alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholics than others, and daughters of alcoholic mothers are three times more likely to become

alcoholic than other daughters (Woodside, 1988). These results suggest that the gender of the alcoholic parent may effect a child's personality in different ways.

A study done by Fisher et al. (1992) did not find any significant differences attributable to gender and group membership or gender of the alcoholic parent. They determined that there was no clear evidence that the gender of the ACOA and the alcoholic parent results in differences of adult characteristics. Gender of both the child and alcoholic parent differed significantly in the coping categories, where males are more vulnerable than females for alcoholism and psychosocial problems, and females more vulnerable for depression (Harman et al., 1995).

Learning About Family Alcoholism

Researchers are constantly looking for comparisons and for cause and effect. Researchers are also interested in the origins of certain topics. Some are interested in alcoholism, its origin, and its effects. There are two primary methods of obtaining information regarding the family's history on alcoholism: The family study method and the family history method (Sheridan, 1995). The family study method involves assessing each family member for the presence of alcoholism, whereas the family history method requires asking the subjects to report on the presence of alcoholism in their relatives. The family history method is preferred but is not feasible due

to time and cost, in most cases. The Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST) is a survey that identifies a person who is living with or who has lived with alcoholic parents (Jones & Kinnick, 1995). Previous reports indicate that the CAST is a reliable and valid instrument for identifying ACOAs (Werner & Broida, 1991). Pilat and Jones (1984/85) state that the CAST scores yield a validity coefficient of .78.

Summary

In summary, self-esteem plays a large role in distinguishing people as individuals. The studies of effects of parental alcoholism on self-esteem have been controversial. Some research has shown that parental alcoholism lowers self-esteem while other research does not show an effect. On the other hand, research has shown that parental alcoholism does effect aspects of life which in turn effects self-esteem. Therefore, literature shows that parental alcoholism indirectly effects self-esteem.

The next chapter will address the study done for this thesis, parental alcoholism and it's effects on self-esteem. It will also give the statistics on the subjects involved in the study such as number of students, number of males and females, and average age. The materials used will be discussed and the procedure for the study is given.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the possible effects that growing up in an alcoholic environment may have on self-esteem. The focus of the study was on ACOAs, and in particular, college students and their self-esteem.

Subjects

Surveys were given out to three psychology classes at a medium size private university in the Midwest. The students were given extra credit for their participation in the study. Of the 74 surveys distributed 55 (74%) were returned. Only 52 (N=52) of the surveys could be included in the study because three students turned in incomplete surveys. This gives a usable return rate of 70%.

Materials

A demographic page (see Appendix A) and two inventories, the SEI and the CAST, were completed by each of the volunteers for the study. The demographic page (Appendix A) asked background questions such as age, gender, grade, and ethnicity. The demographic page was easily completed with a one word answer or circling the response that related to the examinee.

The SEI Adult Form (Coopersmith, 1975) is a 25 item questionnaire. The SEI evaluates the attitude toward the self in social, family, and personal areas of experience. The Adult

Form and School Short Form exceeds a .80 correlation for three samples of high school and college students (N=647). Test-retest reliability on the School Form was .88 after a 5 week interval with a sample of 30 children in the fifth grade. After a 3-year interval with a different sample of 56 children scored a .70 on test-retest reliability. This test takes about 10 minutes to complete.

The CAST (Jones, 1983) is a 30 item inventory. It measures children's attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and experiences related to their parents' drinking behavior. All items were judged as face valid by many alcoholism counselors and ACOAs. A Spearman-Brown split-half reliability coefficient of .98 was found in a sample of adolescent children of alcoholics. The same coefficient (.98) was found in a random sample of 81 adults. The validity coefficient was found to be .78($p < .001$). The CAST takes about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The CAST has a cut off score of six or more that reliably identifies children of alcoholics. A score of two to five identifies a child who has parents that are problem drinkers. If a person scores a zero or one on the CAST it usually means that the individual has a parent that is not a problem drinker.

Procedure

Packets were made of the demographic page, the SEI, and the CAST. These packets were handed out to the college students who were willing to participate in the study. These students

were to complete the questionnaires and hand them into their professor at the next class. The professor then in turn gave them to the researcher. Before the packets were distributed the students were told that this survey was for a thesis project, but they were not told about the purpose of the study.

The questionnaires were gathered at three different times. There were three different classes that participated in the study. Therefore, the previous procedure was repeated for each of the classes. After the questionnaires were received by the researcher, she wrote a thank you note to the classes and explained the purpose of the study.

The results were tabulated according to the guidelines for each of the tests the CAST and the SEI. Those students who scored a six or higher on the CAST were compared with their SEI scores. This shows the self-esteem of ACOAs in the study. Next, students who scored 2 to 5 on the CAST was compared with their self-esteem results. This showed the self-esteem of students who grew up with a parent who had a drinking problem, but would not be considered an alcoholic. Students who scored a 0 or 1 on the CAST are considered to have parents that are non-problem drinkers. This gives the self-esteem of nonACOAs in this study.

The participants were then divided by their SEI scores into two categories, students with high self-esteem (51 or higher on the SEI) and students with low self-esteem (50 and below on the SEI). These groups were then divided into two groups

according to their CAST scores, parents that were alcoholics/alcohol abusers or social/non-drinkers. A student who scored a 2 or higher on the CAST had an alcoholic/alcohol abusing parent and those who scored a 0 or 2 were social/non-drinkers.

