



The relationship between family environment, self-esteem, and classroom behavior of school-age children

by Su Zan Lee Hoxsey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education  
Montana State University

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between children's perception of conflict and control in their family environment, children's self-report of their self-esteem, and their classroom behavior. These variables were examined to investigate the possible association of conflict and control in the family environment and low self-esteem, and disruptive classroom behavior. Conflict and control were assessed by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (GV/FES); self-esteem was measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). Disruptive classroom behavior was assessed by the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist routinely used by classroom teachers in the school.

Students from Monforton Elementary School (N=88) completed the CV/FES and the SEI, and their classroom behavior was assessed by their teacher. The results indicated a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative association between self-esteem and classroom behavior and between self-esteem and conflict and control in the family environment. Significant ( $p < .05$ ) results were not obtained in the positive association of conflict and control in the family environment and disruptive classroom behavior.

Self-esteem appeared to be the link between all of the variables. Although conflict and control in the family environment were not found to be positively associated with disruptive classroom behavior, these factors were found to be negatively associated with self-esteem, and self-esteem was found to be significantly ( $p < .05$ ) negatively associated with disruptive classroom behavior.

Recommendations resulting from this study include further research in the area of factors associated with disruptive classroom behavior. Also, the study provides information for parents, teachers, and social service agencies concerning the association of poor self-esteem with conflict and control in the family environment and classroom behavior.

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OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN**

by

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of the requirements for the degree**

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Su Zan Lee Hoxsey

This thesis has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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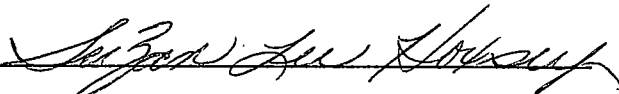
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between children's perception of conflict and control in their family environment, children's self-report of their self-esteem, and their classroom behavior. These variables were examined to investigate the possible association of conflict and control in the family environment and low self-esteem, and disruptive classroom behavior. Conflict and control were assessed by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (CV/FES); self-esteem was measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). Disruptive classroom behavior was assessed by the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist routinely used by classroom teachers in the school.

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Recommendations resulting from this study include further research in the area of factors associated with disruptive classroom behavior. Also, the study provides information for parents, teachers, and social service agencies concerning the association of poor self-esteem with conflict and control in the family environment and classroom behavior.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Someday, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well considered, yet fervent conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit.*

-- Erik H. Erikson<sup>1</sup>

The following study examined the relationship between children's perception of conflict and control in their family environment, their self-esteem, and their involvement in disruptive classroom behavior. In the last two decades there has been a recognition of the growing problems of children in our society. These problems have been associated with alcohol abuse by parents, the rising divorce rate, and abuse of children. All of these problems impact the family environment in which children grow and develop (Elkind, 1981). Given the rise in problems in the family environment, it is important to understand what relationship children's perceptions of their family has to their self-esteem and classroom behavior.

Alfred Adler's (1927) theory of Individual Psychology provides a potentially important conceptual framework for understanding the impact children's perception of their family has on their lives. Adler's concept of the significance of children's perception of their family environment is a primary

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Thorman, 1983, p. 80.

emphasis of this thesis. According to Adler's (1963) theory of Individual Psychology, the experiences of children in the family environment mold and shape their development for the remainder of their lives. Children perceive the world in the same manner that they perceive their family. Perceptions of their families affect their self-perceptions as well as their behaviors (Dinkmeyer, Pew & Dinkmeyer, 1979). In this way, children's perceptions of their family environment may be an important factor in development of children's self-esteem and how they behave in the classroom.

#### Statement of the Problem

The following study investigated the association between children's perceptions of their family environments, their levels of self-esteem, and their behavior in the classroom. Family environment was assessed in terms of the degree of conflict that children perceive to exist within the family, and the degree of control which children perceive that parents exert over them. Children's perception of their family environment was restricted to these two ideas because these areas have been found to be associated with behavior problems in children (Moos & Moos, 1981). Conflict was "the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression and conflict among family members" (Pino, Simons & Slawinowski, 1984, p. 1). Control was described as "the extent to which set rules and procedures are used to run family life" (Pino et al., 1984, p. 2). Self-esteem was defined as the way children feel about

themselves (Corsini, 1984). Also examined was the degree of disruptive behavior of children in their classrooms. Behavior in the classroom was described as an outward expression of how children feel about themselves, which may be related to their self-esteem (Driekurs, 1957). It was also characterized by the degree of cooperation children display with each other, their acceptance of direction from their teacher, and their respect for themselves and others.

#### Significance of the Problem

The problems of children in our society are growing. As the United States approaches the twenty-first century, many problems exist within families. These problems include alcohol abuse, divorce, and abuse of children (Addington, 1985; Black, 1981; Erickson & Egeland, 1987; Salter, 1988). Alcohol abuse, divorce, and child abuse may also be related to the level of conflict and control within the family environment (Aber & Allen, 1987; Emery, 1982; Moos & Moos, 1981). In 1981, 12 to 25 million children were living in families in which substance abuse was a chronic problem (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1981). In 1986 there were 66 million children between birth and 18 years of age living in the United States. Of these it is estimated that approximately 1.1 million experienced divorce (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1986). In the same year the American Humane Association estimated that over two million children

were physically, sexually, or emotionally abused and/or neglected in the United States. Thirty-three percent of the children reported as maltreated in 1986 were elementary school age children, age 6-11 years (American Humane Association, 1987).

The statistics cited above indicate that a large number of children in the United States live in family environments which may be detrimental to their normal development. Problems such as alcohol abuse, divorce, and abuse of children occurring within family environments may cause stress for children (Elkind, 1981). These stresses may limit children's development of self-esteem and may be associated with behavior problems at school (Driekurs, 1957).

According to Adler (1963), the family environment shapes and molds children. Children's perceptions of their family environments influence how they perceive the world around them. The following section will examine the significance of the problems of alcohol abuse, divorce, and abuse within the family environments and how they are related to development of children's self-esteem and behavior. p32

Children's self-esteem may be negatively influenced by problems in the family environment. Self-esteem is described in various ways, such as self-image, self-blame and sense of self. Poor self-image was found to be one of the prevalent symptoms of children in alcoholic family environments (Black, 1981). Self-blame, sadness and grief were found to be responses of young

children to their parents' divorce (Addington, 1985). Child abuse has a lasting effect on children's sense of self (Erickson & Egeland, 1987). Low self-esteem is a prevalent research finding in victims of sexual abuse (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986). Whether self-esteem is described as self-image or self-blame, research supports that it is significantly influenced by the family environment.

Children may act out the level of stress and trauma that they feel within their family environment. Families with a high level of conflict and a high degree of control tend to exhibit more problems than normal families (Moos & Moos, 1981; Scoresby & Christensen, 1976). It has been found that children who have witnessed family violence suffer more behavior problems than children who have not (Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson & Zak, 1985). Expectations within the family environment can have a considerable influence on the development of behavior problems in children (Thomas & Chess, 1984). Abused children act out the stress and trauma they experience at home in disruptive, attention-seeking behaviors more often than children who are not abused (Aber & Allen, 1987). Children who are abused in their family environment justify their aggressive behavior because of their own experience (Dean, Malik, Richards & Stringer, 1986).

Children may act out at school because of the stress within their family environment. Children from homes in which alcohol abuse occurs exhibit more acting-out behaviors, and perform more poorly in school than do

children from homes in which alcohol abuse does not occur (Black, 1981). Children from divorced families also exhibit behavioral problems and poor school performance (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Emery (1982) found that conflict within parental relationships is positively correlated with children's behavioral problems. Children that are abused show a significantly greater number of behavioral problems which may result from the events and interaction problems within the family environment rather than from any one abusive incident. (Wolfe & Mosk, 1983). A prevalent result of abuse of children is disruptive classroom behavior and poor school performance (Erickson & Egeland, 1987).

The importance of the effect of a healthy family environment on children's self-esteem and classroom behavior is supported by the literature (e.g., Addington, 1985; Erickson & Egeland, 1987; Wolfe & Mosk, 1983). Given the statistics cited by the American Humane Association (1987), the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census (1986), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1981) regarding the growing problems that families are experiencing, it may be inevitable that children from impaired family environments will develop personality and behavior problems, which they may bring to the classroom.

This study examined children's perceptions of their family environment, self-esteem, and classroom behavior. Children's perception of family environment and their self-esteem could be important to schools, parents and

other professionals in developing an understanding of the possible origin of problematic classroom behavior. Because of stresses within the family environment, children may be coming to school less prepared to cope with the academic and social demands of the classroom (Erikson & Egeland, 1987). Teachers may feel frustrated and ineffective in helping these children. The recognition of an association between family environment and classroom behavior could be of assistance to schools in deciding on children's needs for special programs, aiding in the selection of teaching staffs, helping teachers understand student problems, and assisting teachers in the utilization of referral to other agencies. This study could inform schools and parents how family environment may be associated with classroom behavior of children.

### Conceptual Framework

Individual Psychology, as developed by Alfred Adler (1927), served as the conceptual framework for this study. Individual Psychology was appropriate because of its emphasis on the importance of children's perception of their family environment as the basis for their self-esteem and resultant behavior. Special attention was given to the concepts of Individual Psychology that directly relate to the research carried out in this study.

Alfred Adler was an associate of Sigmund Freud's who disagreed with Freud's view of development as driven by sexual instincts. Rather, Adler

theorized that persons are social beings and their development, rather than being pushed by sexual instincts, is pulled by social interests and personal goals (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979). People have the desire to contribute to social well being, and this desire is referred to by Adler as "social interest" (Corsini, 1979).

Adler (1927) theorized that persons search for a place in the world, a position of personal meaning. This search begins before the age of five within the family environment. It begins with the "process of judging the status of self and the status of the world. . ." and ". . . based on those perceived judgements. . ." forms ". . . a pattern of behavior that becomes the life-style" (Hanson, Stevic & Warner, 1982, p. 57). Life style becomes the personal interpretational framework used throughout life. It is shaped and molded within the family environment and is the manner in which the person receives and interprets all life experiences. It includes not only the receiving and interpreting of stimuli, but also the resulting actions and attitudes of the person. The person pursues a sense of mastery and superiority in life through the interpretational framework of the life style (Adler, 1927).

