

**A STUDY OF THE SELF CONCEPT OF
PARENT-DEPRIVED JUNIOR HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS**

BY

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A STUDY OF THE SELF CONCEPT OF PARENT-DEPRIVED
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Norma Cary Prestwood entitled "A Study of the Self Concept of Parent Deprived Junior High School Students." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Education.

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Major Professor

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	4
	Basic Assumptions.....	4
	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	5
	DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	5
II.	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	7
	PREVIOUS RESEARCH WITH SELF CONCEPT.....	10
III.	METHOD.....	17
	Pupil Population and Sample.....	17
	Description of the Instrument.....	17
	Research Procedures.....	19
IV.	RESULTS OF STUDY.....	20
V.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	21
	Conclusions.....	22
	Implications of the Study.....	23
	REFERENCES.....	24

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher in a school in which sixty per cent of the pupils were from military families, the author recognized the upheavals that were caused by the frequent moves of the military families. Sometimes the entire family was relocated; sometimes only the father left.

Unfortunately, these changes in the status quo were not restricted to the military families. Numerous students were the progeny of parents who had divorced. Regardless of the reason, there seemed to be a definite impact upon the students when substantial changes took place in their home life. Of course, it is possible that many students from parent-deprived homes went unnoticed because their behavior did not distinguish them from the student body as a whole.

Some students were made more visible because of their misconduct. Still, some leaders of the class were also from broken homes. The manner in which the pupils were coping with their home situations seemed as diverse as the school's 1400 students.

In the United States in 1960, slightly more than one household in ten among those containing children under eighteen had only one parent present. Population surveys

in some urban areas suggest that by age eighteen, from 30 to 40 per cent of all children have experienced a broken home.

While the loss of a parent through death, divorce, or separation hampers a child's adjustment, we cannot conclude that because one parent lives at home, the child or children from that environment will be maladjusted or emotionally damaged. The determining factor in whether or not the effects of a broken home will be detrimental seems to be the manner in which the situation is handled by the adults involved (Hamachek, 1971).

An intact home does not guarantee that the children within it will grow up to be happy, well adjusted people. Fortunately, children from broken homes do not fall into a class by themselves. It appears that they have comparable percentages of poorly adjusted people as those coming from intact homes.

While evidence on the long range impact of broken homes on children is slim, one study did draw some important conclusions. A study of adult mental health found a marked increase in the number of emotional problems among people whose remaining parent remarries. This was especially true among those instances in which the parent of the same sex remarries. This finding can be contrasted to the report

that people who come from broken homes had only slightly higher risk of psychological difficulties later in life than those from intact homes (Hamachek, 1971).

What may cause problems? Critical for boys raised in father-absent homes is the fact that mothers are given custody about nine times out of ten. Since male models may be missing, boys may develop characteristics that are more feminine. This can lead to difficulties in adjusting to traditional masculine sex roles.

Although tensions, insecurities, unsuitable models, hostilities, and guilt feelings are common in homes in which divorce or separation occurs, a child need not see himself as a victim of adult gamesmanship - a pawn in marital wars. "A basic condition for healthy self-concept concept development...lies in the fact that he is loved and knows it - not the overindulging, overprotecting love of guilty parents...but rather a love which allows him to grow up without feeling responsible for something he had no control over" (Hamachek, p. 164).

Mead (1976) notes that the number of single-parent-and children households has more than doubled in the past 15 years; they make up 7.2 million households. This in itself would be more tolerable if it were not for the direct relationship between single-parent homes and poverty.

The trend toward single-parent homes has not reached its zenith. Not only are death and divorce taking their toll, but a new tendency is appearing. Some adults are choosing separation as an alternative to traditional patterns after they have had children. Stories of unwed mothers deciding to make a life for themselves with their offspring, runaway housewives, and fathers demanding their rights to their children permeate the periodicals.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The major purpose of this study will be to compare the test scores of seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students at New Providence Junior High School in Clarksville, Tennessee on the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself) to the norm group's scores. The children tested will be from parent-deprived homes.

