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Children's Self-Esteem and Family Environment

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CHILDREN'S SELF-ESTEEM AND FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

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Dedication

Chapter 1
Introduction
Chapter 2
To Aunt Margaret, for all of the
unconditional love and support that
has guided me through my journey.

Chapter 3
And to Nikki, for being a great
friend that I can always count on.

Chapter 4
And to Glenn, for understanding,
loving, and believing in me.

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Chapter I	3
Introduction	3
Statement of Purpose	5
Hypothesis	6
Chapter II	7
Review of Literature	7
Self-Esteem	8
Sex Differences and Self-Esteem	11
Measuring Self-Esteem	13
Family Structure and Self-Esteem	14
Family Environment and Self-Esteem	16
Implications for Parent Training	20
Conclusion	21
Chapter III	23
Methodology	23
Subjects	23
Instruments	24
Procedure	28
Variables and Data Analysis	29
Chapter IV	31

Results	31
Chapter V	33
Discussion	33
Limitations	36
Recommendations	37
Appendix A	
Vita Auctores	39
Appendix B	
Parent Consent Form	40
Parent Demographic Letter	41
Parent Demographic Survey	42
Raw Data	43
References	45

Listing of Tables

Table 1		
Descriptive Statistics		31
Table 2		
Pearson Correlations		32
Table 3		
T-test results		33

Abstract

The relationship between children's self-esteem and family environment was examined. In addition, self-esteem scores were compared to family type (intact vs. non-intact). Male and female students were obtained from a non-random sample in the Midwest. There were 51 participants, 36 were girls and 14 were boys. The subjects were given the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale. Their parents were given a demographic survey to complete. The self-esteem scores were the dependent variable. There was a significant relationship between self-esteem scores and conflict, control, and expressiveness scores. However, there was not a significant relationship between self-esteem scores and cohesion scores. Furthermore, there was not a significant mean difference between self-esteem scores and family type.

Chapter I

Introduction

The family unit has undergone significant changes over the past three decades. In today's society, it seems the blended family has become more the norm. In fact, there have been projections that it will be the predominant family type in the near future (Kurtz & Derevensky, 1994). Some alarming statistics have revealed this trend.

For example, in 1984 it was estimated that one in every five children under the age of eighteen was a stepchild. By the year 2000, the stepfamily will outnumber all other family types in the United States (Darden & Zimmerman, 1992). In addition, Kurtz and Derevensky (1994) noted that 70% of all divorces involve children and 45% of the children born since 1970 will live approximately six childhood years in a single-parent home, usually headed by the mother. Furthermore, the majority of those divorced remarry within two to five years, with the divorce rate usually higher for the second marriage. "In 1988, 79% of divorced men and 75% of divorced women were remarried, and of these, 60% had children" (Darden & Zimmerman, 1992 p.1).

According to previous research, the impact divorce has on children varies (Beardsall & Dunn, 1992; Bishop

& Ingersoll, 1989; Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996; Hoelter & Harper, 1987). Some research has proven that divorce has a negative impact on children's self-esteem, (Bishop & Ingersoll, 1989; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Nunn & Parish 1987); Parish & Parish, 1983) while other studies report no adverse effects (Raschke & Raschke in Parish & Parish, 1983). Some researchers report that additional factors need to be considered such as: salience of environment, level of expressiveness, cohesiveness, and support in the family, as well as parent's self-esteem (Beardsall & Dunn, 1992; Gauze et al., 1996; Mahabeer, 1993; Nelson, 1993; Parish & Parish, 1983; Parish, 1991).

Although there are many concerns about the growing rate of blended families and the effects on children, research has focused primarily on the traditional intact or single-parent families. Darden and Zimmerman (1992) reported on a decade review they conducted from 1979 to 1990 of three major marriage and family journals (i.e., The Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Family Process, The Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies). Their findings indicated that there were ten articles out of 1,061 published that focused on the blended family. This depicts a discrepancy between the types of families in society and the ones addressed in the literature.

One should note, however, these authors cautioned that there appears to be a myth that step, remarried, or blended families are viewed as dysfunctional. In fact, "64% of stepfamilies rate themselves as having excellent relationships, while only 18% rate themselves as having poor relationships" (Darden & Zimmerman, 1992, p. 2). It is important to realize the various factors that contribute to children's self-esteem. In order to do this, the family structure and environment must be examined (Demo, Small, & Williams, 1987; Derne, 1991).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between children's self-esteem and perceptions of their family environment. The children's perceptions of the family environment will be correlated with self-esteem and the type of family they are from (intact versus single-parent or blended families).

Coopersmith (1981) defined self-esteem as:
a set of attitudes and beliefs that a person brings with him- or herself when facing the world. It includes beliefs as to whether he or she can expect success or failure, how much effort should be put forth, whether failure at a task will

"hurt", and whether he or she will become more capable as a result of different experiences.

(p.1)

In addition, parents are involved in forming their children's self-esteem in the home (Coopersmith, 1981; Hoelter & Harper, 1987).