Personal perception and interpretation was the primary focus and theoretical base for this paper. Personal perception and interpretation has special significance in understanding children's behavior (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979). The interpretation of an event by a person is influenced by individual perception. This perception is based on the person's feelings and

experiences within the family environment. Personal perception and interpretation of events are the determining factors in a person's behavior (Hanson et al., 1982). According to Adlerian theory, events such as alcoholism, divorce, or child abuse influence children's perceptions. It is perception and interpretation of personal events that has the largest influence on behavior because the personal interpretation of events creates a perception of reality that guides behavior (Hanson et al., 1982).

Also of importance to this process of perception and interpretation is the concept of inferiority. All humans are born with a sense of inferiority because of their smallness, vulnerability and dependence on others (Adler, 1927). Inferiority persists throughout life and is the motivational force for humans to strive for their personal goals. Inferiority motivates humans to master their environment and to find their personal place in life. When persons perceive they have mastered an important accomplishment, their feelings of inferiority diminish. Inferiority can influence behavior negatively as well. An overwhelming sense of inferiority may influence persons to act out in anger, aggression or hostility in order to compensate for their sense of inferiority (Adler, 1927). Personal perception and interpretation of events may reinforce an existing strong feeling of inferiority which may lead to poor self-esteem and resultant negative behavior (Corsini, 1979).

In summary, Individual Psychology theorizes that persons are not controlled or determined by nurture or nature exclusively, but are also

influenced by their own perception and life style. The theory of Individual Psychology has special significance for this study. It provides a conceptual framework to examine the experiences of children in their family environment through their perception of conflict and control in that environment. Self-esteem and behavior were identified by Adler (1963) as two factors that offer a measurement of children's perceptions and life experiences. As families experience more problems and intrusions in their environment, so do the children who live within these families. According to Individual Psychology, perceptions within the family environment are a potent influence on children's self-esteem and behavior. Therefore children's perception of their family environment may give parents, teachers and mental health professionals valuable information into the self-esteem and behavioral needs of children (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979).

### Operational Definitions

Three major concepts were used in this study. These concepts are children's perception of the family environment (specifically conflict and control), children's perception of their self-esteem, and their classroom behavior.

Conflict and control within the family environment were measured by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (CV/FES). The CV/FES is organized into three dimensions that measure major concepts within the

family. These dimensions are relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance (Pino et al., 1984). Within the relationship dimension is the subscale, conflict. Conflict is "the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression and conflict among family members" (Pino et al., 1984, p. 1). Control was measured by a second subscale which is contained with the system maintenance dimension. Control is described as "the extent to which set rules and procedures are used to run family life" (Pino et al., 1984, p. 2). High control indicates more parental management of family rules and structure, and less democratic decision making.

Self-esteem is regarded as the way people feel about themselves (Corsini, 1984). It includes their self-acceptance and self-respect. Adler (1927) theorized that people who feel inferior may direct their energies toward proving and demonstrating their abilities to those around them through their actions and attitudes. Adler viewed self-esteem as being demonstrated in negative as well as positive actions and attitudes (Corsini, 1984). Children's report of self-esteem was measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). The SEI defines self-esteem as "a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 5).

Disruptive classroom behaviors are physical or verbal actions that interfere with teaching and learning in school (Driekurs, 1957). Behaviors

such as talking out of turn, lack of cooperation with peers and the teacher, and not obeying school rules are examples. Classroom behavior was measured by the Work Habits and Social Development checklist. The checklist is routinely used by teachers at the school to be studied, to evaluate students' behavior at the end of each quarter's grading period. Of the 17 items on the list, seven were used. These items are: (a) willingness to accept correction, (b) acceptance of responsibility, (c) practice of self-control, (d) obedience to school rules, (e) respect for school property, (f) respect for authority, and (g) cooperation with others in work and play.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature examines current theoretical and empirical studies in the recent literature that pertain to the possible effects of family environment on children's self-esteem and behavior in the classroom. Adler's (1927) Individual Psychology was used as a framework to support and interpret the findings of the studies. The review of literature is arranged according to the three concepts to be discussed. The first concept is the effect of family environment on children's behavior. The second concept is the importance of the family environment on the development of children's self-esteem. The final concept considers the possible effects of the family environment on children's self-esteem and classroom behavior. The review of literature chapter will conclude with a summary of the literature and a statement of the research hypothesis.

## Family Environment, Self-Esteem, and Classroom Behavior

### Family Environment and Effects on Children's Behavior

According to Alfred Adler (1963), the important constructs of an individual's personality are formed by the age of four or five. Heredity and environment are two of the important factors that determine how children see themselves and their world. Individuals use their heredity and environment to understand and find their place in the scheme of life. The family environment provides the foundation that influences children's interpretations of life, relationships with others, and who and what they are (Adler, 1963). Children learn by trial and error what influences the significant people around them (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979). The family environment is the primary social environment for children, and it is through this environment that children learn rules, customs and behavior (Corşini, 1979). The family environment may be the primary or only source of information and feedback for children prior to their entry into school (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979).

The family environment is an important source of support for children. Browne and Finkelhor (1986), in reviewing recent research on sexually abused children, found that the quality and quantity of family support was a primary factor that influenced the impact of the abuse on children. Browne and Finkelhor examined a number of variables that hypothetically relate to the

effects of sexual abuse on children. These variables are duration and frequency of abuse, the child's relationship to the offender, the type of sex act, the amount of force and aggression used, the age at the onset of the abuse, the gender of the offender, the age of the offender (whether an adult or an adolescent), the effect of telling or maintaining a secret, parental reaction, and the result of agency intervention. In reviewing the literature on parental reaction, Browne and Finkelhor (1986) found that the mother's negative response aggravated the trauma. Children who were sexually abused and experienced an angry response from their mother exhibited more behavioral problems. The authors cautioned that only two studies have evaluated parental reaction, and more research is necessary. Browne and Finkelhor also reported research findings indicating that the trauma of sexual abuse appears to have its greatest impact during latency (ages 6-12). They concluded their review of recent research by stating that knowledge about the causes and effects of sexual abuse is still in its infancy and further examination of these factors and their association is needed. They continued by explaining that sexual abuse of children is a trauma, and regardless of long-term effects, there is a need to understand the immediate effect on childhood. This effect can be examined through children's perceptions of their experiences.

A study of women who were sexually abused as children (Gold, 1986) offers some data about the possible mediating function the family environment

plays in helping people survive traumas. Gold studied 191 women to determine the long-term effects of childhood sexual victimization. In Gold's study, 103 of the women had been victims of sexual assault as children and 88 of the women had not. Gold examined the correlation between and within the groups on several variables. There were no significant statistical differences on demographic variables between the groups of women, other than their level of education. The non-victimized women had more education. Women who had been victimized as children attributed bad events to themselves and good events to others more frequently than the non-victimized group. Their victimization and manner of attribution were significantly related to their adult functioning. Also of importance was the women's perceptions of their mother's response to them and to the abuse at the time of the event. Women who perceived their mothers as emotionally supportive at the time of the incident were more likely to have satisfactory emotional relationships in adulthood than the women who perceived their mothers as non-supportive. In addition, the mothers' responses to the victimization and their placement of blame for the incident influenced the victims' attributional style. As the author pointed out, it is difficult to know if the style of attribution of events preceded or resulted from the abuse. There may be long-term effects of childhood sexual victimization on adult functioning. However, in retrospective studies such as this one, it is difficult to determine the origin of these effects, and whether or not they are a result of

the abuse or originated prior to the abuse in the family environment. Gold did state that more research into the support of children by their mothers is needed. As this research indicates, adult functioning is related to perception of family environment during childhood, and the relationship of this perception to children's functioning needs to be studied in more depth.

In a study of 198 children ranging in age from 4 to 16, Wolfe et al. (1985) found that children from families in which there was violence and maternal stress due to that violence were rated higher in behavioral problems and lower in social skills than children who did not live in violent families. The study determined that 26.5% of the 198 children exhibited problems severe enough on the Child Behavior Profile to place them in the clinical range of disturbance. The study also concluded that the more exposure to violence children experienced in their families, even if the violence was indirect, the more likely they were to have high levels of behavioral problems. A further examination of children's perception of conflict within the family environment may provide more important information on behavior problems.

School aged children who were often victims of sexual abuse have some very specific problems and behaviors (Salter, 1988). They also display many of the same problems as children from divorced or alcoholic families, such as anger, aggression, and acting out behavior. Addington (1985) stated that 9 to 12 year-old children of divorce often have behavior and school problems and these problems tend to be more severe than other age groups. He

observed that the duration and intensity of these problems is often related to the duration and intensity of the conflict between the parents. The atmosphere of conflict and disruption in the family environment has a profound influence on the behavior of the children involved. These children carry the influence of their family environment to the classroom (Addington, 1985).

Aber and Allen (1987) examined 190 preschool and early school-age (4-8 years old) children to study their development. Ninety-three of the children they studied were classified as maltreated (the children had multiple overlapping incidents of abuse and neglect). These children were referred to the study by social workers from public and private protective service agencies. Sixty-seven of the children were from families that received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Several instruments were used to measure the children's socio-emotional development. A factor analysis was used to evaluate the data. The researchers found that the maltreated children had significantly less feelings of security and less trust for adults than the children in the other two categories. The researchers also found that the maltreated children were more intent on gaining attention from adults. The researchers speculated that this attention-getting behavior may have resulted from parental punishment and control. This study supplied important information on the behavior of maltreated children and concluded that excessive control in the family environment may contribute to attention-seeking behavior in maltreated children. A high degree of control may

contribute to high dependency in the children which appears to relate to attention-seeking behavior. The researchers suggested that further study into the relationships of these factors is necessary.

