AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

____Stan V. Buckley Jr.____ for the _____Master of Science_____

in ____Psychology____ presented on ____May, 1997____

Title: __A Comparison of the Self-Esteem of African American Students__

__at a Predominately Black College Versus African American Students__

__at a Predominately White University__

Abstract approved: _____

Race in the latter part of the 20th century still continues to play a major role in the lives of many African Americans within this country. Simply being of African American ancestry means that one is more likely to have negative experiences and be faced with unpleasant situations that could have an adverse effect on self-esteem. But does this sort of thing hold true in the university environment? If so, how might the self-esteem of African American college students be affected depending upon what type of institution (predominately Black, predominately White) they chose to attend? Traditionally, within this country, higher education has been considered to be "different" or "set apart" or "insulated" from society in general. This is the "ivory tower" mentality. This concept holds that somehow the university environment is different, or better, than society in general. Is this true?

This study was designed to compare the self-esteem of African American college students at a predominantly Black college and a predominantly White university. Fifty students from a small Midwestern university, and 47 students

from a small Southern college volunteered to participate. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A) and a demographics questionnaire were administered. It was hypothesized that (a) African American students who attended a predominately Black college would have higher self-esteem than those who attended a predominately White university, (b) African American men and women would not differ significantly with regard to self-esteem, and (c) upperclassmen would have higher self-esteem than underclassmen.

To determine significance, a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. School (Rust College or Emporia State University), Gender (men or women), and Classification (underclassmen or upperclassmen) were the between subjects independent variables, and the overall score on the SEI-A was the dependent variable. The data indicate neither school, gender, or classification affected the self-esteem of African American college students. No significant main effects or interactions were found for the between subjects independent variables of school, gender, or classification on the total SEI-A score. There are several possible reasons for these results. One, African American self-esteem is more likely to be influenced by significant others within one's own environment. Usually, this means other African Americans. Second, it is not clear what reference groups men and women use when evaluating the self, nor is it clear how the self-esteem of men and women differ across reference groups. Thus, a null finding with regard to self-esteem differences does not mean that no differences

exist. Third, there is no evidence to indicate that self-esteem and age are positively correlated. The reason for this is that self-esteem could just as easily decrease as one ages. In addition to these results, implications for future research were also provided.

A COMPARISON OF THE SELF-ESTEEM

OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINATELY

BLACK COLLEGE VERSUS AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT A

PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERSITY

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Division of Psychology and Special Education

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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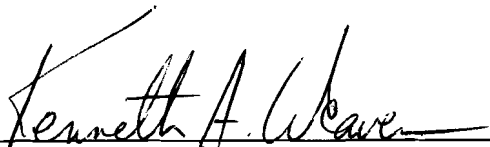
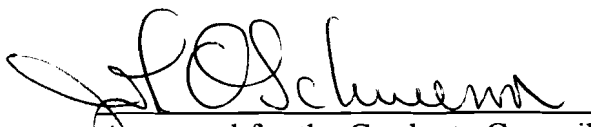In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

———————

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of evidence suggests that racism and issues regarding race are inextricably woven into the very fabric of American society (Bell, 1992). Brink and Harris (1967) elaborated on this point in their discussion of what they referred to as the "tolerant and generous" American people. According to their view, throughout history, Americans have been willing to bankroll, and fight in, foreign wars for the sake of principle. They have often been willing to embrace the oppressed, and shelter the homeless when called upon to do so. But these same "generous" Americans have not seen fit to grant to African Americans the freedom that has been guaranteed them by the Constitution and the Emancipation Proclamation. Along similar lines, Bell (1992) stated "the fact of slavery refuses to fade, along with the deeply embedded personal attitudes and public policy assumptions that supported it for so long. Indeed, the racism that made slavery feasible is far from dead in the last decade of (the) twentieth century" (p. 3).

Historically, because government in the United States had been established by northern Europeans, these individuals wielded a great deal of power, and as a result, they came to view themselves as superior to other racial and ethnic groups (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990). Clark (1965) referred to this belief as the "fantasy of aristocracy," where white skin somehow conferred superiority upon an individual -

implying that white was more intelligent, purer, and more self-controlled. As one's color or one's features provided salient characteristics, they became the basis upon which one could be classified, thus making an individual eligible for discriminatory treatment (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990). As a result of this, race began to play such a prominent role in inter-ethnic relations within this country, that it is now considered to be equivalent to distinctions made by caste in other countries (Ogbu, 1978). Both caste and race are "invidious distinctions imposed unalterably at birth upon whole categories of people to justify the unequal social distribution of power, livelihood, security, privilege, esteem, freedom- in short, life chances" (Berreman, 1985, p. 37).

The strategy devised for delegating African Americans to inferior status involved blaming perceived shortcomings upon characteristics inherent within the individual (Suskin, 1964). This belief provided the justification for inequitable treatment, and laid the groundwork for a "scientific" theory of inferiority.

