Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

An Exploratory Study of the Perception of Family Conflict and it's Relationship to Family Structure and Birth Order: Effects on Late Adolescent Male and Female Self-Concept.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
Psychology

At Massey University, Turitea, Palmerston North
New Zealand.

Sasha Jane Wealleans
2000

ABSTRACT

The relationship between self-concept, birth order, family structure and family conflict is an area of potential interest to researchers due to the complexity of factors, which can influence development in adolescence. The purpose of the following study was to explore the relationship between self-concept, gender, birth order, family structure, family conflict, and family relationships for the late adolescent between the ages of 17 and 19. The sample consisted of 204 people, the vast majority of which came from three Palmerston North high schools. The sample also consisted of a few first year Massey university students. Demographic information along with a scale to measure family conflict and relations with family members came from a questionnaire designed by the researcher. Self-concept was measured by the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (2nd Edition). Results indicated there was a significant difference in the self-concept scores between those from high and low conflict families but no significant difference in self-concept scores between those in intact and non-intact families. Males scored significantly higher than females on the Total Self-Concept Scale, Moral Self Concept Scale, Academic/Work Self-Concept Scale, Social Self-Concept Scale, Physical Self-Concept Scale, Family Self-Concept Scale, and Personal Self-Concept Scale. There was no significant difference on total self-concept scores between birth orders. First borns did perceive significantly higher conflict in their families than last borns but did not perceive significantly higher conflict than middle borns. The total self-concept correlation coefficient was highest for first borns but this only differed from middle borns. Family relationships as a buffering measure did not interact with family conflict and therefore, does not moderate the relationship between total self-concept and conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the help of a number of people who deserve to be recognised for their support and assistance.

Firstly, to my supervisor Cheryl Woolley. My sincere gratitude for the time you put into helping me with this project. Thankyou, for all your encouragement and support especially during the difficult stages of this thesis. Your assistance and guidance made this thesis an overall enjoyable project and valuable learning experience.

To Ross Flett, thankyou, for your suggestions and guidance in analysing the results.

To Margaret and Justin Mills, Thankyou, for being my second family while I was in Palmerston North completing this project.

To my two good friends Lisa and Caron, for their friendship, being their understanding selves and giving me a laugh when I needed it the most.

Finally to my family, without their total belief in me over the years this project would never have happened. To my parents, Margaret and Rod, my deepest thankyou for all the listening, advice, encouragement and support you have given me throughout my university years and my life. Thankyou also, for your patience and giving me an extra push when I needed it the most.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 1

SELF-CONCEPT DEFINED..... 3
MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATURE OF SELF-CONCEPT..... 4
AGE DIFFERENCES IN SELF-CONCEPT..... 5
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SELF-CONCEPT..... 6
THE FORMATION OF SELF-CONCEPT..... 8
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY STRUCTURE, FAMILY CONFLICT AND SELF-CONCEPT..... 9
DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE FAMILY SYSTEM..... 10
GENDER AND FAMILY CONFLICT..... 11
A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AS A BUFFER AGAINST FAMILY CONFLICT AND FAMILY DISCORD..... 12
BIRTH ORDER..... 13
BIRTH ORDER AND SELF-CONCEPT..... 14
FAMILY SIZE..... 15
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS..... 15
THE CONFOUNDING EFFECTS OF BIRTH ORDER, FAMILY SIZE AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS..... 16
BIRTH ORDER, CONFLICT, AND FIRST BORNS AS BUFFERS FOR YOUNGER SIBLINGS..... 17
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM..... 18

METHODOLOGY..... 20

PARTICIPANTS..... 20
PROCEDURE..... 21
MEASURES..... 22
DESIGN..... 30

RESULTS **32**

PRELIMINARY ANALSES: PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES 32
COMPARISON OF GENERAL FAMILY CONFLICT WITH PARENTAL CONFLICT 33
DESCRIPITIVE STATISTICS 33
ANALYSIS OF HYPOTHESES 1-8 36
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS 45

DISCUSSION **48**

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SELF-CONCEPT 48
FAMILY CONFLICT AND SELF-CONCEPT 49
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SELF-CONCEPT 51
BIRTH ORDER, FAMILY SIZE, SOCIAL STATUS AND SELF-CONCEPT 54
BIRTH ORDER, FAMILY CONFLICT AND SELF-CONCEPT 55
CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AS A BUFFER AGAINST FAMILY CONFLICT 57
LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH 58
CONCLUSION 64

REFERENCES **66**

APPENDICES **77**

APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET 77
APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE 78
APPENDIX C: TENNESEE SELF-CONCEPT SCALE (2nd Ed) 83

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges of all Study Variables..... ...33

TABLE 2. Correlation Coefficients among scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (2nd Edition), Family Conflict Scale and Buffering Scale..... 35

TABLE 3. Means, Standard Deviations and F Statistic for Intact and Non-Intact Family Structures on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (2nd Edition)... ...37

TABLE 4. Means, Standard Deviations and F Statistic for Low and High Conflict Groups on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (2nd Edition)..... 38

TABLE 5. Means, Standard Deviations and F Statistic for Male and Female Adolescents on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (2nd Edition)..... 39

TABLE 6. Means, Standard Deviations and Numbers for Birth Order, Family Size and Social Status..... 40

TABLE 7. Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Conflict and Buffering on Total Self-Concept Score. Showing Standardised Regression Coefficients ß, R^2, R^2, Adjusted R^2 and R^2 Change..... 42