A study by Wolfe and Mosk (1983) compared the behavior of abused children with the behavior of low income children who were not abused and other children who were neither abused nor low income. All of the children in the study were between 6 and 16 years of age. The Child Behavior Profile was used to assess the behavior of all of the children because it gathers demographic information as well as behavioral information. Social workers either administered the CBP to parents or asked parents to fill out the CBP themselves. A multivariate analysis established that there was no significant difference in the age, occupation, or number of members in the family in the three groups. A two-tailed t-test was used to establish whether there were differences between the abused group and the AFDC group on appropriate childrearing methods. They found that the abusive parent defined physical aggressiveness and childrearing methods differently than AFDC parents. They also found that abused and low income children exhibit significantly more difficult-to-manage and maladaptive behaviors than the non-abused children. No significant differences in the behavior of AFDC children and abused children were found. The researchers suggested that the stress of maltreatment and financial deprivation in the family may have a direct correlation to the behavior of children. They also concluded that behavioral

problems in children may be more related to the family environment than any one abusive event.

The researchers (Wolfe & Mosk, 1983) compared their findings with other research on children from families of divorce (Emery, 1982), in which children's behavioral problems were related to the family environment. As noted earlier, Emery concluded that sustained conflict within the family environment may explain the behavior problems of children from separated or divorced families more effectively than the separation of divorce alone. Wolfe and Mosk suggested that there may be many variables in the family environment that contribute to the behavior problems that the children exhibit, and that further information on abused children is needed.

A study of 267 mother-child pairs over a 10-year period of time revealed data regarding the effects of maltreatment on children's self-esteem and behavior (Erickson & Egeland, 1987). The mothers were identified as at "high-risk" for maltreatment of children on a number of factors. The researchers identified that approximately 30% of the children experienced one or more types of maltreatment from their mothers by age two. Within the sample population, they were also able to identify 85 children who were not maltreated by age two. These two groups were followed through their kindergarten year in school. They found that in all categories of maltreatment (physical and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect) the children developed disruptive behavior in the classroom, including aggressiveness,

inattention, impatience and disrespectfulness. The researchers suggested that when children are maltreated early in their development, it leaves long-term and lasting effects. They believed this is due to long-term lack of concern by the family for the children's needs rather than the specific abuse. The researchers did not describe the measures they used in obtaining their results in detail sufficient to evaluate the validity and reliability of those measures. Another weakness in this study is the absence of any information on intervention in cases of maltreatment of the children and what effect any intervention may have had on the behavior of the children being studied. The study also lacks insight into children's perception of their family and their self-esteem.

In an effort to examine the family environment through the perceptions of individual family members, Moos and Moos (1981) researched and developed the Family Environment Scale (FES). They found that normal families were higher than distressed families on cohesion, expressiveness, independence, intellectual, and recreational orientation, and lower on conflict and control. Statistical control for demographic difference did not change the results of the performance on the scales. Moos and Moos studied 1,125 normal families. Family types included single-parent, two-parent, and multigenerational families, from minority groups, and from all regions of the United States. The specific means of selection was not described. Five hundred families identified as distressed were clients of family clinics, children

in crises associated with social service agencies, delinquent youth, and families in which alcohol abuse was an identified problem. The FES scale establishes means and standard deviations for both normal and distressed families. The mean for normal families on the conflict subscale was 3.31 and the standard deviation was 1.85. For distressed families the mean on conflict was 4.28 and the standard deviation was 1.93. The distressed families had a mean of .97 higher than normal families on conflict, indicating that distressed families had more conflict in the family environment than normal families. It was not reported if the difference in the means was significant. On the control subscale, normal families had a mean of 4.34 and a standard deviation of 1.81, while distressed families had a mean of 4.84 and a standard deviation of 1.87. The differences between normal and distressed families were not as wide on the control subscale as on the conflict subscale, but they did indicate a difference in the manner that children are controlled and, conversely, the amount of independence that children experience (Moos & Moos, 1981). It was not reported if the difference in the means was significant. Test-retest reliability was established for the Family Environment Scale by testing 47 members of nine families at eight-week intervals. Conflict was found to have a .85 reliability and control was found to have a .77 reliability (Moos & Moos, 1981). The Family Environment Scale is the only measurement that examines the ideas of conflict and control from the perspective of individual family members' perceptions.

These studies suggest that the quality of children's family environments, especially in the areas of conflict and control, may be associated with their behavior. Maladaptive and distressed family environments may be associated with low self-esteem and disruptive classroom behavior in children. The studies cited above leave out several important elements. These elements are children's perception of their family environment and their perception of self-esteem. It would be useful to understand how each of these elements may be associated with each other and with disruptive behavior.

#### Family Environment and Development of Self-Esteem

Adler (1963) believed that the level of self-esteem that children develop before entering school is influenced by their family environments. Individual Psychology views the family unit as the primary socializing agent for children. Within this environment, children learn what is expected of them, and whether they are competent or incompetent, superior or inferior (Corsini, 1979). Adler theorized that all persons feel inferior and incompetent at times. The force that pulls people along is the search for significance. However, if the family environment cannot support and sustain children in their search for significance because of dysfunction, then children develop feelings of inferiority, or an inferiority complex (Adler, 1927).

Positive self-esteem is thought to be essential to an individual's happiness and functioning as a person (Mussen, Conger & Kagan, 1956).

Self-esteem is universally presumed "to be a major factor in determining behavior" (Coopersmith, 1959, p. 87). It is defined as "a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 5). Persons demonstrate their self-esteem through their actions and views toward others, as well as how they describe and speak about themselves (Hamachek, 1985). In this way, behavior is a reflection of self-esteem.

The level of self-esteem in children is directly related to the manner in which they are treated by their parents (Mussen et al., 1956). Mussen et al. observed that one of the primary reasons children have behavior problems is poor parenting. Hamachek (1978) also suggested that people's self-esteem is directly related to the parents who raised them. It is within this parental environment that children learn their personal worthiness or unworthiness, their capabilities or lack of capabilities. Self-esteem influences the ways in which children act and react to the stimuli around them, and influences their subsequent behavior (Nurius, 1986). EDUC

Black (1981) observed that two of the consequences for children who grow up in alcoholic families are self-blame and low self-esteem. Addington (1985) stated that the stress of divorce on children promotes low self-esteem. Erickson and Egeland (1987) found that by age 42 months, children that were maltreated showed lower self-esteem than non-maltreated children. This

lowered self-esteem persisted for the children into their school years whether the maltreatment continued or not.

Coopersmith (1959, 1967) studied 102 fifth and sixth graders from a public school in the eastern region of the United States. He, too, found that children's behavior may be linked to their self-esteem. The primary purpose of the study was to develop a reliable measure of self-esteem that could differentiate between low and high self-esteem, and between the real self-esteem and answers given in a defensive mode. Coopersmith identified two components of self-esteem: subjective and behavioral. The assumption is that self-esteem is displayed in the behavior of the person. Persons having high self-esteem will act accordingly, displaying high social and academic behaviors and satisfaction with life. Persons having low self-esteem display it in aggressive and attention-seeking behaviors.

The internalized idea of self (self-evaluation) and the external behavior were found to be closely congruent (Coopersmith, 1959). When self-esteem was measured as high and external behavior was low, the conclusion was that reported high self-esteem was a cover-up for actual low self-esteem as measured by observed behavior. Another incongruity was observed when self-esteem was reported as low, but behavior and performance were exemplary. Low self-esteem coupled with high performance and good behavior were found to result from extremely high expectations by parents. Children with both low self-esteem and good behavior and performance were

thought to view themselves poorly because they could not meet their families' expectations. This perceived failure resulted in children seeing themselves as unworthy. The conclusion of the study was that there was a high degree of agreement between self-esteem (self-evaluation) and behavior. In further investigation, Coopersmith (1967) found three antecedents of positive self-esteem: (a) "total or nearly total acceptance of the children by their parents," (b) "clearly defined and enforced limits" (p. 236), and (c) the ability of the parents to respect and allow the children to act as individuals. Parents who are harsh, retaliatory, or who seek power decrease children's self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967) also found that self-esteem may be reflected in defensive reactions. Coopersmith's study is highly regarded in the field of psychology, and the measure he devised is widely used in the schools.

Studies described above suggest that there is a relationship between self-esteem and behavior, and that self-esteem is intrinsically interwoven within the family environment. In the studies cited above there is no discussion or examination of children's perceptions of their family environment. The possibility exists that children's perception of family environment may have influenced self-esteem and behavior.

The studies cited in the section below on family environment and children's behavior suggest that the family may indeed influence children's behavior. The research which follows investigated the level of correlation between self-esteem and disruptive behavior in the classroom. Individual

Psychology also suggests that family environment may impact self-esteem and, therefore, children's classroom behavior.

### The Effect of Family Environment and Self-Esteem on Classroom Behavior

The following section on the effect of the family environment and self-esteem on classroom behavior will discuss Adler's (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979) theory regarding self-esteem and classroom behavior, and review theoretical and empirical studies that have investigated how both factors contribute to disruptive behavior in the classroom.

The theory of Individual Psychology as proposed by Alfred Adler describes the "irreducible wholeness of the individual" as a "dynamic unified organism moving through life in a definite pattern toward a goal" (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979, p. 9). All behavior is directed toward the goals of significance and belonging. The need to feel important and useful and the need to not feel inferior and to be part of the social environment are the reasons people strive toward these goals. Humans behave in a purposeful way and define life consistently with their goals. Disruptive classroom behavior can be understood in the context of the search to satisfy personal goals and the need to belong (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979). Driekurs (1957) stated that children have the four following goals in their misbehavior: (a) to gain either positive or negative attention, (b) to gain superiority or power over another, (c) to hurt feelings through retaliation or "getting even," and/or (d) to prove their

disability or inadequacy. Children strive toward these common goals by acting out.

Individual Psychology states that humans are primarily motivated by social urges and the need and desire to belong. Social urges help to explain why children are disruptive. If all actions are purposeful, goal directed, and motivated by the need to belong, then children who have suffered or are suffering emotionally troubling circumstances may indeed be the most likely to be disruptive in class. Children who are disruptive in the classroom may be searching for social acceptance and satisfaction of their need to belong (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979).

Individual Psychology explains feelings of inferiority as resulting from faulty self-evaluation. Children have powers of keen observation but lack the ability to accurately interpret what they observe (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979). Children watch the effects of their behavior on others. If they receive little or no attention when they behave well and much attention when they behave disruptively, then they may interpret disruptive behavior as being worthwhile. In their quest for acceptance, their behavior brings them continuous negative attention, but not the sense of belonging to which they aspire, which leads to feelings of inferiority.

