A study of middle age women and self esteem

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The objective of this study was to explore and describe the relationship between self-esteem among middle age women. Thirty women between the ages of forty-two and fifty-nine were evaluated according to the Index of Self-Esteem and the women were ranked according to each score.

The result of the study indicates that no significant relationship exists between self-esteem of married women, divorced, and those who never married. No relationship exists in the level of self-esteem and income. There is no statistical difference in the level of self-esteem between those who are employed meaningfully employed, and never employed. No statistical difference exists in the level of self esteem between those who have graduated from high school and those who have graduated from college. Similar results were found in ethnicity and respondents.
STUDY OF MIDDLE AGE WOMEN AND
SELF ESTEEM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
SUSAN P. TINDALL

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** .................................................. ii

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** .................................................. iii

**LIST OF TABLES** ..................................................... iv

**CHAPTER**

I. **INTRODUCTION** ..................................................... 1

II. **REVIEW OF LITERATURE** ......................................... 5

   Major Theoretical Orientations .................................. 14

   Definition of Terms ................................................. 16

   Statement of the Hypotheses ..................................... 16

III. **METHODOLOGY** ..................................................... 18

   Research Design .................................................... 18

   Sampling ............................................................. 18

   Data Collection Procedure ...................................... 19

   Data Analysis ....................................................... 21

IV. **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS** .................................... 22

V. **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS** ................................... 32

   Limitations of the Study .......................................... 33

   Suggested Research Directions .................................. 34

VI. **IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE** ................. 35

VII. **APPENDICES** ..................................................... 36

VIII. **BIBLIOGRAPHY** .................................................. 41
LIST OF TABLES

1. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Marital Status................................. 22
2. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Income Level.................................... 22
3. Frequency and Percent of Employment Status of Respondents............................ 23
4. Frequency and Percent of Educational Status of Respondents............................ 24
5. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Ethnicity......................................... 24
6. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Religion........................................... 25
7. There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are married, divorced, and never married............ 26
8. There is no statistical difference between the self esteem of women whose income is over $30,000, from $20,000 to $29,000, from $10,000 to $19,000, and from $5,000 to $9,000............ 27
9. There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are employed, those who are meaningfully employed and not employed................................. 28
10. There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who graduated from high school and those who graduated from college.................................................. 29
11. There is no significant difference between the self esteem of middle age women who are African American and those who are Caucasian............... 30
12. There is no significant difference between the self esteem of middle age women who are Protestant, Catholic and Jewish................. 31
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Written in bold black letters on an anti-drug poster displayed in a Community Center are the words, "ENJOY YOURSELF JUST THE WAY YOU ARE." There is a picture of a young girl viewing herself in a large mirror. The pretext of the poster is that if she likes what she sees, not only the outward appearance, but also the substance of her person, she will not feel the need to indulge in self-destructive behavior. Furthermore, if the young girl learns to care for herself and build self-esteem, that this appreciation will carry over from adulthood to middle age.

Unfortunately, this assumption holds very little weight in our world today. According to a study commissioned by the American Association of University Women, and released in 1991, a large part of the lesson girls learn is to undervalue themselves. As nine-year-olds, for instance, 67 percent of girls said that they are happy with the way they are. By the time these students reached high school, the number had plunged to 29 percent.

Girls are encouraged both in school and in the community to act in a dependent manner and to refrain from pursuing any semblance of self-assertiveness, whether in their academic studies, on the playing field, or in their relationships. Most women are programmed to locate power
any where except within themselves. The reasons for this lie neither in the biological nor economic disabilities of women but in our sense of being caught between a man's world and a world of our own.

Margaret Mead has pointed out that the biological life cycle of a woman has certain well-marked phases from menarche through the birth of her children to her menopause; and if during these cycles her energies are focused exclusively outside of herself, middle age will come as an empty blow to her. Ida Fisher Davidoff and May Elish Markewich studied fifty educated women who had been full-time housewives and mothers throughout the years their children were in school. All of these women suffered severe distress when the last of their children left home because they had no deep interest beyond the home. The fact that they had been leaders in community work did little to compensate for the emptiness they felt at that time.

The problem that has no name, which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities, is taking a far greater toll on the female population over the age of 46 than most of us realize.

