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INTOXICATING AND DEVASTATING THE UNITED STATES: THE INFLUENCE OF  
ALCOHOLISM ON SELF-ESTEEM

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## **ABSTRACT**

Alcoholism is a prevalent and growing problem within the United States. Past studies have researched different effects of alcoholism, such as on one's family, career, and society overall. Another important concern is its association with self-esteem, specifically in women who were raised by someone who may be an alcoholic. A group of three hundred and twenty-one adult women, recruited online, were surveyed to determine whether growing up in a family with an alcoholic parent affected self-esteem. Firstly, it was hypothesized that daughters raised by an alcoholic would report lower self-esteem. Also, it was hypothesized that the current relationship between women and the alcoholic parent or guardian they were raised by would be strained. Findings suggest that daughters of an alcoholic did have lower self-esteem, and that the relationship that they had with the person who was an alcoholic was strained in comparison to women who were not raised by an alcoholic.

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## Chapter 1

### Background Information

Alcohol misuse is not only the fifth leading cause for early deaths around the world (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2015), but it also kills 88,000 people every year (National Council on Alcoholism, 2014). As of July 2014, it was reported that over 17 million adults within the United States are dependent on alcohol (Cunha, 2014). This abuse can be categorized by the prioritization of excessive drinking despite negative consequences and can be followed by withdrawal symptoms (Dryden-Edwards, 2014). Alcohol affects communication within the brain (National Institute on Alcohol, 2014.) and can also create long term, permanent conditions throughout the entire body (Oscar-Berman & Marinkovic, 2004). This addiction not only affects the drinker, but also those within their community. The National Institute on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (2014) found that in the United States, 40% of hospital beds are being used for alcoholics who have developed with some type of medical condition. As a continuous, developing dilemma, heavy drinking creates strong dependences (Patton, 1981), increases risks to the body (National Institute on Alcohol, 2014), and damages relationships (Kleinschmidt, 2013). Long-term alcohol abuse can be not only be detrimental to the abuser's body, but also to their family and friends, career, and emotions (Cunha, 2014).

Going back several centuries, people have been concerned with the negative influence of alcoholics on society and the one abusing it (Crown & Freeman, 1994). Whether or not alcoholism is even a disease has been a debate for over one hundred years. In the nineteenth century, alcohol was first considered addictive. After the Prohibition, this idea became more

widely recongnized. Alcoholism was then later defined more closely as damage to one's self or society through the consumption of alcohol. Emphasis has now also begun to be placed on its biological and physical effects (Crown & Freeman, 1994).

Other research on alcoholism has looked at its indirect effects on things such as loss of productivity and income (Mullahy & Sindela, 1994). The connection between loss of earnings and cost of alcohol in alcoholics is hard to study, so other variables that deal with it have been researched. However, these types of correlations display the impact of alcoholism on a society as a whole by affecting the labor market (Mullahy & Sindela, 1994). Also, studies on alcohol's effect on the brain and personality have been published. Differences between alcoholism and antisocial personality, such as when the drinking begins (Hesselbrock et al, 1984), along with brain deficits due to alcoholism affecting memory and advanced brain aging (Wilkinson & Carlen, 1981) are some of the aspects previously studied.

Past research has also put its efforts into revealing the connections between alcohol abuse and violence (Norstrom & Pape, 2010), not just as a main concern of society in the United States, but also within the family (Covington, 1986). This type of research has shown that when more alcohol is consumed, aggressive behavior increases (Norstrom & Pape, 2010). These associations have developed due to alcohol's effect on judgment (Buikhuisen et al, 1988) and the way that alcohol use increases irritability (Covington, 1986). While the spectrum of aggression varies between each alcoholic (Norstrom & Pape, 2010), almost all have an issue with trust and relationships (Covington, 1986), increasing their regression of emotions. By an alcoholic putting all of their adoration and concern into alcohol (Covington, 1986), their violence towards others increases (Buikhuisen et al, 1988).