At the turn of the century, individuals investigating human social evolution and superiority (anthropo-sociologists) pictured Nordic populations (dolicho-cephalics) as being blonde, aggressive, and adventurous. These were considered to be positive characteristics. Alpine populations (brachy-cephalics) were viewed negatively. They were believed to be darker, timid, and submissive. In their

investigations, Ammon and de LaPouge (in Banton,1967) found a higher

proportion of Nordics living in cities. To them, this indicated that Nordics were of

greater ability and had been favored in the selective process. However, these men

also found that the Alpines were becoming more numerous, and felt that

eventually, they would overwhelm the "superior" race (Banton, 1967).

Karl Pearson, a pupil of Sir Francis Galton, took these ideas a step further

and applied them to another group of people. He believed that genetically

speaking, African Americans were of inferior stock, and that "if you want to know

whether the lower races of man can evolve a higher type, I fear the only course is

to leave them to fight it out among themselves" (Pearson, 1901, p. 9). He later

defined what might be characterized as the "mind set" of many early twentieth

century White Americans when he stated:

> ...the scientific view of a nation is that of an organized whole kept up to a
>
> high pitch of internal efficiency by insuring that its numbers are
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> substantially recruited from the better stocks, and kept up to a high pitch of
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> external efficiency by contest, chiefly by way of war with inferior races. (as
>
> cited in Banton, 1967, p. 41)

The "war" begins at an early age. By the age of five, minority school children may

have already developed negative feelings about themselves and may experience

personal conflict regarding identification with their racial group (Clark, 1955). In explanation of this, Barker (1993) wrote:

> The peculiarity exists that youth internalize or define others' actions toward them as factual information and interpretations about themselves rather than as social interactions or as explications that may not be valid. Their acceptance of this information is based upon the perceived influence and status of the individual rendering such information. Therefore, when the Black child's environment labels him as such, the internalization of these messages has long lasting and severe consequences. (p. 172)

The educational system further affects young minority children by refusing to acknowledge pedagogically the accomplishments made by African Americans and other minorities. These omissions not only suggest what African Americans are, or are not capable of doing, but also reinforce misleading representations which tend to reflect low or menial social and economic roles (Ogbu, 1978).

The impact that the above mentioned social and educational variables may have on a child is largely determined by how children come to view themselves (the self-concept). This consists primarily of social identity elements, dispositions, and physical characteristics (Rosenberg, 1979). These categories are explained below.

Social identity is largely defined by the groups or categories to which one is recognized as belonging. This component can be further divided into six sub-categories. They are: social statuses, membership groups, "labels," derived statuses, types, and personal identity.

Social statuses are ways in which people may be classified socially. Gender, age, family status, and occupation are all examples of some of the criterion used for classification in virtually all societies. The larger a society becomes, the more likely it is to divide into groups based on association, similarity of belief, sharing of culture, commonality of origin, or regional proximity. These are known as membership groups.

"Labeling" occurs when an individual is perceived as behaving in ways that are contrary to established social norms. It is only when society, through an authoritative agency (e.g., judge, doctor, or political party) has placed individuals in well-recognized, socially-defined categories, that labeling can occur.

Derived statuses are usually based upon one's biography, or racial or ethnic history. Essentially, this sub-category endorses the belief that "part of what (an individual) is, is what he was" (Rosenberg, p.11). Social types encompass those attributes that might be characterized as interests, attitudes, or habits that are perceived as being cohesive. For example, consider an individual commonly thought of as a "lover" or an "intellectual" or a "nerd." Generally speaking, these

words are vague descriptions of characteristics that an individual might exhibit and which are then used to define the individual.

Personal identity involves classifying an individual into a category by means of a unique label. These assigned labels are only as complex as is necessary to serve their purpose. The elements that combine to form the social identity are numerous, and as this identity forms the base upon which the self-concept is built, then the formation of the self-concept should be considered a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is not important that an individual is of a specific gender, belongs to a particular race, or has a certain political agenda. What is important is that individuals regard themselves as a man or a woman, an African American, a Democrat, a Republican, and other categories (Rosenberg, 1979). However, problems result when a society constructs stereotypes, or builds expectations based upon separate social identity elements, i.e., only considering one's race, gender, or religion (Schutz, 1970).

Before going further, an important distinction needs to be made. While self-concept is not synonymous with self-esteem, the two terms are interrelated. For instance, one cannot see oneself in a positive light and feel badly about oneself, nor can one feel good about oneself, yet view oneself in a negative light. As defined previously, self-concept is concerned with what an individual sees when one looks at the self. With regard to self-esteem, Brokner and Wallnau

stated:

> Self-esteem as a concept provides a framework within which to understand
> an individual's adjustment to the environment. It encompasses an
> individual's perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and a plethora of inner
> emotions, which have been shaped by environmental experiences including,
> but not limited to, success and failure reinforcements and punishments. (as
> cited in Haynes, Hamilton-Lee, & Comer 1987, p. 259)

In addition, Sprigle suggested self-esteem be considered as an internalization of

the perceptions one receives from the significant others who exist in one's

environment (as cited in Haynes et al., 1987). So, in essence, how one feels about

oneself (self-esteem) is largely dependent upon how one sees oneself (self-

concept). But perhaps the most important factor involved in the development of

self-esteem (besides an analysis of one's personal qualities) is an assessment of the

qualities that count (Rosenberg, 1979). Historically, in this country, the qualities

that "count" have in large part been determined by, and derived from, individuals

of Nordic ancestry (Clark, 1965).

