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A COMPARISON OF SELF-ESTEEM

IN STEPFATHER AND NUCLEAR FAMILY CHILDREN

Nancy Briggs Collins , A.A., B.S.

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate

School of Lindenwood University in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Art

1999

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Ron, whose willingness to work long hours, and whose faith in my abilities, made it possible for me to pursue my goal. To my son, Greg, who would not allow me to go to work at Walmart, when finances were scarce. To my son, Jerry, and his family, who are consistently supportive of my efforts.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Divorce became common in the United States during the middle of the century. In 1943, for the first time, more marriages ended in divorce, in the United States, than were terminated by death. In 1982, the Science Monitor, as cited in Stern, 1984, projected, "...by 1990 stepfather and single-parent families will make up more than 50% of U.S. families, with the traditional family in the minority" (p. 89). In 1984, Stern reported that there were more than 30 million adults and about 1 in 5 children in stepfamilies in the United States, and in states where the divorce rate was high, about 1 in 3 children was living in a stepfamily situation.

Historically, until the 1940s, becoming a stepfather usually meant marrying a widow with children, Stern, 1984. In divorce, children are generally awarded to the custody of their mothers, although today's courts adhere less to maintaining that practice, as they attempt to place the child in an environment that will meet the child's needs, which include nurturing. In a nurturing environment, the child's feelings of self-worth develop as his or her competencies are acknowledged (Coopersmith, 1967). A child becomes competent by learning to do things well, which adds to his or her feelings of being a worthy individual, who has something to contribute to his or her society (Kaplan, 1995).

An important aspect of a child's self-esteem depends upon the interaction he or she has with others. Family members, including those living outside the child's

household, provide the security that enables the child to experiment with behaviors, which have the potential of building his or her self-esteem (Colemen & Ganong, 1990).

Children who experience divorce in their biological family are forced to make adjustments which often challenge the very core of their being. Fears, doubts, and frustration often accompany their emotionally painful transition, as they attempt to make sense of who they are and where they fit in (Ganong & Coleman, 1986). As they struggle with these questions, they may become involved in delinquent behaviors (Kurtz, 1994). They may develop depressive symptoms (Dubois, Felner, Bartels & Silverman, 1995) and styles (Fichman, Koestner & Zuroff, 1996) of responding, or reacting to demands made upon them. They may criticize themselves (Fichman, Koestner & Zuroff, 1996). The feelings and thoughts a child has about his or her abilities to make a difference will be challenged (Coopersmith, 1967). This is particularly true for an oldest child, who has been residing in a single-parent family, as they desperately struggle to maintain the status they have enjoyed in their previous environment, by attempting to undermine the intruder, the stepfather (Ganong & Coleman, 1986).

The dynamics of the stepfather family are very complex, when compared to the nuclear family (Crosbie-Burnett & Ahrons, 1985). All family members must be involved in order to establish security, maintain loyalties, build relationships, and develop permeable boundaries (Crosbie-Burnett & Ahrons, 1985).

Identifying with their peers, who are engaged in the same process or circumstances, eases the transition for the child who is adjusting to family

disruption (Jenkins & Smith, 1993). Blaming themselves for the separation tends to slow the transition for all family members, as they struggle with their individual challenges (Marsiglio, 1992). Adults must set an example of self-respect, self-discipline, and compassion, if they want their children to form these attributes (Coopersmith, 1967). A rise in self-esteem and confidence results as family members recognize their ability to successfully confront challenges (Visher & Visher, 1990).

To further assess the impact of family type on a child's self-esteem, this study examined two groups of children. These include children from a family with a stepfather and those children from an intact nuclear family, who are matched by gender and age. A reliable instrument, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form, will be used to measure the self-esteem of the subjects in this study. A difference, or lack thereof, in Total Self-Esteem and four subscale scores of the inventory; General, Home, School, and Social, will be examined and compared to earlier findings in the literature. A 2 X 2 factorial analysis of variance will be used with the Total Self-Esteem scores as the dependent variable, and type and gender as independent variables. Lie Scale scores, included in the inventory, will be examined to assess the extent to which subjects are being forthright in their responses to the statements in the inventory. If, in fact, there does prove to be a significant difference in the self-esteem in the children in these two family types, the approach in helping a child, who resides in a stepfather family, to gain self-esteem, could be altered according to family type. This study does not address

extenuating circumstances as to how the stepfamilies were formed. Children from other non-traditional types of families will not be examined in this study.

The purpose of this study is to measure the differences, or lack thereof, in self-esteem of children living in stepfather families to children living in nuclear families. To create an accurate comparison of the projected differences in self-esteem, the nuclear family subjects were matched, by gender and age, to the stepfather family subjects.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

<u>Self-Esteem</u>

Attention to the concept of self-esteem has not been limited to North America, various cultures, for many years, have acknowledged the importance of self-esteem (Steinem, 1992). Coopersmith (1967) presents the sources of self-esteem and adds that the importance that an individual places on a particular attainment, will have the impact of either raising or lowering his or her self-esteem. In addition to Coopersmith's sources of self-esteem, James (1890), as cited by Coopersmith, 1967, purports that extensions of the self are also a source of self-esteem. Frank and Edwards (1988) believe that a healthy self-esteem is essential to an individual's psychological well-being. Mead (1934), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, expounds the importance of social interaction on the individual's self-esteem. Piers (1984) distinguishes between global and specific components of self-esteem.

The concept of self-esteem is as old as humanity itself (Steinem, 1992). Everyone has a word for it, but their meaning is the same. North American definitions shorten its meaning to "belief in oneself" or "self-respect". Thesaurus antonyms run the negative gamut from "self doubt" and "self-effacement" to "self-hatred" and "shame" (Steinem, 1992). In order to circumvent embracing these negative perceptions on self-esteem, Coopersmith presents sources of self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967) believes that there are four sources of self-esteem,

and four criteria for defining success: (1) the ability to influence and control others (Power); (2) the acceptance, attention, and affection of others (Significance); (3) adherence to moral and ethical standards (Virtue); and (4) the successful performance in meeting demands for achievement (Competence). Coopersmith further explains that it may be possible for an individual to attain high self-esteem by attainment in any of the four areas, even when attainment in the other areas is mediocre or poor. Additionally, it is possible for an individual to attain success in an area that they do not regard as being important, and thus conclude that they are unworthy because they have not succeeded by the criterion they value the most. An additional source of self-esteem is identified by James (1890), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967. James views the self as the sum total of all that he or she can call his or hers, not only his or her psychic process and his or her body, but also his or her clothes, house, wife or husband, children, ancestors, and friends.