Hypothesis

It is thought by the researcher that children from families in which there is higher conflict and control, and less cohesiveness and expressiveness, will score lower on measures of self-esteem, while those children whose families experience more cohesiveness and expressiveness and less conflict and control will score higher on measures of self-esteem. Therefore, the null hypothesis is that childrens' self-esteem and their family environment are independent. The alternative hypothesis is that childrens' self-esteem and their family environment are not independent.

In addition, it is thought by the researcher that those children from intact families will score higher on measures of self-esteem than those from single-parent or blended families. Thus, the null hypothesis is that there is no significant mean difference in self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families. The alternative hypothesis is that there

is a significant mean difference in self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

The family unit has been receiving increasing attention in the family therapy field. The focus is shifting from treating the individual to treating the entire family as a whole. Vosler, Green and Kolevzon (1986) pointed out the marital relationship is a primary influencer of children's behavior. According to the Bowenian family therapy model, the child's behavior is typically a function of the marital relationship (Vosler et al., 1986).

Many studies have been conducted to determine the effects of the presence or absence of the marital relationship on children (Bishop & Ingersoll, 1989; Nunn & Parish, 1987). The findings are somewhat contradictory. According to Vosler et al. (1986) this is because the studies did not compare the influence the family structure has on the children's functioning with the influence of the level of the family-system functioning.

On the other hand, those studies that have examined the relationship between family structure and children's functioning have omitted measures of family-

system functioning or have examined the functioning of the family unit as a background or intervening variable. Beardsall and Dunn (1992) added that it is important not only to study structure and environment, but also to study more than one child in the family. They asserted that experiences in the family are specific to each child and influence their development differently. Furthermore, the impact of divorce may differ for each child because of their age, sex, and developmental level.

Darden and Zimmerman (1992) pointed out that the roles in the blended versus the intact families also differ. For example, in the intact family, the parental roles are appointed by society (i.e., love, support, and care for the children). Likewise, the children are expected to respond with love and respect. On the other hand, the blended family must work to achieve those elements because they are not condoned by society.

Self-Esteem

Despite the differing viewpoints on what needs to be studied in the family, the consensus seems to be that children's self-esteem or psychosocial functioning is one of the key elements. Self-esteem has been studied for many years, although it is a difficult

construct to measure and define. Researchers have been struggling with this for sometime, especially when dealing with children. There is no one agreed upon definition in the literature.

For example, self-esteem is a tone of self-feeling each person carries around about him or herself and is independent of satisfaction or discontent (Alpert-Gillis & Connell, 1989); self-concept is the personal theory of the self (Parish & Parish, 1983); a person with high self-esteem is said to have self-respect and self-worth. However, a person with low self-esteem may have a lack of respect and may view the self as unworthy (Demo et al., 1987). For the purpose of this paper, self-concept and self-esteem will be used interchangeably.

The concept of self-esteem has been used by many of the theorists. In fact, Erikson (Hamachek, 1988) developed eight psychosocial stages, which are based on self-concept and ego development. The psychosocial theory emphasizes the inter-connectedness of biological, psychological, and social components of development, which contribute to the growth of an individual. Hamachek (1988) defined the terms: self, self-concept, and ego. Self is "one's sense of personal existence, or one's phenomenological feeling or sense of personal identity" (p. 354). Self-concept

is the cognitive awareness of the kind of person one is.

Erikson (Hamachek, 1988) referred to the ego as the life force of human development. He went on to add that the ego is a part of the self that consists of thinking, perceiving, remembering, reasoning, and attending. These cognitive processes are linked to an individual's self-concept. In addition, the strength or weakness of one's ego can be determined by a person's success in performing tasks.

Although there are eight psychosocial stages, the first five are closely related to ego development: 1) Trust versus Mistrust (birth to 18 months); 2) Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt (18 months to 3 years); 3) Initiative versus Guilt (3 years to 6 years); 4) Industry versus Inferiority (6 years to 12 years); 5) Identity versus Identity Confusion (12 years to 20 years) (Hamachek, 1988).

Stage five is crucial in that it gives people the challenge of establishing an identity, which can lead to a positive self-concept, providing things went well in the previous stages. The more negative ego qualities individuals encounter, the more likely they are to experience adjustment problems (Hamachek, 1988).

In addition, children's development of their self-concept requires constant interaction with their direct

environment, especially with regard to their parents (Nunn & Parish, 1987). In particular, children often make comparisons between themselves and their mother and father. Therefore, if one parent is absent, a child depends on the existing parent to fulfill his or her interpersonal stability with the hope of avoiding further rejection (Parish & Parish, 1983).

Researchers have reported that self-concept is a good indicator of one's mental health (Parish & Parish, 1983). Furthermore, self-esteem is an important variable in the educational development of elementary students (Kosmoski, Pollack, & Estep, 1994). Finally, self-esteem is considered a motivational construct across the life span (Alpert-Gillis & Connell, 1989).

Sex Differences and Self-Esteem

Although gender does not necessarily predict self-esteem in children, sex-role personality characteristics in adults and children have been found to significantly predict self-esteem (Alpert-Gillis & Connell, 1989). These authors offered three differing views of self-esteem.