The problems encountered by African Americans in education do not

necessarily end at the elementary or high school level but often persist well into

adulthood (Obiakor, 1994). While higher education may reduce misconceptions

held about African Americans and other minorities, the more educated are

(a) more likely to hold derogatory stereotypes, (b) more likely to favor informal types of discrimination, and (c) more likely to reject close forms of contact with minority groups (Stember, 1961). With these assertions in mind, the author now turns attention to the subject of higher education, and how a predominately White college environment could affect the self-esteem of African American college students.

Statement of Problem

The condition of being Black in America means that one will likely endure more wounds to one's self-esteem than others and that the capacity for self-doubt born of these wounds will be compounded and expanded by the Black races' reputation of inferiority. Black skin has more dehumanizing stereotypes associated with it than any other skin color in America, if not the world. When a Black presents himself in an integrated situation, he knows that his skin alone may bring these stereotypes to life in the minds of those he meets and that he, as an individual, may be diminished by his race before he has a chance to reveal a simple aspect of his personality (Steele, 1990, p. 36).

If the above statement is true, it is reasonable to assume that the conditions described therein could affect the self-esteem of African American students on White college campuses. Specifically, if interaction within a predominately White

university environment caused African American students' self-esteem to be comparatively lower than the self-esteem of African American students in a predominately Black college environment, then both environments should be examined in an attempt to determine the factors that might be causing the discrepancy.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the measured self-esteem of African American students attending a predominately Black college would differ significantly from a demographically similar group of African American students attending a predominately White university. In addition, the relationship between several demographic variables (age, gender, school classification) and self-esteem were examined.

Statement of Significance

If significant differences between the self-esteem levels of the two college populations are found, it is hoped that an examination of the variables involved might provide some insight as to why a difference between the two populations exists. This type of information could do at least two things. First, it could make it easier for other investigators to identify the different types of variables that might affect self-esteem, and second, it could help others to be mindful of the impact that the social environment could have on one's self-esteem.

Review of Literature

The Development of Self-Esteem

It is through an interaction and identification with the significant others in one's life that one comes to realize the necessity of being aware of how others feel, think, and act towards oneself. It is from this interaction that the self-esteem emerges (Erikson, 1968). Further, Goodman (1972) believed that interactions between oneself and others determined whether an individual's self-esteem would be positive or negative. For example, if an individual were to receive a great deal of support from his or her environment, then that person would be likely to develop healthy levels of self-esteem. If, on the other hand, this same individual were constantly abased or denigrated by those within the environment, that individual might be hard pressed to feel good about himself. Additionally, any negative self-esteem might tend to be self-fulfilling in nature. This means those persons who tend to view themselves in an unfavorable light, and who were treated and perceived by others unfavorably, might unconsciously sabotage their own pursuits in order to maintain the image that they had formed of themselves (Bradley & Stewart, 1982).

Early in life, African American children are aware that their characteristics are not highly valued: from darker skin color to curly hair to an alleged inability to learn as well or as fast as White children (Pouissant & Atkinson, 1972). This point

was further elaborated by Mosby (1972) who noted the African American

personality still continued to be molded by the very value system that relegated

African Americans to a well-defined inferior position. Young African Americans

generally have had few opportunities to develop a positive outlook towards

themselves. Because of this, the individual would have little choice but to define

the self in a way that would be foreign to a personal frame of reference. In

essence, this would involve utilizing what the dominant culture endorsed as being

important in order to obtain some idea as to one's self-worth, when the dominant

culture had a completely different frame of reference (Bradley & Stewart, 1982).

As a result of this comparison process, the African American child would soon

come to dislike and reject those who were ethnically similar, and once this point

had been reached, the personality and the way in which one interacted with others

would have been shaped in a warped and self-depreciating manner (Pouissant &

Atkinson, 1972).

The White College Environment

The problems faced by African Americans on predominately White college

campuses are often representative of the problems faced by African Americans in

the society at large (Beckham, 1988). Feagin (1992) further stressed this point

when he presented information obtained by the Baltimore National Institute

Against Prejudice and Violence. During 1986 and 1987, there were 175 reported

incidents of racial aggression directed against African Americans on college campuses; during the spring of 1988, an additional 78 incidents were reported. These incidents included racist graffiti, parties with racist themes, interracial fights, and physical attacks.