Making up the largest group of those affected by alcoholism, some research has also been done on its effect on family of, and, in particular, children of alcoholics (Woititz, 1984). Hall and Raymond (2007) classified several implicit rules that children grow up with when living in an alcoholic home. Not only is the development of vulnerability compromised, but also they are mainly taught not to trust anyone, even themselves (Hall & Raymond, 2007). Since the effect of an alcoholic is widespread, it can cause those around them to develop emotions such as guilt, depression, anxiety, and anger (Harper, 2011).

While research has shown the impact of alcoholism on one's behavior, family, and career, it has also been shown to be connected to self-esteem. Firstly, studies have been done that display how alcohol lowers the efficiency of one's mental processes required to use self-awareness (Hull, 1981). In addition, it has been noted that children of alcoholics are more likely to develop depression due to lower self-esteems in comparison to non-children of alcoholics (Rodney & Mupier, 1999). In another study, alcoholic women were shown to have very low self-esteems and that their drinking makes it hard for them to improve it (Turner, 1995). Combined with alcoholism, self-esteem becomes an important factor in the lives of alcoholics and their children.

### **Self-Esteem**

Along with the immense amount of research on alcohol's effect on several aspects of life and society, self-esteem and alcoholism together have only begun to be studied within the last fifty years (Kernis, 1993). Robinson et al (1991) describe that while it can be mentioned under many names, it is always more desirable to have a high self-esteem. Also, it is so important in some societies that California even created a program for self-esteem in order to attempt to raise it within its communities (Robinson et al, 1991). However, one of the main problems is that self-esteem is a psychological construct so it cannot be studied with just a single measure (Robinson

et al, 1991). It is assumed that having a society with low self-esteem will not be as successful, and will bring down the welfare of the community (Mecca et al, 1989).

While gender differences, the stability of self-esteem, and its varying levels (Josephs et al, 1992) have been studied, there is still little research on the effects of them (Kernis, 1993). It is also important to consider work that has shown that those with low self-esteem do not lack desire, but deal with unfulfilled needs (Baumeister, 1993). As one's success changes throughout their lives, it has been researched that it causes a fluctuation of high and low self-esteem (Kernis, 1993). Motivation has also been associated with self-esteem whereas it is not opposite in those with low or high self-esteem (Tice, 1993). Also affecting children, Strauss (2000) researched the link between obesity and lower self-esteem, however not all of the effects are known. This longitudinal study on adolescents showed that low self-esteem did not precede the obesity, but was related to present obesity (Strauss, 2000).

Another longitudinal study, done by McGee and Williams (2000), looked at whether low self-esteem leads to getting into compromising behaviors such as drugs and drinking. It was found that there was a relationship between performing such behaviors and fluctuating self-esteems. However, there was a difference between the children's self-esteem towards their school work and their behavioral self-esteem. Importantly in this research it was noted that the lower the self-esteem that was reported, the higher amount of negative behaviors were performed (McGee & Williams, 2000). While self-esteem has begun to be looked at in individuals, Crocker and Major (1989) looked into self-esteem in stigmatized groups. They pointed out that self-esteem is just one of the factors that effects discrimination, but by being perceived differently, these groups tried to improve their self-esteem that was brought down by group differences (Crocker & Major, 1989).

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Even though an extensive amount of research has been done on alcoholism and self-esteem, not much has focused directly on how they affect each other. Since children are the largest group affected by those who deal with alcoholism, it is vital to study what affect this has on them. Also, self-esteem developed in adolescence can have a profound effect on a child's future. Specifically, daughters of alcoholics have been thought to have better relationships with their fathers, even if he is the alcoholic. In comparison, daughters of an alcoholic mother may show a more strained relationship.

The first question raised for this research was, will adult women who were raised by an alcoholic report lower self-esteem than women who were not raised by an alcoholic? It was proposed that adult women raised by an alcoholic would have significantly lower self-esteem than women who were not raised by an alcoholic. Secondly, this research asked if women who were raised by an alcoholic would show a strained relationship with the person who was the alcoholic. For this question, it was hypothesized that daughters of an alcoholic would show strained relationships with the alcoholic parent. Finally, this study wanted to compare relationships that daughters of alcoholics have with their alcoholic parents. It was hypothesized that the women would have a better relationship with their fathers, even when he is the alcoholic, then with their mothers.

