

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Susan J. Burke for the degree of Master of Science in Human Development and Family Sciences presented on October 27, 1994. Title: Perceptions of Family of Origin Health, Self-Esteem, and the Divorced Single Mother Among College Students

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This study sought to determine the contributions of college students' perceptions of family of origin health and self-esteem to their perceptions of the divorced single mother. It was hypothesized that individuals who hold more positive views of their family of origin health will also view themselves and, consequently, the divorced single mother more positively. Participants were 170 college students, 113 of whom lived only with their biological parents, and 57 of whom lived at sometime in their lives with a divorced single mother. Four instruments were used to collect the data, including the Family of Origin Health Scale (Hovestadt et al., 1985), the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Perception of Divorced Mother Scale (Ganong & Coleman, 1983), and a demographic questionnaire. A series of hierarchical regression analyses were used in data analyses. Generally, results indicated that family type made no major impact on participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother. Among participants in the biological parent group and the divorced single mother group, family of origin health significantly predicted more positive perceptions of the

divorced single mother. In this analysis, the regression model for the biological parent group was significant, while for the divorced single mother group it was not. Self-esteem was not found to contribute significantly to participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother, and thus did not mediate the relationship between family of origin health and perceptions of the divorced single mother. Finally, among the biological parent group, amount of interaction with single parent families headed by a divorced single mother significantly predicted more positive perceptions of the divorced single mother. Among the divorced single mother group, however, amount of time lived in a single parent family headed by a divorced mother did not significantly predict their perceptions of the divorced single mother.

Perceptions of Family of Origin Health, Self-Esteem,  
and the Divorced Single Mother Among College Students

by

Susan J. Burke

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Major Professor, representing Human Development and Family Sciences

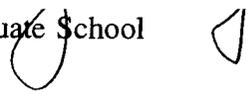
  
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# PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN HEALTH, SELF-ESTEEM, AND THE DIVORCED SINGLE MOTHER AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Because so many of today's families are not the traditional two-parent family, early childhood educators and family advocates are challenged with redefining, accepting, and respecting individuals who live in various other family structures. These nontraditional family structures may occur because of the death of a partner, divorce of a couple, or preference for a personal life style. Whatever the reason or circumstance, early childhood educators and family advocates have the professional responsibility to conduct themselves without bias against members of these families (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Recent research has suggested that the perceptions held by teachers and other individuals who work with families may be biased against nontraditional families (Amato, 1991; Bryan et al., 1986; Guttman et al., 1989). Where does this bias originate? Studies are available suggesting that perceptions individuals have about their families of origin are related to their perceptions of self and others (Franklin et al., 1991; Hovestadt, 1985; Parish & Nunn, 1986; Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). Furthermore, how individuals perceive themselves has been found to be related to their perception of others (Rosenberg, 1989). Therefore, individuals who perceive their families of origin as warm and respectful of individual uniqueness are more likely to perceive themselves and others positively. In addition, individuals who perceive themselves positively (high self-esteem) are more likely to perceive others positively,

including divorced single mothers. Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to explore the relationships between perceptions individuals have about their families of origin, themselves, and single parents, particularly divorced single mothers.

To better understand perceptions individuals have about single parents and sources of these perceptions, the present study employed ideas from the cognitive-perceptual approach. According to Markus and Zajonc (1985), this approach emphasizes the idea that perceivers have an internal cognitive structure, also known as theory, schema, prototype, category, stereotype, or attitude, which they use to receive, organize, and interpret events that are experienced in life. This cognitive structure develops over time and is the result of the many events, situations, and behaviors a perceiver encounters in life. Certain past experiences may lead to a cognitive structure that allows a perceiver to have positive perceptions of present life events, while other past experiences may lead to negative perceptions.

For this study, the concept of healthy family of origin perceptions was defined as the degree to which individuals perceive they were allowed during childhood to express their autonomy as persons and also were able to establish warm, nurturing, respectful, and intimate relationships with family members (Hovestadt, 1985). Erikson (1950) emphasized the need for individuals to achieve autonomy and intimacy as part of healthy growth and development. Schaefer and Olson (1981) suggested that intimacy should be considered an important dimension of healthy personality development. In other research concerning the influence of the family of origin on adolescent relationships, Benson et al. (1993) found that lack of autonomy in the

family resulted in individuals having doubts and insecurities about genuineness of relationships.

It is the proposition of the present study that individuals who have healthy perceptions of their families of origin during their childhood years would have more favorable perceptions of themselves and divorced single mothers. The basis for this proposition is that experiences in healthy families lead to more open acceptance of uniqueness among family members, and thus also lead to more respectful and intimate relationships in the family. These relationships then allow individuals to develop more favorable attitudes about themselves and other people (i.e., cognitive structures) regardless of the family structures (i.e., divorced single mothers) with which other people are associated.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of research literature, which guided the development of this study and led to its proposition, can be divided into three parts. The first part deals with studies focused on delineating perceptions individuals have about single parent families. The second part deals with studies focused on persons' perceptions of their families of origin and its impact on aspects of their lives. The third part deals with studies focused on self perception (self-esteem) and how it is related to individuals' perception of others.

### Perceptions of Single-Parent Families

Although the amount of literature on single-parent families has been expanding for the last quarter century, only in more recent years have researchers tried to fully examine and understand the nature of this family structure. Recent scholarly interest focused on the psychological health of single-parent families has stirred interesting debate in light of earlier studies of a negative bias against single-parent families (Blechman, 1982). This negative bias was pointed to quite early by Brandwein et al. (1975), who recognized that researchers stigmatized single-parent families headed by divorced women with descriptions such as "broken," "deviant," and "disorganized," and the possible adverse effects such stigmatization would have on these families. Even after Verazano and Hennon (1980) wrote about the negative myths held regarding single-parent families, and called for a more fair and fresh

approach to evaluating this family structure, research continued to be published about negative qualities and traits of single-parent families.

Since single-parent families most often are families headed by women, this study focuses on perceptions people have about divorced single mothers (see Appendix A). Over the years, single-parent mothers have been described in research as stressed, overburdened, unhappy, less nurturing, and potential abusers when compared to traditional two-parent families (Garbarino, 1979; Wallerstein, 1988). Glasser and Navarre (1965) and Hetherington et al. (1976) described single-parent families as compared to two-parent families to be lacking in good parent-child communication, unorganized in terms of household task, and inconsistent in parental decision making. Children in mother-headed single-parent families have been characterized as lonely, less emotionally and cognitively adjusted, inconsistently disciplined, and having achieved less educationally compared to children from "intact" families (Krein, 1986; McKinnon et al., 1982; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; Wallerstein, 1988). Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of children from divorced single-parent families in comparison to children from nondivorced or "intact" families have been more negative, indicating that the children were less socially, emotionally, and academically adjusted in these homes (Fuller, 1986; Guttman & Broudo, 1989; Santrock & Tracy, 1978).

In spite of the proliferation of studies focused on the negative characteristics of single-parent families, other studies are available that reveal the presence of positive characteristics. Simenaur & Carroll (1982), in their research on single men and women, found that the single parents in their study experienced an increased sense of

personal growth and had improved relationships with their children after the divorce; they also found that the divorced single-parent women, in particular, perceived themselves as better parents. According to DeFrain and Eirick (1981), single parents had good relationships with their children after the divorce. The parents in their study, overall, did not feel overburdened by their children, and felt their moods had improved with their children. In addition, Hodges et al. (1983) reported that divorced mothers perceived themselves as being just as warm and enjoyed their children just as much as mothers of two-parent families. Acock and Kiecolt (1989) did research on family structures during adolescence and adult adjustments. Their results suggested that economic deprivation associated with family disruption and current socioeconomic status, rather than family structure, were better indicators of adult adjustment.

In an assessment of parent-child relationships, Demo (1992) indicated that the negative consequences of single-parent family structure has been greatly exaggerated and strongly influenced by traditional views of the "normal" family. Most recently, research by Amato (1991) found that the majority of children accepted the inevitability of their parents' divorce and see it as a desirable alternative to continuing family conflict.