Feagin (1992) provided further insight into some of the problems encountered by African Americans on predominantly White campuses as a result of interviews that he conducted with student participants. One interviewee described the features of campus life as follows:

It's a constant battle dealing with racism. It is so much a part of everything. To integrate simply means to be White. It doesn't mean fusing the two cultures; it simply means to be White, that's all. And we spend so much effort in passing into the mainstream of society. They [Whites] have no reason to know our culture. But we must, in order to survive, know everything about their culture. Racism is simply preferring straight hair to an afro; that's certainly more acceptable in our society today. Black vernacular, it's not seen as a cultural expression, it's seen as a speech problem. (p. 552)

The person then went on to describe how African Americans are often perceived by others:

When you look at something as simple as just a group of people talking,

Black people are given much more, a much higher, regard if they are seen
in an all-White group than they would if they were to be seen in an all-
Black group. If you're seen in an all-White group laughing and talking,
you're seen as respectable, and probably taking care of something
important. You're not wasting time. You're all right. But if you're in an
all-Black group, regardless if they can even hear your conversation, White
people think you're trying to, you're congregated to take over the world.
It's just that basic...you're just punished for expressing your Black
culture...you're just constantly forced to take on the culture of White
America. (pp. 552-553)

Essentially, integration (as defined by the student), means that African
Americans were expected to learn, understand, and be fluent in White culture only.
This is the critical difference between the student's definition, and the commonly
accepted dictionary definition of the term. Instead of the two cultures merging
together in an attempt to learn from one another, African Americans were expected
to learn about White culture only, yet the reverse was not true for White
Americans. This was the nature of the great inequity that the student attempted to
convey. That African Americans were "integrated" into the White culture and
were expected to absorb what it taught them yet White Americans often made no
effort to learn anything about the African American culture. There was no

reciprocity. The second point the student attempted to convey was that in this country, African Americans are often expected to conform to that which is desired or considered to be important by the White culture (straight hair as opposed to curly, "proper" English as opposed to a "Black" dialect). If these individuals had declined to accept that which was defined as "right" by the dominant culture, then they would have been labeled as "abnormal," "freakish," or as a "troublemaker." These are all terms that could hamper one's progress within a society.

The student also attempted to convey a sense of the premium that is placed upon one's interaction with White groups. In this person's view, a great deal of importance was attached to White group membership, and when these groups met, they were believed to have purpose. Conversely, no particular importance seemed to be associated with African American group membership, and they tended to be viewed as "plotting" or "planning" when they met.

Socialization

In an attempt to paint a broader picture of the campus environment as it was experienced by African Americans and to obtain some sense of the emotions that were engendered in African Americans as a result of their interaction with the environment, Feagin (1992) received the following reply when he asked one student if White people could be trusted:

I'm sure you could. But I haven't been in a situation where I could find out,

because most of the White people that I've met here at college all seem to

be reacting on a superficial basis... People that I've met living in the dorm -

you know most of the time there's a majority of people who are White in

the dorm, and most of the people who really develop a close friendship are

just White. People I start out knowing, though, I usually get phased out

with toward the end of the year. I still don't know why. I've tried to figure

it out. But lately I try not to bother with it, because it will just cause me

mental anguish, and I don't want to do that to myself. Now when I was in

high school it was different. We hung out with a lot of different people.

We had a lot of Orientals, Mexicans - it was just a whole rainbow of friends

I had in high school. I didn't think much of it, but when I came to this

university, it seemed to change. I don't know if it was just me, or the

environment, but somehow my view of intimacy with other people,

especially White people, has soured since then. (pp. 554-555)

There are three important points that should be noted by the reader: first,

the student felt that the friendships most likely to develop into close relationships

tended to occur among Whites and not cross-racially. Second, as time went on, he

felt that he was "phased-out" of the friendships that he had formed with Whites.

Third, these experiences had negatively affected the student's belief that he would

be able to form intimate relationships with Whites.

Points 1 and 2, in essence, deal with social isolation. With regard to Point 1, the student had not been successful in forming many close relationships with Whites, yet he was able to see examples of this type of relationship when he observed White-White student interactions. It is here that the student might have realized that he possessed "qualities" that made him different from, and less valued than, a White individual.

"Uncertainty" is the word that best describes Point 2. Initially, the student had experienced difficulty in forming relationships with Whites, so when he was able to form friendships, he may have found himself uncertain as to what to expect. If a particular friendship did not continue (as he indicated most had not), then there may have been uncertainty as to why this had been the case. This point seems to be supported by the student's own words: "I've tried to figure it out. But lately I try not to bother with it, because it will just cause me mental anguish" (Feagin, 1992 p. 555).

The third point deals with the negative emotions that seem to have been engendered within the individual as a result of his "forced isolation." Not only did the student indicate that his view of intimacy with regard to Whites had been affected, but he also seemed to state that these views applied to "other" people as well. In other words, a number of unpleasant experiences seem to have altered this person's desire or ability to form intimate relationships with others, regardless of

race.