Regardless of what constitutes self-esteem, Frank and Edwards (1988) view a healthy self-esteem as being essential to psychological well being. Frank and Edwards define positive self-esteem as the capacity to view oneself with a sense of value and competence. Inherent in this definition is the belief that one can meet life's challenges. Frank and Edwards cite Abraham Maslow's (1954) explanation of self-esteem: "Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capacity, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world. But thwarting of these needs produces feelings of inferiority, or weakness, and of helplessness" (p.2). Frank and Edwards (1988)

expound on the "helplessness" in Maslow's explanation. By avoiding responsibility for ones actions (or lack of action) the individual's negative self-evaluation is reinforced. On the other hand, those individuals having a healthy self-esteem recognize that they have free will and that they are responsible for their actions and choices. Trusting in their inner resources, and realizing that they are responsible for their behavior, allows them to take control of their lives and self-esteem is enhanced.

Assuming responsibility for their actions and choices helps to prepare the individual for participation in a larger social group. As a sociologist, Mead, in 1934, as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, was concerned with the process by which the individual internalizes the attitudes and ideas expressed by key figures in his or her life – observing their attitudes and actions, adopting them (often unknowingly) and expressing them as his or her own. Mead further states that this also holds true for attitudes and actions expressed toward external objects.

Piers (1984), as well as Mead (1934), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, views an individual's interaction with others as a strong influence on his or her self-concept. Self-concept from a global perspective, refers to a person's self-perceptions relative to the important aspects of life. Although biological and cultural factors shape these perceptions, they are formed primarily through the interaction of the individual with the environment during childhood, and by the attitudes and behaviors of others. From these perceptions, attitudes and feelings play a part in motivating behavior. Over time, the individual's self-concept may change as their values and priorities change. However, these changes are not

usually brought about by an isolated incident. Dickstein (1977) and Harter (1978), as cited in Piers, 1984, further explain. Global self-concept reflects how an individual feels about himself or herself as a total person, which takes into account his or her interactions with others, physical self-image, and specific and general abilities. Piers adds, some of the specific components of self-concept are relatively broad (e.g., physical self, academic self), while others are defined quite narrowly (e.g., good at mathematics). Dickstein and Harter, as cited by Piers, 1984, adds that the importance placed on specific components determines the degree to which success and failure affect global self-concept.

Piers (1984) suggests that there are other aspects of self-esteem. She views self-concept as being relatively stable, although it is shaped by experience, it does not change easily or rapidly. In children, initially, self-concept is dependent upon the circumstances in which they find themselves, however, their self-concept becomes increasingly stable, over time. In addition, Erikson (1950) and Schonfeld (1969), as cited in Piers, 1984, contend that certain areas of self-concept may be more difficult to change than others, and other areas of self-concept may change only during certain critical periods.

Piers (1984) views self-concept as having self-evaluative, as well as self-descriptive components. Piers suggests that self-concept is a compilation of an individual's accumulated judgments concerning themselves. These judgments may evolve from internalized judgments of others, other judgments may be unique to the individual.

Piers (1984) contends that children, at various stages to their development, experience and express self-concept differently. Piers also views self-concept as serving an important organizing function, and as playing a key role in motivation. By maintaining a consistent self-concept of who we are and how we react in given situations, we reduce the ambiguity in new situations and are able to structure behavior toward pre-existing goals. After exploring self-esteem in the general population, we will apply these findings to children.

<u>Self-Esteem in Children</u>

The concept of self, as an independent entity, develops over a period of two to three years (Jacobson, 1954, and Mahler, 1975, as cited in Corsini & Wedding, 1989). There is evidence that for a certain period of time during the first year of life, the child is unable to distinguish himself or herself from the person who takes care of him or her (Winnicott, 1953, as cited in Corsini & Wedding, 1989).

Coopersmith (1967) believes that during his or her early years, the child develops a concept that the parts of his or her body, the responses of others to him or her, and the objects he or she receives have a common point of reference – himself or herself. This concept is refined as he or she masters solving problems, becomes competent in dealing with situations in life, engages in social interaction, and reacts to himself or herself privately.

When we consider the amount of time the development of a child takes, we are reminded that human life cannot develop without the presence of a protecting community (Adler, 1927). Every child, dependent as he or she is on the help of the community, finds himself or herself face to face with a world that gives and

takes, that expects him or her to be able to adapt, but, at the same time, satisfies his or her needs in living. He or she operates on instinct until obstacles form in his or her path of self-satisfaction. When these obstacles become too painful to confront, he or she will change his or her behavior (Adler, 1927).

At the very basis of a child's development lies his or her struggle to compensate for his or her weaknesses. Feelings of inadequacy provide the impetus to develop capabilities and talents. The situations that life presents to children differ to an extraordinary degree between individuals. In some cases, the child is dealing with an environment that is threatening to him or her, and gives him or her the impression that the whole world is hostile territory. The child's thought processes, which include underdeveloped perspectives, bring this dramatic impression to the child. If the child's upbringing does not counteract this fallacy, the personality of the child may develop so that he or she always acts as if the world really were hostile territory. With every difficulty he or she encounters, his or her impression of hostility will grow (Adler, 1927).

As children grow older they develop more complex beliefs about who they are. As their theory about themselves evolves, a child's concept of himself or herself comes to be based upon a combination of the evidence of past experiences, the opinions of others, and his or her untested assumptions of himself or herself. A child's self-theory is subject to change when new evidence emerges, and it is also used to control future behavior and interpret past experiences (Brim, 1978, as cited in Berger, 1988).

Preschoolers have very little self-theory to guide their actions (Harter, 1982, as cited by Berger, 1988). However, children's thoughts about themselves develop rapidly during childhood, as their social experience widens, and their cognitive abilities mature. This enables school children to view themselves in terms of several areas at once, (Harter, 1983, as cited by Berger, 1988). Being able to understand various aspects of their personality sometimes helps children to change their behavior (Berger, 1988)

As their self-theory develops, children gradually become more self-critical, and their self-esteem decreases. Children, as they mature, are more likely to feel personally to blame for their shortcomings (Powers & Wagner, 1984, as cited by Berger, 1988). Self-esteem is usually quite high in early childhood, then it decreases throughout middle childhood, reaching a low at about age 12 before it gradually rises again (Harter, 1983; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1984; Simmons et al., 1973; Wallace et al., 1984, as cited in Berger, 1988).

A crucial factor in gaining positive self-esteem seems to be feeling that one is competent at various tasks. Developing this feeling depends partly on the child's ability; for example, children who are intellectually able at age 7 tend to develop relatively high self-esteem by age 12 (Joreskog, 1983, as cited in Berger, 1988).

Causes of Self-Esteem

Competence.