Basic Assumptions

For the purpose of this investigation, the author assumed that: the self concept is a determinant of personality; the self concept is determined by the interactions between the individual and his environment; the self concept can be accurately evaluated by the instrument used in this research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study are: Temporal limitations; The self is in flux, as is the subjects' environment; the self concept, as revealed by the test results, would only indicate their opinion at that point in time. Methodological limitations: (a) Pencil and paper tests are limited in that they indicate what the subject wishes; (b) They also depend upon the verbal ability; (c) It is tempting to assign a cause-effect relationship, even though it may not be an accurate conclusion; (d) Even though the studies on the self concept are proliferating, there have been no longitudinal studies (Wylie, 1961). There is no comprehensive overview and there is a dearth of information about replications.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Self Concept - This construct has a multiplicity of definitions. According to Dorothy Rogers (1969), it encompasses all of the impressions and beliefs a person has about himself. She also notes three factors that affect it. These are (a) the effect of others, (b) the effects of age, and (c) the effect of sex.

Self Esteem - Coopersmith (1967) defines this construct as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself...a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitude the individual holds towards himself. (p. 5)

Parent-deprived - For the purposes of this paper, it will be defined as pertaining to children for whom one or more parent(s) is/are absent because of death, divorce, or separation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The self concept has been the topic of psychological literature and arm-chair philosophical discussions for many years. Purky (1970) states that at a very early point in man's history, he began to give serious thought to his non-physical, psychological self. Later, with the development of written history, the awareness of self was to be thought of in terms of spirit, psyche, or soul. He contends that the writings of Rene Descartes in 1644 marks a turning point in man's thinking about his non-physical being.

The beginning of the twentieth century brought about profound changes in the field with writings of Sigmund Freud. Freud gave attention to the self under the concept of ego development and functioning. A contemporary of Freud was William James. Wylie (1961) states that James accorded the self concept an important place in his psychological writings.

Another important date in the study of the self concept is 1949. Prior to this date, few emperical studies were done. Silver (1958) indicated that the Psychological Abstracts list six references to the self in 1939; in 1949

nine were cited; the index of the 1956 Psychological Abstracts yields fifty-four articles relating to the self concept. Gordon and Gergen (1968) note that psychology and sociology alone accounted for over 2000 publications concerning these.

The increase in the number of articles pertaining to the self concept can be attributed to the emphasis upon Gestalt psychology and the phenomenological methods. Combs and Snygg (1959) proposed that the basic drive of the individual is the maintenance and enhancement of the self. They state that "all perceptions...acquire their meaning through their relationship to the existing self." (p. 156) This contribution was to have a great bearing on psychology and education.

Carl Rogers has been one of the most consistent in objecting to the behavioristic ideas, feeling that their tenants are too narrow and passive. His non-directive approach is built around the importance of the self in human development. Rogers (1954) notes that the conscious scheme of the self has a regulatory and guiding influence. Anxiety and maladjustment tend to occur when it is threatened by a dim awareness of experiences that are contradictory to it.

The self concept, states Dorothy Rogers (1969), embraces all the impressions and beliefs a person has about himself.

Much evidence supports the contention that the child's behavior in any specific instance is determined largely by the way he perceives himself. She notes three major factors affecting the self concept. They are (a) the effect of others, (b) the effect of age, and (c) the effect of sex.

Wylie (1961) states that all personality theorists who are concerned with constructs involving the self place great importance on the parent-child interaction in the development of the self concept. She states that, "this notion follows from such general ideas as these: (a) The self concept is a learned constellation of perceptions, cognitions, and values. (b) An important part of this learning comes from observing the reactions one gets from other persons. (c) The parents are the persons who are present earliest and most consistently (p. 121). They, therefore, have a unique opportunity to reinforce selectively the child's learning because of their presence and impact.

Coopersmith (1968) attributes much importance to Alfred Adler's contributions. He contends that Adler's system for diagnosis and treatment depends on the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy which underlie many neurotic tendencies. Clinicians realize that many of their disturbed patients come to them feeling incompetent and socially rejected.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH WITH SELF CONCEPT

Numerous studies of various aspects of the self concept have been made. Kelley (1970) experimented with 54 parent-deprived 10-14 year olds and with 54 controls who lived with both natural parents. Of the parent-deprived group, 18 were in institutions, twenty resided with one parent (divorced), and 16 lived with one parent (bereaved). The shortened form of the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory was administered. Results of the t tests indicated that (a) the mean for the controls did not differ significantly from the means for the total experimental, divorced and bereaved; (b) the mean for the institutionalized subjects were significantly lower than for controls and bereaved; and (c) the mean for the subjects from divorced families did not differ significantly from the means for the institutionalized or bereaved groups. She concluded that emotional growth seemed affected by the loss of both parents but that it was not necessarily dependent upon the presence of both parents.