This review of literature related to perceptions of single-parent families indicates that people do hold various perceptions, stereotypes, and attitudes about single parents, which according to cognitive-perceptual theory (Markus & Zajonc, 1985) are cognitive structures that ultimately influence behavior toward single parents. The question of interest related to this thesis, however, focuses upon selected

perceptual factors that might play a role in the development of these cognitive structures. These include a person's perception of his or her family of origin and self, the number of years a person lived with a divorced single mother or the amount of interaction an individual from a two-parent biological family had with a divorced single mother. Regarding time-related factors, research has suggested that a child's age at the time of separation did not significantly affect adolescent behavior (Furstenberg & Teitler, 1994) nor did time since divorce affect childrens' perceptions of parental behavior (Krakauer, 1992).

Literature on social perception has suggested that a person can correct biased perceptions by others by providing corrective feedback to those people. Also, the more frequently a biased person positively interacts with a certain target person, the more positive perception that biased person will cognitively process (Zebrowitz, 1990).

### Perceptions of Family of Origin

A person's family of origin is the family in which a person has his or her beginning (Hovestadt et al., 1985). The family of origin is the place where people learn who they are and how to be that way. This family of origin comes in different forms, with different beliefs, behaviors, and emotions. No matter how different they are, each form has its own rules, norms, and expectations about the family and life outside the family (Dallos, 1991). According to Hovestadt et al. (1985), "... the impact of the family is deep and persuasive and continues to play an important role in the present" (p. 287).

Research has shown that perceptions people have of their family of origin influences different aspects of their lives. A study by Weinberg & Mauksch (1991) investigating life at work indicates that individuals become used to patterns of interaction in their families of origin, which then influence their lives outside of the home and in the work place.

Franklin et al. (1991) found that college-aged students who experienced parental divorce during the early years had a less positive perception of success of their own possible marriages than students who were from nondivorced families. In addition, Amato & Booth (1991) found that among individuals from divorced families, those who perceived their parents' marriage as unhappy held more favorable views about divorce. Among this same group of individuals, those whose parents had divorced when they were young held more positive attitudes toward divorce in later life when compared with those who grew up in nondivorced families.

Research by Fine & Hovestadt (1984) indicates that college students who had positive perceptions of their families of origin also had more positive perceptions about marriage in general. In addition, in a study by Mitchell and Dickerscheid (1985), positive perceptions of early family life experiences were found to be positively related to effective teacher behaviors among preschool children.

On the basis of these findings, it is clear that individuals' perceptions of their experiences in their families of origin had an impact on their perceptions about aspects of their lives. While no studies were available directly linking individuals' perceptions

of family of origin and their perceptions of single parent families, it seems reasonable that such a link does exist.

### Perceptions of Self

We can assume that family of origin experiences may lead to how one views other families and their members. In addition, there may be another variable, perception of self, which is influenced by family of origin experience, and in turn influences how one perceives others (including divorced single mothers).

To examine perception of self, this research will use the independent variable, self-esteem. High self-esteem, according to Rosenberg (1989), means that an individual has self-respect. Low self-esteem implies self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction. Rosenberg concluded from his research that extreme parental indifference was associated with lower self-esteem in children. Rosenberg suggested that lack of interest very likely goes along with lack of love, failure to treat a child with respect, and failure to give encouragement. More importantly, a child's feeling of self-worth is tied to feeling important among significant others in the child's life, such as family members.

Other researchers have shown the importance of family happiness in how children and adults view themselves (Fine, 1984; Hovestadt et al. 1985; Nunn & Parish, 1982; Parish et al., 1981; Parish & Nunn, 1986). Parish & Nunn (1986), in their research on the importance of family in forming life and personal values, concluded that as subjects' positiveness towards families increased, so too did they

value themselves more positively. When subjects viewed their families in a negative light, they tended to view themselves in the same manner. Family happiness, regardless of the family structure, is very important. Parish et al. (1981) suggested that children from unhappy, divorced families evaluated mothers more negatively than children from happy, divorced families.

As indicated earlier, research has suggested a correlation between family experiences and perception of self and others. Furthermore, Rosenberg (1989) suggested a relationship between self-esteem and how one views others. He concluded from his investigation on self-esteem and faith in people that as self-esteem decreases so does faith in people decrease. Rosenberg concluded that people act on the basis of their assumptions of what they are like, and these actions, in turn, have consequences for their lives in society.

Parish & Nunn (1986) suggested there was a relationship between how one evaluates family and how one evaluates self and parental figures. These researchers found that as students' negative evaluation towards the family increased, so did their negative perception of parental figures and themselves. Parish & Nunn (1986) suggested that the ability to deal with what life has to offer is based on early family life experiences.

Therefore, with these ideas in mind, the proposition explored in this research suggested that healthy family of origin perceptions among individuals would be positively related to more positive perceptions of self, which in turn, would relate to more favorable perceptions about divorced single mothers (Figure 1).

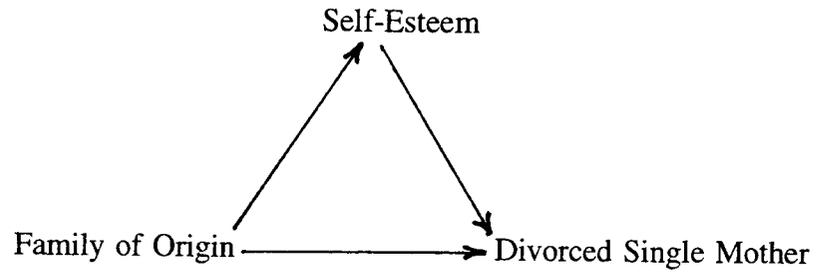


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

## CHAPTER 3 METHOD

### Participants

Participants for this study were 170 university students enrolled in a Human Sexuality course offered by the Human Development and Family Sciences Department at Oregon State University. One hundred of the participants were women, while the remaining 70 were men. In addition, 57 of the participants lived at some point with a divorced single mother, while 113 only lived with their two-parent biological families. Participants represented a wide cross section of students at the University, including various class levels, colleges at Oregon State University, and socioeconomic levels. Socioeconomic level was established using Hollingshead's four factor index of social status (1975). Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 46 with the sample having a mean age of 21. Table 1 shows the characteristics of participants of the two samples used for this study: those who lived with a divorced single mother (for either 5 years or less, or 6 years or more); and those students who never lived with a divorced single mother and were raised by both biological parents.

T-test and chi-square analyses were conducted to assess if there were any differences between the two groups in age, family income, gender, socioeconomic status, and major. No significant differences were found between the two groups with these variables.

Table 1. Characteristics of Sample		
Variable	Divorced Single Mother	Two-Parent Biological
Subjects (number)	57	113
Mean Age (years)	21	21
Standard Deviation <sup>1</sup>	2.27	3.65
Family Income (% frequency) <sup>2</sup>		
\$19,999 or less	5.88	4.12
\$20,000 to \$29,000	5.29	7.06
\$30,000 to \$49,000	5.29	14.71
\$50,000 or more	17.06	40.59
Gender (number) <sup>3</sup>		
Male	23	47
Female	34	66
Socioeconomic Status		
Mean	46	46.74
Standard Deviation <sup>4</sup>	9.68	11.85
Major (% frequency) <sup>5</sup>		
Business	12.35	6.47
Health	13.53	5.88
Home Economics/Education	16.47	7.06
Liberal Arts	14.12	9.41
Science	10.00	4.71
Years Lived with Divorced Single Mother (number)		
None	--	113
5 or less	27	--
6 or more	30	--
Amount of Interaction with Divorced Single Mother (number)		
None	--	28
A little	--	65
More than a little	--	14
A lot	--	6
<sup>1</sup> $t^2 = .10$ (not significant) <sup>2</sup> $\chi^2 = 7.14$ (not significant) <sup>3</sup> $\chi^2 = .02$ (not significant) <sup>4</sup> $t^2 = .41$ (not significant) <sup>5</sup> $\chi^2 = 1.17$ (not significant)		

Participants not fitting into either of these two groups were eliminated from the study along with respondents whose surveys were not completed. There were 230 surveys in all returned. Informed consent was granted by respondents via the required form (Appendix B).

### Instruments

Four instruments were used to collect the data for the present study. They included: (1) Hovestadt et al.'s Family of Origin Scale (Hovestadt et al., 1985), which was used to measure perceptions of family health; (2) Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965); (3) Ganong & Coleman's Semantic Differential Scale, which was called Perception of Divorced Mother Scale (Ganong and Coleman, 1983); and (4) a demographic questionnaire.