Children who experience stresses in their family environment, such as physical or sexual abuse, neglect, divorce, or alcoholism, may have impaired self-esteem which could lead to many behaviors which are disruptive. One

of these behaviors that has been repeatedly reported in the literature is disruptive classroom behavior in school. Disruptive classroom behavior is generally perceived as lack of cooperation and aggressiveness with peers and teachers.

Henley (1987) advocated that teachers understand classroom behavior in relation to children's levels of ego functioning. Henley viewed ego functioning from the psychoanalytic perspective, as children's ability to control their behavior when presented with stressful situations. He postulated that children's levels of behavior are directly related to their levels of ego functioning, and that the amount of stress that is put on children's egos relates to their behavioral outbursts. Children who experience stress and frustration in the family environment, with peers, and in the classroom, and who also feel badly about themselves are prime candidates for disruptive behavior. If teachers understand that children can only take a certain amount of stress before they "blow up," then they can better help children through those stressful situations (Henley, 1987). Disruptive behavior therefore develops because of issues of stress, such as poor family functioning.

Disruptive behavior in the classroom is a major concern for the teacher, and a major reason for referrals to counselors and special education programs within the school system (Cobb & Richards, 1983). Cobb and Richards studied the effectiveness of a school program to decrease disruptive classroom behavior. They worked with 90 fifth grade boys and girls who were

in self-contained classrooms because of their disruptive behavior. The children's behaviors were rated on the Behavior Problem Checklist by their teachers and an independent observer. The reliability of the results of the comparison between the teacher and independent observer was not reported in this article. Classes were randomly assigned to either control or treatment groups. Two of the major goals of this treatment program were to raise the children's self-esteem, and to encourage better communication between the children and their parents. The treatment sessions were held in the classroom with the entire class present. The sessions were led by a counselor and focused on increasing self-awareness and the understanding of the uniqueness of others. In addition, 28 children who were identified by their teachers as having the most severe behavioral problems received intensive intervention. The intervention consisted of 16 one-half hour sessions led by a counselor. The sessions were directed toward behavior modification of disruption in the classroom. The researchers found that problem behavior scores declined after treatment, and that untreated problem behaviors did not decline until after the group received treatment. However, the researchers advised caution in interpreting these results because of the possible influence of the teachers' evaluation of their students' behavior and their participation in the treatment sessions. The success of the program relative to improving communication with the parents was not reported. The study by Cobb and Richards examined the effect of treatment which focuses on self-esteem and

communication with parents without examining children's perception of these two important factors. It would be useful to have data on children's perception of their self-esteem and family environment both prior to and following the treatment.

Gumaer (1984) worked with a group of eight emotionally disturbed children, ages eight and nine, in a developmental play group. He identified the origin of their disruptive behavior as the stresses within their family environments as well as feelings of detachment. He also identified inadequacy and insecurity as factors of low self-esteem. In designing the groups, he requested participation by one or both parents. Although each parent was asked to participate, none did. The groups were designed to help the children recognize similarities and differences between themselves and their peers, and to encourage empathy as well as appropriate confrontation. Behavior was rated on the Devereux Child Behavior Rating Scale and self-concept was measured by the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale.

Seven of the eight children who participated in the developmental play groups completed the post session measures (Gumaer, 1984). The total increase of scores on the self-esteem measure was 44 points, with a mean of 6.3. Of the seven who completed the measure, five increased their scores in self-esteem. There was no report of the response to the behavior measure other than to indicate that the teacher observed more cooperation and affection among the children in the classroom setting. This study was

marginal in reliability. The evaluation of change in behavior was judged subjectively by the teachers who were involved with the study. The teachers' evaluations may have been influenced by their interest in seeing results which were not quantified. The study, although poor in design, contributes to the presumption that the level of self-esteem may be reflected in the behavior of children.

In their study of group counseling with disruptive children, Kelly and Matthews (1971) identified poor family environment as a possible influence on disruptive behavior. They studied 22 children from the fifth and sixth grades who were identified by their teachers as having behavior problems. Twelve of these children were placed in a group counseling situation, and 10 were used as the control group. The basic premise for the group was based on Glasser's Reality Therapy and Behavior Modification techniques. The group sessions were one hour in length, and the groups met eight times. The children were administered a pre and post semantic differential with polar adjectives that tested school and family items. Their behavior was rated by their teachers on a 7-point, 11-item scale. The conclusion concerning the effectiveness of the counseling was that the behavior of those in the treatment group was not significantly different from the behavior of the control group. All of the children chosen for this study were from a racially mixed and low-income area, which may have been an influence on the results. According to the research by Wolfe and Mosk (1983) cited earlier in this paper, the stress

of a low income family environment could also have contributed to these children's behavior problems. Also, if the children experienced stressed family environments, the short-term effect of the group may not have impacted a lifetime of environmental influence.

In a longitudinal study of 132 children over a 20-year span (from infancy to early adulthood), Thomas and Chess (1984) investigated the origins of behavioral problems in children. The researchers described their approach as anterospective (studying the children in each stage of development) rather than retrospective. Using numerous psychometric tests and clinical interviews and observations, as well as parent and teacher reports, they studied the development of children's behavioral disorders. They found that these disorders began most often between three and six years of age, with the second highest incidence at six to eight years of age. They concluded that a primary indicator of behavioral disorders was parental practices (discipline, expectations, and attitudes). Thomas and Chess identified these parental attitudes, expectations, and discipline practices as contributing to the outcome of the children's behaviors. They found that the level of healthy adjustment in children was accounted for 34% of the time by the level of parental congruency with the children and the children's temperament. The remaining 66% of the variance was attributed to other psychological and development differences that were not measured by the researchers. Although these percentages are low, this is one of the few long-term studies

of the first 20 years of children's lives. This article is very brief and many important details are omitted. For instance, there is a very brief rationale and review of the literature included, no information on subject selection, the instruments used for evaluation are not mentioned or critiqued, and the discussion of the statistical findings is minimal. In spite of these flaws, this study provides the basis for other studies.

Erickson and Egeland (1987), in their 10-year study of maltreated and non-maltreated children in Minneapolis, Minnesota, found that the family environment and self-esteem were linked to classroom behavior. They studied 267 mother-child pairs; the children were identified at birth as being at high risk for maltreatment by the parent. It was not stated clearly how many of the pairs were identified as abusive or neglectful. From the information supplied, it appears that approximately 86 pairs were identified for the maltreated group and 85 pairs were identified as not being maltreated and were used as a control group. The two groups were tested on several objective scales every three months for the first year, every six months for the second year, then again at 42 months, 54 months, and 64 months. There was no significant difference in behaviors, except in the neglected group, until 24 months. The neglected children exhibited an insignificant trend toward less socially responsive and more anxious attachment behavior, starting at three and six months. After two years of age, the maltreated children began to exhibit many differences from the control group. Low self-esteem and

behavioral problems began to develop and became more pronounced as the children's ages increased. By the time the maltreated children entered kindergarten, they all exhibited low self-esteem and disruptive behaviors. In their conclusions, the researchers stated that children who live in non-supportive home environments, where various forms of maltreatment occur, are limited in what they can accomplish in school. The article did not provide information about selection of the mother-child pairs, the methods used to measure developmental issues, possible intervention to stop the maltreatment and its effects on the developmental issues, or the validity and reliability of the measures used.

There are indications in the research that family environment has a major influence on children's self-esteem and classroom behavior. Further investigation to determine if relationships exist could be useful to parents and teachers in understanding children's behavior and helping them to develop healthy self-esteem. There seems to be a lack of research that examines children's perception of their family environment or links their perception to either their self-esteem or their behavior. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing research by examining the relationship between children's perception of their family environment, self-esteem, and classroom behavior.

### Summary of the Literature Review

The literature indicates a possible relationship between family environment, children's self-esteem, and classroom behavior. Statistics indicate that large numbers of children in this country are experiencing stress and trauma in their family environments. Individual Psychology suggests that the family environment is the major source of learning for children prior to entering school. It is within the family environment that children develop their personalities. If the positive effects of family environment are decreased because of stresses such as divorce, alcohol abuse, or child abuse, children may develop impairments to their self-esteem and behavior. The studies cited above describe the importance of self-esteem for children's development. The level of self-esteem may influence the ability to relate to adults and peers. Self-esteem may influence the ways in which children view the world and the way that they interpret their experiences. Several studies link family environment to behavior, while others link self-esteem to behavior. Several studies found that an improvement in self-esteem decreases disruptive behavior in the classroom. The combined literature suggests a strong relationship between family environment, self-esteem, and children's behavior. However, none of the studies specifically examine children's perceptions of the conflict and control within their family environment which is suspected to contribute to self-esteem and disruptive behavior. Also, the survey of current

literature revealed no studies that examined the relationship among family environment, self-esteem, and classroom behavior. The intent of this study was to investigate if a statistical relationship exists among all three factors.

### Research Hypotheses

- (1) There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship between disruptive classroom behavior as measured by the score on the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and children's self-report of their level of self-esteem as measured by the score on the Self-Esteem Inventory.
- (2) There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) positive relationship between disruptive classroom behavior as measured by the score on the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and children's perception of conflict in their family environment as measured by their score on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.
- (3) There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) positive relationship between disruptive classroom behavior as measured by the score on the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and children's perception of control in their family environment as measured by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.
- (4) There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship between children's self-report of their level of self-esteem as measured by the score on the Self-Esteem Inventory and their perception of conflict within their family

environment as measured by their score on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.

- (5) There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship between children's level of self-esteem as measured by the score on the Self-Esteem Inventory and their perception of control in their family environment as measured by their score on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter the methods and procedures for the study will be described. The chapter will advance from a discussion of the design to the sample and its selection, followed by the reliability and validity of the instruments, procedures, data reduction and transformation, and finally the statistical analysis.

#### Design Statement

The research design for this study was a correlational static group comparison employing a survey format (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The variables were children's perception of conflict and control in their family environment, children's perception of their level of self-esteem, and disruptive classroom behavior.