## Chapter 2

### Methods

#### Participants

Three hundred and twenty-one adult women, ages 25 to 50, were recruited for an online survey. This process was done using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Due to how these women were found, the sample was racially diverse (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Demographic Characteristics.*

Variable	Total Participants (%)
Age	
24-34	189 (61.5%)
35-44	64 (21%)
45-54	54 (17.5%)
Ethnicity	
White	217 (70.92%)
African American	42 (13.73%)
Asian/ Pacific Islander	16 (5.23%)
Hispanic/Latino	21 (6.86%)

	Native American	4 (1.31%)
	Other	6 (1.96%)
Annual Income		
	Less than \$25,000	102 (33.33%)
	\$25,000 to \$34,999	54 (17.88%)
	\$35,000 to \$49,999	56 (18.54%)
	\$50,000 to \$74,999	59 (19.53%)
	\$75,000 to \$99,999	19 (6.29%)
	\$100,000 to \$149,999	9 (2.98%)
	\$150,000 to \$199,999	2 (.66%)
	\$200,000 and more	1 (.33%)
Education		
	High School Education or Less	37 (12.13%)
	Some College	81 (26.55%)
	Vocational Training	16 (5.24%)
	Associate's Degree	54 (17.70%)
	Bachelor's Degree	108 (35.40%)
	Professional Degree	4 (1.31%)

	Doctorate Degree	2 (.65%)
Marital Status	Married	127 (41.37%)
	Single, never married, in a relationship	87 (28.34%)
	Single, never married, not in a relationship	49 (15.96%)
	Divorced, in a relationship	14 (4.56%)
	Divorced, not in a relationship	23 (7.49%)
	Separated	5 (1.63%)
	Widowed	2 (.65%)
Parent Raised By	Mother Only	60 (19%)
	Father Only	36 (11%)
	Mother and Father	194 (61%)
	Other	28 (9%)
Identified as Raised By An Alcoholic	Mother Only	21 (19.44%)
	Father Only	67 (62.04%)

Mother and Father	14 (12.96%)
Other	6 (5.55%)

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## **Materials/Measures**

The beginning of each survey contained questions regarding the participant's relationships. These questions pertain to the person or persons who primarily raised them. Some of these questions ask about the participant's relationship with their caregiver(s) during their childhood, and then during their adulthood. For example, participants were given Likert scales to rate their relationship with their mother during their childhood and then during their adulthood. In addition, further questions pertain to how the participant feels about the person or people who raised them. For example, one question asked, on a scale from one to five, if the participant felt that they could confide in their mother.

Next, there was another section of questions created that asked participants about their current relationship with their mother, father, or caregivers. Paired with a Likert scale, these questions asked about several aspects of one's current relationship. For example, one question asked participants if they feel that they can confide in their mother or caregiver. Secondly, different questions asked things like if participants would want a child that they had to have the same relationship that they did with their caregiver.

Also, the CAST-6, Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (Hodgins, 1993), was given to each participant to identify which groups are daughters of alcoholics and those that are not (Hodgins, 1993). It asks six true and false questions that deal with a wide range of aspects involved in an alcoholic home (Hodgins, 1993). Each question revolves around the drinking of

one or both parents. Consequently, two groups were identified from this test. For example, one of the questions from this scale asks if the participants ever wished that one of their parents would stop drinking (Hodgins, 1993).

Pertaining to participants' self-esteem, they were asked to complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This is a ten question scale that asked participants how they feel about themselves overall. Higher scores on the test are indicative of greater self-esteem. The scale is ranked from 0 to 30, being that a score between 15 and 25 rates as a normal self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). However, if one scores below 15, then they are considered to have low self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). For example, one of the questions asked the participant if they were satisfied with themselves overall (Rosenberg, 1965).