First, those individuals with a combination of masculine and feminine traits should show elevated levels of self-esteem for healthier functioning. Second, because society rewards masculine traits more

so than feminine traits, masculinity should then be the greatest predictor of self-esteem. Third, children with traditional sex-typing should show higher levels of self-esteem compared to the non-traditional types (Alpert-Gillis & Connell, 1989). Derne (1991) explained that people are shaped by impulses, institutional roles, and social pressures.

Parish (1991) studied self-esteem as related to family status, gender, and birth order. There were 648 youths (274 males and 374 females) that participated in the study. The researcher concluded that male's self-esteem was higher in divorced nonremarried families when compared to divorced remarried families. However, for females, the self-esteem was highest for intact families. The self-esteem of females from divorced nonremarried and divorced remarried families were comparable to each other.

Demo et al. (1987) found boys' self-esteem to be more closely related to family environment when compared to girls. This could be due to parental responsiveness (i.e., control and support) toward the self-esteem of boys as opposed to that of girls. For instance, boys may be more overt in their expressions of self-esteem, which elicits more of a response from parents, while females may act in more covert ways. This could deny the parent the opportunity to respond

appropriately.

Measuring Self-Esteem

The difficulty with measuring self-esteem lies in the fact that most of the test instruments are self-report questionnaires and checklists. The focus is on individual's feelings toward themselves, which does not take into account the aspects they are unwilling or unable to reveal (Chiu, 1988). This researcher also recommended using additional criteria (i.e., teacher ratings) to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

Coopersmith (1981) is in agreement. He stated it is important to gather as much information as possible with regard to the person being assessed. He recommends using a behavior observational rating in addition to the self-esteem measurement.

Other researchers pointed out that children should provide a list of others in their life who they believe affect their self-esteem, along with identifying situations where their feelings of worth are important to them (McCreary-Juhasz & Munshi, 1990). Because many believe self-esteem is important, there needs to be further techniques "with the power to identify components which fall outside those measured by instruments currently used (McCreary-Juhasz & Munshi, 1990, p. 692).

Family Structure and Self-Esteem

Contradictory findings have been reported regarding the effects that marital separation and divorce have on children. Some adverse effects are: acting out behaviors, withdraw, depression, low self-esteem, and problems in sex-role learning (Bishop & Ingersoll, 1988). Killeen (1993) and Kurtz & Derevensky (1994) noted that poor academics, low motivation, and problems with peers are some additional negative effects that children experience.

Other studies report that mothers' life strains are related to the children's adaptation and may have a negative impact through poor parenting (Nelson, 1993). Therefore, it has been found that family structure is important in shaping the self-concept of children (Derne, 1991).

When parents divorce, they often believe it improves the well-being of the family. However, it often has the opposite effect. Children usually have a negative reaction due to the loss of a parent, restructured living arrangements, and changes in rules and lifestyles (Kurtz & Derevensky, 1994).

Nunn and Parish (1987) found that divorced families may be associated with decreased fulfillment of various physical and psychological needs (i.e., increased dependency due to fear of losing parental

support). In homes that provide a stable and organized structure, in which the parents are consistent, children are likely to assign characteristics of self to their parents. Therefore this is a positive association that occurs through an affirmative process of need fulfillment. Conversely, in divorced homes, there may be need deficits.

Parish and Parish (1983) conducted a study on children's self-concepts and family structure. Their findings revealed that children's self-concepts were significantly associated with family structure and family concept. Another study examined and compared the associations of family structure and levels of psychosocial functioning of children from single-parent, intact, and blended families (Vosler et al., 1986).

These researchers recruited 136 families and discovered that family structure predicted children's functioning when two-parent families were compared with one-parent families and when children's self-esteem was used as an indicator of psychosocial functioning. However, the family structure was not a significant predictor when blended families were compared with intact families and the children's locus of control was the indicator of psychosocial functioning.

Nelson (1993) compared children from mother

custody (n=22) and two-parent families (n=44) on risk, resistance, and self-esteem variables. Interestingly, his study revealed that family income level rather than family type was associated with the mother's life strains and children's self-esteem. Although these findings indicate that children are at risk for low self-esteem, it is not clear how it occurs. In addition, this author stated that it is important to control for the variable, income, when comparing mother custody with two-parent families because 50% of the mother custody families live below poverty lines (Nelson, 1993). In divorced homes mothers tend to work more due to the decreased level in income.

Family Environment and Self-Esteem

An additional factor to consider when discussing the influences on children's self-esteem is the family environment. The family helps to form an initial sense of self (Demo et al., 1987; Mahabeer, 1993). Mahabeer (1993) reported that it is necessary to study mothers and children's self-esteem as related to the family environment. Mothers with high self-esteem are said to be more competent, responsive, and sensitive with regard to their interactions in the family. This particular study established that "children's scores on self-esteem and their reported perceptions of family

members are aligned with familial configurations, family processes, and mother-child relationships" (p. 489).