Coopersmith (1967) contends that the concept of self is based upon different levels of competence, in dealing with life situations that arise in the individual's environment. Kaplan (1995) found that self-esteem is a function of mastery. The

more a young person learns to do well, the more competent he or she becomes and the more self-worth they develop. White (1959), as cited by Coopersmith, 1967, is in agreement with Kaplan. He proposes that, from infancy onward, a child experiences a pleasurable sense of efficacy that accompanies his or her encounters in his or her environment, and this becomes the basis for intrinsic motivation toward achieving greater competence.

Social Acceptance and Significance.

Coopersmith (1967) contends that during his or her early years, the child develops a concept which includes the responses of others to him or her. To feel significant, a child must receive affection, concern, and love expressed by others. These experiences are included in the larger categories of appreciation and interest, which are the polar opposites of rejection and isolation. Berger (1988) believes that toward the end of early childhood, praise and blame, as reinforcers and punishments, become powerful because children are now aware of themselves and how others perceive them.

Baron and Byrne (1991) contend that it is often difficult to evaluate ones own traits, abilities, or attitudes without reference to those around us. We cannot tell if we are intelligent, charming, or boring by looking in the mirror. We must rely on social interaction to answer these questions.

Karen Horney (1945,1950), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, believes that interpersonal processes can ward off self-demeaning feelings of helplessness and isolation, which she calls "basic anxiety". Horney views this anxiety as a major source of unhappiness and reduced personal effectiveness. Anxiety producing

conditions include indifference, lack of respect, domination, disparagement, lack of admiration, lack of warmth, isolation, and discrimination.

Conduct or Behavior.

James (1890), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, contends that our achievements are measured against our aspirations for any given area of behavior. High self-esteem results when our achievement approaches or meets our aspirations in a valued area. Coopersmith (1967) views power as being measured by the individual's ability to influence the course of action by controlling his or her own behavior and the behavior of others. Such power is revealed by the recognition and respect the individual receives from others and by the weight that is given to his or her opinions and rights.

Ben (1972), as cited in Baron and Byrne, 1991, suggests that often we do not know our own attitudes, feelings, or emotions directly. If we have acted in some manner, we seem to reason, then we must hold a feeling or attitude consistent with such behavior. Bem further suggests that we draw such inferences about ourselves in the same way we do about others. Therefore, the process through which we come to know others is similar to the process through which we come to know ourselves.

Morals and Ethics.

Coopersmith (1967) measures virtue as adherence to a code of moral, ethical, and religious principles. Parents presumable establish the guiding philosophies and traditions and indicate the behavior by which they can be realized. People who adhere to ethical and religious codes, which they have internalized, assume a

positive attitude toward themselves as they successfully fulfill the expectations inherent in their acceptance of the codes. After identifying some of the sources of self-esteem, we will now examine the consequences of being without these sources to fortify self-esteem.

Consequences of Self-Esteem

Emotional Well-Being.

Research indicates that emotional well-being is related to levels of self-esteem in children. Fichman, Doestner, and Zuroff, in 1996, used a global index of self-esteem by averaging across three self-reported domains of social, sports, and general self-worth. Youngsters who scored low on self-esteem were more likely to report a depressed mood. Dubois, Felner, Bartels, and Silverman, in 1995, found that self-reported depressive symptoms were strongly correlated with ratings of self-esteem. Older adolescents reported higher levels of depressive symptoms than younger adolescents and preadolescents did. Fichman et al. Also found that in terms of depressive styles, self-esteem was negatively related to self-criticism. Further, they found that older children evidenced lower levels of self-criticism than did younger children. These findings suggest that even though older children, having low self-esteem, report higher levels of depressive symptoms, they are careful not to express criticism of themselves, openly.

Coopersmith (1967) found that low self-esteem children have higher levels of anxiety, more frequent psychosomatic symptoms, are rated to be less effective, and are likely to be more destructive than persons who regard themselves with considerable worth. Children having low self-esteem, reared under conditions of

uncertainty, rejection, and disrespect, have come to believe that they are powerless and without resources to change their future. They feel unlovable, isolated, incapable of expressing and defending themselves , and too weak to confront and overcome their deficiencies. Unable to initiate action, they tend to withdraw and become overtly passive and compliant, while at the same time, suffering pangs of anxiety and symptoms that accompany its chronic occurrence.

In contrast, Coopersmith (1967) describes children, who have high self-esteem. These children are at least as aware of other persons in their social world, as they are of themselves, but they are inclined to pay greater attention to their personal beliefs and convictions, than are children who are less sure of themselves. Children with high self-esteem, who are conditioned and fortified by favorable treatment and by performance they believe to be successful, appear far more likely to expect successes in their social and academic world. Children having high self-esteem, reared under conditions of acceptance, clear definition of rules, and respect, appear to be personally effective, poised, and competent individuals who are skilled socially and are able to deal with external situations and demands in a direct and incisive manner. Their social relations are good and, being relatively unaffected by personal difficulties, they move toward positions of influence and authority.

Finally, Coopersmith (1967) describes children having medium self-esteem. These children appear to be similar to those having high esteem, with a few major exceptions. These children are generally well accepted, have good defenses, and reared under conditions of considerable definition and respect, they also have the

strongest value orientation and are most likely to become dependent upon others. It appears that they are uncertain of their worth and are inclined to be unsure of their performance relative to others. Research indicates that effects on self-esteem may be different for boys and girls.

Gender Differences

In 1989, Alpert-Gillis and Connell examined direct and moderating influences of gender on children's self-esteem. They found that self-esteem is predicted by perceived capacity to do well in school more strongly in girls then boys.

Spence and Hall (1996) examined gender-related self-perceptions, activity preferences, and occupational stereotypes in fourth through sixth grade boys and girls. They found that the margin by which boys preferred masculine activities over feminine ones was significantly (p<.001) larger than that by which girls preferred feminine over masculine activities. They found significant gender differences for both masculine and feminine occupations. Boys were bound more to the traditionally stereotypical occupations than girls were.

Ohannessian, Learner, Learner, and Eye (1998) examined the extent to which perceived parental acceptance affected self-competence in early adolescents. They found that, in boys, paternal acceptance significantly predicted academic competence, physical appearance, and self worth. In contrast, maternal acceptance did not significantly predict any of the self competent measures. On the other hand, for girls, they found that maternal acceptance predicted academic competence, physical appearance, athletic competence, social competence, and

self-worth. In contrast, paternal acceptance did not significantly predict any of the self-competence measures. As this research indicates, the relationship between a parent and a child can have a great deal of influence on the child's self-esteem.