The question of how a person can most fully realize her own capacities and thus achieve identity has become an important concern of Social Workers. For "self
realization" or "self-fulfillment" or "self-esteem" does not come from looking into a mirror in rapt contemplation of one's own image. It comes from something far deeper, by finding a true identity and an authenticity of personhood. Without this there is a feeling of terror, and the realization that she no longer has a place in the world.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem to be considered in this study is: the middle aged women's perception of their self-esteem.

Middle age is one of the fastest growing life spans. Yet there is little information in social work literature investigating self-esteem at different points in the adult life cycle of this population.

What are the sources of positive self-esteem among middle aged women? The situation of middle aged women is different from that of any other oppressed social group: exploited at work, and relegated to the home. Social work practitioners must be concerned with general reflections on the different roles of middle aged women and some of their interconnections. Social workers need to be more cognizant of the issues and problems that middle aged women are confronted with.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY/SIGNIFICANCE

The purpose of this study is to address the self esteem issues among middle aged adult women, currently the fastest growing group in America. Exploration of the social and mental health care needs of middle aged women and interventions to meet these needs is crucial for social workers.

The significance of this is that it will provide social work practitioners with new knowledge. Rational and comprehensive social work planning depends on adequate information regarding this population.
A review of the literature underscores the importance of understanding further the way in which middle aged women perceive their own self-esteem. There is no formal discipline that studies the middle aged woman. There is no clear agreement on when middle age begins.

This literature review will address the following areas of concern: 1) Chronological definition of middle adulthood; 2) Theoretical approaches; 3) Emotional, spiritual and social dimensions of middle-aged adults; 4) Selected physiological changes; 5) Empirical studies of self esteem, and 6) Social changes in women's lives.

Middle age is one of the fastest growing life spans. There is consensus among some writers who address this issue that middle age is a process that proceeds in a series of identifiable stages.

Levinson et al., describes the following chronological definition of middle adulthood that has five developmental periods:

40 to 45 years: Midlife transition
45 to 50 years: Entrance into middle adulthood
50 to 55 years: Age 50 transition
55 to 60 years: Culmination of middle adulthood
60 to 65 years: Late adulthood transition.¹

Chronological age may not be the most significant determinant of entrance into the middle years. Newgarten suggests that the onset of middle age typically occurs at younger chronological ages for the working class and disadvantaged individuals than for the middle class and more advantaged parents.² Culture defines developmental time tables for taking on various roles. The movement into middle adulthood is challenging. Some people make a smooth transition to this life cycle; others experience a mid-life crises.³

The DSM-III R uses V codes to classify conditions that require attention but are not caused by a mental disorder. Several V codes apply to the middle-aged adult:
1) Occupational problems; 2) Parent-child problems; 3) Specific family circumstances; and 4) Other interpersonal problems.⁴

¹D. Levinson et al., The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1978), 65.
²D.I. Newgarten, Middle Age and Aging (Chicago The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 15.
There are several theoretical approaches that are related to the life span development cycle. Erikson considered the seventh stage of life the middle years. The developmental task is generativity versus stagnation. Failure to achieve generativity may cause stagnation.\footnote{E.H. Erikson, \textit{Childhood and Society}, Ed. 2 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 50.}

Jung's theories about the middle years addressed aspects of the spiritual dimension. Middle-aged people must make a transition to their inner orientation.\footnote{C.G. Jung, \textit{Modern Man in Search of a Soul} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), 30.} Similar to Jung, Buhler's theories about the middle years emphasized goal formulation. She viewed life as an expression and contraction process. Goal achievement depends on 1) Satisfaction of needs; 2) Ability to expand creativity; 3) Adjustment to limitations; and 4) Consistency of inner self.\footnote{Charlotte Buhler, "The Course of Human Life as a Psychological Problem," In W. R. Looft (Editor), \textit{Developmental Psychology: A Book of Readings} (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 25.}

The emotional response to unfulfilled goals are depression, despair, and sometimes suicide.