Finally, each participant took the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), which is a 20-item scale. This scale was used as a measure of one's self-esteem at the time of taking the survey. Scores can range from 20 to 100, the higher the score, the higher the self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Broken into three sections, this scale measures one's performance, social, and appearance self-esteem. Each section can be scored according to their matching questions. A question that pertained to one's performance asked the participant to rate how confident they are in their abilities (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Next, a question asking about one's social self-esteem asked how much one felt that they are displeased with themselves (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Finally, a question related to one's appearance asked how satisfied the participant is with their body at the moment (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

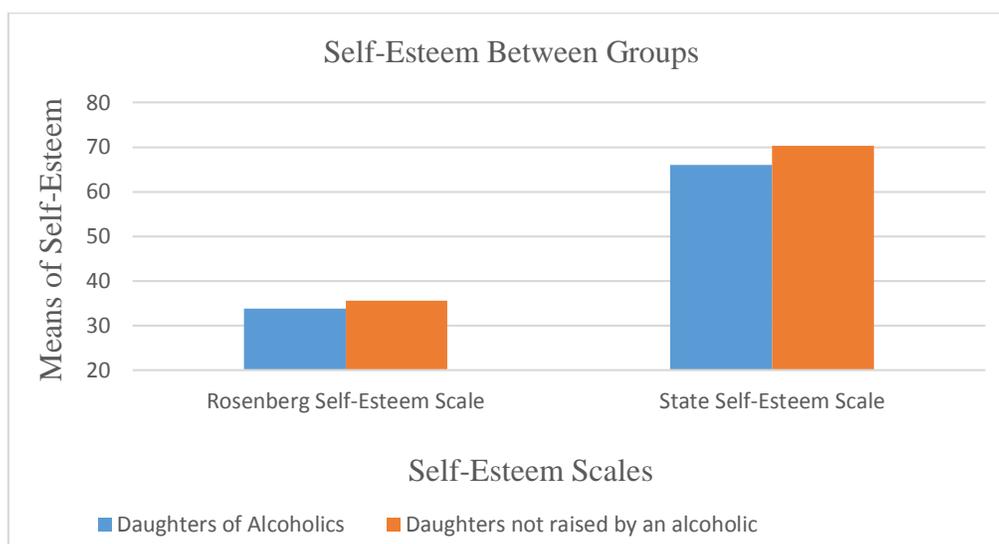
**Procedure**

Each participant was recruited online, through Amazon Mechanical Turk. All of the women completed a survey found on Mechanical Turk. Upon completion of the survey, the women received their compensation of twenty cents. On average, it took participants ten minutes to finish the survey.

## Chapter 3

### Analysis

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare self-esteem in daughters of those who are not alcoholics and those who are. This test was done for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, where there was not a significant difference in the scores for daughters who are not children of alcoholics ( $M=35.54$ ,  $SD=10.23$ ) and those who are ( $M=33.76$ ,  $SD=9.56$ );  $t(288) = 1.388$ ,  $p=.166$ . For the State Self-Esteem scale, another independent samples t-test was run to also compare self-esteem in daughters of those who are not alcoholics and those who are. There was a significant difference in the scores for women who were not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=70.31$ ,  $SD=15.12$ ) and the women who are children of an alcoholic ( $M=65.97$ ,  $SD=14.30$ );  $t(269) = 2.213$ ,  $p=.028$ . While the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale did not show a significant difference in self-esteem between both groups, the State Self-Esteem scale showed that the children of alcoholics displayed lower self-esteem (see Figure 1).