To provide his audience with an additional example of some of the negative behaviors that might be manifested towards African Americans on predominantly White campuses, Feagin (1992) relayed the story of a student who "lost a friend" during the course of a 24 hour period:

> I had an incident with discrimination, which really, basically took me by surprise. I lived in the dorms for a couple of years. And you sit around in the dorms and eat food with the girls, eat popcorn and watch the soaps when you don't have classes. And I remember this particular incident, this girl, we had just socialized the night before, watching t.v., having popcorn, et cetera, and I saw her on campus the next day. And she turned her head to make sure that she didn't have to speak to me. And I had that happen more than once. And I think that was a bout with discrimination which just slapped me in the face, because it doesn't feel real good to be a friend to someone, or an associate to someone at seven o'clock, and then at eight or eight-thirty, when they're around friends of their race, they don't know who you are or what you are, and don't even give you the consideration of acknowledging your presence or speaking to you. (p. 555)

Note the commonalities that exist. In the first paragraph, the student seemed to convey both feelings of disappointment and embarrassment, in that her "friend"

refused to acknowledge her outside a certain context (the t.v. lounge).

The material contained within the second paragraph seemed to indicate anger and embarrassment. Embarrassment is what the two paragraphs had in common. This student's inability to gain recognition from her acquaintance may have been only one in a number of blows to her self-esteem or self-concept. If an individual consistently elicited these types of reactions from others, then it is possible that that individual might begin to wonder what it was about herself that caused these types of responses. In short, one might begin to question oneself instead of questioning the qualities of those who were doing the "snubbing."

Loss of Individuality

Another problem illuminated by Feagin (1992) was the expressed tendency for others to view African Americans in stereotypical ways. An interview with a female undergraduate revealed the following:

A Black undergraduate in my department is doing some research on Black and White achievement in college, and one of her advisors was once the head of a rather prestigious organization in my field, not to mention [being] chair of the department. Apparently she assumed that this one undergraduate somehow spoke for all Black people. This professor would ask her things like, "Well, I don't know what you people want. First you want to be called Negro, then you want to be called Black. Now you want

to be called African American. What do you people want anyway? And why don't Black people show up in class more? Why is it that I can't get enough Blacks to sit in on my classes?" So every now and then that sort of racist mentality comes out. (p. 556)

This account brought to light the fact that often, an African American may find himself thought of as speaking for, or bring representative of, all African Americans. In this instance, the professor quickly turned a proposed discussion about research into a dialogue about what African Americans "wanted." This type of mentality seems to reflect insensitivity and a lack of cultural awareness. First, insensitivity was reflected by the way in which the professor spoke to the individual, "Well I don't know what you people want" (p. 555). Second, a lack of cultural awareness was exhibited by the fact that the professor seemed to be aware of African Americans only as labels, as "Negroes" or "Blacks," without regard to what these people, as a group, had gone through. In short, if one constantly experienced feelings of depersonalization and a loss of the sense of self, then it is possible that one could be adversely affected.

Reaction to Negative Feedback

The comments made by one particular student seemed to summarize all of the points mentioned previously. He stated:

After a while, I think that you become real sensitive to certain kinds of

feedback, and I think that becomes self-defeating. Like if the message that

you receive from someone or some institution, from a school or a class, or a

professor is that you're not quite as good, or you're not good enough, or

your performance is not up to standard - whether or not that happens to be

true - you tend to internalize that. And to the extent that you internalize

that, I think that really affects your actual performance. You know, the self-

fulfilling prophecy. If you really think that you're dumb, you'll act as a

dumb person will. (Feagin, 1992, p. 563)

Self-Esteem Differences

Contrary to the personal accounts presented above, which tend to indicate

that persons who experienced negative interactions on White campuses had been

affected in some way, a fairly significant body of research contends that the self-

esteem of African Americans is not likely to be significantly lower than the self-

esteem of White Americans. According to Simmons, Brown, Bush, and Blyth

(1979), the majority of studies conducted thus far do not indicate lower levels of

self-esteem among African Americans. Crocker and Major (1989) concluded there

was not enough evidence to support the belief that members of stigmatized groups

had lower levels of self-esteem than non-stigmatized groups. After conducting an

extensive literature review, Wylie (1974) felt the evidence did not support the

notion that minority status resulted in lowered levels of self- esteem. Rosenholtz

and Simpson (as cited in Madhere, 1991) stated that even though "the socialization process leads individuals to accept institutionalized realities as their own perceptions of what is real" (p. 47) repeatedly, African Americans possess higher levels of self-esteem than their Anglo American counterparts.

Problems With Previous Studies

The major problem associated with these articles and others like them is that often the authors did not define the concept about which they were referring, self-esteem. Major, Sciacchitano, and Crocker (1993) began their paper by indicating research had shown that being exposed to individuals who had performed better than the self would result in lower self-esteem levels than would exposure to others who had performed worse than the self. This sounds plausible, yet the concept being measured was never defined. Rancer, Silvestri, and Kosberg (1992) stated that self-esteem was an important component of self-concept, yet neither of these terms were defined. Greenberg et al. (1992) stated that people had a strong need for self-esteem, yet no definition of self-esteem was ever given. Finally, not only did Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, and Haslow (1993) not define self-esteem, but they immediately went on to discuss how the stability of this concept was more important than how high or low its levels were.

Applicability

The articles just mentioned were all essentially in agreement with the belief that the self-esteem of African Americans was often equal to, or greater than the self-esteem of White Americans. The problem with this idea is that many authors have tried to generalize these results to all situations, without regard to each experiments unique set of situational variables, and without regard to the notion that self-esteem can be situation specific. With this notion and the previously stated definition of self-esteem and its components in mind, attention will now be turned to the self-esteem of the African American college student.