Peck described four phases of psychological development for middle age; 1) Valuing wisdom versus valuing physical powers; 2) Socializing versus sexualizing in human relationships; 3) Cathetic flexibility versus cathetic impoverishment; 4) Mental flexibility versus
mental rigidity. Havighurst notes that the individual needs to master the following tasks: 1) Achieve adult civic and social responsibility; 2) Establish and maintain an economic standard of living; 3) Help teenaged children become responsible and happy adults; 4) Develop adult leisure activities; 5) Relate to one's spouse as a person; 6) Accept and adjust to the physiological changes of middle ages; and 7) Adjust to aging parents. Each task must be achieved for satisfactory adjustment to middle age and progression to the next developmental stage.

Emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions of middle-aged adults may be viewed from the perspective that some of the major stressors of this cycle of life result from losses and role changes. Most persons approaching middle age feel confident of their ability to adjust to mid-life changes and losses. There is increased prevalence of major depression in persons over the age of 45. Merikangas et al., revealed new information about middle age women and depression; married women are more likely to

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be depressed than single women. Gove carried the study further in reporting that middle age women who are married and do not work are even more likely to be depressed. According to Bothwell and Weissman the role of wife seems to inspire many women to be less assertive, to deny their own needs, or at least to see them as less important than those of their husbands. Whatever the reason, women with severe recurrent depressions do express more anger and have more somatic complaints than men, according Frank, Carpenter, and Kupfer.

Job loss is an important consideration when assessing for depression in the middle-aged adults. Some middle-aged adults use alcohol to cope with the depression in other age groups. Kalish notes that suicide is less common between the ages of 40 and 50, after which it increases. Over 90% of successful suicides in mid-life are

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12 W. R. Gove, "The Relationship Between Sex Roles and Mental Illness", *Social Forces* 51 (1972), 34-44.


by persons who are depressed, alcoholic, or both.\textsuperscript{16}

In an effort to cope with some of the changes in mid-life, many people turn to religion. Using Jung's theory, it is possible to assess the extent to which persons have accepted the inevitability of their own death.\textsuperscript{17}

Many of today's middle aged adults are caring for their dependent children and their aging parents at the same time. Sommers et al., suggests that these middle-aged adults are referred to as the sandwich generation, caught between competing obligations to their children and to their parents. The role reversal involved in caring for aging parents may be a source of strain. One of the most stressful experiences of middle age is the death of a spouse.\textsuperscript{18}

Levinson argues that bereavement often leads to the death of widowed persons within 5 years of the spouse's death. The majority of widowed persons in the late 40's and 50's remarry because they want companionship to avoid loneliness, and to have a partner for social activities.

\textsuperscript{16}R. A. Kalish (Editor), \textit{Midlife Loss Coping Strategies} (Neubury Park, California: Sage, 1989), 49.


Few women in their middle to late 50's remarry.\textsuperscript{19}

Newgarten and Weinstein's comprehensive study indicated that most grandparents derive pleasure and satisfaction from their role.\textsuperscript{20} The grandchild establishes a bond of common interest between the parent and the grandparent.

Havighurts suggests that the individual has to accept and adjust to the physiological changes of middle age.\textsuperscript{21} The most visible changes are greying hair, wrinkling skin, and obesity. For women menopause is a normal physiological response during the climacteric. A side effect of menopause is osteoporosis, a decrease in bone mass. Of women over the age of 45, 50\% are affected with osteoporosis. Of the 25\%, Anglo women are likely to have one or two fractures by age 65, 70\% will be caused by osteoporosis.\textsuperscript{22}

Self-esteem is a major component of self-concept. Self-esteem is judging one's own worth in relation to one's


\textsuperscript{21}R. J. Havighurts, Developmental Tasks and Education (New York: Alfred Knoff, 1972), 20.

ideal self and to the performance of others. Self-esteem may be high or low. Self-concept and self-esteem influence how one relates to others. Recent research on self-esteem and racial identity challenges some traditional findings and offers new evidence about how African Americans positively adapt to one of the central tasks facing them: establishing and maintaining a positive sense of self.23

Cross reviewed 161 studies of African American self-concept done between 1939 and 1977. Some 101 of these studies involved self-esteem, 71% showed African American self-esteem to be equal to or to exceed that for Caucasians, 16% found Caucasians with higher levels of self-esteem, 13% had mixed results.24