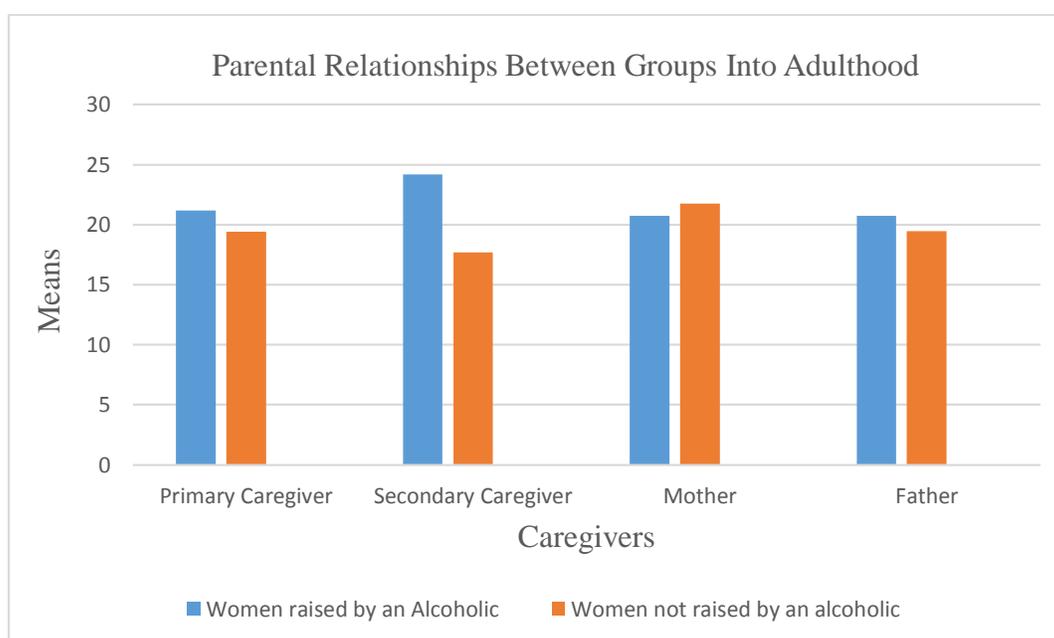
**Figure 1. Self Esteem Between Groups.**

**This figure shows self-esteem between both groups, using the Rosenberg and State Self-Esteem Scales**

### **Influences of Alcoholic Parent or Caregiver on Lifespan Relationships**

Independent samples t-tests were then run to compare parental relationships between daughters not raised by an alcoholic and those raised by an alcoholic throughout their lifespan so far. In relationships between women who noted a primary caregiver there was no significant difference between those not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=19.42$ ,  $SD=8.64$ ) and those who were ( $M=21.17$ ,  $SD= 8.42$ );  $t(23) = -.434$ ,  $p= .668$ . In addition, there was no significant difference for those who noted a secondary caregiver between those not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=17.70$ ,  $SD=10.45$ ) and those who were ( $M= 24.20$ ,  $SD= 10.16$ );  $t(23) = -1.250$ ,  $p=.224$ . Another independent samples t-test showed no significant difference in this same relationship between those raised by their mother who were not a daughter of an alcoholic ( $M=21.75$ ,  $SD=7.49$ ), and

those who were ( $M=20.72$ ,  $SD=8.69$ );  $t(264)=.988$ ,  $p=.324$ . Again, there was no significant difference shown for this relationship when the women were raised by a father when they were not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=19.45$ ,  $SD=7.48$ ), and when they were ( $M=20.72$ ,  $SD=8.69$ );  $t(263)=1.448$ ,  $p=.148$ . These results suggest that the continuous relationship between ones caregivers and the daughters was not affected by whether or not they were alcoholics (see Figure 2).



