

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND SELF-PERCEPTIONS: HOW PARENTAL DIVORCE IMPACTS TURKISH CYPRIOT DAUGHTERS

ÇiŖe BarıŖsever

Department of English Language Teaching
Near East University

Change is an inevitable fact of life. In today's modern societies, divorce is one of the most significant reasons for the structural change in families. In this regard, parental divorce brings massive changes to the lives of those experiencing it. This study explored the impact of parental divorce on Turkish Cypriot daughters' self-perceptions and educational aspirations using qualitative research methods. Results of the study suggest that for the participants, the primary role model has always been their mothers. Some of the participants gave up their educational aspirations due to the financial constraints following parental divorce. Although all of the participants were successful in their academic lives, they experienced a decrease in their grades for a certain period during and after their parents' divorce. During this period, they also presented withdrawn behavior in and outside the school setting, and experienced symptoms of depression. Some of them mentioned about their thoughts of committing suicide and claimed that they overcame such negative thoughts with the help of the emotional support of their mothers. In this respect, it is concluded that teachers and school counselors could play a key role in providing professional assistance for divorced parents and their children.

Introduction

Change is an inevitable fact of our lives – life is never static. In some cases, change comes as a natural outcome; in others, as a purposeful action of the person who is experiencing it. As Fullan (2001) explains, "Change may come about either because it is imposed on us (by natural events or deliberate reform) or because we voluntarily participate in or even initiate change when we find dissatisfaction, inconsistency, or intolerability in our current situation" (p. 32). Divorce certainly fits in this explanation because it brings a change to the lives of everyone involved in it. Nevertheless, we need a more explanatory definition for divorce. A simple and clear definition would be "the legal dissolution of the marriage contract" (Hebding & Glick, 1996, p. 351). Moreover, Price and McKenry (1988) provide a more comprehensive description:

... the legal dissolution of a socially and legally recognized marital relationship that alters the obligations and privileges of the two persons involved. It is also a major life transition that has far reaching social, pathological, legal, personal, economic, and parental consequences. (as cited in Rao & Sekhar, 2002, ¶ 2)

It is true that divorce, from a legal point of view, ends marriage ties in the sense that the adults involved are no longer called husband and wife afterwards. Furthermore, all the family members generally do not live in the same household anymore. Grusec and Lytton (1988) explain that it is helpful "to see marriage dissolution as a disruptive, often traumatic, event that changes family relationships but does not end them" (p. 415). Therefore, divorce cannot be perceived as an end. On the contrary, it usually serves as a beginning.

When people hear the word "divorce," they usually feel sorry for the ones experiencing it. But what really is divorce? Why do we generally attach negative feelings to it? How do couples feel when they make the final decision and go to the court to change their lives? Why are they doing that to themselves and, if there are any, to their children? What about children? They are usually viewed as the "victims" of parental divorce. How do they perceive divorce? What happens to their lives after the process of divorce when they no longer have either of their parents living with them? How does it affect their current lives and future aspirations? As the daughter of a divorced family, I could ask an endless number of questions but I suggest that the answers given by those who experienced divorce will neither be uniform nor fixed due to the multi-dimensional nature of the effects of divorce.

Divorce and its aftermath have been the issue of ongoing debate since the middle of the last century, although it was discussed previously only in certain fields. The increasing rates of divorce in many different countries make it one of the most pressing social issues. Grusec and Lytton (1988) report that in Canada, there were approximately 60,000 divorces annually towards the end of 1980s. In 1998, this number was 37 divorce cases per 100 marriages for Canadians (Nugman, 2002). Statistics in other parts of the world are similar. In 1996, Belarus had the one of the highest divorce rates, with 68% of marriages ending in divorce every year (World Divorce Statistics, n.d.). The Russian Federation and Sweden followed Belarus, with 65% and 64% respectively. In 1997, Scottish society celebrated 29,611 marriages and experienced 12,222 divorces (World Divorce Statistics). In the year 2000, many developed countries still had high rates of divorce. Sweden, for example, had the highest divorce rate with 54.9 divorce cases in every 100 marriages (Nugman). Similarly, this rate was 54.8 in the United States and 51.2 in Finland (Nugman).

The picture in North Cyprus is not much different than other countries. Until 1994, divorce had a fluctuating rate between 414 divorce cases at court in 1991 to 357 in 1993 (Statistics and Research Department [SRD], 1998). The number of marriages remained almost the same for these years with 1015 marriages in 1991 and 1097 marriages in 1993 (SRD, 1998). In 1995, however, the divorce cases at court jumped from 463 to 880 (SRD, 1998). In 1996, there were more divorce cases than marriages: The divorce cases doubled to be 1627, where the number of marriages remained 1042 (SRD, 2003). Fortunately, the number of cases at court is falling since 1996 and there were 480 divorce cases at court in 2001. In spite of this positive view in the number of applications for divorce, more cases are ending in divorce every year. The number of cases at court that finalized in divorce was 252 in 1996 and 351 in 2001 (SRD, 2003). "Divorce is a fact of life," say Grusec and Lytton (1988, p. 412), who suggest that these statistics are better to be used to show the changes in the social structure of the whole society and the lives of many children, than to impress people about the breakdown of the society's traditional institutions. As a result, the number of children living in one-parent

families is increasing steadily, compared to the number of children living in intact families, i.e. families where biological parents are married and live together (Kilmartin, 1997).

In the past decades, much has been said about the disadvantages of living with only one parent for children and their developmental processes. However, the most important point to make is that the latest trend in the literature is no longer to call divorce as a tragedy, but rather as a change in children's lives (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). As many scholars indicate, the experiences of individuals going through divorce are various and complex (Fitnushel & Hillard, 1991; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). The effects on children may differ because of their gender, age at the time of divorce, developmental stage, and the quality of the custodial parenting. In addition, the meaning that they attach to the concepts of family, parents, children, and marriage are also influential. Therefore, understanding the effects of such a complex phenomenon requires a detailed analysis of the meanings of these concepts for the individual child.

Many scholars draw varying conclusions about how children are affected by parental divorce. These conclusions vary from emotional well-being, developmental shortcomings, and psychological stability to various outcomes in their educational lives. As for the functions of the teachers and counselors in this respect, two facts should be considered. First, teachers are not only instructors in the classroom, who provide the academic content, but they are also educators who have an impact on a child's lifeworld (Tomison, 1996), where a lifeworld refers to the total of a person's experiences and his/her perceptions of these experiences as well as his/her self-perception. It also includes the meanings an individual attaches to his/her experiences. Second, since the number of children who experience parental divorce is increasing at every level of the educational setting, it is the responsibility of teachers and school counselors to be aware of the consequences such an event might have on their students and to become knowledgeable about possible ways of help (Beekman, 1986; Nielsen, 1999).

Many professionals point out that two variables are specifically important in understanding the impact of divorce on individuals and the meaning they attach to it. These variables are the cultural setting in which the marital discord is taking place (Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; de Vaus, 1997), and the person's gender (Bolgar, Zweig-Frank, & Paris, 1995; Hetherington, 2002; Nielsen, 1999; Page & Bretherton, 2003; Walzer & Oles, 2003). In the light of these generally accepted facts, my research attempts to understand the kinds of changes Turkish Cypriot daughters of divorced families experience in their self-perceptions in the educational settings, and the impact parental divorce has on their educational aspirations and achievements. In addition, this study appears to be the first qualitative study done in this area in Turkish Cypriot society.

As mentioned earlier, the issue of divorce is not a newly emerging one and there is a massive amount of research done on the impact of divorce on children. However, the uniqueness of this research comes from its focal point: daughters of divorced parents in Turkish Cypriot society and their educational aspirations. Although the children of divorce are portrayed as academically disadvantaged in most of the literature (e.g. Hetherington, 2002; Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999; Nielsen, 1999), the negative effects caused by divorce can be reversed by providing the necessary setting for them to be successful at school and by helping them to shape their future lives away from the black shadow of divorce (Rutter, 1987, as cited in Palosaari & Aro, 1994). Finally, my research tries to provide the necessary basis for identifying and formulating ways to assist these daughters.