#### Family of Origin Health (FOH) Scale

Hovestadt et al.'s Family of Origin Scale was used to assess participants' perceptions of the health of their families of origin during their childhood years. The FOH is designed to assess two major concepts: autonomy and intimacy (see Appendix C). Hovestadt et al. felt that autonomy and intimacy were two essential and interwoven concepts related to healthy families.

For an individual to develop autonomy, Hovestadt et al. believed that a healthy family must emphasize such characteristics as clarity of expression, personal

responsibility, respect for other family members, openness to others in the family, and dealing with loss. On the other hand, intimacy in a healthy family comes from an emphasis on the expression of a wide range of feelings, creating a warm atmosphere in the home, dealing with conflict without unnecessary stress, promoting sensitivity in family members, and trusting in the goodness of human nature.

The FOH consists of 40 items, of which 20 were related to autonomy and the remaining 20 were related to intimacy (Appendix D). Participants were asked to rate each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagree (1 point). Ratings on each item were summed, creating a range of possible scores from 40 to 200 for the entire scale. Higher scores represent more healthy perceptions of the family of origin.

Test-retest reliability estimates for the scale, with a 2-week interval between testings and using 41 graduate students, have been .75 for the entire scale, .77 for autonomy, and .73 for intimacy. A Cronbach alpha of .75 and a standardized item alpha of .97 have been obtained for the entire scale.

Scores on the FOH have been related to scores on the Family Relationship Index (Holahan & Moos, 1983), revealing a correlation coefficient of .72. In addition, Berston and Schrader's (1982) Affectional and Associational Solidarity Scale has been related to FOS scores among adult children and their parents, revealing coefficients of .61 and .48, respectively, for mothers. These studies have provided the FOS with estimates of convergent validity (Govin et al., 1992).

### Perception of Divorced Mother (POD) Scale

Ganong and Coleman's Semantic Differential Scale (Appendix E) was used to assess participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother. The POD is a semantic differential consisting of nine pairs of bipolar adjectives which participants are asked to rate using a 7-point scale from 1 (negative pole) to 7 (positive pole).

The bipolar adjectives included in the POD consisted of hateful-affectionate, bad-good, unfair-fair, cruel-kind, unloving-loving, strict-unstrict, severe-lenient, unhappy-happy, and unlikable-likable. This scale was chosen by Ganong and Coleman (1983) because the adjectives were found to be appropriate for assessing an individual's perceptions of various family members. This scale has been used in two different studies by Ganong and Coleman (1983) and Fine (1986). Both studies investigated students' perceptions of parents. Fine (1986) argued that the use of this scale allowed researchers to compare the perceptions individuals have about different types of parents. Findings revealed that the scale did successfully discriminate between different types of parents, as predicted on the basis of past research (Fine, 1986; Ganong & Coleman, 1983). Biological parents were perceived more positively than stepparents.

### Self-Esteem (SE) Scale

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Appendix F) was used to assess participants' level of self-esteem. This scale consists of 10 statements which participants were

asked to respond to in four possible ways: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Responses were scored from 1 (lowest self-esteem) to 4 (highest self-esteem). Thus, the scores of participants on the SE ranged from 10 to 40, with the higher scores representing more positive self-esteem.

Internal reliability coefficients for the SE have ranged from .72 to .87 on five different populations (Wylie, 1989). Test-retest reliability estimates with both a 2-week (Silber & Tippett, 1965) and a 6-month (Byrne, 1983) time interval between testings have revealed coefficients of .85 and .63, respectively.

Convergent validity estimates have been obtained for the SE using Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory, which revealed coefficients ranging from .55 to .65 (Wylie, 1989).

#### Demographic Questionnaire (DQ)

In addition to the FOH, POD, and SE Scales, a demographic questionnaire (Appendix G) was administered to participants, asking them for background information to be used for sample description and analysis purposes. The demographic questionnaire includes items on gender, age, class standing, major, marital status, number of children, family structure subject grew up in, number of years lived with a divorced single mother, amount of interaction with a divorced single mother, mother's education, mother's occupation, father's education, father's occupation, and total family income. Responses to family structure subject grew up in were used to separate respondees into two subsamples: students who lived in a two-

parent biological family, and students who lived for awhile with a divorced single mother. Interaction with a divorced single mother was used in regression analysis on only the two-parent biological group. Number of years lived with a divorced single mother was used in regression analysis on the single mother group.

### Procedures

The FOH, POD, SE, and DQ were compiled in the form of a booklet for administration to participants. The positions of the FOH, POD, and SE in the booklet were counterbalanced to rule out test section effect. The DQ was placed at the end of the test booklet. Students were tested in the last 20 minutes of a Human Sexuality class period during Winter Term 1994. Administration time for completing the questionnaire was approximately 20 minutes.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purposes of the present study were twofold: 1) determine the relative contributions of the predictor variables, which were perception of family of origin health and self-esteem, to the criterion variable, which was perception of divorced single mother; and 2) determine the mediating contribution of self-esteem between family of origin health and perception of divorced single mothers. Of the 170 university students comprising the sample, 57 of the students lived at some point in their lives with a divorced single mother, while the remaining 113 lived only with their two biological parents.

Among students who only lived with their two biological parents, the contribution of the amount of interactions these students had with single parent families headed by a divorced mother to their perceptions of the divorced single mother was also explored. In addition, among students who lived at some point in their lives with a divorced single mother, the contribution of the amount of time lived in such a family situation to their perceptions of the divorced single mother was investigated.

As indicated in the Method chapter, preliminary statistical analyses of the data revealed no significant age, family income, gender, or socioeconomic differences between participants who only lived with their biological parents and those who lived at some point with a divorced single mother.

Several statistical analyses were undertaken to support the purposes of this study. First, means and standard deviations or frequencies were calculated for all

predictor and criterion variables. Predictor variables included family of origin health, self-esteem, amount of interaction with single parent families headed by a divorced mother (for student who only lived with two biological parents), and amount of time lived with a divorced single mother (for student who lived in such a family situation). The criterion variable was students' perception of the divorced single mother. Table 2 summarizes the means and standard deviations or frequencies associated with these predictor and criterion variables.

Second, t-tests were applied to the data to determine whether the two subsamples of students used in this study (i.e., divorced single mother group versus biological parents group) were significantly different from each other in their scores related to the predictor and criterion variables. As revealed in Table 2, these two groups were significantly different from each other in their perception of family of origin health ( $t(168) = 3.87, p < .001$ ). This indicated that students from the biological parents group had higher family of origin health scores than those from the divorced single mother group. These two groups did not differ from each other relative to their self-esteem and perception of the divorced single mother scores.

Third, correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the relationships that existed between the predictor and criterion variables of this study for the two subsamples separately. The coefficients for the three scales used in this study are presented in Table 3. (See Appendix H for correlation coefficients of sample characteristics.) Among students who lived with their biological parents and those who lived at some time with a divorced single mother, findings revealed that their family of origin health scores were significantly and positively related to their

Table 2. Comparison of Subsamples							
Variable	Divorced Single Mother			t Value	Two-Parent Biological		
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation		Standard Deviation	Mean	N
FOH <sup>1</sup>	57	138.35	28.50	3.87*	25.08	154.87	113
SE <sup>2</sup>	57	17.60	5.64	-1.13	4.60	16.68	113
POD <sup>3</sup>	57	44.21	8.09	-1.32	8.48	42.42	113
Years Lived w/ Divorced Single Mother:							
None	--	--	--	--	--	--	113
5 or less	27	--	--	--	--	--	--
6 or more	30	--	--	--	--	--	--
Amount of Interaction w/ Divorced Single Mother:							
None	--	--	--	--	--	--	28
A little	--	--	--	--	--	--	65
> a little	--	--	--	--	--	--	14
A lot	--	--	--	--	--	--	6
<sup>1</sup> Family of Origin Health <sup>2</sup> Self-Esteem <sup>3</sup> Perception of Divorced Single Mother * p < .001							

perceptions of the divorced single mother ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ;  $r = .31, p < .05$ ). For both subsamples of students, therefore, the more favorable their perception of family of origin health, the more positive their perceptions of the divorced single mother.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix for Subsamples						
X	Divorced Single Mother			Two-Parent Biological		
	POD <sup>1</sup>	FOH <sup>2</sup>	SE <sup>3</sup>	POD	FOH	SE
POD	1.00	.31*	-.15	1.00	.25**	-.15
FOH		1.00	-.35*		1.00	-.36***
SE			1.00			1.00

<sup>1</sup> Perception of Divorced Single Mother  
<sup>2</sup> Family of Origin Health  
<sup>3</sup> Self-Esteem  
\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01  
\*\*\* p < .001

In addition, among both subsamples of students, their self-esteem scores were significantly and negatively related to their family of origin health scores ( $r = -.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r = -.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Among both subsample of students, therefore, the lower their self-esteem scores, the higher their family of origin health scores. No significant relationships were found between self-esteem and perception of the divorced single mother among students in both subsamples. Finally, three separate hierarchical regressions also were performed to support the purposes of this study. In all regressions undertaken, the variables of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and family income acted as control variables.