A correlational design was appropriate for the research questions of this study because correlation examines the relationship between the variables, without making assumptions about causation. There was no effort to prove causation in this study because manipulation of the variable family environment was not within the scope of the research effort.

The static group comparison is a Pre-Experimental "correlation design of a very weak form" (Campbell & Stanley, 1957, p. 64). The static group comparison presents several strengths and also contains several threats with regard to internal and external validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The strengths are in the areas of history, testing, instrumentation, and regression. The threats to internal validity are selection, mortality, and interaction of selection and maturation, etc. (Campbell & Stanley, 1957). A potential threat to external validity is interaction of the selection of subjects with any one or all of the variables.

In this study the static group comparison design alleviated the effects of history or time delay between first and second administration of measurements because the measures were administered only once. Also, because there was not a second administration of the measurements, learning effects from testing did not occur. Two of the measurement instruments used were standardized measures which relied on personal perception and not on observation by another, which eliminated the effect of change on the part of the observer. One instrument, the Work Habits Checklist, was obtained by observations by the subjects' teacher. The observations were made on a single occasion and did not require a period of time that might produce changes in the observers' scoring. All members of a classroom had the opportunity to participate in the study and scores were on a continuum so as not to be biased by the statistical regression from use of extreme scores.

Sample selection was limited to one school. The sample was limited to those who agreed to participate and whose parents consented to their participation. The potential threat to external validity of interaction of subjects with other variables was reduced by the use of all students in the four classrooms.

All of the threats to internal validity cited above are related to proving causation. Because this study was attempting to show associations, not causation, threats to internal validity were not a concern. Also, the subjects were not grouped or selected by any criteria other than they attended the specific grade school used in this project. The students' level of perception of control and/or conflict in their family environment, self-esteem, and classroom behavior were specific to each subject.

The survey format facilitated the investigation of the perceptions and feelings of the subjects (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988).

All data were maintained by the researcher according to the Ethical Standards of the American Association for Counseling and Development (1981) for research. The parents of the children involved were informed, by letter, of the purpose of the research and were encouraged to examine the survey instruments used. Participation was voluntary and all participants remain anonymous. All materials were kept in a locked cabinet and the researcher was the only person with access to any identifiable information. Participants and staff were informed that a presentation of the research

results would be made to the school board on May 8, 1990, and that a bound copy of the research would be available in their school library by June 1990.

### Population Sample

The children for the sample were drawn from the second, third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms at Monforton School. Monforton is a rural school in Gallatin County, Montana. The children came from primarily Caucasian families who live on the outskirts of the city of Bozeman. A sample size of 96 students was available.

Monforton has a total school population of 204 children in grades kindergarten through eight. Monforton was selected as the school for this project because of the interest of the principal, guidance counselor, and board of trustees. The Monforton school staff has consistently over the years been interested in factors that influence the children who attend the school, and the needs of those children academically and emotionally. Monforton participated in this study to increase the staff's understanding of the possible relationship between children's perception of their home environment on their self-esteem and their classroom behavior. Limitations of the sample for generalization to other populations include the limited number in the sample and their specific geographic location.

As cited earlier, elementary school children have been shown to be victims of abuse as often or more often than other age groups. When elementary school children experience stress and trauma, it may have a significant impact on their emotional well-being (Addington, 1985; American Humane Association, 1987; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Salter, 1988). The second through fifth grades were selected because their reading and comprehension levels were commensurate with the established norms for two of the measurement instruments that were used; the third instrument, the Work Habits Checklist, is a reporting measure routinely used with second through fifth grades at Monforton school.

Of the available 96 students, 41 were boys and 55 were girls. The age range was from 7.5 years to 13 years. There were 21 children ages 7.6 years to 9 years in the second grade classroom, 12 girls and 9 boys. There were 12 girls and 13 boys in the third grade, ranging from 8.6 to 9.6 years of age. The children in the fourth grade, 18 girls and 5 boys, ranged from 9.5 to 10.5 years of age. In the fifth grade there were 13 girls and 14 boys, ranging in age from 10.8 to 13. Eighty-eight students completed the CV/FES conflict and control subscales; 85 completed the SEI. Table 1 presents student demographic data and Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the test instruments.

Table 1. Student demographic information.

|                | N        | Age Range (years) | Mean | Standard Deviation | Percentage of Participants |
|----------------|----------|-------------------|------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Gender:</b> |          |                   |      |                    |                            |
| Female         | 51 (55)* | 7.8 - 11.4        | 9.7  | 1.20               | 57.9                       |
| Male           | 37 (41)  | 7.6 - 13.0        | 9.8  | 1.30               | 42.1                       |
| Total          | 88 (96)  | 7.6 - 13.0        | 9.8  | 1.20               | 100.0                      |
| <b>Grade:</b>  |          |                   |      |                    |                            |
| 2              | 19 (21)  | 7.6 - 9.0         | 8.3  | .53                | 21.9                       |
| 3              | 22 (25)  | 8.6 - 9.6         | 9.1  | .49                | 26.0                       |
| 4              | 23 (23)  | 9.5 - 10.5        | 9.6  | .66                | 24.0                       |
| 5              | 24 (27)  | 10.8 - 13.0       | 11.2 | .71                | 28.1                       |

\*Numbers in parentheses indicate total possible participants.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for test instruments

| Instrument               | N  | Range (points) | Mean  | Standard Deviation |
|--------------------------|----|----------------|-------|--------------------|
| Work Habits Checklist    | 96 | 7 - 21         | 14.46 | 1.89               |
| CV/FES Conflict Subscale | 88 | 3 - 9          | 5.47  | 1.25               |
| CV/FES Control Subscale  | 88 | 3 - 9          | 6.23  | 1.49               |
| Self-Esteem Inventory    | 85 | 32 - 98        | 67.25 | 16.99              |

### Instruments

Three instruments were used for measuring the variables being studied: (a) the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (Pino et al., 1984) to measure the children's perception of conflict and control in their family environment; (b) the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967) to measure

the children's self-esteem; and (c) the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist to measure the children's classroom behavior.

First, conflict and control in the family environment were measured by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (CV/FES) (Pino et al., 1984). The original instrument, the Family Environment Scale (R) (real), was normed on 1,125 normal and 500 distressed families from all areas of the United States, different family styles, and urban and rural areas (Moos & Moos, 1981). The Children's Version is an adaptation of the Family Environment Scale for children 5 to 12 years of age. It is a 30-item test using drawings. Children indicate which drawings (A, B, or C) were most like their family. The cartoon-like drawings represent different scenes within the family environment such as closeness or distance between members, cooperation in the completion of a task, and methods of discipline. Only the scales for family conflict and control were used in this study. Conflict and control have been shown to be the two subscales most closely associated with distressed family environments (Moos & Moos, 1981). Conflict was described as "the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression and conflict among family members," and control was described as "the extent to which set rules and procedures are used to run family life" (Pino et al., 1984, p. 1). The Children's Environment Scale was tested on 158 Buffalo, New York area children. The CV/FES manual (Pino et al., 1984) reports test-retest (over a four-week period) reliability of  $r = .80$ . Reliability was not reported for each scale

individually. The statistical method of establishing reliability was not reported. Content validity of the scale was established at .90 by two clinicians using an analysis of "stimulus pull" based on the responses of 16 subjects. The clinicians analyzed written responses the subjects made to the meaning of the pictured test items. The statements were analyzed on the basis of the response to the "stimulus" of the content of the picture. The instrument is scored on a 0-to-3 point system with the total points possible on each scale being 9. The higher the score on the conflict and/or control subscale, the more conflict and/or control is perceived within the family environment. Each of three drawings (A, B, and C) was given a numerical weight of 1 to 3 depending on the content of the drawing. The weight for each question is printed on the Examiner's Worksheet. The answer was assigned the appropriate weight for the response. The total of the responses in each subscale represented the score for the subscale.

Self-esteem was assessed by use of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) (Coopersmith, 1967). It is a 58-question "like me/unlike me" survey. Examples of questions in the SEI are: "Things usually don't bother me"; "My parents expect too much of me"; "I often get discouraged at school." The School Form is suitable for children 8 to 15 years of age. Only two students in the sample were under the suitable age. In order that age or reading ability was not a factor in this study, all students were read each item. The SEI took approximately 10 minutes to administer. The internal

consistency reliability was obtained at .81 for fifth graders and at .92 for fourth graders. Split half reliability is reported at .90. Concurrent validity is reported at .33 ( $p < .01$ ). The concurrent validity scores were obtained by correlating scores on the SEI of 87 fourth grade children with their scores on the SRA Achievement Series. Norms for the Self-Esteem Inventory have been documented for urban and rural children in the fourth through eighth grades. Caucasian, Black and Hispanic racial groups were included in the norms. The SEI is scored by totalling the number of "like me" items, excluding the eight items on the "lie" scale. One point was given for each "like me" answer. The total score was then multiplied by two, giving a possible score of 100. The SEI manual suggested that this measure be used in conjunction with a behavioral observation rating and by establishing "local norms" (p. 8). Means already established have ranged from 70 to 80 and standard deviations from 11 to 13. The SEI was combined with the Work Habits Checklist already in use at Monforton School to rate behavioral observation. The mean for the SEI with this sample was 67.24 and the standard deviation 16.99.