Literature Review

Child Development and Motherhood

Attachment to the Mother

In order to comprehend divorce and its effects, the developmental phases a child experiences and his/her relationship to the parents during these phases must be considered. The general view that the mother is the primary caregiver of a child is stressed by many researchers (Grusec & Lytton, 1988; Hoffman & Moon, 2000; Howard, 2003). Therefore, a special bond is formed between the mother and the child, where the mother provides the care and the child reacts to the mother's care-giving behavior in certain ways (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Storr, 2001). Because the child becomes attached to his/her mother, he/she feels secure when the mother is around (Grusec & Lytton, 1988; Storr, 2001). As Daly (1994) and Howard (2003) report, even fathers believe that mothers have a special bond with children as well as great influence on their children due to their experiences of giving birth.

It is not surprising that the mother is the main socializing agent in a child's life, as the child and the mother have a special attachment (Grusec & Lytton, 1988). Socialization is the process by which an individual internalizes the patterns of behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes as prescribed by society in order to be able to become socially competent (Hebding & Glick, 1996; Zanden, 1996). The child goes through the process of socialization with the help of his/her family members because they are usually the "first group to provide meaning and support" (Hebding & Glick, p. 101). As Grusec and Lytton point out, "Mothers who are naturally helpful, responsive, and nurturant have been found to have children who display more helpful and prosocial behavior," compared to their peers (p. 189). Therefore, the mother can shape a child's behavior as well as his/her self-perception in society during the process of socialization.

The points previously mentioned contribute to the idea that a child cannot develop fully without a mother figure. This general belief causes most children live under maternal custody after the separation. In "Mothers' and Fathers' Gender-Role Characteristics: The Assignment of Postdivorce Child Care and Custody," Hoffman and Moon (2000) provided their subjects with short descriptions of different couples, who decided to divorce. These descriptions included gender traits, such as warm for feminine gender-role characteristics and assertive for masculine gender-role characteristics, and the descriptions had no direct relationship with the biological categories of the people described. The researchers asked the subjects to assign the children to one of these parents. Not surprisingly, they found that regardless of the sex of the parent, the subjects in the study assigned the child to the parent with feminine gender-role characteristics. This finding shows both that a father has less chances of getting the custody of the child unless he displays a mother's gender-role traits, and that the mother usually continues to be the most influential person in a child's life after the divorce.

The economic well-being of mothers and children generally decreases after the separation. Bartfeld (2000) suggests that the main reason for the disadvantaged position of a divorced mother is due to the dual nature of her responsibilities. As the custodial parent, the mother faces "de facto financial responsibility for those children, constrained

employment options, and a high opportunity cost of working due to child care needs" (Bartfeld, ¶ 8). The mother has to divide her time between the responsibilities of her job and her children, which leads to part-time and less-paid employment of the single-mothers (Gray, Qu, Renda, & de Vaus, 2003). Thus, the economic well-being of mother-headed single-parent families worsens.

Importance of Gender

Studies of post-divorce families and their children reveal that the social meaning that a child obtains from the process of divorce depends very much on his/her gender (Page & Bretherton, 2003). It is important to note the differences between the relationship of a mother to her son, and a mother to her daughter since the mother's different treatment of their sons and daughters are found to cause variations in boys' and girls' responses to and perceptions of events (Thorne & McLean, 2002).

Ex and Janssens (1998) report that a mother's child-rearing style and her gender-role perception influence her daughter's role perception both for intact families and single-parent families. The researchers suggest that the relationship between a mother's gender-role attitude and her daughter's gender-role attitude are directly related because the daughter observes her mother practicing these attitudes in her daily life and internalizes them (Ex & Janssens). This finding supports the idea that mothers as caregivers influence their children's perceptions as well as their behavior. Supporting the same view, Barns (2003) found that when a young woman decides on her career, her mother is the most influential family member in whatever decision is made.

Importance of Parenting after Divorce

It is generally thought that the best parenting can be done when two biological parents of a child live together. This belief is proved false in a few divorce cases with the presence of certain conditions. Page and Bretherton (2003) found that the quality of the parenting of the custodial parent and the amount of parental conflict that the child is exposed to are the main predictors of post-divorce social and emotional adjustment. The quality of the child's relationship to the custodial parent, who is the mother in most cases, is also an important defining factor of the child's well-being and adjustment in adolescence (Dunlop & Burns, 2001). As Richardson and McCabe (2001) report, "a good relationship with at least one parent provides a buffer against the negative impact of conflict and/or divorce" (¶ 33).

The Presence and Absence of Fathers

As mentioned previously, it is a widely accepted view that mothers are the primary caregivers of their children (Grusec & Lytton, 1988; Hoffman & Moon, 2000; Howard, 2003). However, a growing body of research points out the importance of the presence and the consequences of the absence of fathers. Absent fathers are defined as "those who do not interact with their children on a regular basis and consequently do not play a significant role in their development" (Krohn & Bogan, 2001, ¶ 3). In a father-absent home, the mother has to assume both the breadwinner and the homemaker roles, which limits the time and attention she has for her children. The father's absence, when combined with financial difficulties in mother-headed single-parent families may often be associated with a child's poor educational attainment (Buchanan, 2002, as cited in Dornau, 2003; Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

When the father is absent before the separation, children seem to care less about the event of divorce (Sviggum, 2000). However, Page and Bretherton's (2003) research reveals that children, who experienced parental divorce and who are identified to have developed an attachment to the mother figure are generally more competent in their social interactions regardless of their sex. On the other hand, girls, who mention attachment to their fathers more, are found to rate lower in social competence. Interestingly, the researchers found that a positive relationship exists between attachment to the father and social competence in boys – the more they show attachment to the father, the more competent they are socially (Page & Bretherton). It is also possible to conclude that father-child relationships are more negatively affected by divorce than mother-child relationships because usually the fathers leave the home environment and their contact with their children becomes intermittent (Nielsen, 1999; Richardson & McCabe, 2001).

Krohn and Bogan (2001) point out those females, who lose contact with their fathers through divorce, tend to be critical of their fathers as well as the opposite sex; and seek attention from men but are unable to build long lasting relationships with them. Likewise, Hetherington (1988) proposes that girls from divorced families tend to be sexually forward, where girls who lost their fathers due to death tend to be shy with the opposite sex (as cited in Sroufe, Cooper, & Detlart, 1996). Regardless of the sex of the child, however, a father's absence is found to be positively correlated with anti-social behavior in children (Piffner, McBurnett, & Rathouz, 2001). In other words, the anti-social behavior of children may be associated with the absenteeism of their fathers during their early development. In addition, Krohn and Bogan also report that the children whose fathers were absent before the age of two scored lower on measures of IQ and achievement tests. On the other hand, the negative consequences are not one-sided. Baum (2003) suggests that, even though it is the father who usually leaves the family home, after the separation he usually mourns for the loss of his children rather than his ex-wife.

In light of the expanding literature on the importance of fatherhood, some researchers suggest that, especially in the case of the divorced families, the child's attachment to the father should be considered important (Fletcher, 2002). They also state that social organizations, such as schools, should not target the mothers only, but try to involve the fathers in decision-making and inform them about their children's progress (Fletcher, 2002; Hawthorne, 2003).