In the first hierarchical regression, the entire sample of 170 students was used. In this analysis, the predictor variables included family type (i.e., biological parents versus divorced single mother group), family of origin health, and self-esteem. In the second hierarchical regression, only the subsample of 113 students who were raised by

both biological parents was used. In this analysis, the predictor variable of family type was dropped, but the variable called amount of interaction with single parent families headed by a divorced single mother (interaction) was added, along with the family of origin health and self-esteem variables. In the third hierarchical regression, only the subsample of 57 students who lived at one time with a divorced single mother was used. In this analysis, the predictor variable of family type was dropped, and the interaction variable was substituted with the variable referring to the amount of time these students lived in a single parent family headed by a divorced single mother. In all of these analyses, students perceptions of the divorced single mother was the criterion variable.

Table 4 presents the results of the hierarchical regression applied to the entire sample ( $N = 170$ ). In the control step of this regression, when the control variables of age, sex, socioeconomic status, and family income were analyzed, findings revealed that the control variables did not contribute significantly to explaining the criterion variable, that is, perception of the divorced single mother. In Step 1 of this analysis, the variable of family type did not contribute significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother. In Step 2, however, the variable of family type gained in significance ( $p < .05$ ), when the variable of family of origin health was added. In this step, the variable of family of origin health also made a very significant contribution to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother ( $p < .001$ ), which in combination with family type explained 10% of the variance ( $F(6,163) = 3.16, p < .01$ ), and alone significantly explained 6% of the variance ( $p < .001$ ). In Step 3, when the mediating variable of self-esteem was added to the regression, the variable of

Table 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Students' Perceptions of the Divorced Single Mother for the Entire Sample (N = 170)				
Variable Entered	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	F Value	R <sup>2</sup> Change
Control Step: Control Variables		.03	1.34	--
Gender	.14			
Age	.05			
Socioeconomic Status	.12			
Family Income	-.01			
Step 1: Family Type	.11	.04	1.45	.01
Step 2: Family Type	.18*			
Family of Origin Health	.27***	.10	3.16**	.06***
Step 3: Family Type	.18			
Family of Origin Health	.25**			
Self-Esteem	-.08	.11	2.85**	.01
* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001				

family type lost its significance, and self-esteem made no significant contribution to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother, uniquely but insignificantly explaining a minimal 1% of the variance. Family of origin health continued to contribute significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother ( $p < .01$ ), and in combination with other variables entered into the regression, the model was still significant ( $F(7,162) = 2.85, p < .01$ ). Overall, then, the variable of family of origin health contributed significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced single

mother, while the mediating variable of self-esteem did not. As with calculations of the correlation coefficients (Table 3), the more favorable a students' family of origin health scores, the more positive their perceptions of the divorced single mother.

Family type as a variable was a significant predictor only in combination with students' family of origin health scores, but lost its significance when self-esteem was added to the model.

Table 5 presents the results of the hierarchical regression applied to the subsample of students who only lived with their biological parents while growing up ( $N = 113$ ). In the control step of this regression, when the control variables of age, sex, socioeconomic status, and family income were analyzed, findings revealed that the control variables did not contribute significantly to explaining the criterion variable, that is, perception of the divorced single mother. In this analysis, the variable of amount of interaction students had with single parent families headed by a divorced mother was added as a predictor variable in place of the family type variable. In order to analyze for this effect, a dummy variable was created for this interaction, where 1 = a little interaction, 2 = more than a little interaction, and 3 = a lot of interaction. In Step 1 of this analysis, the amount of interaction with a single parent family headed by a divorced mother tended to ( $p < .10$ ) or significantly ( $p < .05$ ) contributed to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother, accounting for 13% of the variance, ( $F(7,105) = 2.23, p < .05$ ). In Step 2 of this analysis, when the variable of family of origin health was added to the regression, having a little interaction with single parent families headed by a divorced mother lost its significance, but having more than a little and a lot of interaction continued to

Table 5. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Students' Perceptions of Divorced Single Mother for Two-Parent Biological Sample (N = 113)				
Variable Entered <sup>1</sup>	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	F Value	R <sup>2</sup> Change
Control Step: Control Variables		.07	2.04	--
Gender	.18*			
Age	.09			
Socioeconomic Status	.16			
Family Income	.09			
Step 1: Amount of Interaction with Single Parent Family		.13	2.23*	.06**
1. A little	.20 <sup>t</sup>			
2. More than a little	.21*			
3. A lot	.22*			
Step 2: Amount of Interaction with Single Parent Family				
1. A little	.20			
2. More than a little	.19*			
3. A lot	.19*			
Family of Origin Health	.19*	.16	2.51**	.03*
Step 3: Amount of Interaction with Single Parent Family				
1. A little	.19 <sup>t</sup>			
2. More than a little	.20 <sup>t</sup>			
3. A lot	.20*			
Family of Origin Health	.17 <sup>t</sup>			
Self-Esteem	-.08	.17	2.30*	.01
<sup>1</sup> Dummy variable used for amount of interaction with single parent family. <sup>t</sup> p < .10 * p < .05 ** p < .01				

maintain their significance ( $p < .05$ ). Also in this step, family of origin health made a significant contribution to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother ( $p < .05$ ), which in combination with the interaction variable explained 16% of the variance ( $F(8,104) = 2.51, p < .01$ ), and alone significantly explained about 3% of the variance. Finally, in Step 3, when the mediating variable of self-esteem was added to the regression, self-esteem made no significant contribution to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother, uniquely explaining only a minimal of 1% of the variance. In this step, however, the interaction and family of origin health variables all tended to ( $p < .10$ ) or significantly ( $p < .05$ ) contributed to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother, and in combination with other variables entered into the regression, the model was significant but less so than in Step 2 ( $F(7,162) = 2.30, p < .05$ ). Overall, therefore, among students who only lived with their biological parents, interactions with the single parent family headed by a divorced mother, and their family of origin health scores tended to or significantly contributed to their perceptions of the divorced single mother, while the mediating variable of self-esteem did not.

The greater the amount of interactions with single parent families among students from biological parent families and the more favorable their family of origin health scores, the more positive their perceptions of the divorced single mother.

Table 6 presents the hierarchical regression applied to the subsample of students who lived at some time in a single parent family headed by a divorced mother ( $N = 57$ ). In the control step of this regression, when the control variables of age, sex, socioeconomic status, and family income were analyzed, findings revealed

Table 6. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Students' Perceptions of the Divorced Single Mother for Sample Where Students Had Lived with a Divorced Single Mother (N = 57)				
Variable Entered <sup>1</sup>	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	F Value	R <sup>2</sup> Change
Control Step: Control Variables		.01	.06	--
Gender	.03			
Age	.01			
Socioeconomic Status	-.03			
Family Income	-.04			
Step 1: Years Lived with Divorced Single Mother--6 years or more	.16	.03	.31	.02
Step 2: Years Lived with Divorced Single Mother--6 years or more Family of Origin Health	.13 .33*	.13	1.24	.10*
Step 3: Years Lived with Divorced Single Mother--6 years or more Family of Origin Health Self-Esteem	.12 .30* -.09	.14	1.10	.01
<sup>1</sup> Dummy variable used for years lived with divorced single mother. 0 = 5 years or less; 1 = 6 years or more. * p < .05 ** p < .01				

that the control variables did not contribute significantly to explaining the criterion variable, that is, perception of the divorced single mother. In this analysis, the variable of years lived with a divorced single mother was added as a predictor variable

in place of either family type or interaction with single families. To analyze for this effect, a dummy variable was created for years lived with a divorced single mother. This variable consisted of two categories: those students who lived 0 to 5 years with such a mother, and those students who lived 6 years or more with such a mother. In Step 1 of this analysis, the variable of years lived with a divorced single mother did not contribute significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother. In Step 2, when the variable of family of origin health was added, years lived with a divorced single mother continued to be nonsignificant, but the variable of family of origin health contributed significantly to students' perception of the divorced single mother, which in combination with the time lived with a divorced single mother variable explained 13% of the variance, and alone significantly explained 10% of the variance. However, the overall model in this step was not significant. Finally, in Step 3, when the mediating variable of self-esteem was added to the regression, self-esteem as well as years lived with a divorced single mother made no significant contribution. However, family of origin health continued to contribute significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother ( $p < .05$ ); although, the overall model in this step was nonsignificant and became slightly less so than in Step 2. Overall, therefore, among students who lived at some time with a divorced single mother, the variable of family of origin health contributed significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced mother, while the mediating variable of self-esteem and the time spent living with a divorced single mother did not.