Classroom behavior was measured by the participants' classroom teacher's checkmarks on the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist that is routinely used at the end of each quarter's grading period. Seven items from the 17-item checklist were used to indicate disruptive and nondisruptive classroom behavior. The seven items were: (a) is willing to accept correction, (b) accepts responsibility, (c) practices self-control,

(d) obeys school rules, (e) shows respect for school property, (f) shows respect for authority, and (g) cooperates with others in work/play. These items were marked by the teacher as S+ (exemplary), S (satisfactory), S- (unsatisfactory), or N (needs improvement). Each letter was assigned a number on a Likert scale: S+ = 1, S = 2, S- = 3, and N = 4. The individual numbers for each response were totaled to arrive at one score for each of the students. Low scores were indicative of displaying less disruptive classroom behavior and high scores were indicative of displaying more disruptive classroom behaviors. Reliability of the measure was established by a test-retest assessment of score consistency after a two-week interval. The four teachers rated every student in their class on the seven-point Work Habits Checklist (without viewing the prior quarter's rating). This rating was then compared with the prior quarter's rating. A Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was utilized to compare the first rating with the second rating for reliability. An  $r = .82$  ( $p < .01$ ) was obtained. Validity was assessed on two levels, face and content validity. Face validity is the evaluation of a measure to establish whether it appears to measure what it is intended to measure (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988). Face validity was assessed by the four classroom teachers. Face validity was established at 100% agreement on the following item statements: (1) is willing to accept correction, (2) accepts responsibility, (4) obeys school rules, (5) shows respect for school property, and (6) shows respect for authority. Three out

of four teachers agreed on the two remaining item statements: (3) practices self-control, and (7) cooperates with others in work/play. The teachers were asked if the preceding statements were useful for assessing classroom behavior. Each teacher's reaction was compared with those of the other teachers for agreement or disagreement. In the case of five of the statements, all four teachers agreed. In the case of two of the statements, one teacher did not agree with the other three. Content validity represents the degree that an instrument measures the variable to be examined. Content validity was assessed by two experts on elementary school behavior who were independent of the school being studied. These experts were asked if the seven items on the Work Habits Checklist would be useful in assessing classroom behavior. The experts agreed unanimously on the usefulness of the items.

### Procedures

All children who participated in the study were surveyed on March 14, 1990. The study was explained as a research project investigating how they viewed themselves and their families. The students were told that there were no wrong answers because every answer was about them, and they were the best authority on their feelings.

The instruments were handed out one at a time. The first instrument administered was the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale

(CV/FES). The CV/FES was explained as the pictures representing their family. A brief explanation was given that their family may be made up of more or fewer members and that they should picture their own family members in the activities when they answered the questions. The researcher led the subjects through the measure by saying, "Turn to question number one. Which picture -- A, B, or C -- looks like your family? Now mark on your answer sheet under question one either A, B, or C." This procedure was carried out with each question. When all questions were completed, the instrument books and answer sheets were collected.

The second instrument administered was the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). Each student was handed an inventory. Book markers were used to help students answer one question at a time by having them move the marker down the page as each question was addressed. Students were instructed that the statement would be read to them by the researcher and they should respond to the questions by making an "X" in either the box that said "like me" or the box that said "unlike me." The researcher then read each statement and instructed the students to mark in the box "like me" or "unlike me." Reading the questions was intended to minimize the effect of reading competency as an intervening variable. The same procedure was carried out in each classroom.

### Data Reduction and Transformation

After all the data were collected and taken to the researcher's office, each test was scored according to the guidelines of the specific manual for that test (Coopersmith, 1967; Pino et al., 1984). The tabulation of each score was verified for accuracy by a research assistant. All three scores for each student were then placed together and checked for accuracy. These three scores were then placed on a master sheet with an identification number. The research data were placed in a locked file cabinet and all further references were made to the master sheet.

All information items (identification number, gender, grade, behavior score, conflict score, control score, and SEI score) were entered and checked for accuracy on a computer. Computations of all statistical information were performed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Norusis, 1988).

### Statistical Analysis

Demographic information (age and gender) was analyzed to determine range, mean, standard deviation, percent, and frequency.

Scores on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale, the Self-Esteem Inventory, and the Work Habits Checklist were analyzed to determine each variable's range, mean, and standard deviation.

Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients were utilized to test each of the five hypotheses being investigated. The level of significance used in this study was  $p < .05$  on a one-tailed distribution. The .05 level of significance allows that 5 times out of 100 a Type I error will occur, which is considered appropriately liberal for exploratory correlational studies such as this one (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988). A one-tailed test was used to examine the hypotheses because a prediction was made in each hypothesis regarding the direction of the relationship between variables.

## CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the hypotheses that relationships exist between children's perception of conflict and control in the family environment, children's report of self-esteem, and children's disruptive behavior in the classroom. The stated hypotheses were formed following a review of the empirical and theoretical research which indicated that a relationship may exist between these factors. The difference in this research project and other research that was reviewed was the use of measurement instruments that involve children's perception of the family environment and self-report of self-esteem, instead of others' observations of these factors. Adler's theory of Individual Psychology (1927) supported investigation of these variables because it suggested that children's perception of their family environment has a significant effect on their self-esteem and behavior. The Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (conflict and control subscales) (Pino et al., 1984) and the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967) were used to measure children's perceptions and self-report.

Demographic information regarding the students was as follows: Of the available 96 students, 88 (92%) participated in this study. Of the 88

participants, 51 were girls and 37 were boys. Scores on each of the three instruments were correlated with gender and grade; no significant difference at the  $p < .01$  level was found. Four children did not participate at their parents' request, and four additional children were absent. The age range was from 7.6 to 13 years (mean = 9.8 years; standard deviation = 1.2 years). A total of 51 (57.9%) girls and 37 (42.1%) boys participated. The classroom demographics were as follows: 19 students in grade two (11 girls and 8 boys), ages 7.6 to 9 years; 22 students in grade three (10 girls and 12 boys), ages 8.6 to 9.6; 23 students in grade four (18 girls and 5 boys), ages 9.5 to 10.5; and 24 students in grade five (12 girls and 12 boys), ages 10.8 to 13 years. Demographic information was reported in Table 1, Chapter 3.

Data were analyzed to determine if correlations of statistical significance existed between the variables as hypothesized. Descriptive statistics for each instrument were reported in Table 2, Chapter 3. The following text reviews each hypothesis and the results that correspond to it. The information is reported by hypothesis, number of participants, range of the measures used, means, standard deviations, report of the correlation, and probability level.

### Analysis of Data

#### Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated: There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship between disruptive classroom behavior as measured by the score on the

Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and children's level of self-esteem as measured by the score on the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI).

Eighty-five pairs of student scores were used in the calculation of Hypothesis 1. The behavior scores ranged from 7 to 21, with a mean of 14.46 and a standard deviation of 1.89. The scores on the SEI ranged from 32 to 98, with a mean of 67.25 and a standard deviation of 16.9 (see Tables 3 and 4).

Using a Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, the correlation was  $r = -.31$  ( $df = 83$ ), which was significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Based on these findings, Hypothesis 1 was retained (see Table 5).

Table 3. Frequency distribution of Work Habits and Social Development Checklist scores.

| Points  | Frequency | Percent | Points | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 7   | 1         | 1       | 15     | 14        | 15      |
| 10  | 2         | 2       | 16     | 6         | 6       |
| 11  | 1         | 1       | 17     | 4         | 4       |
| 12  | 1         | 1       | 18     | 1         | 1       |
| 13  | 4         | 4       | 20     | 2         | 2       |
| 14  | 58        | 60      | 21     | 2         | 2       |
| Range = 7-21 points; Mean = 14.46; Std. Dev. = 1.89 |           |         |        |           |         |

Table 4. Frequency distribution of Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) scores.

| Points   | Frequency | Percent | Points | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 32   | 1         | 1       | 70     | 5         | 6       |
| 34   | 3         | 4       | 72     | 4         | 5       |
| 36   | 1         | 1       | 74     | 3         | 4       |
| 42   | 1         | 1       | 76     | 1         | 1       |
| 44   | 5         | 6       | 78     | 2         | 2       |
| 46   | 3         | 4       | 80     | 2         | 2       |
| 48   | 1         | 1       | 82     | 6         | 7       |
| 50   | 1         | 1       | 84     | 2         | 2       |
| 52   | 4         | 5       | 86     | 3         | 4       |
| 54   | 3         | 4       | 88     | 3         | 4       |
| 56   | 2         | 2       | 90     | 2         | 2       |
| 58   | 1         | 1       | 92     | 2         | 2       |
| 62   | 3         | 4       | 94     | 2         | 2       |
| 64   | 8         | 9       | 96     | 2         | 2       |
| 66   | 5         | 6       | 98     | 1         | 1       |
| 68   | 3         | 4       |        |           |         |
| Range = 32-98 points; Mean = 67.247; Std. Dev. = 16.99 |           |         |        |           |         |

Table 5. Correlation between classroom behavior and SEI.

| Correlation Coefficient | N  | Degrees of Freedom | Significance | Confirmation of Hypothesis |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| $r = -.31$              | 85 | 83                 | $p < .05^*$  | Yes                        |

\*Indicates met level of significance.

## Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated: There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) positive relationship between disruptive classroom behavior as measured by the score on the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and children's perception of conflict in their family environment as measured by their score on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.

Eighty-eight pairs of scores were used in the calculation of Hypothesis 2. The behavior scores ranged from 7 to 21, with a mean of 14.46 and a standard deviation of 1.89. The scores on the CV/FES conflict subscale ranged from 3 to 9 points; the mean was 5.46 and the standard deviation was 1.25. The frequency distribution of the CV/FES conflict subscale is presented in Table 6.

Using a Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, the correlation was  $r = .1721$  ( $df = 86$ ), which was not significant at  $p < .05$ . Based on these findings, Hypothesis 2 was not retained (see Table 7).

Table 6. Frequency distribution of CV/FES conflict subscale scores.

| Points  | Frequency | Percent | Points | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 3   | 1         | 1.1     | 7      | 9         | 10.2    |
| 4   | 21        | 23.9    | 8      | 4         | 4.5     |
| 5   | 25        | 28.4    | 9      | 2         | 2.3     |
| 6   | 26        | 29.5    |        |           |         |
| Range = 3-9 points; Mean = 5.46; Std. Dev. = 1.25 |           |         |        |           |         |

Table 7. Correlation between classroom behavior and CV/FES conflict subscale.

| Correlation Coefficient | N  | Degrees of Freedom | Significance | Confirmation of Hypothesis |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| $r = .1721$             | 88 | 86                 | $p > .05$    | No                         |

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated: There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) positive relationship between disruptive classroom behavior as measured by the score on the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and children's perception of control in their family environment as measured by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.

Eighty-eight pairs of scores were used to calculate Hypothesis 3. The behavior scores ranged from 7 to 21, with a mean of 14.46 and a standard deviation of 1.89. The range on the CV/FES control subscale was 3 to 9 points; the mean was 6.227 and the standard deviation was 1.49. The frequency distribution of the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale control subscale is presented in Table 8.