Potential Influences of Parent-Child Relations on a Child's Self-Esteem

Fromm (1941, 1947), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, emphasizes the possible debilitating effects of social isolation. If the child realizes freedom for others, he or she has the opportunity to pursue his or her own path. On the other hand, if the individual does not feel confident of his or her views, he or she may forsake independence. By joining and conforming to a group, a child enjoys the shelter and privileges they provide, however, the individual also obligates himself or herself to their authority. Among the conditions that determine whether he or she will seek independence or the security of the group are the presence of a stable and consistent frame of reference from which he or she can view the world, ability to form love relationships marked by understanding and mutual respect, and the conviction that social relationship can be carried on in a spirit of trust. A child may struggle in attaining a consistent and stable frame of reference from which he or she can view the world.

While a child's thought processes have had only a short while to develop and his or her abilities to adjust are immature, he or she confronts obstacles, which can be compared to material obstacles in his or her environment, from every angle. Sometimes these obstacles can be unreasonable demands made upon a child by his or her misguided family. Taking all this into consideration, it is

hardly surprising that a child's responses are not always appropriate. Behind every inappropriate response to the environment is a whole series of attempts by his or her phyche to respond correctly and progress through life. The obstacles a child encounters in his or her psychological development may result in the stunting or distortion of his or social feelings (Adler, 1927).

To counteract these negative effects, parents of children having high self-esteem expect their children to strive and comply with the standards they establish. These expectations represent a belief in their child's adequacy and a conviction that he or she has the ability to perform in whatever way is required to succeed. To the child, the conviction of his or her parents provides a clear indication that what is desired is attainable, which gives the child courage as well as direction. In this atmosphere, the child becomes convinced that his or her personal behaviors will affect what happens, and that he or she can control his or her destiny. The result is that the child has confidence that he or she can deal with adversity, realize personal strivings, and gain respect and attention. Due to the poise and persistence this confidence engenders, the child finds himself or herself able to deal with the challenges in his or her world. Self-expectations of success may be expressed as assertiveness urges toward exploration, and self trust, qualities that are apt to have invigorating and stabilizing consequences (Coopersmith, 1967). The high self-esteem family is notable for the high level of activity of its individual members, strong-minded parents dealing with independent, assertive children, stricter enforcement of more stringent rules, and greater possibilities for open dissent and disagreement (Coopersmith, 1967).

On the other hand, the self, parental, and social expectations of individuals having low self-esteem are marked by lack of faith, expectations of failure, and the anticipation of rejection. Relating to their children in a distant and rejecting manner, these parents lead the children to believe that they are not important, that they cannot learn, and that they have no privileges and powers. These children begin to believe that this treatment is what they deserve and that they will be treated similarly by others. Anticipations of rejection and failure are likely to result in passivity and withdrawal in the belief that they deserve no better and are incapable of improving their life. Expectations of failure and rejection by parents thus cause doubts of adequacy in the child, which are made self-fulfilling by the way in which the parent treats him or her and the self-image of weakness and inferiority he or she develops. By virtue of the treatment he or she receives and the self-attitudes he or she develops as a consequence, the child with low self-esteem is likely to believe that his or her personal actions will not have a favorable outcome, that he or she cannot effectively cope with adversity, or that he or she is unworthy of love and attention. These anticipations of failure are likely to sap his or her motivation, reduce his or her personal vigor, and leave him or her with little hope or courage for dealing with the problems and people she or he will inevitable confront (Coopersmith, 1967).

To circumvent these negative consequences from occurring, Rogers (1962), as cited in Rogers, 1980, contends that there are three conditions that must be present in order for a climate to promote growth. The first element is genuineness, realness, or congruence. The more the parent is himself or herself,

the greater the likelihood that the child will grow and change in constructive ways. This means that the parent is openly being the feelings and attitudes that are flowing within at the moment. The parent makes himself or herself transparent to the child; the child can see right through what the parent is, in the relationship; the child experiences no holding back on the part of the parent. As for the parent, what he or she is experiencing is available to awareness, can be lived in the relationship, and can be communicated, if appropriate. So, there is a close matching or congruence, between what is being experienced at the gut level, what is present in awareness, and what is expressed to the child.

The second attitude of importance, or caring, is what can be called unconditional positive regard. When a parent is experiencing a positive, accepting attitude toward whatever the child is, at that moment, change is more likely to occur. The parent is willing for the child to be whatever immediate feeling is going on. Such caring on the part of the parent is nonpossessive. The parent prizes the child in a total rather than a conditional way (Rogers, 1962, as cited by Rogers, 1980).

The third facilitative aspect of the relationship is empathic understanding. This means that the parent senses accurately the feelings and personal meanings that the child is experiencing and communicate this understanding to the child. When functioning for the maximum good, the parent is so much inside the private world of the child that he or she can clarify not only the meanings of which the child is aware but even those just below the level of awareness (Rogers, 1962, as cited by Rogers, 1980). We have examined some of the possible avenues by

which parents can make a contribution to their child's self-esteem. Now, we will consider the effects on children of having this support system disrupted.

Adjustment to Stepfamily Formation

Glick, in 1989, as cited in Visher & Visher, 1994, projected that by the year 2000, there will be more stepfamilies in the United States than any other type of family. Crosbie-Burnett and Ahrons (1985) projected that approximately 40% of children born in the 1970s will spend some portion of their growing up years in a binuclear family (living in both stepfamily households).

Coleman and Ganong (1990) explain the difference between a stepfamily household and a stepfamily: a stepfamily household is one in which at least one adult is a stepparent to a child who resides with them, while a stepfamily is a group of people who may contain members who do not reside full-time in the household but who are nonetheless significant family members.

Ganong and Coleman (1986) found that some issues clinicians most often identified as being problematic for children in stepfamilies include adjustment to stepfamily formation, role confusion within the stepfamily, loyalty conflicts, and conflict between co-parents.

Crosbie-Burnett and Ahrons (1985) found that when a biological parent marries suddenly or without the children's approval, it is likely that the children will feel out of control. The children may react with hostility toward, or withdraw from, the stepparent or the family. These researchers also found that the children may act out in school, abuse drugs or alcohol, isolate themselves in their rooms, and be continuously alert while in the presence of the stepparent. The children

often fear that they will lose the attention and the loyalty of the biological parent, and that the stepparent will come between them and their parent. Additionally, these researchers found that the oldest child often has an additional adjustment to make. During the readjustment of roles in the one-parent phase of the household, the oldest child often assumes some of the responsibilities which were formerly shared by both parents. Along with gaining responsibility, there is a rise in status and power for the child within the family. Consequently, the child may spend a great deal of energy sabotaging the inclusion of the stepparent into the family group.

In coping with separation or divorce, Jenkins and Smith (1993) found that children with friends, whose parents were separated or divorced, and children who did not blame themselves for their parents separation, showed a tendency toward fewer emotional and behavioral problems than children who did blame themselves and who lacked friends, whose parents were separated or divorced. These researchers also found that the majority of children, whose parent are divorced, are preoccupied with the divorce for some months afterward. Half of the children pretended to themselves that their parents were still together. A great number of children worried about the parent with whom they resided, rather than the absent parent. The children rarely spoke of the separation. Less than half the children in the study had asked their parents for information, for fear of upsetting them.