Summary

A great many studies have reported that the self-esteem of African Americans often exceeds the levels of those reported for White Americans. There were problems with these studies because many attempted to generalize their results to dissimilar situations. Another problem was that often, the experimenter(s) neglected to define the concept about which they were referring, leaving the reader to come up with his or her own definition. If this is true, it is reasonable to assume that these experimenter(s) defined self-esteem according to their own personal criteria, and the definitions would not be consistent. This would lead to questionable validity. For the purposes of this study it was hypothesized that (a) African American students who attended a Black college

would have higher self-esteem than those who attended a predominantly White university, (b) African American women and men would not differ significantly with regard to self-esteem, and (c) upperclassmen would have higher self-esteem than underclassmen.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of undergraduate volunteers

($\underline{N}$=97). Forty-seven were obtained from Rust College, a private, Southern,

predominantly Black institution of 1,000 students. Fifty were obtained from

Emporia State University (ESU) a predominantly White, public, Midwestern

institution of 6,000 students. The samples consisted of 34 seniors, 32 juniors, 13

sophomores, and 18 freshmen. Fifty men comprised approximately 52% of the

sample, while 47 women made up 48%. Among the college majors sampled were

education, the humanities, and the social sciences. In addition, student

organizations such as Freshman Year Experience and the Black Student Union

were utilized.

Design

School (Rust College or Emporia State University), Gender (men or

women), and Classification (underclassmen or upperclassmen) were the between

subjects independent variables for this study. The dependent variable was the

score obtained on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A).

This design necessitated the use of a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in

order to determine the main effects for school, gender, and classification. While

no specific predictions were made with regard to interaction effects, they were reported so as to provide a more complete representation of the possible relationships that exist within the data.

Instruments

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A) is a 25 item, self- report instrument designed to measure one's attitudes toward the self in social, familial, and personal situations (Coopersmith, 1981). This instrument presents respondents with a variety of short statements about the self and requires them to indicate whether each statement is "like me" or unlike me." The Adult Form was largely derived from the School Short Form, to be used with older individuals. Coopersmith (1981) indicates a total score correlation of .80 between the two instruments for three samples of high school and college students ($\underline{N}$=647).

With regard to convergent and divergent validity, Taylor and Reitz (1968) reported a correlation of .45 between the Adult Form and the California Psychological Inventory Self-Acceptance Scale. Divergent validity was assessed by correlating scores on the Adult Form, the Edwards and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scales. The coefficients obtained were .75 and .44, respectively.

Utilizing 103 college students, Bedian, Teague and Zmud (1977) reported that the Adult Form produced test-retest reliabilities of .80 for men and .82 for

women. Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability coefficients (KR-20) were .75 and .74 for

men and .70 and .67 for women. Ryden (1978) supplied additional information on

the test-retest reliability of the Adult Form. With testing performed over a 6 to 58

week period, she found test-retest reliabilities of .80 for 20 adult females.

Participation Consent Form

A consent form was developed to explain the study and to inform the

student of the strict confidentiality that was involved. Participants were asked to

sign the consent form before being allowed to take part in the study. This form

was approved by the Emporia State University Committee for the Protection of

Human Subjects (see Appendix A).

Demographics Questionnaire

The author developed a demographics questionnaire to obtain data relevant

to the research questions within the study. Information on the occupation, and

highest level of education obtained by both parents, the other schools that were

considered, and why, and the reason for the current school selection, was sought

(see Appendix B).

Procedure

Student organizations and individual volunteers were utilized in order to

obtain participants. With regard to the student organizations, the presidents of

these organizations were informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate the self-esteem of African American college students. The presidents were then asked how many graduate students were in their organizations. They were then told to inform those persons that the group was to participate in a study in which they were not eligible. The graduates were informed that they should not discuss this information with others in the group, and that they should not come to the meeting during which testing was to take place until after it was over. Materials were administered during a regular meeting period. After the participants had entered the room and had been seated, the experimenter said:

> My name is _____ and I am a _____ here at the university/college. I am gathering data for a study whose purpose is to investigate the self-esteem of African American college students. This study is open to individuals classified as Freshman through Senior. Graduate students cannot be utilized, so if you are a graduate student, please let me know as I hand out the materials.

> Pencils and consent forms were passed out. The experimenter then said: "Please read this form carefully, and sign it when you have finished reading it." When everyone had finished, consent forms were collected and checked for signatures. The experimenter then returned to the front of the room and said:

"I am now going to pass out two stapled pages. Please leave them face down."

After the materials had been handed out, the experimenter returned to the front of the room and said:

When I say begin, I want you to answer the questions presented to you, beginning with the top page (Demographics Questionnaire). Read the instructions on each page carefully before answering any questions. Take your time, and answer to the best of your ability. Do not leave any questions unanswered, as this may render your information unusable. With regard to the Demographics Questionnaire, on any question in which you are not sure, make your best estimate. Remember, leave nothing unanswered. When you have finished, turn your information over, and wait quietly until everyone has finished. Please begin.