In addition, the higher the level of expressiveness in the family, the higher the level of children's self-esteem. Many researchers agree that parental support is a key element to an increased level of self-esteem in children (Demo et al., 1989; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Killeen, 1993; Mahabeer, 1993; Parish & Parish, 1991). Moreover, communication is another key variable, according to Olson's Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Demo et al., 1987).

This model asserts that open and frequent communication is critical because it allows supportive feelings and behaviors to be conveyed between family members. Therefore, when children feel good about their relationships with their parents, it is likely they will have an increased level of self-esteem (Demo et al., 1987). Hoelter and Harper's (1987) findings suggest that the family is crucial for the development and maintenance of self-esteem among high school-aged adolescents.

Parish (1991) pointed out that when parents divorce, the children's support system tends to break down. For example, parental hostility, lack of care, less supervision, and financial hardship can

contribute to children's unmet needs. This can then lead to negative self-concepts and greater social incompetence. In addition, because the parent-child relationship is one of the most important, it has been suggested that the parent's and children's conceptions of self are influenced by their relationship with each other (Demo et al, 1987).

Interestingly, it has been reported (Kurtz & Derevensky, 1994) that children from divorced families with mothers who were employed were more likely to have a higher level of self-esteem than those children from divorced families whose mothers were full-time homemakers. These researchers attribute several factors to their findings. First, those children from maternally employed divorced families may be able to offer their children more opportunities for extracurricular activities, due to their finances. Second, children from two-income homes generally learn more independence. While this can also be true for children in single-parent homes, previous research has pointed out that these children are said to be "hurried" (Kurtz & Derevensky, 1994). Finally, children's evaluations of their self-esteem may be attributed to the recreational orientation in the family of the divorced homes.

Gauze et al. (1996) revealed that an adaptive or

cohesive family environment enables a child to cope with stresses in their friendships. Friendships were also found to be significant for children from homes that were low in cohesion. Perhaps this was due to the validation and support friends provided those children lacking these qualities in the home. Therefore, this boosts the children's feelings of self-worth.

In contrast, children raised in a more cohesive family demonstrated adequate levels of adjustment regardless of the quality and level of reciprocity in their friendships. These findings seem to indicate that support of friends is important in relation to the development of children's self-esteem when parents are unavailable. However, when parents are available, this seems to be less of a factor.

Killeen (1993) pointed out that it is important to use transactional models when exploring the antecedents of children's mental health. These models "take into account the transforming effects of parents, children, and environments on each other" (p. 324). Further, according to this model, parents can influence their children's self-worth by : labeling their children's behaviors and attributes, communicating which specific areas of performance are important and specifying the criteria by which performance should be evaluated. Therefore, the tone of the parent can influence their

children's self-esteem in a positive or negative manner.

Implications for Parent Training

Because studying the family and its adaptation is one of the most important areas in the behavioral and social sciences, it is critical to promote and formulate ways for them to function effectively as a whole (Pino et al., 1995). Some researchers have suggested that parent-training programs be implemented in order to assist parents with enhancing their children's self-esteem (Cedar & Levant, 1990; Mahabeer, 1993; Schulman et al., 1991). Many reasons stem from ineffective parenting. For example, there may be lack of knowledge, family stressors, history of abuse, or unrealistic expectations for the children (Schulman et al., 1991). These are serious issues that have implications for therapists. Mahabeer (1993) recommended developing multifaceted training programs which incorporates teaching positive parenting, stress management, and relationship skills. In addition, parents should be educated about the alternatives to an authoritarian approach to raising their children. Nelson (1993) pointed out that economic hardship can be directly related to inconsistent parental discipline and inversely related to parental nurturance.

Cedar and Levant (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of parent-effectiveness training. Their findings revealed that there is support for using parent-effectiveness training as a preventive intervention. However, these researchers faced difficulties such as: they were only able to use twenty-six of the sixty studies, there was variation in the quality and adequacy of research, and they were not able to make meaningful statements about the effectiveness of the parent training programs.

Schulman et al. (1991) explained in their study on developing a preventive approach to positive parenting that there were two parts. In the first part, the subjects determined that parenting style affects children's self-esteem (through watching public service announcements). In the second part, they found that the subject's reported self-esteem increased as positive strategies were used and decreased as negative strategies were used.

Conclusion

The research clearly indicates that the blended family is becoming the norm. However, although there is variety in the amount of research with regard to children's self-esteem and their family, there does not seem to be a general consensus as to the effects on

children. Most researchers agree that structure and environment play a key role in shaping a child's self-esteem. However, there appears to be differing perspectives on other factors that influence self-esteem such as: divorce, parenting skills, and remarriage. It is important for therapists to realize the family needs to be treated as a whole. In addition, therapists need to be aware of several issues facing the changing family in order to be effective.

Chapter III

Methodology

Parents of children attending a Catholic grade school in the Midwest were asked permission for their children's participation in a thesis research project. Demographic information was collected from the parents at a later date (see Appendix B). The parents were informed that the children would be filling out two separate questionnaires related to self-esteem and family environment. The children recruited for the study were elementary students (4th - 7th grades). The parents were also informed that all information would be kept strictly confidential and participation was voluntary.