Generally, the more favorable the perceptions of family of origin health among students who lived at some point with a divorced single mother, the more positive

their perceptions of the divorced single mother. Caution must be taken in considering this result, however, since the contribution of family of origin health, while significant, could not explain a significant percent of the variance in the perceptions of the divorced single mother scores to make the overall model significant. Also, when considering these results, the large number of variables in each separate regression analysis should be noted. The combination of seven, nine, and eight variables in each regression analysis (see Tables 4, 5, and 6, respectively) could have affected the results of each separate analysis.

## CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

To understand perceptions individuals have about the divorced single mother and the sources of these perceptions, the present study utilized a cognitive-perceptual approach to identify several significant variables for investigation. Among the significant variables identified in a review of literature related to this area that might contribute to individuals' perceptions of a divorced single mother were the perceptions of their family of origin health and self-esteem. The general purposes of the present study, therefore, were to explore how individuals' perceptions of their family of origin health and self-esteem contributed to their perceptions of the divorced single mother, and whether self-esteem mediated between these individuals' perceptions of their family of origin health and their perceptions of the divorced single mother.

Participants included 170 university students (100 women and 70 men) enrolled in a human sexuality course offered at a northwestern university. They represented a wide cross section of students at the university, including those from various class levels, colleges, socioeconomic and income levels, with ages ranging from 18 to 46 years. Socioeconomic level was generally high. Fifty-seven of these participants lived at some point in their lives with a divorced single mother, while 113 only lived with their two-parent biological families. These two subsamples of participants were not significantly different from each other with respect to their ages, gender composition, socioeconomic status, and income levels.

In addition to the family of origin health and self-esteem predictor variables, when data from the entire sample were analyzed, family type was included as another

predictor variable. However, when data from the subsample of participants who only lived with their biological parents were analyzed, the variable of amount of interactions with single parent families headed by a divorced mother was substituted for the family type variable. With respect to participants who at some time lived with a divorced single mother, when their data were analyzed, the variable of the amount of time lived with a divorced single mother was substituted for the interactions variable. In all multivariate analyses undertaken, the variables of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and income levels acted as control variables. In all analyses conducted, none of these variables contributed significantly to explaining participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother.

Among the variables identified on the basis of cognitive perceptual theory and a review of literature as contributing to an individual's perception of the divorced single mother, the variable of perception of family of origin health was by far the most predictive. Generally, the more favorable students' perceptions of their family of origin, the more positively they will likely perceive the divorced single mother. Self-esteem did not contribute significantly to students' perceptions of the divorced single mother, nor did it mediate the relationship between family of origin health and perception of the divorced single mother. In addition, among participants who lived only with two biological parents, the amount of interaction they had with single parent families headed by a divorced mother had a significant impact on their perception of the divorced single mother. The more interaction they had, the more positive their perceptions of the divorced single mother. Finally, whether a student came from a

family headed by a divorced single mother or not, family type made only minimal impact on perception of the divorced single mother.

For purposes of discussion, the major results obtained from this study are discussed below according to overall sample findings and comparison of subsample findings. The limitations of the study and implications for early childhood educators also are discussed in separate sections.

### Overall Sample Findings

With respect to the overall sample, a number of significant findings can be addressed. First, the hierarchical regression for the entire sample indicated that the variable of family type made no major or only minimal contributions to participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother. This minimal contribution was only in combination with participants' family of origin health scores. Past research has suggested that the family type a person comes from contributes to how that individual perceives nontraditional family life, with those from two-parent biological families having more negative views of nontraditional family life than those from other family structures (Amato & Booth, 1991). In addition, research by Fine (1986) and Fluit and Paradise (1991) suggested that students from single-parent and step families had less stereotypical perceptions of nontraditional family types than students from two-parent biological families. Furthermore, Parish et al. (1981) indicated that children in divorced homes evaluated their mothers more negatively than children from two-parent families. These results are in contradiction with findings of the present study,

indicating that an individual's family type had no major impact on their perception of the divorced single mother. Perhaps, there are other factors more important than family type, such as family of origin experiences, which affect an individual's perception of the divorced single mother. In fact, Goldstein-Hendley et al. (1986) found that teacher ratings of children's behavior were not found to be related to the marital status of the children's parents. This may also be so with respect to the relationship between persons' family type and their perceptions of the single divorced mother.

Second, findings associated with the three hierarchical regressions undertaken relative to the data revealed that family of origin health made a significant or tended to make a significant contribution to participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother. This means that among participants who lived only with two biological parents, and those who at some time lived with a divorced single mother, those who had generally more favorable family of origin health perceptions also held more positive views about the divorced single mother. These findings were further supported by the correlation coefficients calculated regarding the simple relationships between these variables for each subsample. Therefore, regardless of family type, those who had more positive views about their family of origin health also viewed divorced single mothers more positively. As such, these results do support Parish et al.'s finding (1981) that in happy families, regardless of family type, children positively valued themselves and others. Likewise, as suggested by Hovestadt et al. (1985), individuals' positive perceptions of their family of origin were also related to their positive sense of autonomy. This positive sense of autonomy allowed such

individuals to have a broader picture of the world outside the family. As Weinberg and Mauksch (1991) indicated, individuals' patterns of interactions within their family of origin influence their lives outside the family. If a person perceives his or her family of origin in a positive way, then such a person will tend to see the best in others and have a broader, more positive view of life outside the family.

Third, the variable of self-esteem made no significant contribution as a mediator between participants' perceptions of family of origin health and their perceptions of the divorced single mother. While not significant, the contributions of self-esteem in the hierarchical regressions were all in the negative direction. In fact, the simple correlation coefficient calculated for the relationship between participants' self-esteem and their perceptions of the divorced single mother was negative and significant for both subsamples of participants studied. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between the self-esteem of participants from the biological parents and divorced single mother groups. These findings do not coincide with results of previous research by Parish et al. (1981) regarding the positive relationship between self-esteem and perception of parents. However, they do support findings of Holland and Andre (1994) that marital status of parents made no significant contribution to the self-esteem of adolescents from two-parents and single parent-families. In fact, Gately and Schwedel (1992) indicated that children from single-parent families may experience increased self-esteem after divorce because of the new challenges they must take on and master. Given these latter results, perhaps the negative relationship between self-esteem and perception of the single divorced mother may be best explained on the basis of an adolescent's developing sense of autonomy.

According to Erickson (1950), the development of autonomy is part of the healthy growth and development of any individual, particularly during adolescence. Such autonomy may lead to conflicts between parents and children, which may be generalized to parents in general. As a result, the relationship between a healthy sense of autonomy and a more negative view of the parent figure is likely. Indeed, as Kalter (1990) discovered, during adolescence, individuals modify their views of parents. In addition to admirable qualities, adolescents come to view their parents as also having a number of limitations and faults as well.