Taylor, in a comprehensive review of theory and studies of child and adult self-esteem, reached similar conclusions.25 Yancy, et al.,26 and Heiss et al.,27 found


that the two groups, African American and Caucasian adults, had essentially equal overall self-esteem. Veroff, et al., 28 using national survey data, found African American and Caucasian adults to have equivalent overall self-esteem and equivalent self-esteem in a number of areas. Berlin's research contributes important data concerning self-esteem in middle age women 29. Baruch, Bennett, and Rivers assert that many women between the ages of 35 and 55 felt more positive about this new stage of life and about their future. These women indicated a significant increase in self-esteem and a stronger sense of self-worth than they had experienced in their younger years. 30 Little information investigating African Americans' self-esteem at different points in the adult life cycle exists. McGoldrich et al., agrees that the middle generation women who have nurtured and cared for their husbands, and their children are launched behind in the skills needed to


29 Ibid.

deal with the outside world. Gilligan observed that women's embeddedness in relationships, their orientation to inter-dependence, their subordination of achievement to care, and their conflicts over competitive success leave them at risk in mid-life.

Bianchi and Spain noted that competition is increasing, that 42% of women 55 to 64 were in the labor force, as opposed to 27% in 1950. A study conducted by Block et al., affirmed that women were not nearly as sorry to see the child bearing era end and that they, indeed, welcomed their new found freedom to pursue new goals and to develop their own creativity.

Overview of the Major Theoretical Orientations

This study is built on the theoretical framework described by Carl Jung wherein he describes the Coping Theory when the middle age woman is transformed into a spiritual person, and she is then free to explore instinctual aims. Opposing forces of the external

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32 Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 27-35.


environment and the needs of the unconscious are allowed to unite in a coordinated and harmonious flow of physical process.35

As Jung predicted, middle age women are enjoying an ever increasing amount of publicity and number of role models who are charting unknown territories. New ways of coping are being explored as old and worn platitudes about how life "should" be lived are being set aside and new life styles adopted. Women are not necessarily becoming old and tired as they age, but, indeed, are experiencing a new surge of energy. This phenomena needs to be examined and used to help women to experience their own identities without feeling strange or inappropriate.

The question of how a person can most fully realize her own capacities and thus achieve identity should become an important concern for social thinkers of our time. For "self-realization" or "self-fulfillment" or "identity" does not come from looking into a mirror in rapt contemplation of one's own image. Those who have most fully realized themselves, in a sense that can be recognized by the human mind even though it cannot be clearly defined, have done so in the service of a human purpose larger than themselves.

The freedom to lead and plan her own life, what Jung refers to as self-actualization, is frightening to a woman

when she finally starts listening to the voice inside of her that questions, "Who am I?" For the woman who "moves on" towards personality development, there is a sense of isolation and loneliness, and this vacuum must be filled. These problems cannot be solved by anything other than a drastic reshaping of the cultural image of the middle-age woman so that she can reach Jung's idea of maturity, identity, completeness of self without conflict. A massive attempt must be made by educators and parents to help to prepare women to experience their genius at all ages.

Definition of Terms

1. Middle age: the ages between forty-two and fifty nine.

2. Self esteem: the subjective judgement about one's own general well being and is defined by scores on the Hudson Scales Index of Self Esteem.

Statement of the Hypotheses

This is a correlational design which will be utilized to affirm or confute whether there is any significant statistical relationship with reference to marital status, income level, employment, level of education, ethnicity, or religion between the self esteem of middle age women in these various groups. This design will enable the researcher to gain greater insight into the intervention
strategies for working with middle age women. The research hypothesis for this study are:

**H1:** There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are married, divorced or never married.

**H2:** There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women whose income is over $30,000, from $20,000 to $29,000, from $10,000 to $19,000, and from $5,000 to $9,000.

**H3:** There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are employed, those who are meaningfully employed and not employed.

**H4:** There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who have graduated from high school and those who have graduated from college.

**H5:** There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are of African American ethnicity and those who are Caucasian.

**H6:** There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The goal of this study is to explore and describe the relationship between self-esteem and middle aged women. Critical factors which may impact the scores were evaluated, such as the marital status of the women tested. Also taken into account were their income level, employment status, level of education, ethnicity and religion. The Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) was used for the purpose of measuring problems of self esteem in this group.