Consequences of Divorce in General

Divorce as a Positive Experience

In understanding a child's long-term development as an individual, his/her family structure cannot be disregarded (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). Divorce is perceived as a solution to many social, personal, or marital problems. Many researchers support the view that staying in an unhappy marriage is worse for children than going through the process of divorce (Black & Pedro-Caroll, 1993; Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Tüzün, 2004; Zanden, 1996). Amato, Loomis, and Booth mention that if the parents have a harmonious relationship prior to their divorce, their children's well-being in later life is reduced. The opposite is also true - children from unhappy marriages that ended in divorce experience "relief when their parents divorce" (Fitnushel & Hillard, 1991, p. 39). It appears that for

girls, the main reason for long-term negative consequences is found to be the ongoing parental marital conflict (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Black & Pedro-Caroll, 1993). Similarly, Bolgar, Zweig-Frank and Paris (1995) point out that high levels of parental hostility before parental divorce is associated with young adults' "greater sense of being too controlling in their interpersonal relationships" and maternal interference with the father's relationship with his children after the separation is associated with greater problems of intimacy (§ 30). In addition, Pryor and Rodgers (2001) say that relief from conflict, closer relationships with mothers, positive aspects of supporting mothers in all respects, feelings of social growth, maturity, and independence are the positive sides of experiencing divorce.

Divorce as a Negative Experience

The negative consequences of divorce are indicated throughout the literature. Sviggum (2000) states that children report feelings of shock, despair, sadness, and disbelief in their reactions to parental divorce. Tomison (1996) reports that neglect, and poverty, which are different types of child maltreatment, are mostly observed in mother-headed single parent families. He also proposes that schools should not be limited to purely academic initiatives but should be directed at helping such children and their families.

Children of divorce are found to have problems with authority or working collaboratively with others (Bolgar, Zweig-Frank, & Paris, 1995). In addition, children from divorced families usually are found to have a lower emotional well-being than children of intact families (Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; Dykeman, 2003). These children may also get caught up in a whirl of negativities such as persistent academic failure, disciplinary problems, or destructive peer group associations leading to "severe depression, suicidal thoughts or drug or alcohol abuse" (Sammons & Lewis, 2001, § 21). On the other hand, emotional security is found to buffer the negative effects of inter-parental conflict if it is provided to the child by at least one of his/her parents (Black & Pedro-Caroll, 1993; Richardson & McCabe, 2001). For example, Fullan (2001) suggests that "the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on the child's development and educational achievement" (p. 198).

Pseudomaturity is defined as the state when due to increased autonomy in one-parent households and emotional needs of lone parents, a kind of role-reversal occurs and the children become confidants and comforters of their parents (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). It is another negative aspect of parental divorce because children take on adult roles before they are mature enough to cope with these responsibilities. Pseudomaturity, which usually associated with early partnering and youthful parenting, can also cause children to become too attached to the parent and not to be able to spend time with peers (Pryor Rodgers).

Since children of divorced families are unable to form stable long-term relationships, they are more likely to experience divorce themselves when they become adults (Black & Pedro-Caroll, 1993; Martin et. al, 2003). When compared to young adults from intact families, young adults from divorced families are also found to have lower levels of satisfaction with their lives, more difficulties in coping with anxiety, and poorer relationships with their same-sex peers (Headley, 2002; Richardson & McCabe, 2001). Hetherington (2002) states that children from divorced families have twice as much risk as children from intact families to have psychological and behavioral problems such as "teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, substance abuse, unemployment, and marital break-ups" (§ 11). She also points out that this relationship is a "closer association than between smoking and cancer" (Hetherington, § 11).

Reactions by Gender

The gender of the child is as important in comprehending the effects of parental divorce, since males and females are affected differently from parental divorce. Women may become more depressive than men after the parental divorce, since they have emphatic concerns for and identification with their mothers (Black & Pedro-Caroll, 1993; Palosaari & Aro, 1994). On the other hand, men who experience parental divorce earlier in life are found to suffer more from depression in their young adulthood than men who experience it later in life (Palosaari & Aro). When the reactions of adolescents are examined, Allison and Furstenberg's (1989) study reveals that girls show academic difficulties, distress, and dissatisfaction with the family's situation; whereas boys develop behavioral problems (as cited in Sroufe, Cooper, & Detlart, 1996). As McNeal and Amato (1998) report, girls have poorer relationships with their fathers if they witness marital violence prior to divorce, whereas boys do not. They also propose that poor relationships last far into adulthood (McNeal & Amato). In contrast, Hetherington (2002) says that the experience of divorce causes girls to be more competent and responsible because this experience teaches them how to handle stress later in their lives.

Finally, Tüzün (2004) provides a comprehensive list of possible long and short-term negative effects of divorce on children, which includes almost all of the negative points mentioned previously, without mentioning any sex differences. The list of effects includes lying to others, a decrease in self-esteem, depression, thoughts of committing suicide, biting nails, becoming too dependent on either of the parents, fear, despair, anger, introversion, refusal of the parental divorce, sleeping/eating disorders, behavioral problems, academic failure, difficulties in modeling behavior and internalizing gender roles due to living with one parent only, anti-social behavior, problems in establishing relationships with the opposite sex, difficulties in controlling anger, and problems in socialization.

Impact of Divorce on Children's Education

The number of children in the classrooms, who grow up in divorced families with only one parent, is increasing. This fact makes it essential for educators not to ignore the experiences that these children go through. The literature already presented suggests that social capital is very important in helping children to develop fully. A significant part of this social capital is provided in the school environment, since children from the age of five or six spend the majority of their days at school. In addition, as the literature points out, achievements at school can help children of divorced families break the cycle of negative thoughts about their self-concepts and failures. In other words, educators must attempt to understand the situation that these children are in and should try to provide the necessary resources to compensate for their special needs.

Dacey and Travers (2002) argue that often it is the "emotional aspects of adjusting to parental divorce" that affect "the child's ability to meet the academic and social expectations at school" (as cited in Dykeman, 2003, § 7). When compared with children from intact families, children in one-parent mother-headed families are found to have completed fewer years of schooling, to be less likely to receive high school diplomas, to fall behind their age cohorts in high school,

and to be less likely to enter college (Evans, Kelley, & Wanner, 2001; Graham, Beller, & Hernandez, 1994, as cited in Furr, 1998). Besides performing less well in the academic arena, Miller, Ryan, and Morrison (1999) argue that children of divorce have lower academic self-concepts and that they are less motivated to achieve. Not surprisingly, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) mention that "regardless of what the family's income was to begin with, it is the decline in income after divorce that account for at least half of the negative impact on children in regard to dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and not having good jobs after high school or college" (as cited in Nielsen, 1999, ¶ 48).

Career choices and aspirations of children of divorced families differ from those of intact families. Coma (2000) categorizes the fatherless daughters into two distinct groups in regards to career choices (as cited in Krohn & Bogan, 2001). The females in the first group are overachievers, who strive to go beyond their college education and earn a master's and a doctorate. The members of the second group are underachievers, who tend either to drop out of college or never attend college. According to the same research, fatherless girls hardly ever fall in between these categories (Coma, as cited in Krohn & Bogan). Moreover, Krohn and Bogan argue that the fatherless girls tend to avoid studying in the fields such as mathematics and sciences because these fields are basically male-dominated and without a role model, such as the father, the girls appear to make their choices favoring the arts.

In their extensive study of the effects of parental divorce on educational attainments of Australian children, Evans, Kelley, and Wanner (2001) found that parental divorce reduces children's educational attainment. They also suggest that when the custodial parent remarries, this remarriage does not compensate for the educational damage caused by parental divorce. In addition, Evans, Kelly, and Wanner argue that the shift from the extended family to the nuclear family and the segregation of the workplaces and households weakened parental socialization and disrupted parental control. As a result, parental divorce has become more damaging to the children's educational attainment in the last decades than it was in the past (Evans, Kelly, & Wanner). Since children of single parent families grow up with a certain degree of autonomy, when it comes to school or work, they find it hard to respect people who have authority, to set and reach goals on their own, and to accept criticism from their teachers or employers (Nielsen, 1999).