#### Comparison of Subsample Findings

In reference to findings associated with a comparison of the subsamples used in this study, first, the t-test result associated with the family of origin health scores of the two subsamples revealed that these two groups were significantly different from each other. Participants who lived only with their two biological parents had significantly more favorable family of origin health scores than those who had at some time lived with a divorced single mother. This finding supports those found by Parish and Nunn (1986) indicating more negative perception of the family by children in divorced homes than those from two-parent families. Fluit and Paradise (1991) also suggested less satisfaction with family life among children from divorced in comparison to nondivorced families. Furthermore, Holnack (1992) found that subjects whose parents were divorced perceived their family of origin less close and less organized than those whose parents were married. Thus, family type does play a role

in children's perceptions of their family of origin health. However, as suggested by Kalter (1990), perhaps it is not family type that is important, but the consequences of how the divorce experience affects children's perceptions that are important. The crises encountered by such a family, including parental conflicts, contact with noncustodial parents, economic decline, and residential changes, all make their impact on the child within such a family.

Second, results of the separate regression analyses undertaken relative to participants from the biological and divorced single mother groups revealed that among participants who lived only with their biological parents, the amount of interactions they had with single parent families headed by a divorced mother tended to or significantly contributed to their perceptions of the divorced single mother. Generally, the more interactions these participants had with single parent families, the more positive were their views of the divorced single mother. In the past, research suggested that people held biased views of single parent mothers. Families headed by women have been described as "broken", "deviant", and "disorganized" (Brandwein, 1975). Children from these homes have been perceived more negatively than children from two-parent biological families (Fuller, 1986; Gutlman & Bourdo, 1989; Santrock & Tracy, 1978). Perhaps if these studies had taken into account the variable of amount of interaction subjects had with single parent families, such biased views may not have been as paramount. According to perceptual theory (Zebowitz, 1990), contacts between an individual and the other influences that individual's perception of the other. Such contacts have a way of refuting biased impressions a person has of the other. Information absorbed in face to face interactions often take precedence over

a perceiver's abstract stereotypic expectations of the other (Cohen, 1981). Thus, with such interactions come more realistic perceptions of the other, which are likely to include both positive as well and negative experiences encountered by the other.

On the other hand, analyses of the data also revealed that among participants who had at some time lived with a divorced single mother, the amount of time spent in such a family did not contribute significantly to their perceptions of the divorced single mother. This finding is in support of those obtained by Krakauer (1992), which indicated that time since divorce or child's age at divorce had little or no effect on children's perception of their parent's behavior. Perhaps by virtue of their relationship with their mothers, children do form a basic consistent view of their mothers, which does not basically change as a result of the divorce, but remains intact no matter how long one lives in a single parent family.

Finally, while separate regression analyses revealed that the variable of family of origin health made a significant contribution to the perception of the single divorced mother among participants from both subsample groups, the contribution of family of origin health among these participants affected the overall regression models differently. For participants in the biological parents group, its contribution made the overall regression model significant, while for the divorced single mother group, it did not. A number of possible suggestions can be made to explain this difference. All, however, are conjectural at this point.

First, for participants in the biological parents group, it appears likely that their perceptions would have been greatly influenced by their experiences with their own mothers in their families of origin. This is because their perceptions of the divorced

single mother occurred not as a result of living with one but as a result of only limited interactions with such a single parent family. In this case, experiences in their families of origin will likely have a strong impact on their perception of mothers in other situations, such as the divorced single mother. Among participants in the divorced single mother group, however, since their perceptions of a divorced single mother was asked for, it appears likely that their actual single mothers' behavior would have been thought of rather than a generalized assessment of their family of origin. In this case, participants' general family of origin assessment would have much less of an impact than their single mothers' characteristics.

Second, research on children from divorced homes has indicated that children often gain a great deal of strength and maturity from such an experience (Johnson & Hutchinson, 1989). Such strength and maturity often leads them to become more autonomous in their perceptions and behaviors. As a result, they become more independent from their families; thus, the influence of their families of origin on their perceptions is likely to be less important.

Third, findings in the present study indicated that the significance of family of origin health in predicting the biological parent group participants' perception of the divorced single mother was in combination with the amount of interaction a student had with families headed by a divorced single mother. Family of origin health, although uniquely and significantly contributed to the overall model (3% of variance), was not as great as the unique contribution of the interaction variable to the overall model (6%). This suggests that important variables other than family of origin health are also present in explaining participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother.

In the divorced single mother group, no such comparable variable was studied; although amount of time lived with a divorced single mother was included as a variable for analysis, it made no significant contribution.

Finally, the small sample size available for study in the divorced single mother group ( $N = 57$ ) may have limited the present researcher's capacity to fully understand the significance of the family of origin health variable in predicting their perceptions of the divorced single mother. The biological parent sample was twice as large as the divorced single mother group sample.

#### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although attempts were made to control for a number of variables that may have influenced the results of this study, a few important limitations were present that suggests caution must be taken in generalizing the findings obtained. First, the sample size was unequal and small, which may have greatly influenced the results of this study. The biological parent group was twice as large and the divorced single parent group. This perhaps did not allow the researcher to accurately understand the relationships between the variables of interest in this study among the smaller group. A larger sample of participants in the divorced single parent group may have helped to bolster the validity of the present findings.

Second, the sample used was limited to college students. Results obtained, therefore, are generalizable only to this group of young adults. The experience of divorce affects children differently at different ages (Wallerstein, 1988) and the

amount of interactions children from nondivorced parents have with single parent families differ depending upon the age of the child. In the present study, such interactions were significant in predicting biological parent group participants' perceptions of the divorced single mother. Future studies, therefore, might wish to conduct similar studies using participants at other ages levels to see whether the present findings are maintained.

Third, the use of survey questionnaires to obtain information on participants relative to their attitudes and family life had limitations. For example, participants in answering the survey questionnaires could have easily answered them on the basis of social convention rather than providing the researcher with their actual perceptions. In addition, some participants reported having difficulty in responding to the bipolar questionnaire used in assessing their perceptions of the divorced single mother. Using a single continuum to assess participants' perceptions on a dimension may have been easier. Furthermore, information obtained on the family type variable was limited. Although attempts were made to obtain clear samples of participants in the biological parent and divorced single parent groups, it was evident that such division was not as clear cut. Moreover, there are many different family types, and several individuals do live in different family types during the course of their lives. Future studies should reexamine this variable in order to obtain more accurate and exact information. Such information can then lead to studies which take into consideration the complexity of the variable of family type in research, not eliminating large numbers of participants who do not fit into the limited pre-established family type categories.

Finally, this study focused on college students' perceptions of the divorced single mother. While studying college students has its merits, since they do influence the perceptions of others, and some of them will eventually work with young children who come from a variety of family types in their later professional lives, it is important that similar studies be done with teachers and counselors who have direct impact on the lives of children and families living in a wider range of family types. Past research has suggested that teachers hold biased attitudes toward single parent families headed by women (Fuller, 1986; Guttman & Broudo, 1989; Santrock & Tracy, 1978). Future studies could begin to identify what important variables are influencing the development of these biases, and how such biases could be dealt with in training programs designed for these professionals, focusing on helping them develop strategies that would positively benefit children and parents from all family life circumstances.

### Implications for Early Childhood Educators

What are some of the implications of the present findings relative to the importance of students' perceptions of their family of origin health, self-esteem, and the divorced single mother? More specifically, what implications do the present findings have for professionals who work with families, including early childhood education teachers.

First, this study indicated that there were no significant differences between students who grew up in a two-parent biological family and those brought up in a

divorced single-parent family in their perceptions of the divorced single mothers. Family type, therefore, was not important in students' perceptions of the divorced single mother. This suggests that educators, rather than focus on their perceptions of family type differences among people, move away from them to addressing the unique needs of all families in their work. While it is important for teachers to acknowledge and deal with their biases toward single parent families, it is of utmost importance that they focus their attention on supporting all families, no matter what family type the teachers come from.

Second, the present study found that the family type students lived in affected the way the students perceived their family of origin health. Students who lived at one time with a divorced single mother perceived their family of origin health significantly less positively than students who grew up in a two-parent biological family. This difference may be due to the students' negative experiences associated with the divorce. Therefore, educators should be sensitive to the needs of children who are or have been in family crisis. However, educators also should be careful not to reinforce feelings in children that their divorced single parent family is "broken" nor assume children from single parent families are different from others.

Third, the present study found no significant differences between the self-esteem and perception of family of origin health among students from the biological parent and the divorced single parent groups. These findings suggest that educators begin to avoid automatically expecting individuals to manifest a wide variety of problems because of the family type they grew up in. Individuals have different reactions to life no matter what family type they grew up in, and children in all

families strive for nurturance and autonomy in their lives. It is such nurturance and autonomy among all children that educators should be foremost concerned about.