Howell, Portes, and Brown, (1997), in examining gender and age differences in adjustment in children whose parents have separated, found that overall, the

children appeared to perceive their parents' separation as a negative event; yet most reported something positive about their family's disruption as well (e.g., more privileges, decrease in fighting, etc.). If given three wishes, the majority of the children claimed that they would wish for the reuniting of their parents (n=21).

Stern (1984) makes the point that if the divorced couple is still at war, or if the stepfather feels threatened by the ex-husband's intrusion, the adults tend to fight through the children. Children are invited to disrupt, asked to spy, and are subjected to propaganda. Children often feel that they are being pulled apart by their parents behavior, however they may lack the verbal skills to explain their feelings. Mandell and Birenzweig (1990) found that often family adults expectations, of their newly established family, are unrealistic. On the other hand, children, particularly older children and those with an actively involved non-resident parent, are aiming for a peaceful and respectful co-existence, at best. Even though contact with family members may be troublesome at times, in most instances, it is important to the will-being of the child, that the relationships are maintained.

Parental Contact

Coleman and Ganong (1990) state that "it is naïve to assume that children having little or no contact with nonresidential parents, after divorce, are psychologically detached from and unaffected by their parents" (p. 935). Amato (1987) found that many noncustodial fathers provide less support to their children after separation and divorce. Kurtz (1994) found an inverse relationship between

frequency of visitation by the noncustodial parent and paternal blame and fear of abandonment in their children. Clingempeel and Segal (1996) found that for girls in stepfather families, frequency of visits of nonresidential parents was positively correlated with the proportion of positive behaviors stepfathers emitted toward their stepdaughters. Healy, Malley, and Steward (1990) found that both boys and younger children benefited from more frequent and regular contact with fathers, while both girls and older children actually had lower self-esteem when their fathers' visits were regular and frequent. Perhaps this finding is due to the girls' close relationships with their mothers, which includes identifying with their mothers' feelings toward their fathers. It may be that their love for their fathers and their loyalty to their mothers created conflicting feelings for the girls, which, in turn, lowered their self-esteem. These researchers also found that frequency and regularity of visits were associated with higher self-esteem for children reporting closer relationships with their fathers. Finally, regular visits by noncustodial parents were related to high self-esteem when legal conflict was low, but to low self-esteem when legal conflict was high. As children strive to deal with a change in their family's structure, they are often confronted with an additional family member, who, in many cases, is a stranger to them.

Stepfathers and Stepchildren

Coleman and Ganong (1990) found that following parental remarriage, children are exposed to an additional role model who has control of some valued reinforcers. However, many factors (e.g., degree of the child's identification with the stepparent, the extent to which the stepparent provides reinforcers, the

availability to the child to reinforcers outside the stepfamily, and the extent to which the stepparent attempts to socialize the child) can influence the impact of the stepparent.

Crosbie-Burnett and Ahrons (1995) found that boundaries within a binuclear family exist between households and between individuals within households in a manner that is much more complex than boundaries within and around a nuclear family. Divorced women with children, today, bring to a marriage their divorce papers, memories of fractured relationships, an ex-husband with visitation rights, a variety of in-laws, including the children's paternal grandparents, and all of these people demand attention because of their connection with the children. However, these researchers point out that this respectively large family does provide considerable social protection for the children. Coleman and Ganong (1987) found that low conflict stepfather households had the greatest boundary clarity. Even though the boundaries of stepfather families are more complex than nuclear families boundaries, in the absence of conflict, the members are able to respect the needs and rights of those individuals who need to move between the households of their loved ones.

Daly and Wilson (1991) explain why steprelationships are associated with greater probability of so many negative outcomes: "If parents lack concern for an individual child's well-being, then all manner of risks to that child are likely to increase" (p.421). These researchers point out that parents solicitude for their children varies between the parent and various children, and may vary with one particular child, from intense loving concern, through indifference, to active

that their stepfathers had as high a level of control as did fathers in nuclear families.

Amato (1987) found that primary school children and adolescents reported less support from stepfathers than from biological fathers in intact families. However, children see stepfathers as taking on more aspects of the parent role if they have lived in the stepfamily for a long, rather than a short period of time. Further investigation revealed that when mothers have been remarried for six years or more, stepfathers' support scores were as high as those for fathers in intact families.

Ambert (1986) found that although it is not generally easy to raise, support, and care for live-in stepchildren, the live-in situation was felt to be less divisive than when the children lived with the other parent and came for visits. Stepfathers developed a closer and deeper relationship with their live-in stepchildren than with children living elsewhere. Further, stepfathers were more attached to their live-in stepchildren when their own children lived with them. However, when a man's children lived with their mother, but his stepchildren lived with him, he was drawn to his stepchildren, when he had no access to his own children. But when he had even limited access to his own children, he distanced himself from his live-in stepchildren. Finally, men who had live-in stepchildren and a child from a new marriage were not only the happiest maritally but also had the warmest feeling toward their stepchildren. Even though, initially, familiarity, intimacy, and shared activities and memories are missing in the relationship between a child and their stepfather, as these and other ingredients of

the relationship are cultivated, a satisfying relationship can develop, over time. However, in their attempts to adjust to their new family member, a child may vent their frustrations by acting out in various ways.

Children's Ineffective Coping Styles

In a study conducted by Kurtz (1994) it was found that children whose parents had divorced were more likely to exhibit a range of ineffective coping styles. Kurtz found that time in the stepfamily household was negatively correlated with more negative and fewer positive child-to-mother and child-to-stepfather interactions and less spousal intimacy. (For example, the shy withdrawn child behaviors correlated with poorer marital adjustment, less spousal intimacy, and more negative and fewer positive child-to mother and child-to stepfather interactions.) Studies conducted by Ganong and Coleman (1993) indicated that stepchildren are consistently seen to exhibit more behavioral difficulties, which includes internalizing behavior problems as well as displaying antisocial behavior, than children in nuclear families, although the differences between the two groups were small.