When the effects of parental divorce on children's academic lives according to their ages are examined, the effects are more varying (Beekman, 1986). Preschoolers generally focus on emotional security and strive for routines in their home and school lives (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980, as cited in Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999). Middle school children whose parents divorce usually become preoccupied with guilt, blame, and responsibility for their parents' divorce. High school students tend to deal with the issue cognitively by expressing their concerns in terms of their own identities, capacities for relationships, and life-choice issues (Kurdek, 1988, as cited in Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999). Changes often occur in children's academic achievements, moods, attendance patterns, and behaviors as they try to adjust to their parents' divorce (Cantrell, 1986, as cited in Beekman).

Özen (2000) points out that much of the literature on the effects of divorce on children reflects the Western societies' features. She also suggests that the rate of divorce in Turkish society in the mainland is one of the lowest in the world but is increasing every year due to the changes in the marriage laws and women's status (Özen). Various effects of divorce, such as anti-social behavior, anxiety, and depression, appear quite different in Turkish children than that of their Western counterparts. According to Özen, for example, the idea that parental conflict is more damaging to children than the divorce itself is not true for Turkish children. The reason for this difference is that divorce is perceived as the downfall of the family institution in Turkish society and people believe that breaking a family down can never bring something positive to a child's life (Levent, 2002; Özen, 2000). In spite of such differences, which are results of cultural variations, Levent claims that in some cases, Turkish children of divorced families experience difficulties similar to those suggested by Western researchers. These difficulties include problems in establishing relationships with the opposite sex, behavioral problems, difficulties in obeying authority, and a decline in school performance (Levent).

It is unfortunate that a review of literature reveals that there are not any studies related to the cultural aspect of parental divorce in Turkish Cypriot society. Furthermore, studies indicating the modern cultural norms or beliefs of the society can hardly be found. It is important to note that the issues that emerged during the research process and were related to culture were discussed with the participants. This procedure was necessary in order to validate the assumptions about the cultural norms. The results of the study will present an understanding of cultural concepts related to the impact of parental divorce on daughters, which will assist future research in this society. Thus, it will serve as a starting point for exploring the cultural context in modern Turkish Cypriot society.

The literature provides key points to help educators to understand the experiences of children in divorced families in the educational setting. In order to maximize the functioning and development of the children of divorced families in the academic sphere, Miller, Ryan and Morrison (2001) propose a number of strategies for classroom teachers, such as providing a supportive and secure environment, trying to learn the personal meaning each child attaches to parental divorce, and being tolerant to the variations in the academic performances of these children. In addition, good school performance is a "protective against psychopathology because it may reduce the impact of the risk and negative life-chain reactions, or open new opportunities" (Rutter, 1987, as cited in Palosaari & Aro, 1994, ¶ 14). Beekman (1986) suggests that the school counselors and teachers should work together in order to be able to help these children understand their own situations and overcome the negativities they associate with it.

The multi-dimensional nature of the event of divorce and various consequences associated with it are emphasized throughout the literature. The negative consequences of parental divorce on children's educational attainments are stressed. Yet, clear descriptions of how the children of divorce perceive themselves in the educational sphere are not provided. The changes in children's behaviors and achievements are also mentioned but the reasons for these changes are not presented from the children's points of view. Moreover, there are not enough studies on the effects of parental divorce on Turkish Cypriot children. As a result, the literature lacks qualitative studies that investigate this issue from the perspectives of people who have experienced it.

Methodology

Methodology is not a static entity in qualitative research. It has an emergent nature where the researcher works as a "*bricoleur*" (Denzin, 1994, p. 2), i.e. he/she uses whatever information becomes significant as a result of the data gathering and data analysis processes.

As Pryor and Rodgers (2001) point out, "There is a striking lack of qualitative studies" (p. 265) related to children who experience parental divorce. In addition, they indicate that qualitative studies are useful in understanding the feelings and perspectives of children on parental divorce, and that "these studies' insights into family change are remarkably accurate and sophisticated" (p. 265). In light of the review of literature and the theory of symbolic interactionism, which will be explained in the next section, I concluded that exploring the topic from an emic perspective, i.e. the participants' points of view, was vital. My study is unique, therefore, in the sense that it presents the daughters' points of view from their perspectives rather than the society's point of view.

The research questions took their final shapes after a number of revisions. The main reason for these changes was that I needed to reshape the research questions according to the emerging themes in the literature and the themes that emerged during the data gathering process. As a result, I focused on the following research questions as I progressed through my study:

1. How did parental divorce impact Turkish Cypriot daughters' academic achievements?
2. How do Turkish Cypriot daughters of divorced families perceive themselves in the academic sphere?
3. What kinds of academic/educational aspirations do Turkish Cypriot daughters of divorced families have?
4. How did parental divorce impact the educational aspirations of Turkish Cypriot daughters of divorced families?
5. How would Turkish Cypriot daughters of divorced families change their lives if they had a chance?

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Silverman (2000) emphasizes that the theoretical basis is the most important part of any research because it prescribes general principles surrounding the methodology of a study. As I will be explaining in the following sections, when studying the perceptions of individuals belonging to a specific group, such as Turkish Cypriot daughters of divorced families, a combination of symbolic interactionism and feminism appeared to be the best approach.

Symbolic Interactionism as a Theory

The origins of symbolic interactionism date back to the second decade of the last century. Since its emergence and development are almost simultaneous with Dewey's pragmatism, it is sometimes viewed as the social and developmental theory of pragmatism (Denzin, 1992). According to symbolic interactionism, in order to understand the meaning of a certain phenomenon and the reasons behind collective action, one has to try to look at the phenomenon under investigation from the point of view of the subject experiencing it. Lal (1995) mentions that when it first emerged, "the symbolic interactionist tradition, was not only a statement of perspective and method and a guide to a particular style of social research, it was also a polemic attacking the inadequacies of social systems and other holistic theories" (¶ 3). Symbolic interactionism differs from other holistic theories. Lal explains this difference as:

The actor is deemed to be capable of reason and of the ability to express preferences and exercise choice in circumstances in which his or her access to information is incomplete and in which constraints limit the kinds of activities he or she can reasonably hope to undertake. The symbolic interactionist is required to employ methods that capture the actor's point of view and that enable him or her to speak for him- or herself (¶ 1).

Cooley, the father of symbolic interactionism, states that the formation of self begins in one's interactions with others, especially with family members (Denzin, 1992; Hebding & Glick, 1996). In other words, "our attitudes, behaviors, and self concepts develop from our interactions with others; we develop a feeling about the way we look and act" (Hebding & Glick). Human nature is a social reality that is affected by the values of the primary groups and institutions, such as the family and the school, with which it shares experiences. This statement means that when an individual is born, he/she starts to interact with his/her environment, and as a result of this interaction, the "self" of the individual develops accordingly. The main assumption behind this theory is that the "subject is (and was) the final authority in the subjective experience" (Denzin, p. 3).

Feminist Approach to Research

Feminism is an "interdisciplinary field," which touches nearly every discipline (Miller & Scholnick, 2000, p. 3). For the purposes of shaping my research and clarifying the theory behind it, feminist approach to research will be used as complementary to the theory of symbolic interactionism.

Miller and Scholnick (2000) propose three main concepts that make up the center of feminist perspective. The first concept emphasizes that humans and all phenomena are interconnected rather than solitary and separated. The second concept points out that human experiences and knowledge are situated in the experiences of people. The final concept argues that societies are characterized by institutional androcentrism and its accompanying power structure. Feminists view gender not as a variable but as a status. They also support that currently constructed values within societies value boys and men (Miller & Scholnick). In addition, they propose that "gender identities influence how the self and others are viewed as well as how people act with and react to others" (Leaper, 2000, p. 148). This view explains the possible existing differences between the self-perceptions of boys and the self-perceptions of girls in divorced families. Since self-perceptions and the meaning of divorce vary according to gender, it can be hypothesized that educational aspirations and achievements will be affected accordingly.