Using a Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, the correlation was  $r = -.0027$  ( $df = 86$ ), which was not significant at  $p < .05$ . Based on these findings, Hypothesis 3 was not retained (see Table 9).

Table 8. Frequency distribution of CV/FES control subscale scores.

| Points   | Frequency | Percent | Points | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 3  | 2         | 2.1     | 7      | 17        | 17.7    |
| 4  | 8         | 8.3     | 8      | 7         | 12.5    |
| 5  | 20        | 20.8    | 9      | 8         | 7.3     |
| 6  | 22        | 22.9    |        |           |         |
| Range = 3-9 points; Mean = 6.227; Std. Dev. = 1.49 |           |         |        |           |         |

Table 9. Correlation between classroom behavior and CV/FES control subscale.

| Correlation Coefficient | N  | Degrees of Freedom | Significance | Confirmation of Hypothesis |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| $r = -.0027$            | 88 | 86                 | $p > .05$    | No                         |

#### Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 stated: There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship between children's self-report of their level of self-esteem as measured by the score on the Self-Esteem Inventory and their perception of conflict within their family environment as measured by their score on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.

Eighty-five pairs of student scores were used in the calculation of Hypothesis 4. The scores on the SEI ranged from 32 to 98; the mean was

67.25 and the standard deviation was 16.9. The scores on the CV/FES conflict subscale ranged from 3 to 9; the mean was 5.46 and the standard deviation was 1.25.

Using a Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, the correlation was  $r = -.35$  ( $df = 83$ ), which was significant at  $p < .05$ . Based on these findings, Hypothesis 4 was retained (see Table 10).

Table 10. Correlation between SEI and CV/FES conflict subscale scores.

| Correlation Coefficient | N  | Degrees of Freedom | Significance | Confirmation of Hypothesis |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| $r = -.35$              | 85 | 83                 | $p < .05^*$  | Yes                        |

\*Indicates met level of significance.

### Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 stated: There is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship between children's self-report of their level of self-esteem as measured by the score on the Self-Esteem Inventory and their perception of control in their family environment as measured by their score on the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale.

Eighty-five pairs of student scores were used in the calculation of Hypothesis 5. The scores on the SEI ranged from 32 to 98; the mean was 67.25 and the standard deviation was 16.9. The range on the CV/FES control

subscale was 3 to 9 points; the mean was 6.227 and the standard deviation was 1.49

Using a Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, the correlation was  $r = -.24$  ( $df = 83$ ), which was significant at  $p < .05$ . Based on these findings, Hypothesis 5 was retained (see Table 11).

Table 11. Correlation between SEI and CV/FES control subscale scores.

| Correlation Coefficient | N  | Degrees of Freedom | Significance | Confirmation of Hypothesis |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| $r = -.24$              | 85 | 83                 | $p < .05^*$  | Yes                        |

\*Indicates met level of significance.

### Summary of Results

Examination of the results of this research study indicated that three of the five hypotheses were supported by the data collected. A correlation matrix is presented in Table 12.

- (1) Hypothesis 1 was supported by a significant ( $p < .05$ ) correlation of  $r = -.31$ . The confirmation of this hypothesis suggests that there was a relationship between high disruptive classroom behavior and low self-esteem.
- (2) Hypothesis 2, with a correlation of  $r = .1721$ , was not supported at  $p < .05$ . The rejection of this hypothesis suggests that a significant

relationship between disruptive classroom behavior and children's perception of conflict in their family environment was not supported by the data.

- (3) Hypothesis 3, with a correlation of  $r = .0027$ , was not supported at  $p < .05$ . The findings suggest that a significant relationship between disruptive classroom behavior and children's perception of control in their family environment was not supported by the data.
- (4) Hypothesis 4 was supported by a significant ( $p < .05$ ) correlation of  $r = -.35$ . The data suggest that there was a relationship between children's report of low self-esteem and their perception of high conflict in their family environment.
- (5) Hypothesis 5 was supported by a significant ( $p < .05$ ) correlation of  $r = -.24$ , suggesting that there is a relationship between children's low self-esteem and their perception of high levels of control in their family environment.

Table 12. Correlation matrix.

| Correlations       | Behavior       | SEI           | CV/FES<br>Conflict | CV/FES<br>Control |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Behavior           | 1.00<br>(86)** | -.31*<br>(83) | .17<br>(86)        | .00<br>(86)       |
| SEI                |                | 1.00<br>(83)  | -.35*<br>(83)      | -.24*<br>(83)     |
| CV/FES<br>Conflict |                |               | 1.00<br>(86)       | .21<br>(86)       |
| CV/FES<br>Control  |                |               |                    | 1.00<br>(86)      |

\*Indicates significant at  $p < .05$ .

\*\*Numbers in parentheses indicate degrees of freedom.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between children's perceptions of conflict and control within the family, children's report of self-esteem, and children's classroom behavior. Conclusions and discussion of the research data will be presented in this chapter. Following an introduction, the chapter will discuss limitations of the study, demographics of the sample, descriptive statistics, each hypothesis in order of its presentation in the results, relationships between the hypotheses, and implications for research and practice. The chapter will close with a summary of the study.

#### Introduction

Three main concepts were studied in this research: children's perception of conflict and control in the family environment, self-esteem, and classroom behavior. The results of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between classroom behavior and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and children's perception of conflict and control in the family environment. A statistically significant relationship between children's

perception of conflict and control in the family environment and disruptive classroom behavior was not found.

The results were congruent with the tenets of Individual Psychology's theory (Adler, 1927; 1963) that children's perception of their family environment is directly associated with their perception of self-esteem. The data also confirmed the studies (Addington, 1985; Biller, 1974; Black, 1981; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Erickson & Egeland, 1987; Gold, 1986) that suggested that conflict and control in the family environment negatively influence children's self-esteem. The data did not confirm the literature which has suggested that there is a relationship between conflict and control in the family environment and children's disruptive behavior in the classroom (Aber & Allen, 1987; Wolfe et al., 1985; Wolfe & Mosk, 1983).

### Limitations

The limitations of this study are in the size and nature of the sample, the efficacy of the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale and the Work Habit Checklist to identify variation between subjects, and the statistical analysis that was used. Discussion of the limitations of this study will be organized in these three areas.

### Size and Nature of the Sample

The sample for the study was chosen on the basis of availability, interest of the school staff to participate in the study, interest of the school board to

take part in the research, and willingness by parents to allow their children to participate. The sample was limited in size, demographic diversity, and geographic location. All of these factors limit the generalizability of the study.

#### Discrimination of the Instruments

Two of the instruments, the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist and the CV/FES, may have lacked specificity, which restricted the variance in the scores. This restriction in the variance of the scores may have influenced the power of the correlations. The Work Habits and Social Development Checklist tested as reliable and valid. However, in examining the frequency distribution of the scores on this measure (Table 3), it is important to note that 86% of the scores cluster around  $\pm 1$  standard deviation. In a normal curve, 68% of the score distribution falls within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988). The distribution in this sample may indicate that the measure did not identify enough factors regarding disruptive behavior to discriminate behavior other than the extremes. A measure that was more specific and allowed for more variance in the scores may have identified more children across the range of disruptive behaviors. Scores on behavior may, on the other hand, cluster in three distinct groups. The use of another measure may provide further information. The CV/FES has similar limitations. Each subscale uses three sets of pictures to establish a score for the subscale. This limited number of test items may have limited the responses from the children. An instrument with more

questions specific to the issue may have identified more of the nuances of the family environment.

### Statistical Analysis

Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient is an appropriate statistical measurement to use in finding an index of the relationships between variables. It observes the strength of an association (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988). However, in this study the scores on the Work Habits Checklist clustered around the mean and showed a restricted variance. The lack of variance in the scores limited the  $r$  values, because  $r$  is a measure of shared variance.

### Demographics

The sample employed in this study is representative of the school from which it was drawn. The second through fifth grades at Monforton School who participated in this study are approximately the same in class size and gender distribution as the other grades. All of the children who attend Monforton live in a similar rural setting outside Bozeman, Montana. Monforton is equivalent in class composition, staffing, and curriculum to most of the other rural schools in Gallatin County. Monforton's student population is drawn from families that are mostly Caucasian, Christian, and middle class. There are very few economically disadvantaged or minority persons in the area. Monforton is representative of many rural schools in Montana that do not include a Native American population. It is not representative of the

schools in the more urban areas of the state, nor of schools that include a Native American population. Monforton may be representative of schools in other rural areas of the western United States in demographic composition. Monforton's population is not representative of schools with urban populations.

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the measures used in this study provide some data of interest. The discussion of these data will begin with the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale, then the Self-Esteem Inventory, and conclude with a discussion of the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist.

The sample in this study reflected different means on the CV/FES conflict and control subscales than the norming sample as reported by Pino et al. (1984) in the CV/FES manual. The mean of the conflict subscale in this study's sample was lower than the mean established by the CV/FES, which ranged from 6.36 for second graders to 7.03 for fifth graders. These differences may be explained by less family conflict in the sample studied than in the sample used to establish the means for the CV/FES. Twenty-five percent of the participants in this study perceived lower conflict (scores 3-5) and 15% perceived higher levels of conflict (scores 7-9). The data suggest that in this setting children perceive more moderate and low levels of conflict

than in the norming sample (Pino et al., 1984). This finding may be a reflection of the cultural factor and the isolated geographic area of the study. The children may: (a) not perceive conflict in the same ways as the norming sample, and/or (b) not be exposed to the same types or quantity of conflict as the norming sample. The mean of the level of control in the study sample was higher than the means established by the norming sample (Pino et al., 1984), which ranged from 5.7 for second graders to 5.2 for fifth graders. These differences may represent a perception by the children of more control in their family environment than in the norming sample. They may also indicate a true difference in the study sample because of cultural experience and expectations, which would suggest a broader random sample may present different correlations. Also, the differences may indicate that the norming sample had specific characteristics, such as urban, eastern geographic setting versus rural, western geographic setting, or differences in cultural or ethnic representation in the sample, that are not found in the study sample.

The SEI manual does not report a mean or standard deviation for the instrument; rather, it encourages report of a local norm. Comparison of the data collected in this study with a Montana study cited in the manual (Coopersmith, 1967) found the cited means to be an average of 7.28 points lower than the mean in the data collected in this study. The standard deviations were two points lower than the standard deviation in this study.