In a study on delinquent behavior, conducted by Rankin (1981), it was found that the odds of running away (relative to not running away) are 2.6 times greater for adolescents from broken homes, when compared to intact homes, regardless of the adolescent's age and gender. However, no clear patterns emerged in terms of which specific reason for parental absence (death or divorce/separation) has a greater effect on running away. The odds ratios indicated that adolescents from intact homes are least likely to run, followed by youth from homes in which one

biological parent is absent, followed by reconstituted homes in which a steparent

replaced the missing biological parent, and finally, homes in which both

biological parents are missing (and are not replaced by stepparents). Rankin also

found that truancy and fighting are both related to family context at the .05 level

of probability. The relationship between broken homes and truancy increases

when broken homes are defined more specifically. The odds ratio for children

from disrupted families vs. intact intact family children being truants was 1.7,

however, when the disruption resulted in both of the child's parents being absent

from the home, compared to intact family children, the odds ratio jumped to 2.6

for truancy. On the other hand, the probability of fighting was actually less for

homes in which both parents were absent, than for children from homes in which

either one parent was absent or one stepparent was present. These findings

suggest that a child's emotional ties to their biological parents may cause conflicts

in the home, which may lead to fighting beyond the home. Reasons for mother-

absence or father-absence had no effect on fighting or truancy. Rankin also found

that the probability of stealing autos was greatest among children living in homes

where both biological parents were absent. On the other hand, the odds for

trespassing were less for children from homes where either one or both parents

were absent, when compared to children in intact homes. It appears that a

disruption within the family's structure contributes to the likelihood of the

children misbehaving. The radical change in family structure, which is brought

about by divorce, may produce the effect of undermining the quality of the

relationships within the family, and cause the self-esteem of its members to erode.

Divorce and Self-Esteem in Children

Beer (1989) found that children from divorced homes scored significantly lower on the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test than children from nondivorced homes. Additionally, children from divorced homes scored significantly lower on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form than children from non-divorced homes. Finally, children from divorced homes scored significantly higher on the Children's Depression Inventory than children from nondivorced homes. Using the Semantic Index of Relationships, Hobart (1989) found that the mean collective effect scores for all children in a family were higher in first married than in remarried families. Ganong and Coleman (1993) found significantly higher self-esteem in children in nuclear families, when compared to stepchildren. However, Johnson and Hutchinson (1989) found no statistically significant differences in how children in intact and stepparent families perceived themselves. In addition, a study conducted by Borriene, Handal, Brown and Searight (1991) revealed that adolescent adjustment was not dependent upon parental marital status either through an interaction with perceived family conflict, or alone. Instead, they found that current perceived family conflict did influence the adjustment of adolescents. These findings suggest that regardless of which family members are perceived to be fighting, adolescents are disturbed by it.

In assessing successful stepfamilies, Visher and Visher (1990) found that the children and adults in these families recognize the challenges they have mastered, and their self-esteem rises as they go forward in life with confidence that they can

deal with whatever situations confront them. They appreciate the richness and diversity of relationships, some of them given by birth, while others are created through mutual effort and caring. The stepfamily is proving to be a viable and productive family form, which has the potential for satisfaction and happiness for its members.

Summary

This research has shown that as successful action is accomplished, self-esteem rises, which leads to further action and accomplishments, which strengthens self-esteem. The rise in self-esteem does not happen in a vacuum. The child's interaction with significant family members, as well as others in the child's environment, may act as a catalyst to lead the child to greater heights in self-esteem.

As children experience changes in the structure of their families, the group of family members, who have provided their security up to this point in their lives, is no longer in one location. Fears and doubts, which attack the child's fragile self-esteem, abound. However, as some of the research has indicated, while the child is still clinging to the familiar, time and meaningful interaction with new friends and family members can help to quiet those doubts and fears and help to create an environment in which a new sense of stability can begin to develop. As children establish new satisfying relationships, their damaged self-esteem may rebound and their behaviors may reflect this positive change.

Statement of Purpose

The present study was designed to test the hypothesis that the self-esteem of children who are living in stepfather family households is lower than that of nuclear family children. If the self-esteem of children who are living in stepfather households is actually lower than that of nuclear family children, their scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form will reflect that difference in self-esteem

CHAPTER THREE

Method

Subjects

Subjects for this study were chosen by sending a letter to the parents or guardians of all students in third, fourth, and fifth grades in a rural public elementary school, in central Missouri, requesting permission to administer the survey questionnaire. Upon receiving parental permission, subjects were categorized into 2 groups: (1) those from stepfather families, (2) those from nuclear families. The 23 stepfather family subjects who were finally selected were those who had resided in a stepfather family for at least a year. The selected subjects had resided in their family from 1 to 11 years, with a mean of 4.60 years. The breakdown for this group, by gender, for the length of years of residence within the stepfamily is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Years of Residing in a Stepfather Family

Gender	n	M	Range
Females	11	4.40	1-11 yrs.
Males	12	4.79	1.5-09 yrs.

The 23 nuclear family subjects were selected from the pool of available subjects by finding a match in gender and age for each of the 23 stepfather subjects. Table 2 shows the gender and age information for the subjects who were in the two groups.

Table 2

Age of Subjects

Family Type	n	Mean Age
STEPFATHER FAMILIES		
Males	12	9 yrs. 11 mos.
Females	11	10 yrs. 9 mos.
NUCLEAR FAMILIES		
Males	12	9 yrs. 11 mos.
Females	11	10 yrs. 2 mos.

All subjects were Caucasian and were bussed from nearly all of one rural county,

where residents appear to be of the lower and middle socioeconomic status.

Instruments

In the present study, the School Form of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem

Inventory (SEI) was administered to the 46 subjects in the study. The SEI was

developed from an extensive study of self-esteem in children conducted by

Coopersmith in 1967. The study was based upon the widely held belief that self-

esteem is significantly associated with personal satisfaction and effective

functioning (Coopersmith, 1990). The eighth printing was printed in 1990, by

Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., which holds the 1981 copyright.

The School Form of the SEI, a fifty item inventory to measure self-esteem,

was developed during an investigation of the consequences, antecedents, and

correlates of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1990). The majority of the items in the

inventory were based on items selected from the Rogers and Dymond (1954)

scale, and several original items were included. All of the statements were

carefully worded for use with children ages eight to ten. Five psychologists

grouped the items into two groups – those indicative of high self-esteem and those indicative of low self-esteem. The set of items was tested for comprehensibility by using a group of thirty children. The final inventory consisted of fifty items related to self-attitude in four areas: peers, parents, school, and personal interests.

The SEI was designed to measure evaluative attitudes toward the self in family, academic, and personal areas of experience (Coopersmith, 1990). The SEI also has a Lie Scale that indicates extremely socialized responses, defensiveness, or test wiseness. A high score on the Lie Scale may indicate that the examinee thought he or she understood the intention of the inventory and was attempting to respond positively to all items (Coopersmith, 1990). In relation to the SEI, the term "self-esteem" refers to the evaluation a person makes, and usually maintains of himself or herself. Overall self-esteem is an expression of approval or disapproval, indicating the extent to which an individual believes himself or herself to be significant, competent, successful, and worthy.