The most important similarity between symbolic interactionism and feminism is that both theories suggest that experiences shape people (Hebding & Glick, 1996; Miller & Scholnick, 2000). Feminists argue that "research and theories should be grounded in daily experiences and should take into account the perspectives of the participants in the research" (Miller & Scholnick, p. 6). In other words, it is assumed that universality and objectivity cannot be achieved, since knowledge, experience, and meanings are all embedded in personal and cultural contexts. As Ramazanoğlu (1992) points out, "it is more logical to accept our subjectivity, our emotions and our socially grounded positions than to assume some of us can rise above them" (p. 211, as cited in Westmarland, 2001, ¶ 7). The postmodern view of multiple realities is also adopted by feminist researchers. Postmodern feminists claim that there is not one "truth." Therefore, "although all standpoints are conflicting, none are privileged" (Westmarland, ¶ 8).

Sampling and the Sample

The method used for sampling was random judgmental sampling. The criteria for random sampling were set according to the review of literature and the research questions. After meeting with the potential participants, I identified five females who met the selection criteria. Four of these young women accepted to participate in the study. An interview consent form was prepared to inform the participants about the research process. All of the interviews were carried out in places that would ensure the participants' confidentiality (Fetterman, 1998; Silverman, 2000). These places were generally chosen by the participants and they included locations such as the participants' bedrooms and their offices. In addition, I went to the meetings with the participants alone. I also transcribed all the interviews personally in order to prevent the possibility of someone identifying the voices of my participants. Only one computer was used during the writing phase. When collecting data through interviews, I used a small hand-held tape-recorder with an internal microphone to record my interviews. I also kept a research journal for the field notes to be used in the triangulation of data.

Sema and Nur were university students, Özlem was a high school teacher, and Aysun was a business person. Of course, these are the pseudonyms used for the participants and have no factual relationship with their real names. The university students were from different faculties. None of the participants knew each other. The number of years that passed after the divorce of their parents differed from four to nine years. The fact that their ages at the time of divorce were different is taken into consideration during the data analysis phase. All of them had their mothers as their custodial parents and all of them were Turkish Cypriots.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three recorded interviews were carried out with each of the participants. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The question sets consisted of between 8 to 12 questions. These questions were related to the participants' perceptions of the changes in themselves after divorce, their current perceptions of themselves, their self-images as students, and their educational aspirations and achievements. As mentioned in the previous sections, some questions were generated based on the observations for validation of certain concepts that arouse during the observations. The interview questions were written in English and then translated into Turkish, since all of the participants speak Turkish as their mother tongue.

I carried out a number of observations for each participant. The settings of these observations varied from patisseries to classrooms to the participants' homes. Fetterman (1998) and Wolcott (1995) argue that it is very important to spend as much time as possible with the participants to be able to capture their perspectives and meanings that they attach to phenomena. Thus, I arranged each observation at different times of the day, so that I could witness their daily lives as much as possible. In the case of the students, I observed them in two different classes with two different instructors, which helped me to focus on the different behaviors of the participants.

The data analysis process was neither linear nor fragmented. As Silverman (2000) suggests, data analysis does not come after data gathering in qualitative studies. Furthermore, sticking to the "original research design can be a sign of inadequate data analysis rather than demonstrating a welcome consistency" (Silverman, p. 121). Thus, data gathering and data analysis work together, as the researcher shapes the research design according to the results of these two processes (Creswell, 1994). While analyzing the data, I looked for emergent themes in the participants' behavior and words. During this process, the strategies proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984) were used (as cited in Bloland, 1992; as cited in Silverman, 2000). The first strategy that they suggest is data reduction, which refers to selecting the data chunks that will be useful in further analysis. The second strategy is data display where the raw data is organized to permit conclusions to be drawn. The third strategy that Miles and Huberman suggest is conclusion drawing, which refers to beginning to decide what things mean and paying attention to regularities and patterns. Finally, their fourth strategy, verification, means checking the correctness of the conclusions that were drawn previously against the data. These approaches were used in every stage of the data analysis process.

Discussion of the Results

Family Ties and Education within the Family

As mentioned earlier, most divorce cases are finalized in maternal custody of the children. Since most fathers move out of the home, the daughters' contact with their fathers becomes intermittent. In some cases, such as Özlem's, daughters have no contact with their fathers at all. Three of the participants mentioned that they were emotionally better off when they saw their fathers only occasionally because seeing them reminded the participants of the distressing experiences they had before their parents separated. When they remember the parental conflicts they have been through, they feel depressed. Two of the participants do not share any of their experiences or decisions about life with their fathers. For instance, Aysun pointed out that she feels that her father no longer "has the right to say anything." Therefore, as Nielsen (1999) and Richardson and McCabe (2001) also suggest, results of this study support the view that father-child relationships of the participants were negatively affected by divorce. Apparently, the inability of the participants to relate to their fathers is not associated with the amount of conflict in the family prior to divorce or with the daughters' relationships with their fathers before the separation because these conditions were different for each participant but this estrangement was a common point in all of them.

The fact that all of the participants see the education that they received from their families different from the education that they received at school was one of the first emergent themes during the data gathering process. All of the participants view education as starting in the family. They differentiated between schooling and education, where schooling refers to the academic education provided by the school and education refers to the moral training provided by the family. Thus, schooling and education will be used according to their reference to the terms.

All of the participants claimed that their fathers did not contribute to the education they received from their families. As Ex and Janssens (1998) point out, a mother is the most influential person in the formation of a daughter's self-perception. In the same line with their study, all of the participants believe that the sole role model in the family setting, both before and after the separation, is the mother. For example, Sema claimed that she has a special

“connection” with her mother since they are both females. Their mothers have always been the primary care-givers and role models in their socialization processes. In addition, the participants became emotionally closer with their mothers, whereas they did not feel close to their fathers after the separation. They share almost everything with their mothers. Moreover, their mothers have always been interested and supportive in their daughters’ academic lives. As a result, they describe their mothers as “influential” when making decision about their lives. This claim is parallel to Barns’ (2003) finding, which suggests that young women’s career choices are influenced by their mothers’ comments and views.

Turkish Cypriot daughters usually live with their families unless they get married. This point is true for daughters of intact families as well as daughters of divorced families. In other words, if a Turkish Cypriot woman is single, below the age of thirty, and not working, she typically lives with her parents. Even when she gets married, she keeps her contact with her parents – especially with her mother – close. Whether the woman is married or single, there is an intimate mutual emotional support between her and her mother. However, in intact families, it is usually the parents who provide financial support for their daughters throughout their lives. As opposed to this situation in intact families, the participants in the study feel responsible for supporting their mothers both emotionally and financially. For example, Sema mentioned that she was more “attached” to her mother emotionally after the divorce, and Özlem claimed that she postponed her master’s degree in order to be able to support her mother financially. However, this responsibility is not perceived as a burden by the daughters. On the contrary, they feel that they are growing socially and they are happy that they are able to support their mothers. This increased attachment to the mothers and experiencing encouraging feelings for supporting them in all respects are listed as the positive consequences of divorce in the literature (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001).

Page and Bretherton (2003) claim that girls who develop secure attachments to their fathers generally perform lower in social competence after the separation. They also claim that when fathers leave home and when girls do not have a secure attachment with their mothers, they become anxious about the availability of both parents. Hence, they develop low social competences. The participants in this study mentioned that they were not attached to their fathers but had close relationships with their mothers. However, they have problems in their social relationships – especially with the opposite sex. They find it hard to establish new friendships and to trust other people. My findings suggest that the social problems of the participants are generally associated with the fathers’ disinterest in their socialization both before and after the divorce. All of the participants describe their fathers as being “not interested” in their education – both within the family and at school. Due to this disinterest on their fathers’ part, these daughters lack high levels of self-esteem and they believe that there must be something wrong with them, which they see as the reason for their fathers’ disinterest. Because they have low self-worth, they find it difficult to trust other people. Hence, they experience problems in social competence. As a result, these problems did not occur not because the participants developed insecure attachments with their fathers but rather because their fathers were not involved in their socialization processes.