Subjects

The participants of the study were boys and girls between the ages of 9 and 12. This was a non-random sample and age was a controlled factor. There were 51 children who participated in the study - 36 girls and 14 boys. Of the 51 children, 76.5% (39) were Caucasian and 1.9% (1) was Asian. The other 21.6% (11) children's ethnic origin is unknown due to unreturned demographic information.

Of all research participants, 58.8% (30) live in families with original birthparents, 3.9% (2) children

were adopted, 5.9% (3) children live in homes in which the father has died and in one of those cases, the mother has remarried, 3.9% (2) children live in mother-custody families, and 5.9% (3) children live in mother-custody families in which the mother has remarried. There were 21.6% (11) of the parents that did not return the demographic surveys and therefore the data is accounted for.

There were 12 (23.53%) families with an income between \$30,000-\$40,000, 11 (21.6%) families with an income between \$40,000-\$50,000, 5 (9.8%) families had an income between \$50,000-\$60,000, and 12 (23.53%) families had an income which was more than \$60,000. In addition, of all participants, 3 (5.9%) families reported having 1 child under the age of 18 in the home, 16 (31.38%) families reported having 2, while 14 (27.45%) families had 3, 4 (7.84%) families had 4, and 3 (5.9%) families had 5 children under the age of 18 living in the home.

Instruments

The two instruments used in this study were The Children's Version of The Family Environment Scale (CVFES) developed by Pino et al. (1995) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), developed by Stanley Coopersmith (1981). The CVFES is a 30 item

pictorial, multiple choice test that consists of ten scales in three general areas of family functioning: relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance.

For the purpose of this study, only four scales were used: Cohesion (the support, commitment, and support family members provide for each other); Expressiveness (the degree to which family members express their feelings directly and openly); Conflict (the level that family members express anger, aggression, and conflict); and Control (the magnitude in which set rules and procedures are utilized to manage family life (Pino et al., 1995).

In the test booklet, there are four cartoon characters that represent a mother, father, son, and daughter. All questions ask "Which picture seems most like your family?" Each picture is identical except for one feature that indicates the family environment characteristic in question. Individual pictures are worth a score of 1, 2, or 3 (Pino et al., 1995). Therefore, the scores can range from 3 to 9 on the subscales. The raw scores can then be converted to standardized scores by using the table of norms provided in the manual. This test is used for children between the ages of 5 and 12.

Pino et al. (1995) conducted a study to test the content validity of the CVFES. The structural

pictorial properties ("stimulus pull") were investigated to determine whether the subject perceived each scale as representing what it was supposed to represent. The inter-rater reliability was found to be .84. The 4-week test-retest reliability was .80. The CVFES has also been normed in a school population. However, the normative samples are not comprehensive and the authors advise caution when interpreting the results.

Busch-Rossnagel (1989) reviewed the CVFES and reported that its validity rests on that of the Family Environment Scale (FES). The author further noted that the FES has adequate reliability but the evidence for the validity is weak. In addition, with regard to the CVFES the content validity of the pictures was unclear, there was no range of reliabilities given for each scale, and the standardization sample was restricted (i.e., 158 children from grades 1 to 6 in Buffalo parochial schools). According to this author, the content validity is questionable.

The SEI measures evaluative attitudes toward the self in social, academic, family, and personal areas of life. There are three forms: The School Form, The School Short Form, and The Adult Form. For the purpose of this study, the School Form was used, which consisted of 58 short statements (i.e., "Things usually

don't bother me"). They were to be answered "like me" or "unlike me" (Coopersmith, 1981).

The School Form is used with children between the ages of 8 and 15. There are four subscales: General Self, Social Self-Peers, Home-Parents, and School-Academic. The SEI can be scored by using the scoring key. There are eight items on the School Form that comprise the Lie Scale (detects defensiveness) and they are scored separately. For this particular study, a Total Self score was given to each participant. This is the sum of self-esteem items answered positively. That number is then multiplied by two. The total score results in a number out of 100 (Coopersmith, 1981).

According to the Coopersmith (1981) manual, there is no precise criteria for interpreting what constitutes high, medium, and low self-esteem. Therefore, high scores on the SEI correspond to high self-esteem and low scores correspond to low self-esteem. Coopersmith (1981) has conducted several studies to test the reliability of the School Form. The internal consistency coefficients using the Kuder-Richardson Formula (KR-20) range from .87 to .92 for grades 4 to 8. Test-retest stability coefficients for a three year interval were .42 and .64 for the 9 and 12 year old age groups.

