

Self-esteem and self-deprecation in adolescents.

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Self-image is a construct that has received much attention in the research literature, especially in relation to adolescent development. The self-esteem of an adolescent is based on a personal-emotional and personal-performance evaluation of how one is doing in the environment. In light of school failure, the adolescent's self-esteem suffers and his/her sense of self-worth is lessened. However, the adolescent often employs defense mechanisms to conceal his/her sense of diminished self-esteem from peers and other significant adults in the environment, masking true feelings by portraying a false appearance of competence. The authors of this study posit that this false appearance of competence is "self-handicapping" in that the adolescent is content to project this image rather than try to actually improve his/her competence. This is especially true for young male students. Previous research has found that "self-handicapping" behavior correlated positively with self-orientation, self-deprecation, low interpersonal self-esteem, negative feelings about school, and low scholastic performance. In contrast, such behavior correlated negatively with self-esteem, orientation to learning, good feelings about school, high interpersonal self-esteem and high scholastic achievement.

Given the previous research findings, the authors sought to further explore the relationships between self-esteem, self-deprecation, gender, academic performance and self-handicapping behavior in 655 male and female students ages 14-16 and 17-19 years old using the following tests: two scales from the Self-Esteem Multidimensional Test (TMA) and the Midgley, Arunkumar and Urdan Questionnaire (1997). One of the TMA scales examined school environment, while the second scale examined interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, the Midgley, Arunkumar and Urdan (1997) Questionnaire employed 6 different subscales to explore self-handicapping conditions, self-deprecation, learning orientation, and feelings about school. Beyond the use of these scales, the researchers also collected data on the socioeconomic status and scholastic performance of students in the sample.

Analysis of the data collected along gender lines suggests that adolescent males have a better interpersonal self-esteem than do females, employ more self-handicapping behavior than do their female counterparts, and have primarily more positive feelings regarding school. In contrast, adolescent females performed better academically than their male counterparts, but manifested more self-deprecation and negative feelings about school. The younger group of the sample, ages 14-16, had higher scholastic self-esteem and more positive feelings for school than did students in the older group of the sample. In addition, the younger students had higher scores in self-deprecation and they were more self-oriented in their learning. The father's level of academic achievement also appears to be relevant, with children of higher performing fathers employing more self-handicapping behavior. Overall, self-handicapping behavior correlated positively with self-deprecation, negative feelings about school, and low academic achievement. In conclusion, this research study confirmed the behavioral trend in the literature, even though no correlation between self-handicapping behavior and learning orientation could be found. Furthermore, the data of the TMA scales seems to suggest that a positive social self-image does not overlap with good scholastic performance.

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