Interestingly, all of the participants see divorce as a relief. When they talked about their lives after the separation, they all used the same word – “relieved.” Their reasons for this feeling of relief are different though. For Aysun, divorce brought relief because she was free of her father’s strict attitude toward her behavior. She is now free to decide where to go or what to do. On the other hand, for Sema, her parents’ separation meant a relief from the ongoing fights at home. Divorce brought an end to the parental conflict at home, which was the main reason for her unhappiness. In fact, it is not the divorce process itself but the conflict before and during separation that was the main reason for the depression that all the participants experienced. This finding is consistent with some previous studies (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993; Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; Fitnushel & Hillard, 1991; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Tüzün, 2004; Zanden, 1996). On the other hand, it suggests a cultural difference between Turkish society and Turkish Cypriot society because, as Özen (2000) claims, divorce is not perceived to bring relief but rather more stress to people’s lives in Turkish society. Related with this feeling of relief is the fact that none of the participants wanted to change the event of divorce in their lives. Although Nur claimed that if she had a chance, she would do something to stop her father from cheating on her mother, she added that she would not change the final decision of divorce after all had been said and done. Consequently, the answer they gave to the question, “What kinds of changes did you observe in your life after divorce?” was, “I was relieved.” This answer suggests that the participants’ emotional well-beings were better because they were no longer experiencing parental conflict.

The feelings that the participants associated with their parents’ divorce were anger and pain. They feel angry toward their fathers, whom they see as responsible for both the conflict prior to divorce and the divorce itself. They feel pain because living in a household where the parents, who are supposed to love each other and care for their children in a loving environment, keep fighting was depressing. An unhappy family situation within a home is generally painful for daughters regardless of the reason for the conflict because they identify themselves with their mothers (Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993; Palosaari & Aro, 1994). None of them mentioned feeling guilty about their parents’ separation. Kelly and Wallerstein (1982, as cited in Sroufe, Cooper, & Dettlart, 1996) propose that pre-school children blame themselves for the marital break-up. However, the fact that all of the participants were older than pre-school age when their parents divorced is the reason for not feeling guilty. Apparently, since they were mature enough to grasp that the problem was not related to them, they did not see themselves responsible for the separation of their parents (Kelly & Wallerstein). They tend to accuse their fathers of their insensitive behavior towards their mothers. Plus, they believe that divorce is better than staying in a marriage where parents argue. Thus, they did not try to bring their parents back together; and they do not feel guilty now for the breakdown of the family or for not being able to stop the separation. They perceive it as a positive event that stopped the conflict within home.

Finally, Headley (2002) and Richardson and McCabe (2001) argue that young adults from divorced families have poor life satisfaction rates. The analysis of the data revealed that the participants have conflicting views about the satisfaction that they get for their lives. All of the participants expressed a strong desire to live away from their mothers for a certain period of time. Because they always feel that they are responsible from their mothers, these young women want a period of independence, where they can spend time by themselves. This wish is expressed in the form of a master’s degree completed abroad, as in Nur’s case; or in the form of living alone in a house that is away from the mother’s house, as in Aysun’s case. Nur, Aysun and Sema expressed this wish. Özlem cannot be considered as an exception because she already experienced a period of independence when she stayed in the UK. They believe that this experience will provide the opportunity for them to feel like self-sufficient individuals, who can stand on their own feet. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, they stated that they are closely attached to their mothers and take pleasure

from being able to support them emotionally and financially. Due to these contradictory statements, it is not possible to conclude whether the participants have low life satisfaction rates or not.

Self-Images in the School Setting

All of the participants have successful academic records. Nur and Sema, who are still at university, are also successful students. Everybody, including their friends and their instructors, are aware of their successes. They provide academic assistance for their friends. Their friends copy their work and ask them to help study for exams. They also act respectfully toward their instructors, which is a result of the moral education they received from their mothers. Özlem and Aysun, who are no longer students used to be among the top students in their classes. They had the same respectful behavior when they were at school and have no negative memories about their school years. In this respect, these results suggest an opposing view to the generally accepted belief found in the literature, which claims that children from divorced families display poor school performances (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989, as cited in Sroufe, Cooper, & Detlart, 1996; Evans, Kelly, & Wanner, 2001; Graham, Beller, & Hernandez, 1994, as cited in Furr, 1998; Tüzün, 2004) as well as low academic self-concepts and motivation to achieve (Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999).

All of the participants believe that schooling and further academic education will provide them with the opportunity to have "status" in society. In Turkish Cypriot society, men are perceived as the main authority and as the head of the family. As a result, it is a common practice to speak of a girl with her father's name if she is single – as, for example, "Ahmet's daughter." Unless they achieve success in their own lives, they are bound to be called their father's daughter or their husband's wife. In this respect, the participants want to get rid of their fathers' reflections in their lives because of the anger they feel towards them. They believe that if they receive a good schooling and achieve high grades, they will be able to get first-class jobs, which will help to determine their status in society. Therefore, they see academic education as a way of achieving independence from their families, especially from their fathers' names. Nur and Aysun claimed that the more they proceed in their academic lives, the more they will be perceived as individuals – not as the daughter of this or that man. Özlem mentioned that she needed academic education to "become an individual." For Sema, a diploma meant a good job, which would provide her with a "status." As a result, all of the participants have a strong drive to be successful in their academic lives.

Block et. al. (1986) suggest that when parents divorce, girls usually display withdrawn behavior, which is usually overlooked by teachers at schools (as cited in Sroufe, Cooper, & Detlart, 1996). After parental divorce, all participants presented withdrawn behavior both in and outside the school setting. They became more silent and introverted. They used a lot of effort to keep their parents' divorce to themselves as much as possible. Only Nur shared her parents' situation with a few close friends. This behavior was adopted in order not to attract the attention of their instructors. In this regard, the results of this study provide reasons for such behavior, which are missing in the literature. According to the participants, any attention from the teachers would mean that they had problems at school. They did not want to cause any more problems within the process of their parents being divorced as they considered it a problem for their families. As a result, they tried to act naturally and did not share their situations with their instructors or friends. In this sense, my findings provide new suggestions for the reasons why girls display withdrawn behavior. Some of my participants claimed that they were ashamed of the reason of their parents' divorce and did not want to talk about it. Others simply wanted to avoid the questioning about the reasons for divorce. Interestingly, all of them did not want to talk about the situation itself. If people knew about their situations at home, their images as strong and successful students at school would have been shaken. Therefore, all of the participants preferred not to tell people about their parents' divorce. They hid their familial situations from the people around them, although their reasons for this behavior were different from each other.

The participants tried to portray an independent self-image – a concept that the literature does not mention at all. They strive to be independent as much as possible and try to display this independence in their decision making behavior. As mentioned earlier, daughters are closely attached to their mothers and mothers influence their daughters in Turkish Cypriot society. Although the participants mentioned that their mothers were influential in their lives, they insisted that they made their final decisions independently. They believe that the fact that they make a final decision on their own shows that they can act independently of others – especially their mothers and their friends. However, in fact, they are very much influenced by the people around them. For example, Nur's desire to study in Ankara comes from the fact that her mother had studied in Ankara. In addition, Sema's idea about studying law was changed as a result of a simple comment by one of her friends. The only exception in this respect is Aysun, who is influenced neither by her mother nor by her friends or instructors. For instance, when she decided not to go to the university, all of her teachers and her mother tried to change her mind, but Aysun was determined and did what she believed was right. She did not sit for the university entrance exams and started to work. In this regard, Aysun is the only participant who is autonomous in the way that she makes decisions. Therefore, while most of the participants claim that they are independent in their decision making processes, they are, in fact, not.