Kokens (in Coopersmith, 1981) reported on the

construct validity of the SEI. Through her study which included 7600 school children in grades 4 to 8, she verified that the construct validity of the SEI subscales does in fact measure sources of self-esteem. As supported by Purky's research on self-esteem and achievement scores, the concurrent validity was tested by Simon and Simon (in Coopersmith, 1981) and they correlated the SEI and SRA Achievement Series scores of 87 children in the fourth grade. A coefficient of .33 ($p < .01$) was obtained. The SEI scores were also correlated with scores on the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test and the coefficient was .30. Peterson and Austin (1985) stated in their review that the SEI manual does not provide evidence for differential validity of the four subscales. However, they report the SEI does have sufficient reliability and validity to be used in research.

Procedure

The participants were administered the tests according to their grade level in a group format. The fourth and fifth grades took the tests first; then the fifth and sixth grades followed. The setting was quiet and there was no talking. They were first given the SEI and were asked to fill in their demographic information (age, school, sex, grade). They were then

instructed to complete a questionnaire which would help the researcher better know their likes and dislikes. There was no mention that it was a self-esteem inventory. In addition, it was explained that their answers would be kept confidential and their participation was voluntary. They were further instructed to take as much time as needed.

The subjects were directed to hand in their questionnaires when completed and then the CVFES booklets were administered. The subjects were asked to fill in the same demographic information on their answer sheets. They were informed they would be answering a series of questions in which they were to choose the picture that most closely represents their family. It was explained that their family may be different, but they were to pretend that each picture has their family in it. They were instructed to raise their hands if they needed help. The students who raised their hands were assisted. Again, they were directed to take as much time as needed. Each test took approximately ten minutes to complete.

Variables and Data Analysis

The dependent variable for this study is the score on the SEI. The independent variables are the marital status of the parents and the reported family

environment (cohesion, conflict, expressiveness, control). All variables are interval levels of measurement.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between children's self-esteem and perceptions of their family environment. Therefore, the Pearson correlation coefficient and T-test were used to calculate the strength of this relationship. The null hypothesis is that children's self-esteem and their perceptions of family environment are independent. The alternate hypothesis is that children's self-esteem and their perceptions of family environment are not independent. For the second part of the study, the null hypothesis is that there is a significant mean difference in self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families. The alternative hypothesis is that there is not a significant mean difference in the self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families.

Chapter IV

Results

The overall mean score for self-esteem (SE) (n=51) was 74.5490, with a standard deviation of 14.5001. The mean scores and standard deviations for family environment scores are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Cases</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
SE	51	74.5490	14.5001
Cohesion	51	44.1176	9.1731
Expressiveness	51	50.5490	12.3973
Conflict	51	33.9412	9.0364
Control	51	54.5882	9.3620

The data in Table 2 indicates there was a significant positive correlation between SE and expressiveness (.2996). This means the higher the self-esteem score, the higher the expressiveness score. On the other hand, there was a significant negative correlation between SE and conflict (-.2531), and SE and control (-.2494). This demonstrates that the lower the self-esteem score, the higher the conflict and control score. There was no significant difference

found between SE and cohesion (.1135).

Table 2

Pearson Correlation (N=51)

	<u>SE</u>	<u>Cohes</u>	<u>Express</u>	<u>Conf</u>	<u>Contr</u>
SE	-	.1135 p=.214	.2996* p=.016	-.2531* p=.037	-.2494* p=.039
Cohes	-	-	.3199* p=.011	-.2125 p=.067	-.1613 p=.129
Express	-	-	-	-.4442* p=.001	-.1948 p=.085
Conf	-	-	-	-	.2943* p=.018
Contr	-	-	-	-	-

*p<.05

Results of the data analysis indicate that three of the four areas of family environment show significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis has been rejected. Children's self-esteem and their perceptions of family environment are related.

A t-test, as shown in Table 3, was also computed to compare children's self-esteem scores with the type of family (intact vs. non-intact). The null hypothesis was that there is no significant mean difference in self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families. The alternative hypothesis is that there is

a significant mean difference in self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families. The Levene's test was performed using the p value of .841. This indicates that the variances of intact and non-intact families were homogeneous.

The alpha level of .05 was used for the t-test, with 38 degrees of freedom and the level of significance for the two-tailed test was $\pm .242$.

Table 3

T-test results

Group	N	Mean	SD	DF	t
Intact	30	76.33	14.433	38	1.19
Non-intact	10	70.00	15.055	38	1.19

The equal t value of 1.19 demonstrates there is no significant mean difference in self-esteem scores between intact and non-intact families ($t=1.19, p>.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Chapter V

Discussion

The results of this study indicated that children's self-esteem is influenced by their family environment. Significant relationships were found between self-esteem scores and children's perceptions

of the amount of expressiveness, control, and conflict in their families. Previous research has supported these results (Kurtz & Derevensky, 1994; Mahabeer, 1993). It was interesting to note that for this study, there was no significant relationship between self-esteem scores and cohesion. Past studies have revealed children are more likely to have a higher level of self-esteem in more cohesive families and vice versa (Gauze et al., 1996; Mahabeer, 1993).

Children's self-esteem is vital to their growth and development. Kosmoski et al. (1994) noted that the earlier positive self-esteem is introduced, fostered, and preserved, the better children will feel about themselves and the greater chance they will have of performing better academically, socially, and behaviorally. The family is the primary source for the formation of children's self-worth, specifically with regard to parental support (Hoelter & Harper, 1987).