This study is described as a comparative analysis study. It is comparative because it seeks to compare the life styles of certain women in this age group to determine if certain phenomena help to improve the self esteem in middle age women. This group has not been examined to explore the needs and opportunities available.

Sampling

Using a convenience sampling procedure, a nonprobability sampling technique, thirty women from Clark Atlanta University and Georgia State University were tested in Atlanta, Georgia. The age range of the women is between forty-two and fifty-nine. Each woman was asked to respond to a structured questionnaire determining the level of self-esteem.
Among the thirty women selected, sixteen were married and fourteen were not; the fourteen women who were not married consisted of nine who were divorced and five who had never been married. Sixteen of the women are Protestants, ten are Catholic, and four are Jewish. The educational level is divided as follows: nine have completed high school, and twenty-one of the women are college graduates. Twenty-four of the women are employed, and of that number nineteen have jobs that are considered meaningful and growthful experiences for the women. The economic income categories are divided as follows: five of the women are in the income range of between five and ten thousand dollars per year, seven represent a level of between ten and twenty thousand dollars per year, fifteen of the women fall in the income range of between twenty and thirty thousand dollars per year, and three have an income of over thirty thousand dollars per year. Thirteen of the women are of African-American ethnic descent, and seventeen of the women are Caucasian.

Data Collection Procedure

The Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) will be used for the purpose of measuring problems with self esteem. It is a 25-item scale designed to measure the degree, severity, or magnitude of a problem the client has with self-esteem. Self-esteem is considered as the evaluative component of
self-concept. The ISE is written in very simple language, is easily administered, and easily scored. Because problems with self-esteem are often central to social and psychological difficulties, this instrument has a wide range of utility for a number of clinical problems. The ISE has a cutting score of 30 (+ or - 5), with scores above 30 indicating the respondent has a clinically significant problem and scores below 30 indicating the individual has no such problem.

This scale was derived from tests of 1,745 respondents, including single and married individuals, clinical and nonclinical populations, college students and nonstudents. Respondents including Caucasians, Japanese and Chinese Americans, and a smaller number of other ethnic groups.

The test is designed to measure how a person views herself, and is scored by first reverse-scoring the items listed at the bottom of the scale (3, 4-7, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25), totaling these and the other items' scores, and subtracting 25. This gives a range of 1 to 100 with higher scores giving more evidence of the presence of problems with self-esteem.

Reliability: The ISE has a mean alpha of .93, indicating excellent internal consistency, and an excellent (low) S.E.M. of 3.70. The ISE also has excellent stability with a two hour test-retest correlation of .92.
Validity: The ISE has good known-groups validity, significantly distinguishing between clients judged by clinicians to have problems in the area of self-esteem and those known not to. Further, the ISE has very good construct validity, correlating poorly with measures with which it should not and correlating well with a range of other measures with which it should correlate highly, e.g., depression, happiness, sense of identity, and scores on the Generalized Contentment Scale (depression).¹

Data Analysis

The data in this comparison will be used to determine scores from the instrument. The statistical technique used for the analysis will be the t-test. The level of significance of the correlation will be evaluated at a five percent level.

CHAPTER FOUR
Presentation of Results

Table 1
Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Marital Status
(N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reported marital status of participants shows that of the thirty respondents, sixteen (or 53 percent) are married; nine (or 30 percent) are divorced; and five (or 17 percent) indicated that they were never married.

Table 2
Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Income Level
(N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$ 5,000 to $10,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$11,000 to $20,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 to $30,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$31,000 +</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table indicated that five (or 17 percent) of the women indicated that the level of their income was between $5,000 and $10,000; while seven (or 23 percent) of the women were in the $11,000 to $20,000 income bracket. Fifteen (or 50 percent) were in the $21,000 to $30,000 and the remaining three (or 10 percent) of the respondents indicated that their income was over thirty-one thousand.

Table 3

Frequency and Percent of Employment Status of Respondents
(N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Employment</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmeaningful Employment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data shows that six (or 20 percent) of the respondents are not employed; the majority or nineteen respondents are employed in a meaningful job, while five (or 17 percent) are employed in a job that is not meaningful.
Table 4

Frequency and Percent of Educational Status of Respondents
(N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reported educational status of the respondents suggests that nine (or 30 percent) of the women are high school graduates, and twenty-one (or 70 percent) are college graduates.