Educational Achievements and Aspirations

Parental divorce has brought physical consequences, such as changing schools; economical consequences, such as a decrease in the economic well-being of the single-parent; and psychological consequences, such as depression and suicidal thoughts, to the participants' lives. Moreover, these consequences usually appeared in combination with one another. Whether in combination or single, however, these consequences generally affected daughters of divorce negatively in terms of their educational achievements and aspirations.

Parental divorce brings physical changes to a child's life. For example, the custodial parent may decide to move to another town or city, as in Sema's case. When a child attends another school, he/she may experience difficulties in adjusting to his/her new environment. However, as children in divorced families "struggle to maintain a meaningful relationship with both parents" (Sammons & Lewis, 2001, ¶ 21), they may experience more difficulties in adjusting to a new school setting. At home, they may receive support from their custodial parent. On the other hand, at school, everybody is a stranger for them. Thus, they experience difficulties in adjusting to the new school setting. In Sema's case, this difficulty was usually due to her withdrawn behavior. She lost contact with all of her old friends. Losing friends and having difficulties in finding new friends due to her introverted behavior increased the psychological troubles that the

she was faced with. She also felt lonely because she had no friends in her new school. Her social condition prevented her from concentrating on academic content. Thus, her academic performance and achievements decreased, at least for a certain period, after the separation.

As mentioned earlier, it is usually the mother who gets the custody of the children. However, the economic well-being of the mother and her children generally falls after the separation (Bartfeld, 2000). This economic decline brings a number of constraints on the academic achievements and aspirations of her daughter(s). According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994, as cited in Nielsen, 1999) and Sammons and Lewis (2001), a decreased economic well-being after divorce results, at least in half of the children, in dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and not being able to find good jobs after high school. The experiences of two of the participants, who are no longer students, were quite different though. Schooling is highly valued by Turkish Cypriots. Young people generally graduate at least from high school although compulsory education covers the first eight grades only. For example, high school graduation rate was 50% in 2002 (E. Gazioğlu, Statistics and Research Department, personal communication, June 03, 2004). A majority of these graduates start university immediately after high school. Moreover, if a person fails to go to university, his/her situation is usually perceived as unfortunate, and few parents decide not to send their children to university. In such a context where academic education is highly valued, it can be said that two participants experienced a decline in the years of study due to financial difficulties. For example, Aysun decided that she would not go to a university because her mother could not afford to send her to a private tutoring institution, where she could prepare for the university entrance exam. Similarly, Özlem decided to find a job as soon as she returned from the UK, although her ambition was to start her master's degree. However, this consequence appears to be the only one corresponding with McLanahan and Sandefur's findings. Plus, my findings suggest that the reason for not going further in school is that the daughters felt responsible for supporting their mothers financially. Therefore, Aysun gave up studying after a certain level and Özlem has postponed her dreams for further studies. These daughters felt that they had to help their mothers economically by earning their own money. In addition, they know that the more academic education they pursue, the more money their mothers will have to spend on them. As a result, they cut their education short and sought employment. Hence, the economically disadvantaged position of mothers, who received custody of their children after the separation, caused these participants to give up their educational aspirations and prevented them from achieving educational goals. Nur and Sema were able to pursue their academic goals because their mothers had good financial situations either due to the monetary support they have received from their ex-husbands or due to well-paid jobs. In such cases, daughters are more positive about furthering their studies, since they feel financially secure.

Coma (2000) argues that fatherless daughters fall into two distinct categories in terms of their academic career ambitions (as cited in Krohn & Bogan, 2001). These categories are overachievers and underachievers. Overachievers tend to strive to go beyond their college education; whereas, underachievers either drop out of college or do not attend college at all (Coma). My conclusions on academic and professional career plans of daughters of divorce prove to be slightly different from that of Coma's. For their academic careers, each participant has different views. According to Özlem, who has already graduated from university, doing her master's degree is one of the most important ambitions she has in life. She does not see a master's just as a promotion in her professional career but also wants it for self-development. Thus, according to Coma's categories, she can be classified as an overachiever in terms of academic career plans. The reason behind her ambition is that she did not actually leave the field of education, i.e. she is a teacher. Therefore, her professional career is already related with education. Aysun, who is in the professional world, sees a university degree as nothing more than an increase in her salary. In this regard, she can be called an underachiever, according to Coma's categories, because she does not want to have an academic career. For Nur and Sema, who are still studying at the university, a master's degree is a dream but not an ambition. They want to go as far as they can in academics but both of them prefer professional careers in their vocational areas. Similarly, they believe that a master's degree will provide them with a better position in their professional lives. This positive contribution that a graduate diploma would make to their professional careers is the main reason behind their wishes for further studies. According to Coma's categorization of fatherless daughters with regard to their academic career goals, Nur and Sema are not underachievers but they are not overachievers either. Coma argues that these daughters hardly fall in between the categories mentioned but two of the participants fall in between these categories. In this respect, my findings imply that Coma's categorization is not quite suitable for the participants in this study.

As mentioned earlier, the literature lists the negative consequences of parental divorce on the academic achievements and ambitions of children (Beekman, 1986; Evans, Kelley, & Wanner, 2001; Graham, Beller, & Hernandez, 1994, as cited in Furr, 1998; Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999; Nielsen, 1999). However, there is not enough information on the reasons for these negative effects. In this respect, my study provides explanatory information about possible reasons. All of the participants had problems in concentrating on their courses during the time of the separation and for a certain period after their parents divorced. This inability to concentrate brought a feeling of unwillingness to study with it. Thus, they couldn't achieve their potential. When combined with their withdrawn behavior, unwillingness to study resulted in changes to their educational aspirations. For example, Nur gave up her desire to study mathematics, which had been her ambition since she was a child, after her parents' divorce because she lost all of her interest in her studies. My participants were able to overcome their negative thoughts with their mothers' advice and support. Since there is a close relationship between mothers and daughters in Turkish Cypriot society, the mothers were able to offer psychological support during such hard times. This maternal influence and support suggest that the quality of parenting offered by the custodial parent is very important in helping daughters of divorced families overcome their negative thoughts and stop the decline of their academic achievements (Black & Pedro-Caroll, 1993; Fullan, 2001; Richardson & McCabe, 2001).

Finally, the psychological problems that two of the participants experienced affected their academic performances as well as their educational ambitions and their self-perceptions negatively for a certain period of time. Sammons and Lewis (2001) claim that children of divorce may experience negativities leading to severe psychological problems, such as suicidal thoughts or drug or alcohol abuse. Guetzloe (1991) and Peters (1985) point out that family disruption or coming from a family of divorce is among the reasons why young people between the ages of 15 – 24 commit suicide. Half of the participants expressed earlier thoughts about suicide related to the experience of parental divorce. Two reasons were proposed by both participants for this thought. The first reason was that they believed that they had no control over the flow of events. Since they thought that they did not deserve to go through all those

distressing events, they concluded that life is meaningless. In other words, they thought that no matter how hard they tried, they would not be able to succeed. As a result, they ended up in a cycle of negative thoughts about their potential achievements and gave up trying to achieve more. The second reason was that death seemed like an end to the emotional pain they were experiencing. In fact, according to these participants, divorce is directly related to the thought of suicide because the pain, which lead them to the thought of killing themselves, is caused by their parents' divorce. These participants overcame their difficulties with the help of their mothers. Since they had close relationships with their mothers, they shared these feelings with them. On the other hand, they stated that their teachers did not recognize a change in their behavior. It is possible that the teachers and school counselors have overlooked their introverted conditions because they did not disturb anybody at school. Due to the fact that the participants refused to talk about their situations, signs of suicidal thoughts were not obvious. In other words, their withdrawn behavior at school masked the negative feelings they were experiencing. This unobtrusive situation increases the risks of suicide and decreases the chances of help being provided.