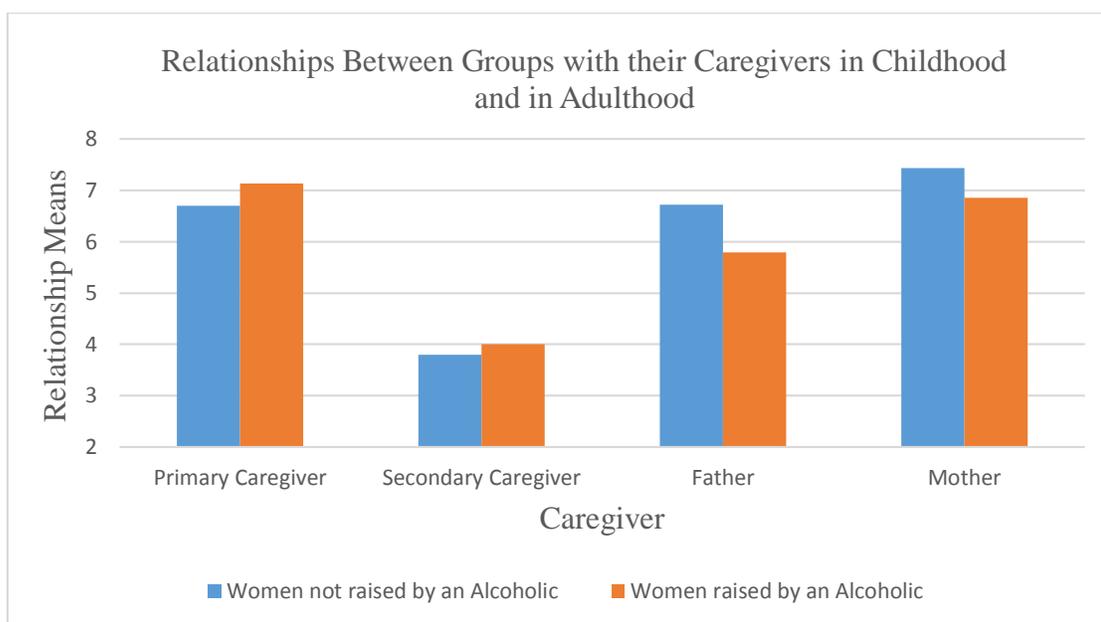
**Figure 2. Parental Relationships Between Groups Into Adulthood.**

**This figure shows relationships participants have with their caregivers into adulthood.**

### **Influences of Alcoholic Parent or Caregiver on Relationships in Childhood and Adulthood**

Childhood and adulthood relationships with parents/ caregivers were compared between women who are or are not daughters of alcoholics. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare how close relationships were between the women and their parents or guardians. For

women raised by a primary caregiver, there was no significant difference in relationships between those not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=6.70$ ,  $SD=3.44$ ) and those who were ( $M=7.14$ ,  $SD=3.02$ );  $t(25) = -.302$ ,  $p=.765$ . There was also no significant difference for women raised by secondary caregivers when comparing those not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=3.80$ ,  $SD= 4.09$ ) and those who were ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=3.51$ );  $t(25) = -.115$ ,  $p=.909$ . On the other hand, there was a marginally significant difference in relationships between the relationship with one's mother when one was not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=7.44$ ,  $SD=2.61$ ), and when one was raised by an alcoholic ( $M=6.86$ ,  $SD= 2.77$ );  $t(277) = 1.668$ ,  $p=.097$ . Also, there was a significant difference between women not raised by an alcoholic ( $M=6.72$ ,  $SD= 2.58$ ) and those who were ( $M=5.79$ ,  $SD=2.54$ ) when it came to their relationship with their fathers;  $t(277) = 2.793$ ,  $p=.006$ . All of this suggests that whether or not an alcoholic raised a woman with a primary or secondary caregiver, it did not affect their relationship with that person during their childhood or adulthood. However, it also suggests that one's relationship with their mother and father is affected by being raised by an alcoholic between their childhood and adulthood (see Figure 3).