Chapter IV

Results

Statistics

There were 52 participants, six were male and 46 were female. Eighty-six and a half percent were Caucasian, 5.8% were African American, and both Hispanics and Persians were represented by 1.9% whereas, 3.8% of the students did not give their race. The average age of the participants was 22 years old. The students in the study had an average grade point average (GPA) of 3.28. Twelve were freshmen, 16 were sophomores, 15 were juniors, and 9 were seniors. The students participating generally were full-time in-state students. Only 2 (3.8%) were part-time students and 3 (5.8%) were students from out-of-state.

The following statistics or results can be found in Table 1. There were 52 students who participated in the study. Thirteen (25%) students had parents that were alcoholic or alcohol abusers. These students had CAST scores of two or higher. Whereas, 39 (75%) of the students had parents that were social drinkers or non-drinkers. These students scored a 0 or 1 on the CAST.

Ten (19.2%) students were in the low self-esteem category, because of their score of a 50 or below on the SEI. One (1%) of these students had an alcohol abusive/alcoholic parent and 9 (9%) had parents that were social drinkers or non-drinkers. Of the 42 (80.8%) students who

scored a 51 and above (high self-esteem) on the SEI, 12 (28.6%) had an alcohol abusive or alcoholic parent. Whereas, 30 (71%) of these high self-esteem students had parents that were social or non-drinkers.

Testing

A correlation test was done to compare the relationship between parental alcoholism and self-esteem. The Pearson Product-Moment (r) equaled .09, therefore r^2 equaled .0077584. The r^2 value shows that .77% of the variation of parental alcoholism was accounted for in the student's self-esteem.

A t-test was completed on the SEI scores comparing high and low CAST scores to determine the results of the study. No significant (ns) difference was found for self-esteem for low and high CAST scores $t_{(50)} = .623$, n.s. Hence, the Null Hypothesis (H_0) was accepted. This hypothesis stated that parental alcoholism does not have an effect or play a role in the self-esteem of adult children.

TABLE 1 Results

Count Row % Col. % Total %	Alcoholic/Alcohol Abusive Parents	Social Drinker/ Non-Drinker	Row Total Total %
Low Self- Esteem	1 1	9 9	10
CAST of 50 or Below	77 1.9	23 17	19.2
High Self- Esteem	12 28.6	30 71	42
CAST of 51 or Above	92.3 23	76.9 57.7	80.8
Column Total Total %	13 25	39 79	52 100

Chapter 5

Discussion

Findings

There were a few interesting results in this study. The Self-Esteem Inventory revealed a wide range of self-esteem in college students, 16 to 96. The mean self-esteem score was 67.827. The CAST also found a wide range of scores, 0 to 29, with a mean of 4.788. The NACA statistic that one out of eight Americans come from an alcoholic home, was confirmed and exceeded by this study because 13 of the 52 students were from an alcoholic or alcohol abusive home. There was only one student who was categorized in the alcoholic/alcohol abusive category and the low self-esteem category. Therefore, this sample suggests that parental alcoholism does not play a role in an individual's self-esteem.

The demographic page asked the student's opinion on his/her parent's consumption of alcohol. There were eight students who felt that one of his/her parents were alcoholic, this was confirmed by the CAST scores. The five students who felt that one of his/her parents were alcohol abusers, were also confirmed by the CAST scores. Of these five students, three of the CAST scores actually would categorize the parent(s) as an alcoholic. Four students who categorized his/her parents as social drinkers or non-drinkers, scored higher on the CAST than what a

social or non-drinker should have scored. Three of these CAST scores would even be considered alcoholic, where one would be an alcohol abuser. These students may be in denial of their parent's drinking problems or they may be trying to look good for outsiders. Denial or false identification of parental alcoholism could be a possible reason for finding no difference in self-esteem between ACOAs and nonACOAs.

Conclusion

The findings of this study was surprising because it was thought that parental alcoholism played a large role in a person's self-esteem. This study does not reflect this to be true. Only 1.9% of the participants in the study had low self-esteem and were from an alcoholic home. There were 42 students who scored high in self-esteem and 12 of these were from alcoholic homes. According to the student's opinions about parent's drinking habits compared with CAST scores, it would be safe to say that these students had the correct opinion about their parent's drinking. Only 7 of the 52 (13%) students mis-labeled or considered his/her parent(s) to be one type of drinker, when according to his/her CAST score they were another.

Limitations and Suggestions

There are a few limitations that this study possesses.

The main one is that the sample of college students may not be a representative sample of ACOAs in that this group seems to be more resilient and have great coping abilities. Therefore, the results of this study should only be generalized to college students. In using only college students, it may have excluded those most affected by parental alcoholism (Churchill et al., 1990; Menees, 1997). Another limitation is that individual reports about the self may not necessarily be an accurate representation of his/her concept because he/she wants to be socially accepted and does not want to reveal too much as cited earlier (Gilberts, 1983).

If this study had a larger sample size the outcome may have been slightly different in that there could have been an even number of parents with alcohol problems as those that did not have an alcohol problem. An even number of students with high self-esteem and low self-esteem could have also made a difference in the results. Future research is suggested with this population but with a larger number of participants. Future research should also examine other populations and compare two different populations.

Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Age: _____
2. Ethnicity/Race: _____
3. Grade point average (GPA): _____

(Please Circle One For Each Question)

4. Gender: male or female
5. Year in college: freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior
6. Are you an in-state or out-of-state student?
7. Are you a part-time or full-time student?
8. Marital status: single, married, widowed, or divorced
9. Do you consider yourself to be a non-drinker, a social drinker, an alcohol abuser, or an alcoholic?
10. Do you consider you father to be a non-drinker, a social drinker, an alcohol abuser, or an alcoholic?
11. Do you consider your mother to be a non-drinker, a social drinker, an alcohol abuser, or and alcoholic?

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