The second part of the study which compared the self-esteem scores with family type revealed no difference between children's self-esteem and family type. These results were supported by some researchers (Parish, Dostal, & Parish in Parish & Parish, 1983) but rejected by others (Parish & Parish, 1983). Studies have shown that children who experience parental divorce when compared to those who have not, are more

likely to encounter hostility from the parents, lack of supervision when not in school, more financial hardship, and lack of concern from teachers (Demo et al., 1987; Parish & Parish, 1991;). These factors contribute to the breakdown of childrens' support systems and, therefore, negative self-concepts and greater social incompetence are manifested.

The parenting system is important whether or not the parents reside in the same home. It is important for parents to continue participation in their childrens' lives even after divorce (Bishop & Ingersoll, 1989). Vosler et al. (1986) reported that family structure was not a notable estimator of children's self-esteem when blended families were compared with intact families.

The research for this study was diverse. Several of the studies have been conducted on the reciprocal parent-child relationship and the influence of self-esteem (Beardsall & Dunn, 1991; Killeen, 1993; Demo et al., 1987). Other studies have taken into account maternal employment, prevention programs for parents, socioeconomic status, and family size and the effects on children's self-esteem (Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Killeen, 1993; Kurtz & Derevensky, 1994; Schulman et al., 1991). With regard to this study, it seems the results revealed that perhaps the intactness of the

family is less of a factor than the family environment. Although most of the data supports the notion that children's self-esteem is related to their family environment and family type, there are some factors that could have affected the results of this study.

Limitations

One weakness of this study could have been sampling error. First, the sample size was small (n=51), with the majority of the subjects consisting of girls. In addition, the number of intact (n=30) as compared to non-intact (n=10) families was disproportionate and perhaps was not a representative sample. This could be the reason for lack of significance. Second, there were 11 demographic surveys that were not returned. Third, the study also consisted of primarily Caucasian children.

Furthermore, the sample was non-random and therefore is perhaps not a true portrayal of the general population. Finally, the children were from a Catholic grade school and therefore, the results are not generalized to other more diverse populations. In addition, it is suspected that children known to be in non-intact families chose not to participate in the study.

Another weakness in the study could have been the CVFES testing instrument. Many of the pictures in the test booklet seemed vague to the children. Several of them asked questions pertaining to the content. Some of the pictures seemed difficult to understand. Pino et al. (1995) noted the most appropriate use for the CVFES is using it in conjunction with the adult FES in family therapy.

Another factor to be considered was the number of years that passed since divorce or remarriage of the non-intact families and the involvement of the non-custodial parent. Research has shown that this can be an important factor in contributing to the positive self-esteem of children. Future studies relating to these areas could control for the factors mentioned above.

Recommendations

Future research could include studying parental conflict as related to children's psychosocial functioning. The breakdown of parenting could be more crucial than the ending of the marriage. Additionally, parenting programs could be researched more thoroughly. By teaching parents appropriate positive skills that will enhance children's self-esteem and hopefully provide them with more support, it could lead to

greater social competence of children.

Further, it would be helpful to test the parents' perceptions of the family environment and their self-esteem and compare it with that of the children in order to obtain a clearer picture of the family situation. Finally, it would be beneficial to test more than one sibling in the family and compare their perceptions of the family with the other family members.

Appendix A

Vita Auctores

The author was raised in St. Louis, Missouri, where she attended Mary Queen of Peace grade school and John F. Kennedy high school. After graduating from high school, she moved to Dunnellon, Florida where she attended Central Florida Community College in Ocala and obtained her Associates of Arts Degree. She then moved to Orlando, Florida, where she attended the University of Central Florida and received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in May of 1994. After graduation, she moved back to St. Louis, Missouri and worked in the social services field while attending Lindenwood University. The author is completing a Master of Arts degree in Professional Counseling which will be granted December, 1997.

Appendix B

Parent Consent

Dear Parents,

As some of you know, I plan to graduate in September with my Master's Degree in Counseling from Lindenwood College. However, in order to graduate I must complete my thesis. Mrs. Huenneke has agreed to let me use St. Thomas for my research. The topic I have chosen is children's self-esteem as related to the family environment. I would like to use the elementary school students (4th-7th grades) as my subjects.

In order to do this, I need to obtain your permission for your child(ren) to participate. They will be filling out two separate questionnaires related to family environment and self-esteem. These questionnaires will be administered to the students before school lets out for the summer. Please have your child(ren) return the permission slips by 5/28/97. If I do not receive your permission by this date, I will assume you do not want your child to participate.

I would like to emphasize that the data is being collected for research purposes only and the results will be kept strictly confidential. The student's scores will also be reported as group data. Therefore, no child's score will be identifiable.

If you have any questions, please leave a message at the school and I will call you back. Below, you will find the permission. Please place a mark by one of the choices and give it to your child(ren) to return to school by the date mentioned above.