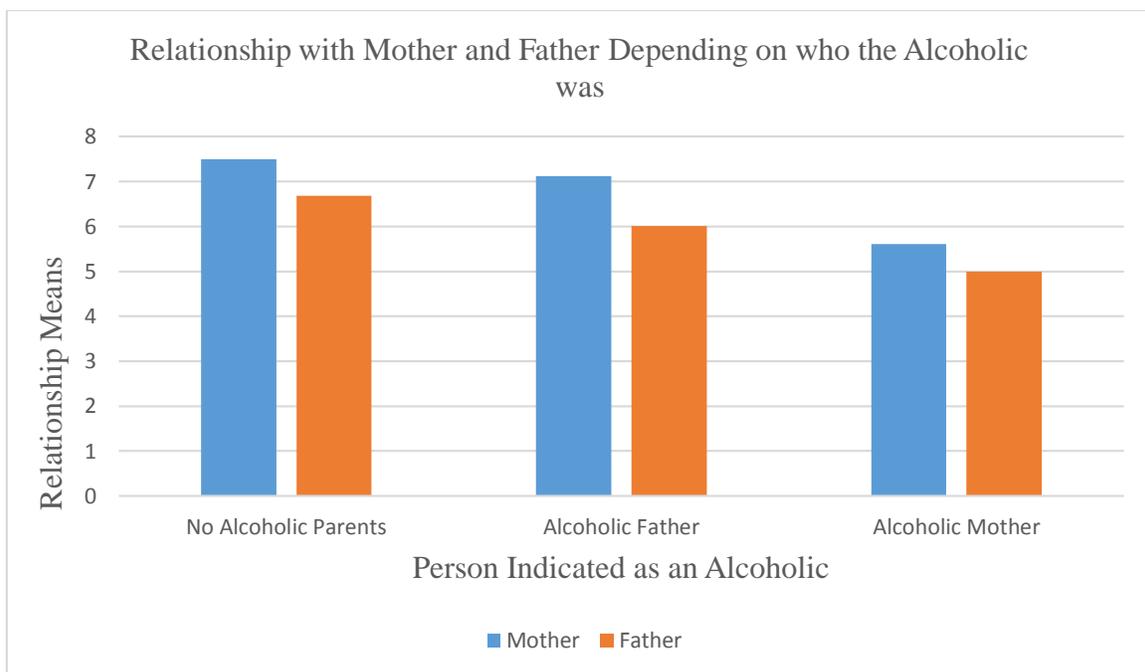
**Figure 3. Relationships Between Groups with their Caregivers in Childhood and Adulthood.**

**This figure shows relationships that participants had with their caregivers in childhood and then in adulthood.**

### **Effect on Relationships Depending on who was listed as an Alcoholic**

A mixed factorial ANOVA was run to test if the current relationship between one's mother and father varied depending on which parent was an alcoholic. Separate ratings of the mother and father relationship were entered as the within subject's factor and the alcoholic status of the parent's alcohol use (Mother only, Father only, or neither parent) was used as the between subject's factor. Results showed a significant main effect for parental relationship ratings with mothers being rated higher ( $M=7.25$ ,  $SD=2.70$ ) than fathers ( $M=6.38$ ,  $SD=2.64$ ),  $F(1,260)=8.02$ ,  $p=.005$ . Similarly, a main effect for parental alcohol use was observed with differences between all three groups with no alcoholic parents ( $M=7.10$ ,  $SE=.15$ ) having better relationships than

alcoholic fathers ( $M=6.57$ ,  $SE=.25$ ) who have better relationships than alcoholic mothers ( $M=5.31$ ,  $SE=.44$ ). There was not a significant interaction between mother-father relationship and which parent was an alcoholic,  $F(2, 260)=.23$ ,  $p=.793$ . On average, this suggests that women had a better overall relationship with their mothers in comparison to their fathers no matter who the alcoholic was, especially when there is no alcoholic parent. When a woman's mother was an alcoholic, the relationship decreased with both their mother and father. In addition, when a woman's father was an alcoholic, their relationship decreased. Overall, relationships were rated the lowest when the women's mothers were noted as the alcoholic (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Relationship with Mother and Father Depending on who the Alcoholic was.**

**This figure shows the relationship that participants had with their mother or father depending on if one was an alcoholic.**