Conclusion

As the number of divorce cases increase throughout the world, more people are becoming aware of both the positive and negative consequences of such an event in people's lives. It is no longer perceived as a family tragedy but rather as a change in the lives of those involved in it – not only spouses but also their children as well. Therefore, the impact of divorce on children's self-perceptions and educational aspirations cannot be ignored. However, nature of this impact is different for each individual because the meaning that he/she attaches to it differs. The way each individual reacts to such changes is determined by these meanings. Hence, reactions vary as well. In the case of parental divorce, two important variables determining its impact are the cultural setting (Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; de Vaus, 1997) and the gender of the individual (Bolgar, Zweig-Frank, & Paris, 1995; Hetherington, 2002; Nielsen, 1999; Page & Bretherton, 2003; Walzer & Oles, 2003). This study investigated the impact of parental divorce on Turkish Cypriot daughters' self-images and educational aspirations using qualitative research methods.

The results of the study suggest that all the participants moved emotionally away from their fathers after their parents divorced. They see their mothers as the primary care-givers in the family setting and as the primary agents of their socialization. As a result, their mothers have a great deal of influence on their decisions. In Turkish Cypriot society, daughters usually do not leave their parents' houses unless they get married. Despite that they are closely attached to their mothers, each expressed a desire to live away from them for a certain period of time in order to prove to themselves that they are independent. Moreover, the participants in my study presented themselves as independent individuals in their decision making behaviors although, in fact, they were mostly influenced in this regard by their mothers or their friends.

All of the participants perceived divorce as an epiphany of relief. In other words, they were relieved of the parental conflict that bothered them a great deal. In fact, it is not the divorce itself but rather the conflict between their parents that had the most negative impact on the participants.

When educational self-images are considered, all of the participants presented strong and successful images. They are successful in academic courses and they connect this success with the moral education they received from their families. They also believe that the more and the better quality formal education they receive, the more they will free themselves from the shadow of their parents – especially from their fathers.

The participants mentioned that they withdrew in the educational settings for a certain period after their parents divorced. However, they tried to act as normal as possible, so that no one would think that they had a problem. The reason for this behavior was that they did not want to attract the attention of their teachers and instructors. They also did not want to cause any more problems since they perceived divorce and its aftermath as an existing problem for their families.

The results of the study indicate that the participants, whose fathers were absent, fell into three distinct categories in regards to their academic career objectives, as opposed to Coma's (2000, as cited in Krohn & Bogan, 2001) two different categories. The first two categories are adopted from Coma's (2000) categorization of fatherless daughters. The first category is the underachievers, who do not attend university but rather start working right after high school. Members of the second group, the overachievers, want to complete their doctoral degrees and go further in their studies and obtain academic titles. The last category, which is not included in Coma's classification, involves girls who study to earn a university degree and mention about further studies but are not ambitious about them. They prefer careers in their professional areas rather than academic careers. These categories only refer to the academic career aspirations of the daughters and have no connection to their achievements in life.

Finally, the academic performances and aspirations of the participants were affected by three major factors related to their parents' divorce. The first factor was the physical and environmental change that they experienced. Moving to a different city after the divorce and changing schools resulted in losing old friends. Since they could not establish new friendships easily, they felt lonely, which also affected their academic performances. The second factor was the economical hardship that the custodial mothers and their children faced. As the daughters felt responsible for supporting their mothers financially, they cut their education short and entered the business world. The third factor was the psychological problems. The participants experienced such problems during and after the divorce. They found it hard to concentrate on their courses. Their grades fell and their aspirations vanished because they did not feel any pleasure in living. These feelings even led to severe depression and to suicidal thoughts in some of them. At this point, the psychological support of their mothers that was available due to their close relationship helped the participants to overcome these negative outcomes. This close relationship between mothers and daughters is a feature of Turkish Cypriot society.

When the results of the study are considered, the importance of parent-school cooperation is evident. Daughters whose parents obtain divorce need extra support and encouragement during and after the period of separation. Teachers can play a key role in identifying such females in their classes because they spend a considerable amount of time with their students (Beekman, 1986; Guetzloe, 1991; Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999; Peters, 1985). It is difficult to identify these girls because they do not disturb anybody in the school setting. Therefore, they may be overlooked and ignored by their teachers. However, teachers should keep in mind that it is not only the disturbing

students who need attention and assistance. As soon as the teachers observe changes in their students, such as withdrawn behavior and a decrease in marks, they should try to find the reasons for it. Moreover, they can help these children by providing an emotionally secure and supportive environment within the classroom. They can also make opportunities available to them to communicate their feelings in the way they want to. For example, teachers can ask students to write compositions about their families. The participants mentioned that they did not want to talk about the situation but they did not claim anything about writing on their feelings. Providing such a writing experience may give these students a feeling of privacy that enables them to express their feelings without having to utter them. Such practices not only help the teacher identify these girls in class but also give the students a chance to express themselves in their own words.

Teachers need to inform the school counselor immediately, who will “notify the parents and other appropriate individuals in the school or community” (Guetzloe, ¶ 7). The school counselor plays a central role in providing professional help since the problems that these daughters experience can be as severe as suicidal thoughts. As the findings of the study highlight the close relationship between the custodial mothers and their daughters, mothers are generally the most knowledgeable ones about these daughters’ problems. Thus, the counselor should try to contact their custodial parents. In this way, the counselor and parents have an opportunity to share information that they have and seek ways to help the children. Moreover, the school can provide help for the single-parents in regards to their children’s problems. The form of this assistance can differ from individual meetings with parents to seminars that inform parents about the facts of divorced people and their children. While providing this help, however, the counselor should be careful not to cross the thin line between providing assistance and getting involved in the family matters of other people. Furthermore, the counselors can organize seminars and meetings for teachers in order to inform them about the experiences of divorced parents and their children as well as possible ways of help.

Wolcott (1995) points out that the answer to the question “How do you generalize the findings of a qualitative study?” is “ ‘You don’t’ ” (p. 171). Therefore, the results of my study can only be generalized to the participants. A longitudinal study, which would include the stages before the actual process of parental divorce and the stages following it, would provide further insights into the changes in the lives of these girls as a result of the separation. Another limitation of the study is that all of the participants had their mothers as their custodial parents. Therefore, the results describe only the experiences of single daughters who live with their mothers after the separation. On the other hand, single Turkish Cypriot women usually live with their families until they get married. In this regard, the findings reflect the cultural features of Turkish Cypriot society. Finally, increasing the number of interviews and observations with each participant would yield richer data about their lifeworlds and deeper understanding of the impact of divorce on their educational achievements and aspirations.

An investigation of daughters, who live with their fathers as their custodial parents, would offer valuable data for comparisons on the issue of the effects of parental divorce on daughters’ self-perceptions and academic achievements. Moreover, gender is one of the important variables that are used to explain the variations in perceptions of people of different phenomena. Thus, a study on the self-perceptions of boys whose parents are divorced would help families and educators to provide assistance to these children to overcome any negative effects that they are experiencing. Such a study would also provide a basis for comparisons between the self-perceptions and educational aspirations of boys and girls whose parents are divorced.

Further research is needed on the cultural features of the modern Turkish Cypriot society. There is a lack of scientific research in this respect, especially on cultural norms and demographic features. Research focusing on issues such as the familial relationships, living arrangements, marriage patterns, parent-child relationships, and emotional connections between the family members could provide invaluable information about the cultural context as well as basis for future research. Moreover, comparative studies, where cultural norms and features of Turkish Cypriot society is compared with other societies, could propose important data, especially with regard to multi-cultural issues.

In conclusion, the family is the social institution where the education of a child starts. School is the second most important setting in this regard. Nowadays, as divorce is accepted as a fact of life, there are many single-parent families. Since children spend much of their time in school, it is in an “excellent position to offer supportive services to children of divorce” (Kiefer, 1982, as cited in Beekman, 1986, ¶ 6). Therefore, educators cannot and should not ignore the changes in the lives of children whose parents are divorced because they have the power to help in reversing the possible negative consequences. Finally, teachers and school counselors can help by providing the necessary professional assistance during times of familial distress.

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