After the participants had finished, they were thanked for their participation and then debriefed as follows:

The purpose of this study was to compare the self-esteem of African American students at a predominantly Black college, with that of African American students at a predominantly White university. For those of you who are interested in knowing the results of this study once they have been obtained, contact me, _____, by phone. Please do not discuss this study with other students, as I may have to use them in the future. Once again, thanks for your participation.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Undergraduate self-esteem was assessed through the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult Form (SEI-A). This instrument provided a single, overall self-esteem score for each individual. Participants were asked to complete a consent form, the SEI-A, and a demographics questionnaire. Volunteers consisted of 50 undergraduates from Emporia State University, a small public university in the Midwest; and 47 undergraduates from Rust College, a small private college in the South.

Scores were tallied for each of the 97 self-esteem inventories. To obtain a Total Self Score, each of the 25 self-esteem items answered similarly to the responses obtained in Coopersmith's norms were added together. This raw score was then multiplied by four, resulting in a maximum possible score of 100. The multiplication was done so that scores obtained on different versions of the Coopersmith would be readily comparable (Coopersmith, 1981).

For the SEI-A, higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Many previous studies have reported a distribution of scores skewed in the direction of high self-esteem. The mean scores in these studies generally ranged from 70 to 80, with a standard deviation of from 11 to 13 (Coopersmith, 1981). The mean self-esteem score for all participants in the present study ($\underline{N}$=97) was 77.9 ($\underline{SD}$=15.6).

To determine significance, a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. School (Rust College or Emporia State University), Gender (men or women), and Classification (underclassmen or upperclassmen) were the between subjects independent variables, and the overall score on the SEI-A was the dependent variable. Analyses were carried out at the .05 alpha level, with the means being calculated for the scores obtained on the SEI-A (Table 1). No significant main effects or interactions were found (Table 2).

Table 1

<u>Table of Means for the SEI-A Scores</u>

<u>Rust College</u>

	Underclassmen	Upperclassmen	Total
Men	72.5	81.6	77.1
Women	76.9	83.1	80.0
Total	74.7	82.4	78.6

<u>Emporia State University</u>

	Underclassmen	Upperclassmen	Total
Men	75.7	78.2	77.0
Women	77.3	76.9	77.1
Total	76.5	77.6	77.1

<u>Both Schools</u>

	Underclassmen	Upperclassmen	Total
Men	74.1	80.0	77.1
Women	77.1	80.0	78.6
Total	75.6	80.0	77.9

Table 2

Analysis of Variance for Scores on the SEI-A

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
School	42.50	1	42.50	.17	.68
Gender	42.30	1	42.30	.17	.68
Class	339.50	1	339.50	1.35	.25
School x Gender	31.60	1	31.60	.13	.72
School x Class	198.70	1	198.70	.79	.38
Gender x Class	38.40	1	38.40	.15	.70
School x Gender x Class	.01	1	.01	.00	.99
Within Cells	22390.45	89	251.60		

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to measure and compare the self-esteem of

African American undergraduates at a predominantly Black college with that of

African American undergraduates at a predominantly White university. It was

hypothesized that (a) African American students who attended a Black college

would have higher self-esteem than those who attended a predominantly White

university, (b) African American men and women would not differ significantly

with regard to self-esteem, and (c) upperclassmen would have higher self-esteem

than underclassmen, as measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Adult

Form (SEI-A).

A comparison of SEI-A scores between schools indicated that the differences

were not significant. This finding is supported by studies that have examined both

college (Demo & Parker, 1986; Pascarella et al., 1987) and elementary, junior, and

senior high school students (Krause, 1983).

Speculation concerning these results has been provided by Bradley and

Stewart (1982), Demo and Parker (1986), Festinger (1954), Hoelter (1982),

McCarthy and Yancey (1971), Pettigrew (1967), Rosenberg (1972), Simmons

(1978), Taylor and Walsh (1979), and Tesser (1986). Essentially, these authors

contend that African American self-esteem is more likely to be influenced by the

opinions of the significant others within the individual's environment.

As African Americans are usually surrounded by other African Americans, they are likely to be evaluated just as highly in their own community, as those in the White community evaluate other Whites. So while one's race or socioeconomic status may be devalued in the society as a whole, this does not necessarily carry over into the African American community because most members of this group share the same characteristics. So, being in a predominately White university environment would not necessarily affect self-esteem, because comparisons are often made with those who are similar racially and socioeconomically, and opinions as to worth are usually only accepted from those individuals deemed significant within an individual's peer group.