The School Form of the SEI, which was used in this study, is to be used with students ages eight through fifteen and consists of 58 items: fifty self-esteem items, and eight items that constitute the Lie Scale. The self-esteem items, yield a total score and separate scores for four subscales: General Self, Social Self-Peers, Home-Parents, and School-Academic (Coopersmith, 1990).

In a study of construct validity reported by Kokenes (1974, 1978), as cited by Coopersmith, 1990, over 7600 school children in grades 4 through 8 were observed. The investigation was designed to observe the comparative importance of the home, peers, and school, to global self-esteem of preadolescents and

adolescents. The study confirmed the construct validity of the subscales proposed by Coopersmith as measuring self-esteem.

As a measure of concurrent validity, Simon and Simon (1975), as cited in Coopersmith, 1990, correlated the SEI and SRA Achievement Scores of eighty-seven students in grade 4 and obtained a coefficient of .33 (p<.01). The students' SEI scores were also correlated with their scores on the Lorge-Thorndike intelligence test (r = 0.30).

Regression analysis of SEI subscale scores on the MAT Grade Equivalent Scores (Donaldson, 1974, as cited by Coopersmith, 1990), revealed that the SEI is a fair predictor or reading achievement. (The Lie Scale of the SEI appears to be the best predictor of reading achievement.) Moderate correlations of SEI subscale scores were obtained with Reading Grade Equivalent Scores. General Self subscale (r = 53) (p<.01).

Kokenes (1983), as cited by Coopersmith, 1990, performed a factor analysis on the responses of 7600 children (grades 4 through 8) on the SEI. The subjects included students from all socioeconomic ranges. Four pair or bipolar factors emerged; each pair appeared to be highly congruent with the subscales of the SEI. There were factors related to the School-Academic subscales (Success and Failure); factors related to Home-Parents subscale (Good-Poor); and factors related to the General Self subscale (Perceived Adequacy of Self, Perceived Inadequacy of Self, and Rejection of Self). Nine factors emerged from a total of eighteen factor analysis conducted by Kokenes. There was little factorial differences from grade level to grade level. There was some differences related to

sex: at all grade levels, females tended to perceive themselves as less capable academically than did males.

In a study that addressed convergent and divergent validity, Taylor and Reitz (1968), as cited in Coopersmith, 1990, reported a correlation of .45 between the SEI and California Psychological Inventory Self-Acceptance Scales. Divergent validity was examined by correlating SEI scores with scores on the Edwards and Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scales. The obtained coefficients were .75 and .44 respectfully. This indicated that those doing well on the SEI are expected to do very well on the Edwards Social Desirability Scale, and less well, but well nevertheless, on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale.

In 1974, Donaldson, as cited by Coopersmith, 1990, calculated subscale intercorrelations for 643 public school students in grades 3 through 8. The sample included primarily students of lower and middle-upper socioeconomic status and a considerable number of minority children. The obtained coefficients ranged from .02 to .52.

The test-retest reliability was obtained in a study by Battle (1977), as cited in Coopersmith, 1990. Since the Canadian SEI was constructed to approximate the Coopersmith SEI, the two may reasonably be considered to be alternate forms. Correlations ranged from .71 to .80 for 198 children in grades 3 through 6.

Procedure

Prior to the day of testing, arrangements were made with classroom teachers for the students to be excused from class for testing. On the day of testing, and near the beginning of their school day, the students were taken from their

classrooms, in groups of no more than 15, to the computer laboratory, where the inventory was administered. The School Form of the inventory is entitled, "Coopersmith Inventory", and does not contain the words self-esteem. The subjects answered "Like Me", or "Unlike Me", to short statements (such as, "I'm a lot of fun to be with"), by placing an X in one of the two boxes preceding the statement. As the students worked to complete their inventories, this researcher supervised and answered their questions concerning the inventory. The subjects had unlimited time to complete their inventories; however, no subject worked longer than 20 minutes on it, and most had finished within 10 minutes. Upon completing their inventories, the students remained seated until all group members were finished. Then the students were escorted back to their respective classrooms.

Design

A 2 X 2 factorial design was selected, with two independent variables, family type, consisting of (1) stepfather and (2) nuclear, and self-esteem as the dependent variable.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The means and standard deviations for the four groups (nuclear males,

stepfather males, nuclear females, and stepfather females) on the total self-esteem

and the subscales of the self-esteem inventory are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Total and Subscale Self-Esteem Scores for Nuclear and

Stepfather Family Subjects

Gender	Family Type		$\underline{n}$	$\underline{M}$	$\underline{SD}$
male	nuclear	TOTSE	12	65.33	19.69
	family	GENERAL	12	16.58	5.47
		HOME	12	6.42	1.08
		SCHOOL	12	4.92	2.43
		SOCIAL	12	4.75	2.30
	stepfather	TOTSE	12	64.67	12.13
	family	GENERAL	12	16.58	3.85
		HOME	12	5.83	2.21
		SCHOOL	12	5.42	1.78
		SOCIAL	12	4.50	1.57
female	nuclear	TOTSE	11	77.45	15.72
	family	GENERAL	11	19.18	4.75
		HOME	11	6.73	1.19
		SCHOOL	11	6.45	2.16
		SOCIAL	11	6.36	1.43
	stepfather	TOTSE	11	78.36	8.14
	family	GENERAL	11	19.18	1.99
		HOME	11	6.73	1.01
		SCHOOL	11	6.64	1.43
		SOCIAL	11	6.64	.81

In most studies, the distribution of SEI scores have been skewed in the direction

of high self-esteem. The means in the norms reported are in the range of 70 to 80,

with a standard deviation of 11 to 13 (Coopersmith, 1990). In the present study, as presented in Table 3, the means of the male subjects, for both nuclear and stepfather families, were below 70, 65.33 and 64.67 respectively.

In examining the total self-esteem scores for males, presented in Table 3, there appears to be little difference in the mean between males from the nuclear families (M=65.33) and males from stepfamilies (M=64.67). However, the nuclear family males show greater variability from the mean (SD=19.69) than the stepfamily (SD=12.13) males do. In examining the total self-esteem scores for female subjects, the means were almost similar for the females from nuclear families (M=77.45) and those from stepfamilies (M=78.36). However, similar to the males, the nuclear family females demonstrated more variance from the mean (SD=15.72) to a much greater degree than the stepfamily females (SD=8.14) did.