Table 5

Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Ethnicity
(N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table indicates that thirteen (or 43 percent) of all respondents are African American and seventeen (or 57 percent) of all respondents are Caucasian.
Table 6

Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Religion (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preceding table suggests that sixteen (or 33 percent) of all respondents are of the Protestant faith, while ten (or 54 percent) are Catholics; and the remaining four (or 13 percent) indicated that their religious preference is Jewish.
Results of Hypothesis Under Study

Table 7

H1: There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are married, divorced and never married (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Label</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test 1.08  DF 28  2-tail Probability 2.98

The results at the point 0.05 level indicate that we will accept the null hypothesis stated. Thus, there is no significant statistical difference between the level of self esteem of women who are married, divorced and never married. The estimated value is 1.08 with DF = 48, and a 2-tail probability of 2.98.
Table 8

H2: There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women whose income is over $30,000, from $20,000 to $29,000, from $10,000 to $19,000, and from $5,000 to $9,000 (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30,000 or More</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 - 29,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 - 19,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 - 9,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mw20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test  DF  2-tail Probability
44     28  .635

Results at the point 0.05 level indicate that we will accept the null hypothesis stated. Thus, there is no significant statistical difference between the level of self esteem of women who have an income of over $30,000, $20,000 to $29,000, $10,000 to $19,000, and $5,000 to $9,000. The estimated value is 48 with DF = 28, and a 2-tail probability of .635.
Table 9

H3: There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who are employed, those who are meaningfully employed, and not employed (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfully Employed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test  DF  2 Tail Probability
2.16  28  .04*

* Symbolizes significance

Results at the point 0.05 level indicate that there is a significant statistical difference between the level of self esteem of women who are employed, meaningfully employed, and not employed. Thus, reject the null hypothesis. The estimated value is 2.16 with DF = 28, and a 2-tail probability of .04.
Table 10

H4: There is no significant statistical difference between the self esteem of women who graduated from high school and those who graduated from college (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test       DF  2-Tail Probability
.54          28     .60

Results at the point 0.05 level indicated that there is no significant statistical difference between the level of self esteem of women who have graduated from college and those who have graduated from high school. The estimated value is .54 with DF = 28, and a 2-tail probability of .60.
Table 11

H5: There is no significant difference between the self esteem of middle age women who are African American and those who are Caucasian (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test  DF  2-tail Probability
.54  28  59

Results at the 0.05 level indicate that there is no significant statistical difference between the level of self esteem of African American women and Caucasian women. The estimated value is .54 with DF = 28, and a 2-tail probability of .59.
Table 12

H6: There is no significant difference between the self esteem of middle age women who are Protestant, Catholic and Jewish 
(N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results at the 0.05 level indicated that there is no significant statistical difference between the level of self esteem of women who are Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. The estimated value is 13 with DF = 28, and a 2-tail probability of .90.
CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusions

The most obvious conclusion of this research is that middle age women are doing quite well in coping with the transitions and changes that are taking place. Eighty percent of the women scored in the "under 30" category which means that they are not struggling with problematic symptoms which hamper their lives. The study also suggests that there is a probability that a high percentage of women in this category are creatively exploring new ways to continue their lives. They are reassessing their lives and thinking in terms of culling out less meaningful relationships.

Middle age women are experiencing transcending sex roles, stereotypes and becoming more androgynous. After having spent most of their earlier years conforming to "feminine" expectations, they are becoming more aggressive and "masculine." Jung describes this time in a woman's life when she becomes more individuated and more differentiated from others and more whole as a human being.

Results from the study suggest that African-American women and Caucasian women were almost equal in self-esteem. Married women did not fare so well. There were almost twice as many women who had scores over 30 in that category. Furthermore, there were five more married women who scored in the gray area of between 25 and 29 which
suggests that there is more discomfort in this group than meets the eye. They may be denying the more aggressive tendencies in favor of the more passive and compliant ones that are more socially acceptable. The men with whom this is most likely to cause conflict are their husbands, who may object to their wives working or seeking some other outlet such as returning to college. These women may feel, at least superficially, that their self esteem is quite high. They may prefer to be the cheerleaders for others and then receive gratification from the approval of others.