The study cited in the manual had a more diverse demographic sample which included minorities and children with low socioeconomic backgrounds. The pressures and insults of racial or cultural discrimination may have contributed to the difference in these scores. The children in the sample for this study are primarily Caucasian and middle class and may not experience the negative effects of being racially or culturally different. Therefore, their scores may reflect their higher self-esteem.

Eighty-six percent of the Work Habits Checklist fell within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean. A normal distribution includes 64% of the distribution of the scores within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988). Therefore, the scores on the Work Habits Checklist cluster around the mean and do not represent a normal distribution. Several potential reasons for this result include: (a) the sample may not have been large enough to provide a normal distribution of the scores; (b) because the sample was not random it may have reflected a larger proportion of children within the middle range of the scores; (c) the Work Habits Checklist may not have discriminated between behaviors specifically and therefore only the most extreme behaviors were reflected in the scores; and (d) the disruptive classroom behavior is not normally distributed, but rather clusters in three areas (low, moderate, and high).

### Discussion of the Hypotheses

This study found a significant association for three of the five hypotheses and no significant association for the other two hypotheses. Perception of family environment was measured by the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (CV/FES), self-esteem was measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), and classroom behavior was measured by the Work Habits and Social Development Checklist used by classroom teachers on each quarter's grade report. The discussion of each of the hypotheses follows in order of presentation in the previous chapters.

#### Disruptive Classroom Behavior and Self-Esteem

The data indicate that there is a significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative association between classroom behavior and level of children's self-esteem. This finding confirms literature (Adler, 1927; Dinkmeyer et al., 1979; Cobb & Richards, 1983; Gumaer, 1984) which associated disruptive behavior and low self-esteem. The results identify an association in this sample between children who displayed disruptive behavior in the classroom and those who report low self-esteem. These findings suggest that the way children view themselves may be exhibited through their behavior. The relationship between perception of self-esteem and behavior is a cornerstone of the theory of Individual

Psychology (Adler, 1927). This research supports that theory's tenet that children act out through their behavior the way in which they view themselves.

#### Disruptive Classroom Behavior and Conflict in the Family Environment

Children's perception of conflict in their family environment was not significantly positively associated with disruptive classroom behavior. However, the correlation was  $r = .1721$ , which is within several hundredths of the level that would be significant (.173) (Ferguson & Takane, 1989), strongly suggesting a trend toward a significant positive relationship between these variables.

The literature (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Erickson & Egeland, 1987; Gold, 1986; Wolfe et al., 1985) strongly suggests that a positive relationship does exist between conflict in the family environment and behavior in the classroom. Because of the closeness of the correlation to significance, further investigation is warranted. The lack of correlation found in this study may be a result of the lack of discrimination between small variations in conflict, control, and classroom behavior on the part of the instruments used rather than the absence of a positive association between the variables. It also might apply to the lack of a random sample. Other intervening variables may have influenced the results, such as support within the school setting, extended family members' support, or others who provide support that offsets conflict at home for the children. One potential variable that is not addressed

in this study is the possibility that children who experience conflict in their family environment compensate for these experiences, as suggested by Coopersmith (1967), by excelling in school.

#### Disruptive Classroom Behavior and Control in the Family Environment

Control in their family environment is not significantly ( $p < .05$ ) positively associated with children's disruptive classroom behavior. This finding contradicts some previous studies. Moos and Moos (1981) found high control in the family environment negatively associated with behavior in adolescent children. Baumrind (1978) stated, "Authoritative, traditional, and harmonious patterns of upbringing appear to be more beneficial to young children than restrictive, authoritarian, or permissive patterns" (p. 266). Aber and Allen (1987) found that children who were maltreated felt less secure and exhibited more attention seeking behaviors than did children who were not maltreated. This behavior was attributed to parental punishment and control. However, the attention seeking behavior may not result in classroom disruption at the elementary school age. Also, the behavior measure used in this study may not have identified the type of attention seeking behavior described by Aber and Allen (1987).

### Self-Esteem and Conflict in the Family Environment

A significant ( $p < .05$ ) negative relationship was found between self-esteem and children's perception of conflict in their family environment. This finding is congruent with other studies. Black (1981), Browne and Finkelhor (1986), Erickson and Egeland (1987), and Gold (1986) suggested that conflict influences self-esteem. The data in this study confirm that an association exists between conflict in the family environment and children's self-esteem. The negative relationship between self-esteem and conflict in the family environment provides information to parents, teachers, and mental health professionals about the relationship of factors that may influence self-esteem.

### Self-Esteem and Control in the Family Environment

Self-esteem was found to be significantly ( $p < .05$ ) negatively associated with children's perception of control in the family environment. These data support the belief that children who live in a more authoritarian family do not experience the chance to explore their own abilities in making decisions and therefore may lack feelings of accomplishment and instead feel powerless (Baumrind, 1978). In research conducted by Aber and Allen (1983), parental control was believed to contribute to children's attention seeking behavior. In this study, children's perception of higher levels of control in the family environment was found to be related to their having lower self-esteem.

### Interaction Among Family Environment, Self-Esteem, and Disruptive Behavior

In this study no significant positive correlation was found between the variables of conflict and control and disruptive behavior; however, a link among all of the variables was found. Self-esteem was found to relate to disruptive behavior, and to conflict and control in the family environment. It appears that the variables are indeed interconnected. The link among these factors is supported in the literature (Aber & Allen, 1983; Black, 1981; Erikson & Egeland, 1987; Wolfe & Mosk, 1983). This study suggests that a relationship between conflict and control in the family environment and disruptive classroom behavior exists through the association of both variables to self-esteem. The link among these factors suggests that disruptive behavior may be a reflection of conflict and control in children's home environment.

### Implications for Research and Practice

The following section will discuss the implications of this study for research and practice. The implications of the study suggest several areas for further research. These areas include replication of the study with a broader random sample, more discriminating scales, and a different statistical measure, such as discriminant analysis. The study also provides information that has implications for parents, teachers, and mental health professionals. This information encompasses the influences of the family on self-esteem, and therefore on behavior.

In the area of additional research, the study suggests that the correlations between disruptive behavior and self-esteem, and self-esteem and conflict and control in the family environment, do not occur by chance. Further investigation of the relationship between these variables with the use of larger random samples may provide stronger correlations that strengthen the association. A restriction of the variance in the scores on the behavioral measure suggests that another measurement that identified more factors might produce different results. A more sophisticated statistical analysis may produce additional information. The data presented in this study may provide additional interesting results with a measure such as discriminant analysis. Discriminant analysis identifies variables that may predict membership in a group from existing information. For instance, in this study conflict and/or control in the family environment might be analyzed by discriminant analysis and hypothetically may predict classroom behavior (Norusis, 1988).

The results identified in this study provide information for parents, schools, and child protection agencies about the factors within the family environment that are associated with low self-esteem and disruptive behavior. High conflict and control in the family environment contribute to low self-esteem and therefore may contribute to disruptive behavior. Programs designed to intervene with disruptive children may need to include components to enhance self-esteem. This information may indicate to parents

and social service agencies that problems may develop from family environments that contain the elements of high conflict and/or control.

### Summary

The research presented within this paper provides information supporting the existing literature regarding the relationship between children's self-esteem and their classroom behavior. In addition, it provides new information on the importance of children's perceptions of their family environment, specifically conflict and control. This study provides supportive information that a relationship between children's perception of conflict and control in the family environment and their self-esteem may exist. More research is needed to investigate the hypothesis that conflict and control in the family environment are related to disruptive behavior in the classroom.

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APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A:**  
**PARENTS' INFORMATION**  
**AND CONSENT LETTER**

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in the Mental Health Counseling curriculum at Montana State University. In pursuit of completion of that program, I am writing a thesis. I am interested in studying the relationship between children's perception of their family environment, their self-esteem, and their classroom behavior.

I have discussed this project with the principal and school counselor at your child's school. They believe that the project is worthwhile. I have also presented my proposed study to the Monforton School Board and they have consented to my survey being done in your school.

The information will be obtained through a survey of questions asked of the second, third, fourth, and fifth grades at your school. Classroom behavior is established by the work habits checklist on prior quarter's grade reports. Answering the questions will take your child about 30 minutes and will be done during classroom time. Participation is voluntary for your child, with your consent.

The identity of every child will be anonymous. There will be no data available that will identify any one child's answer. Answers from a specific child will be known only to the researcher during the pairing of scores. Teacher or other school personnel will not have access to any of the answers to the survey questions. All materials will be kept under lock and key and will only be available to the researcher. Results of the survey will be reported as a group, and by grade.

I feel certain that there is nothing in the survey questions that would be harmful to your child. There are no questions that pertain to personal matters such as morals, sexuality, or the use of alcohol or drugs. Your child will miss about 30 minutes of regular classroom time. Children will be allowed to stop for a rest if they wish.

This project will not benefit any one child or family. However, I believe the project will promote understanding of children and their behavior. It will benefit children in general and the programs that are available to them at school.

I will be grateful if you will allow your child to complete the questionnaires. However, if you do not want your child to participate in this study, you can prevent their participation by tearing off the form on the bottom of this letter and returning it by Monday, March 12, 1990 to your child's principal.

If you have any questions about the study, see the school principal or call her at 586-1557. The principal will answer your questions or you may contact me at 587-8141. If you wish to examine the survey materials, you may view them at the school office.

If you do not return the form below, we will assume that you give permission for your child to participate in the study.

Thank you for your interest in this important project.

Sincerely,

Su Zan Hoxsey  
Graduate Student in Mental Health Counseling

-----

Dear Ms. Hoxsey:

I DO NOT wish my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate  
(child's name)  
in the project described in your letter.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent or legal guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX B:**

**WORK HABITS AND SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST**

WORK HABITS AND SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Mark the questions below either S+, S, S-, or N*

- (1) Is willing to accept correction
- (2) Accepts responsibility
- (3) Practices self-control
- (4) Obeys school rules
- (5) Shows respect for school property
- (6) Shows respect for authority
- (7) Cooperates with others in work/play

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