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion**

Alcoholism and self-esteem have been studied with many other factors, such as their effect on one's career, family, and health. Past research has shown how the presence of alcoholism can have detrimental outcomes, such as dying at an early age. In addition, researchers have demonstrated that high self-esteem is valued more in society because it can be beneficial to different factors of one's life, such as childhood development. However, this research looks specifically at an aspect of family life and its interactions with self-esteem. The first question asked if the adult women who were raised by an alcoholic parent or caregiver would report lower self-esteem than women who were not. Secondly, this study was designed to see if those participants who reported having an alcoholic parent showed a strained relationship with them. Finally, results aimed to compare mother and father relationships that daughters of alcoholics have with each of their parents. Altogether, it was hypothesized that the women raised by an alcoholic would have lower self-esteems, would show a strained relationship with their alcoholic parents, and that relationships would be better with an alcoholic father than an alcoholic mother. Two out of the three were proven to be accurate. It was proposed that women who were raised by an alcoholic would show lower self-esteem than those women who were not, and this study showed that they did. Secondly, the daughters of alcoholics did show strained relationships with their mothers and fathers as it was hypothesized. However, the last hypothesis for this study did not find that women had a better relationship with their fathers, even when he was the alcoholic.

Pertaining to the first research question, if adult women who were raised by an alcoholic parent or caregiver would report lower self-esteem than women who were not, this study found

no difference between groups when using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. However, daughters of alcoholics displayed lower self-esteem scores on the State Self-Esteem Scale in comparison to women not raised by an alcoholic. Next, this study sought to see if participants who reported having an alcoholic parent showed a strained relationship with them. Women raised by a primary or secondary caregiver, other than their mother or father, did not show strained relationships when they were raised by an alcoholic. On the other hand, women raised by an alcoholic mother and/or father revealed strained relationships with their parent(s) between their childhood and adulthood. Lastly, this survey results aimed to compare relationships that daughters of alcoholics have with their alcoholic parent(s). This section of results from this survey showed the most variance from previous literature. It showed that it did not matter if the father or mother was the alcoholic; women had a better relationship with their mothers. Specifically, when one's mother was the alcoholic, the relationship that the women had with both their mother and father decreased. In addition, when the father was the alcoholic, the women's relationships with him still decreased. Overall, the lowest rated relationships occurred when the women's mother was the alcoholic. These patterns may exist due to the possibility of single mother households, or if one's father was the only one working, the children might develop a better relationship with the mother.

These results contribute to existing literature in a few interesting ways. Firstly, the data that was found pertaining to self-esteem between groups and strained relationships is supported by research that has already been conducted. However, many published works state that women have better relationships with their fathers, even if he is an alcoholic, whereas this study found different results. Lastly, this research could help fill in some gaps that seem to be missing that relate to how children are affected by their alcoholic parent(s).

In conclusion, this study had some limitations that are important to note. One of the limitations that affected this research was the time restraint. If more time could have been allotted, additional components such as interviews could be included. While there were also restrictions due to available resources, this study could be progressed upon in the future. With the basis that has been set with the data found, one could do a larger scale experiment and compare it to these results. Doing so could add information regarding other types of personal relationships that daughters of alcoholics have and see if the results fluctuate depending on whom the relationships are with. In addition, in the future, one could pick one of the research questions to make more specific and study it more vastly, such as only looking at mothers and daughters. Finally, more self-esteem scales could be added to see if the difference between groups would be greater.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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### **Academic Vita of Lauren Caine**

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#### Education

Major(s) and Minor(s): Psychological and Social Sciences

Honors: Letters, Arts, and Sciences

Thesis Title: Intoxicating and Devastating the United States: The Influence of Alcoholism on Self-Esteem

Thesis Supervisor: Beth Montemurro

#### Work Experience

Date: December 2015- Current

Title: Sales Associate

Description: Customer service, cashier, stock, clean

Institution/Company: Pet Valu, Rockledge location

Supervisor's Name: Jeffery Minner

Grants Received: Study Abroad Grant from Schreyer Honors College, Penn State Academic Grant

Awards: Heenan Scholarship, Colavita Abington Stu Success Scholarship, R&m Munro Trustee Scholarship, Sharbaugh Trustee Scholarship

Professional Memberships: Psi Chi, Phi Kappa Phi

Community Service Involvement: Autism Fundraiser

International Education: Study Abroad to London

Language Proficiency: French