Another factor which plays into this scenario is that these women may have settled into their long term situations whereby they have not had to step out into the world to make new friends like their divorced sisters. It is interesting to compare this group with that of the "never married" group where none of the women scored over 21. Again these women may be comparing their lives where there has been very little struggle or challenge to those of women who have gone through painful divorces or tremendous changes.

Limitations of the Study

In carrying out the study, the following limitations were observed:

1) The population was limited to thirty middle aged women;
2) The review of the literature indicated that there is a lack of empirical research which addresses this population;

3) The size of the population does not present results that can be generalized, but it does reflect the impact of self esteem on middle aged African American and Caucasian women.

Suggested Research Directions

This study does have implications for further study, especially for social workers. It is the opinion of the researcher that this study needs to be expanded in terms of the number of subjects, race, and time used in conducting the study. The study was very limited in terms of time for collection of data and sample size. There is a lack of systemic research from the social work profession that has been done to explore the self-esteem of this population.
CHAPTER SIX

Implications for Social Work Practice

Clinical work with middle age women should focus on helping them to resolve the developmental conflicts, and to think more in terms of their natural tendencies than what they have been socialized to believe that they "should" be doing. Women in this age bracket struggle typically with feelings of guilt for pursuing goals. It is not too late at this age to "start over" with new directions even when this requires work on the part of the woman. Women may have suppressed these internal conflicting urges and it is important that the social worker help her to become more aware of how she is feeling. Middle age women also need help in coping with the consequences of these changes. Families may resent the women who have nurtured and supported other members suddenly becoming aware of their own needs, and it is important that these women have the support of the social worker.
APPENDICES
Dear Participant,

My name is Susan P. Tindall and I am enrolled in the Masters Program at Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work. I am currently conducting a study of the self esteem of women between the ages of forty-two and fifty-nine.

Be assured that this information will be held in strict confidence and used for the sole purpose of this study. Please answer each item on the questionnaire as carefully and accurately as possible. It is my hope that this research will contribute to the growing body of literature on self esteem of middle age women.

Thank you for participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Susan P. Tindall
Researcher

cc: Hattie Mitchell
QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Information

1. My marital status is:
   1. Married
   2. Divorced
   3. Never Married

2. My income is:
   1. $5,000 to $10,000
   2. $11,000 to $20,000
   3. $21,000 to $30,000
   4. $31,000 +

3. My employment status is:
   1. Employed in a job that is not meaningful
   2. Meaningfully employed
   3. Not employed

4. My education is:
   1. Completed high school
   2. Graduated from college

5. The one racial or ethnic group that best describes me is:
   1. African American
   2. Caucasian

6. My religion is:
   1. Catholic
   2. Protestant
   3. Jewish

INDEX OF SELF ESTEEM (ISE)

This questionnaire is designed to measure how you see yourself. It is not a test, so there are not right or wrong answers. Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by placing a number by each one as follows:

1. Rarely or none of the time
2. A little of the time
3. Some of the time
4. A good part of the time
5. Most or all of the time
Please begin.

1. I feel that people would not like me if they really knew me well

2. I feel that others get along much better than I do

3. I feel that I am a beautiful person

4. When I am with other people I feel they are glad I am with them

5. I feel that people really like to talk with me

6. I feel that I am a very competent person

7. I think I make a good impression on others

8. I feel that I need more self-confidence

9. When I am with strangers I am very nervous

10. I think that I am a dull person

11. I feel ugly

12. I feel that others have more fun than I do

13. I feel that I bore people

14. I think my friends find me interesting

15. I think I have a good sense of humor

16. I feel very self-conscious when I am with strangers

17. I feel that if I could be more like other people I would have it made

18. I feel that people have a good time when they are with me

19. I feel like a wallflower when I go out

20. I feel I get pushed around more than others

21. I think I am a rather nice person
22. I feel that people really like me very much

23. I feel that I am a likeable person

24. I am afraid I will appear foolish to others

25. My friends think very highly of me
BIBLIOGRAPHY