With regard to Hypothesis 2, the data indicate that the differences in mean SEI-A scores between males and females were not significant at the .05 level. This finding is consistent with studies conducted by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) and Demo and Parker (1986). However, Wylie (1979) raised some points that should be considered when evaluating research investigating gender self-esteem differences. First, the prevailing assumption is that self-esteem is a fixed, unchanging entity. The problem with this assumption is that it neglects to address the situational variation in self-esteem. For instance, self-esteem may be a function of one's school, work, or home environment. If this is true, what are the

implications of this variation for the relationship between gender and self-esteem variables? Second, the traditional concepts of self-esteem have failed to take into account the frame of reference used to assign the self a value. For instance, men might choose to compare with other men, women, or some other specialized group. The same holds true for women. In short, self-assessment requires some basis for comparison, yet it is not clear what kinds of reference groups men and women use when evaluating the self, nor is it clear how the self-esteem of men and women differs across reference groups. Theory and research usually do not address these issues, so one cannot be certain that a null finding with regard to gender self-esteem differences means that no differences exist.

A great deal has been written concerning the topic of the self and its development from birth to adulthood (Baldwin, 1899; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for research investigating possible relationships between African American school classification (underclassmen/upperclassmen) and self-esteem. Nevertheless, the results of this study indicate the differences in the mean self-esteem scores between the male and female upperclassmen of each school, as compared to the male and female underclassmen of each school, were not significant statistically. This finding is supported by the work of Spaights, Kenner and Dixon (1986), who reported no significant relationship between self-concept and the number of semesters enrolled.

Hypothesis 3 assumes that self-esteem increases as one ages. This is not necessarily the case as indicated by the current study (Baldwin, 1899; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Spaights et al., 1986). An understanding of the self develops as a result of one's social experience and activity. This means that as one ages, one comes to a better understanding of one's self. However, what Hypothesis 3 fails to recognize is that this understanding of the self could be positive or negative. Self-esteem does not necessarily increase as one gets older. In fact, self-esteem could just as easily decrease as one ages. Thus, a positive relationship between school classification and self-esteem is not supported.

The results of this study indicate that (a) the self-esteem scores of African American students attending a predominantly Black college were not significantly higher than the scores of African American students attending a predominately White university, (b) the self-esteem scores of African American men and women did not differ significantly, and (c) the self-esteem scores of African American upperclassmen were not significantly greater than the scores of African American underclassmen.

One of the inherent difficulties encountered in conducting research on self-esteem is the lack of a universally agreed upon definition of the term. This makes it difficult to accurately assess this concept, because often, assessment devices are based upon an author's "personal" definition of self-esteem, and obviously these

definitions vary.

In addition to the issue addressed above, this study had several other limitations. First, it is possible that the small sample ($\underline{N}$=97) may have affected any possible findings of significance. In addition, since the samples were drawn from a Midwestern and a Southern institution, the possibility exists that the participants were not representative of African American college students living in other regions of the United States. Second, and more specifically with regard to gender differences, the sample may not have been large enough to sustain any main effects or interactions of gender within groups that may have varied greatly with regard to social class, family relationships, and school environment. These are variables that would likely affect self-esteem. Third, this study relied on a self-report instrument in order to measure self-esteem. Participants may have responded inaccurately or may not have taken the study seriously. In addition, self-esteem may vary by situation. It is for this reason that the validity and reliability coefficients of many self-esteem instruments are not as high as instruments which utilize more agreed upon, measurable constructs.

Since it is possible that one's self-esteem is a function of the type of situation that one is in, future research might focus on the implications of situational variation, gender, and race, and their impact on self-esteem. For instance, it is possible that African American men might feel more comfortable in certain types of

situations, while African American women might feel more comfortable in others. Is self-esteem affected by situational variables differently depending upon gender and race, and if so, how?

In addition, when one is asked to rate one's self-esteem, it is necessary that the individual make comparisons. Yet, it is not clear what types of specific groups in the community African American men and women utilize for comparison, nor is it clear how self-esteem may differ across these comparison groups. Questions such as these have not received a great deal of attention in the literature.

This chapter has integrated the results of this study along with their implications. Also included were limitations of this study and suggestions for further research. While Hypotheses 1 and 3 were not confirmed statistically, future investigation of African American comparison groups controlling for gender differences and situational variables will provide a more complete understanding of the self-esteem of the African American college student.

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Participation Consent Form

Read this consent form. If you have any questions ask the experimenter and s/he will answer the question.

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the relationship between self-esteem, and the type of university attended.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should your wish to terminate your participation, you are welcome to do so at any point in the study. There is no risk or discomfort involved in completing the study.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, feel free to ask the experimenter. If you have any additional questions, please contact me, _____ at _____.

Thank you for your participation.

I, _____, have read the above information and have
          (Please print name)
decided to participate. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form.

_____   _____

(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____

(Signature of Experimenter)

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Appendix B

Demographics Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age _____

2. Male   Female

3. <u>School Classification</u>

    Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

4. <u>Parental Occupation</u>

    Mother

    Father

5. <u>Parental Education</u>

    Highest level of education (Mother)

    Highest level of education (Father)

6. What other schools did you consider? Why?

7. Why did you select your current college?

I, _____ Stan V. Buckley Jr. _____, hereby submit this thesis to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available for use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching), and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

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May 4, 1997
Date

 A Comparison of the Self-Esteem of African American
 Students at a Predominately Black College Versus
African American Students at a Predominately White
University
Title

_____
Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

_____
5-8-97
Date Received