Fourth, in the present study, students' perceptions of their family of origin health was significantly related to their perceptions of the divorced single mother. The more positive their perceptions of their family of origin health, the more positive their perceptions of the divorced single mother. Thus, the more positive experiences individuals have within their families, the more likely such individuals will have positive perceptions, and perhaps, behave positively toward others. It is important for early childhood educators, therefore, to capitalize on the positive experiences children have within their families whatever family type they come from, since these favorable perceptions can influence such a child's perceptions of others and their family. Likewise, it is important for early childhood educators to examine their perceptions of members from various family types, so that biases in their perceptions may be effectively dealt with for the benefit of all children and families.

Finally, the more interactions students had with families headed by a divorced single mother, the more positive were their perceptions of such a mother. It appears that such interactions contributed significantly to students' awareness of the positive aspects of the divorced single mother. Early childhood educators, therefore, should open themselves to opportunities to interact with families of all family types in sharing their concerns, joys, and successes in a positive environment of support, trust, and understanding so that all children, their parents, and teachers may benefit positively from them.

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APPENDICES

## Appendix A Summary of Single Parent Literature Review

Table 7. Summary of Single-Parent Literature Review			
Author	Subject	Variable	Results/Conclusions
Garbarino (1979)	Reported abusers (mixed family type)	Census data: economic development, educational resources, rural/urban, socioeconomic situation of mothers	Relationship found between single-parent mothers with low income/less education and child abuse
Wallerstein (1988)	Children ages 3-18 and their families (Calif. Children of Divorce Project)  No comparison group	Parent/child relationships Stages and process of divorce Long-range outcomes Mediation Custody	Parents experience a diminished capacity to parent their children during acute phase of the divorce process and often during transition phase Decline in emotional sensitivity and support for the child Child neglect can be a serious hazard Limit nurturance to child Single parents unhappy
Glasser & Navarre (1965)	One parent families No comparisons	Family structure Age difference between child & parent Sex of parent & child Task Communication Power structure Affectional structure	Parent likely to be limited in social ties Loss of one parent produces a structural distortion in communication between child & parent Loss of one parent destroys the group Needs of children may be intolerable to the parent and damaging to the child Poverty in one parent families tends to go together
Hetherington et al. (1976)	24 divorced families Comparison group was 24 "intact" families (2-year longitudinal study)	Family interaction Sex of child/parent Family structure Time intervals (2 months, 1 year, 2 years)	One-year households of divorced mothers more disorganized Divorced women felt trapped (more nonworking than working) Divorced parents communicate less with their children one year after the divorce Significant difference and interactions between divorced parent and child 1-2 years after divorce
MacKinnon et al. (1982)	20 employed divorced mothers Comparison groups of 20 married women and 20 married-employed women (all Caucasian and middle class)	Family type Employed Home environment of children Income	Home environment of children of divorced working mothers found to be less cognitively and socially stimulating
Krein (1986)	Matched mother/son data set from NLS (type of single-parent family not controlled) Comparison group of intact families	Number of years lived in single-parent family Number of siblings Mother worked Mother/father education Family income Socioeconomic achievement of young men Educational attainment of young men Marital status of young men	Living in single-parent family has negative effect on number of years of education completed for young men Negative effect of single-parent family is reduced but not eliminated when income is controlled Living in single-parent family has only marginal effect on earnings Mother's education impacts son's educational attainment

**Table 7. Summary of Single-Parent Literature Review  
(Continued)**

Author	Subject	Variable	Results/Conclusions
Mueller & Cooper (1986)	Persons 19-24 years old: 123 from single-parent families and 1,245 from traditional two-parent families	Control for economic conditions Family structure Educational, economic, and occupational attainment Marital stability Marital status/family formation of young adult	Persons raised by single parents tended to have lower educational, economic, and occupational attainment Persons from single-parent families tended to have a child at a younger age and be separated or divorced rather than married Factors other than economic disadvantage contributed to findings such as lack of father in family
Fuller (1986)	117 teachers	Teacher age Teacher parenting status (single-parent experience or not) Perception of child's school behavior Child's family type	Positive behaviors are more often associated with children from "intact" homes Negative behaviors are more often associated with children from single-parent families Age of teacher seems to influence perceptions of children Teacher experience as single parents were nonsignificant
Guttman & Broudo (1989)	76 Israeli teachers	Academic, social, emotional levels of 5th grade boys Child's family type (divorced, intact, remarried, conflicted)	Teachers expect a similar level of academic functioning of children from all family types Teachers evaluated social and emotional functioning of child from intact family as better than child from other family types Teachers evaluated child from divorced and remarried family as emotionally functioning better than child from conflicted family
Santrock & Tracy (1978)	30 undergraduate and graduate students	Family structure of child Happiness Emotional adjustment Coping with stress	Subjects rated the divorced child more negatively than child from intact families on happiness, emotional adjustment, and coping with stress
Simenaur & Carroll (1982)	367 divorced respondents: 132 males, 235 females (no comparison group)	Happiness/well-being Relationship with children	60% of women reported happiness/well-being improved after divorce 76% of women reported increased sense of personal growth after divorce 54% of women reported improved relationship with children after divorce
DeFrain & Eirick (1981)	33 divorced fathers 36 divorced mothers	History of divorce process Feelings as a single parent Child rearing Children's feelings and behaviors Social relationships Age Education Occupation Income Age at divorce Race Number of children	For a majority of mothers and fathers, family life improved after divorce Parents felt they had good relationships with their children after divorce Parents did not feel overburdened by their children after divorce Minority of parents hit their children

**Table 7. Summary of Single-Parent Literature Review  
(Continued)**

Author	Subject	Variable	Results/Conclusions
Hodges et al. (1983)	30 divorced mothers Mothers of 60 children from intact families	Socioeconomic status Age Education Family type Child adjustment Sex of child Time since separation Quality of parenting	Divorced mothers perceived themselves as being just as warm and enjoyed children as much as mothers in intact families Time available did not differ between single mothers and mothers of intact families

## Appendix B Paradigm for the Family of Origin Health Scale

Table 8. Paradigm for the Family of Origin Health Scale			
Construct	Meaning in a Healthy Family	Positive Scale Items	Negative Scale Items
<b>AUTONOMY CONCEPT</b>			
A. Clarity of expression	Thoughts and feelings are clear in the family	24, 34	9, 16
B. Responsibility	Family members claim responsibility for their own actions.	11, 38	5, 18
C. Respect for others	Family members are allowed to speak for themselves.	15, 19	4, 28
D. Openness to others	Family members are receptive to one another.	6, 14	23, 37
E. Acceptance of separation and loss	Separation and loss are dealt with openly in the family.	10, 36	20, 25
<b>INTIMACY CONCEPT</b>			
A. Range of feelings	Family members express a wide range of feelings.	1, 12	32, 39
B. Mood & tone	Warm, positive atmosphere exists in the family.	29, 40	2, 22
C. Conflict resolution	Normal conflicts are resolved without undue stress.	27, 31	7, 13
D. Empathy	Family members are sensitive to one another.	21, 35	17, 30
E. Trust	The family sees human nature as basically good.	3, 8	26, 33

## Appendix C Survey Explanation and Consent Form

## INFORMED CONSENT

To the Participant:

The purpose of this study is to assess college students' perception of family and its members. We know that there is great variability in how people perceive families and the individuals that live in them, and that there is no one right way to view them. You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that taps how you perceive the family you grew up in, how you perceive yourself, and how you perceive a particular parent figure.

These procedures should not take more than 20 minutes. Your contribution will add much to the knowledge that is available in this field. Your name will never be connected with your particular answers, and only members of our qualified research team will have access to any information you provide. Any data or answers to questions will remain confidential with regard to your identity. You are free to withdraw your consent or terminate your participation at any time.

\*\*\*\*\*

This is to certify that I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in a scientific investigation as an authorized part of the educational and research program of Oregon State University, conducted by Susan Burke, under the supervision of Dr. Alan Sugawara, Professor of Human Development and Family Sciences.

This investigation has been fully explained to me by \_\_\_\_\_ and I understand the explanation. The procedures are described on this form and have been discussed with me. I understand that I am free to deny any answer to specific items or questions in the questionnaire.