Sincerely,

Maggie Connors

Name of the student(s):

____ Yes, I want my child(ren) to participate in the research study

____ No, I do not want my child(ren) to participate in the research study

Parent's Signature

Date

Parent Demographic Letter

Dear parents of research participants,

I am writing to ask you to please fill out the enclosed survey for my research. I was not able to obtain this necessary information from your children. Therefore, I am asking you to do it. It should only take a few minutes of your time. This will allow my research to be more complete.

Again, I would like to emphasize that all of your information will be kept confidential. The data is only for research purposes and will be reported as group, not individual data.

I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience. Please return the information to me as soon as possible. I would like to have all of the surveys back by July 30, 1997. Thank you again for all of your cooperation. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Maggie Connors

Demographic Survey

1. Please circle the family income:
\$10,000-\$20,000 \$40,000-\$50,000
\$20,000-\$30,000 \$50,000-\$60,000
\$30,000-\$40,000 More than \$60,000

2. How many children under the age of 18 live in the home: _____

3. Please circle your ethnic background:
African American Asian Caucasian Native American
Other _____

4. Please circle the type of family the child(ren) lives in:
Original birthparents
Parents divorced- mother has custody
Parents divorced- father has custody
Has custodial parent remarried? Yes No

Raw Data

data list free/case age sex grade SE Cohes express
 conflict control familyin childhom race maritalS.

begin data

01	12	2	7	88	62	64	32	53	4	2	3	1
02	12	2	6	72	45	36	24	60	-1	-1	-1	-1
03	10	2	5	80	45	50	24	38	-1	-1	-1	-1
04	11	2	5	86	36	50	24	53	6	2	3	1
05	10	2	5	52	62	64	41	60	4	2	3	1
06	11	2	5	98	62	72	32	60	3	5	3	1
07	10	2	4	56	36	36	41	60	3	4	3	1
08	11	2	5	90	36	50	24	53	-1	-1	-1	-1
09	10	2	5	76	36	50	24	46	-1	-1	-1	-1
10	11	2	5	82	28	57	32	75	4	3	3	1
11	11	2	5	74	45	50	41	68	6	3	3	1
12	09	2	4	34	36	57	41	68	3	3	3	1
13	11	2	5	84	28	43	24	46	-1	-1	-1	-1
14	10	2	4	80	45	57	24	46	6	2	3	2
15	10	2	5	70	45	36	32	68	6	2	3	2
16	10	2	4	86	45	72	32	53	3	3	3	1
17	11	2	5	84	53	64	32	53	-1	-1	-1	-1
18	11	2	5	70	53	57	24	53	5	3	3	1
19	09	2	4	68	45	72	24	38	4	3	2	2
20	10	2	4	60	36	57	41	53	4	3	3	1
21	11	2	5	84	62	50	32	53	4	3	3	1
22	10	2	5	92	53	50	32	46	3	2	3	2
23	10	2	4	88	36	72	24	46	5	4	3	1
24	11	2	5	90	45	72	24	53	6	2	3	1
25	10	2	4	70	53	64	24	46	5	3	3	1
26	11	2	5	46	53	50	24	46	-1	-1	-1	-1
27	12	2	7	78	53	50	32	60	4	1	3	1
28	12	2	7	96	36	57	49	60	4	2	3	1
29	12	2	6	80	28	50	41	46	6	2	3	2
30	12	2	6	80	45	43	32	53	6	2	3	1
31	12	2	6	88	45	43	41	53	6	2	3	1
32	10	1	5	82	45	36	49	31	4	4	3	1
33	11	1	5	78	36	50	32	46	-1	-1	-1	-1
34	12	1	5	76	45	72	24	60	-1	-1	-1	-1
35	11	1	5	76	45	29	41	68	4	1	3	1
36	10	1	4	46	53	36	41	46	-1	-1	-1	-1
37	11	1	5	38	28	36	57	75	6	2	3	2
38	12	1	6	80	45	50	32	60	-1	-1	-1	-1
39	11	1	6	88	45	50	41	46	5	2	3	1
40	12	1	6	82	45	36	41	60	6	3	3	1
41	12	1	7	74	53	72	24	60	6	5	3	1
42	12	1	7	90	36	50	41	53	3	3	3	1
43	12	2	7	76	62	57	41	46	3	5	3	1
44	12	2	7	68	45	36	32	53	4	3	3	2
45	12	1	7	78	45	43	32	53	3	1	3	1
46	12	1	6	54	36	36	49	60	3	2	3	2
47	12	2	7	72	45	36	32	75	3	3	3	2

48 12 2 7 68 45 50 24 53 3 4 3 1
 49 12 1 7 56 36 36 41 60 6 3 3 1
 50 12 2 7 60 36 36 32 53 5 2 3 1
 51 12 2 7 78 36 36 57 60 3 2 3 2

end data.

variable labels SE "self-esteem of student"

/Cohes "Cohesion of family"

/express "Expressiveness of family"

/conflict "Conflict of family"

/control "Control of family".

missing values familyin childhom race maritalS (-1).

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