A 2 X 2 factorial analysis of variance was conducted to test the significance of the interaction effects and main effects of type of family and gender on self-esteem. There was no interaction between gender and family type (p=0.979), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance of Total Self-Esteem Scores Between Gender and Family

Type

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TOTSE					
Main Effects					
GENDER	1912.791	1	1912.791	8.906	.005
FAMILY TYPE	.169	1	.169	.001	.978
2-Way Interaction					
GENDER X FAMILY TYPE	7.125	1	7.125	.033	.856
Model	1920.003	3	640.001	2.980	.042
Residual	9020.606	42	214.776		
Total	10940.609	45	243.125		

The main effects were significant for gender (p=.005), but were not significant for

family type as shown in Table 4. These findings fail to reject the null hypothesis,

that there was no significant difference in self-esteem between children of nuclear

and stepfather families, for both male and female subjects. However, gender

effects were significant, with females' self-esteem significantly higher than that of

the males.

Finally, the responses of the children on the Lie Scale of the self-esteem

inventory were significantly high indicting that many appear to have responded

defensively. Those results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Number of Lie Scale Responses by Gender

Number of Lie Scale Items Responded to		Number of Subjects Who Responded		
		FEMALES	MALES	Total
0		0	2	2
1		4	1	5
2		1	7	8
3		6	4	10
4		4	2	6
5		5	5	10
6		2	2	4
	Total Responses	22	24	46

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

A simple factorial design was used in this study consisting of the dependent variable, Total Self-Esteem and the two independent variables, gender and family type. The factorial analysis revealed that there was no interaction between family type and gender. Main effects were only found for gender, but not for family type. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no difference in self-esteem in children living in nuclear families and those living in stepfather families, was retained. One reason for this result may be due to the sample size, which was small. However, the analysis did reveal a significant main effect for gender at a probability level of 0.005, as shown in Table 4, indicating that the males in this study had lower self-esteem than the females did.

In examining the Lie Scale results, shown in Table 5, we find that a high number of the children, tested, made responses which indicate defensiveness. It may likely be that the children were not totally honest in their responses, and maybe gave more positive and socially desirable responses. Hence, we must therefore view the results with caution.

In relating the findings in this study to Adler's and Dreikers', lifestyle's theory, this study suggests that, although lifestyle lends stability, when changes in family structure occur, resilient children are able to adapt their lifestyle to accommodate the resulting changes in their family environment, by either retaining elements of

their previous lifestyle or by changing their lifestyle to mesh with their existing family structure.

Studies reveal that people who seek psychological help frequently acknowledge that they suffer from feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. These people view themselves as helpless and inferior, as being incapable of improving their situations, and as lacking the inner resources to tolerate or reduce the anxiety which is aroused by everyday events and stress, (Rodgers and Dymond, 1990, as cited by Coopersmith, 1967). As we have seen in our review of literature, changes in family structure often bring about stressful situations. However, it appears that the subjects in this study do feel empowered, perhaps due to their success in handling the trials they have encountered. Carl Rogers (1951), as cited in Coopersmith, 1967, theorizes that a "permissive" and accepting environment, in which significant others allow free expression of ideas and affect, is necessary for an individual to be able to erase doubts of self-worth, to know themselves, and to accept themselves. The families of the stepchildren, in this study, may have succeeded in applying Roger's theory, as it appears that the stepchildren were able to maintain, or regain, their self-esteem in what could have been the harsh environment of a stepfather family household.

In his study in 1987, Beer found a significant effect for the marital status of parents. He found that children from divorced homes scored lower on the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory – School Form, and higher on the Children's Depression Inventory than children from non-divorced homes. In addition, Ganong and Coleman, in 1993, found higher self-

esteem in children in nuclear families, when compared to stepchildren. Alpert-Gillis and Connell, in 1989, found a significant difference between boys' and girls' self-esteem, with boys ($M = 2.76$) showing slightly higher levels of self-esteem than girls ($M = 2.66$). Bosacki, Innerd, and Towson, in 1997, investigated the relationship between field-independence/dependence and self-esteem in preadolescent girls and boys. During their investigation, the SEI was administered to 63 6th graders (33 girls, 30 boys). Girls and boys did not differ significantly on either the subscale or the SEI total scale. The present study failed to confirm the findings in these studies.

The findings in this study concur with the findings by Johnson and Hutchinson, in 1989. They found no statistically significant differences in how children in intact and stepparent families perceive themselves. This study also agrees with the study by Salminen, in 1994. He found that males were lower in self-esteem than females.

Limitations

This study is limited by the number of subjects who were involved in it. As the size of the sample increases, the better is its representation of the targeted population . Two procedures are recommended when the SEI is being used in the school setting: (1) the supplemental use of behavior observational rating, and (2) the development of local norms (Coopersmith, 1990). This researcher failed to follow this recommendation, by not establishing local norms and by not using a behavior observational rating, which may have compromised the validity of the study to some degree. A high score on the Lie Scale may indicate that the

examinee thought that he or she understood the intention of the inventory and was attempting to respond positively to all items, or, he or she may have responded defensively. In such instances, the inventory may be invalid if a supplemental observational rating or teacher report indicates low or medium self-esteem for the subject. If that in fact is the case, further evaluation is warrented (Coopersmith, 1990).

<u>Recommendations for Further Research</u>

This study addressed only one of the many non-traditionally structured families. Examining the self-esteem of children from other non-traditionally structured families (stepmother, single-parent, adoptive, foster, etc.) would shed further light on this subject. An in depth study of the many facets of Blended family life, and their effects on the child, would be helpful. Exploring the reason for the formation of the non-traditionally structured family, and its effects on the family members, would add another dimension to a study similar to this one.

<u>Conclusion</u>

As acknowledged in this study, a stepfather family structure brings various obstacles and opportunities for the growth of the children living within. However, as purported in this study, those effects appear to counterbalance each other, which results in the maintenance of the child's self-esteem. Therefore, in helping a child who is experiencing difficulties, the assumption of low self-esteem, due to a child residing in a stepfather family, is not a valid assumption.

APPENDIX

January 31,

1998

Dear Parents,

I am your child's Counselor at school. As a part of my graduate studies at Lindenwood University, I am conducting a study in which I am comparing self-esteem in children, ages 8-15, who are living in various family structures. I would appreciate it if you will allow me to administer a test, Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory, to your child, during his/her school day. The administration rarely exceeds 10 minutes. The inventory is designed to measure attitudes toward the self in social, academic, family, and personal areas of experience. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. No names are needed and no individual scores will be used or shared. The results are for research purposes only. Mr. Jarvis has given his permission for the administration, contingent upon your granting permission. Even though I will be choosing only 50 subjects to test, I need a large number of students to choose those from. If permission is granted, fill the slip and return in the envelope provided, sealing, and putting my name on it, and return it to school with your child. If you have questions, please feel free to call me at school, 438-2223.

Respectfully yours,

_____

Nancy Collins

I hereby give permission for Nancy Collins to administer Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory to my child.

_____(please include first and last name). She/He has resided in

a _____family structure (examples: biological,

single parent, step-father) for a period of _____years.

Teacher's name_____.

Signed_____Date_____

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