I understand that any data or answers to questions will remain confidential with regard to my identity. I further understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

## Appendix D Family of Origin Health Scale

Directions: The *family of origin* is the family with which you spent most or all of your childhood years. This scale is designed to help you recall how your family of origin functioned. Each family is unique and has its own ways of doing things. Thus, there are no right or wrong choices in this scale. What is important is that you respond as honestly as you can. In reading the following statements, apply them to your family of origin, as you remember it. Using the following scale, circle the appropriate number. Please respond to each statement.

Key:

5 (SA) = Strongly agree that it describes my family of origin.

4 (A) = Agree that it describes my family of origin.

3 (N) = Neutral

2 (D) = Disagree that it describes my family of origin.

1 (SD) = Strongly disagree that it describes my family of origin.

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. In my family, it was normal to show both positive and negative feelings.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The atmosphere in my family usually was unpleasant.	5	4	3	2	1
3. In my family, we encouraged one another to develop new friendships.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Differences of opinion in my family were discouraged.	5	4	3	2	1
5. People in my family often made excuses for their mistakes.	5	4	3	2	1
6. My parents encouraged family members to listen to one another.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Conflicts in my family never got resolved.	5	4	3	2	1
8. My family taught me that people were basically good.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I found it difficult to understand what other family members said and how they felt.	5	4	3	2	1
10. We talked about our sadness when a relative or family friend died.	5	4	3	2	1
11. My parents openly admitted it when they were wrong.	5	4	3	2	1
12. In my family, I expressed just about any feeling I had.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Resolving conflicts in my family was a very stressful experience.	5	4	3	2	1
14. My family was receptive to the different ways various family members viewed life.	5	4	3	2	1
15. My parents encouraged me to express my views openly.	5	4	3	2	1

16.	I often had to guess at what other family members thought or how they felt.	5	4	3	2	1
17.	My attitudes and my feelings frequently were ignored or criticized in my family.	5	4	3	2	1
18.	My family members rarely expressed responsibility for their actions.	5	4	3	2	1
19.	In my family, I felt free to express my own opinions.	5	4	3	2	1
20.	We never talked about our grief when a relative or family friend died.	5	4	3	2	1
21.	Sometimes in my family, I did not have to say anything, but I felt understood.	5	4	3	2	1
22.	The atmosphere in my family was cold and negative.	5	4	3	2	1
23.	The members of my family were not very receptive to one another's views.	5	4	3	2	1
24.	I found it easy to understand what other family members said and how they felt.	5	4	3	2	1
25.	If a family friend moved away, we never discussed our feelings of sadness.	5	4	3	2	1
26.	In my family, I learned to be suspicious of others.	5	4	3	2	1
27.	In my family, I felt that I could talk things out and settle conflicts.	5	4	3	2	1
28.	I found it difficult to express my own opinions in my family.	5	4	3	2	1
29.	Mealtimes in my home usually were friendly and pleasant.	5	4	3	2	1
30.	In my family, no one cared about the feelings of other family members.	5	4	3	2	1
31.	We usually were able to work out conflicts in my family.	5	4	3	2	1
32.	In my family, certain feelings were not allowed to be expressed.	5	4	3	2	1
33.	My family believed that people usually took advantage of you.	5	4	3	2	1
34.	I found it easy in my family to express what I thought and how I felt.	5	4	3	2	1
35.	My family members usually were sensitive to one another's feelings.	5	4	3	2	1
36.	When someone important to us moved away, our family discussed our feelings of loss.	5	4	3	2	1

37.	My parents discouraged us from expressing views different from theirs.	5	4	3	2	1
38.	In my family, people took responsibility for what they did.	5	4	3	2	1
39.	My family had an unwritten rule: Don't express your feelings.	5	4	3	2	1
40.	I remember my family as being warm and supportive.	5	4	3	2	1



## Appendix F Perception of Divorced Mother Scale

Directions: The items below inquire about what kind of person you think is a divorced single-mother. Each item consists of a pair of characteristics, with the numbers 1 to 7 in between. For example:

Not artistic 1    2    3    4    5    6    7 Very Artistic

Each pair describes contradictory characteristics--that is, someone cannot be both at the same time, such as not artistic and very artistic.

The numbers form a scale between the two extremes. You are to choose a number which best describes where you believe divorced single mothers fall on the scale. For example, if you think they have no artistic ability, you would choose 1. If you think they are pretty good, you might choose 5 or 6. If you think they are only medium, you might choose 4, and so forth.

Please circle the number that best describes your feelings about divorced single-mothers "in general" and not on the basis of a specific person you know.

Hateful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Affectionate
Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Bad
Unfair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Fair
Cruel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Kind
Loving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unloving
Strict	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Strict
Severe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Lenient
Happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unhappy
Unlikable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Likable

Directions: The items below inquire about what kind of person you think is your own mother. Each item consists of a pair of characteristics, with the numbers 1 to 7 in between. For example:

Not artistic 1    2    3    4    5    6    7 Very Artistic

Each pair describes contradictory characteristics--that is, someone cannot be both at the same time, such as not artistic and very artistic.

The numbers form a scale between the two extremes. You are to choose a number which best describes where you believe your own mother falls on the scale. For example, if you think she has no artistic ability, you would choose 1. If you think she is pretty good, you might choose 5 or 6. If you think she is only medium, you might choose 4, and so forth.

Please circle the number that best describes your feelings about your own mother, specifically.

Hateful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Affectionate
Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Bad
Unfair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Fair
Cruel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Kind
Loving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unloving
Strict	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Strict
Severe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Lenient
Happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unhappy
Unlikable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Likable

## Appendix G Demographic Questionnaire

Directions: The following questions request some information about you. This information will be helpful in interpreting your responses to the other questions.

1. Gender (check one)  
 female                       male
  
2. Birthdate (fill in)  
 month                       day                       year
  
3. Class standing (check one)  
 freshman                       sophomore                       junior  
 senior                       other
  
4. Major (fill in)  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Marital status (check one)  
 single                       widowed                       divorced                       separated  
 married or living in a marriage type relationship
  
6. Children (check one)  
 no                       yes  
 If yes, indicate their ages (fill in)  
 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Family type you grew up in during childhood (check one)  
 mother-headed divorced single-parent family  
 father-headed divorced single-parent family  
 two-parent biological family  
 step-father and biological mother  
 step-mother and biological father  
 other (fill in) \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Number of years lived in a mother-headed divorced single-parent family  
 Never  
 5 years or less  
 6 to 10 years  
 11 years or more
  
9. If you did not grow up in or ever live in a mother-headed divorced single-parent family, how much interaction have you had with mother-headed divorced single-parent families?  
 none  
 a little  
 more than a little  
 a lot

10. Mother's education (check one)  
 8th grade or less                       some college  
 some high school                       college graduate  
 high school graduate                       graduate degree
11. Father's education (check one)  
 8th grade or less                       some college  
 some high school                       college graduate  
 high school graduate                       graduate degree
12. Mother's occupation (fill in)  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Father's occupation (fill in)  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Total annual family income (check estimate)  
 less than \$4,999                       \$20,000 to \$29,999  
 \$5,000 to \$9,999                       \$30,000 to \$49,999  
 \$10,000 to \$14,999                       over \$50,000  
 \$15,000 to \$19,999
15. Number of courses taken in the Human Development and Family Sciences Department (fill in)  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Do you plan on being a teacher?  
 yes     no

## Appendix H Correlation Matrix for Other Subsample Variables

Table 9. Correlation Matrix for Other Subsample Variables <sup>1</sup>						
X	Divorced Single Mother			Two-Parent Biological		
	Age	SS	Family Income	Age	SS	Family Income
POD	.009	-.05	-.05	.03	.15	.12
FOH	-.09	.22	.02	-.04	.32***	-.27**
SE	.12	-.30*	-.20	-.004	-.27**	.03
Age	1.00	-.10	.03	1.00	-.30**	-.21*
SS		1.00	.40**		1.00	.35
Family Income			1.00			1.00

<sup>1</sup> For a correlation between scale variables, see Table 3.  
\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01  
POD: Perception of Divorced Single Mother Scale  
FOH: Family of Origin Health Scale  
SE: Self-Esteem  
SS: Socioeconomic status