Silver (1958) concluded that the level of self concept ratings is significantly associated with parental acceptance and to a lesser degree with maternal acceptance. He also states that high and stable self concept ratings are

positively associated with congruence between a subject's private self concept and the concepts which he believes his parents and peers have of him.

In Castro's studies (1969), 140 military and 156 non-military dependents were given the Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale. She found that the children who lived with both parents have a higher self concept than children who come from broken homes.

Hartnagel, (1970) studied the effects of fatherlessness and race on the self concepts of lower class adolescent males using the orientation of symbolic interactionism and the semantic differential for measurement. A distinction was made between actual and normative self, and the categories of white and black, father-absent and father-present boys were examined. All categories exhibited significant differences between the actual and normative self, although magnitude of the difference varied among categories. Black boys from father-absent homes had smaller differences than white boys from father-absent homes. No difference was discerned between the father present groups. He states that the smaller differences of the black, father-absent boys was the result of the more potent actual self concepts.

Coopersmith (1967, 1968) studied 85 preadolescent white, male, middle class students. He administered the Self Esteem Inventory, composed of 50 items pertaining to peers, parents, school, and personal interests. One criterion

for inclusion in the study was that the subject be a member of an intact nuclear family at the time he was selected. The results showed that previous marriages occurred with greater frequency in the backgrounds of the subjects with low self-esteem.

Harris (1971) conducted a study in the secondary school system of a Midwestern community. The subjects included 219 seventh and eleventh grade students. He concluded that the scholastic self concept is a relatively stable dimension of personality for both early and middle adolescents.

Brookover, et al. (1965), in a study of self concept of ability and school achievement, states that the relationship of perceived evaluations of significant others to self concept is postulated to be that of a necessary and sufficient condition. As the students' parents and peers change their evaluations of the students' ability, a subsequent change will be reflected in the students' self evaluation of ability.

In a study done by Hawk (1958), the self concept as a variable of adolescent behavior was analyzed. His sample population included 123 adolescent boys and girls. The findings indicated that one's self concept was dependent on one's social class as well as his acceptance among his age-mates. He also concluded that the experiences as a boy or girl and in peer affiliation modify the influences of family life style in self representations.

Brainerd (1969) studied 160 college students to test the validity of the prediction that a positive relation should be obtained between one's personal worth estimate and one's perception of one's parents as loving, approving, and affectionately rewarding. A negative correlation was predicted for personal worth estimates with a rejecting and neglecting parent experience. The evaluation of female subjects' mothers were more significant than those of the male subjects'.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was administered to 134 white fifth, sixth, and seventh grade children of average ability from a Georgia rural school (Hillner, 1977). This was to see if self evaluation as defined as goalsetting behavior, self reinforcement as defined by self-determining tokens, and task performance on the Wechsler coding sub-test would vary between children of high and low self-esteem.

The children were divided into two groups based on their scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. They were asked to set their goal or state how many responses they felt they could do. Then, they were to perform the task and reward themselves. After this, appropriate information (or no information) was given and the children were asked to go through the same sequence on a parallel form of the task.

The study found that children receiving information reflecting success did significantly better in task performances than children who received information indicating failure. Also, some evidence suggested that high self-esteem children set significantly higher goals than the low self-esteem children.

In Rosenfeld's study (1977), fifty-one sixth grade Catholic students were trained to categorize and report their daily school-time successes and failures. They were assigned to one of three groups. While one group was asked to recall and report school-time successes for twenty consecutive school days, a second group reported their failures. The third group received primary and social reinforcement from reporting their experiences. Teacher, self, and peer ratings were obtained.

The findings indicated that students who reported their own successes decreased self-esteem by self-report and increased self-esteem on peer ratings. Students who reported their own failures showed no change in self-esteem, although those initially low in self-esteem showed improved self estimations. Students who reported their teacher's successes, according to self- and peer reports, showed improved self-esteem.

The study indicated that teachers' ratings of their students' self-esteem was more a function of the teacher

than the person being rated. Also, Rosenfeld (1977) concluded that no single treatment would raise the self-esteem of a classroom of children.

Williams and Cole (1968) administered the Tennessee Self Concept Scale to 80 sixth grade students. It was hypothesized that the student's conception of school should be related to his conception of himself; this could be construed as an extension of his self concept. They obtained significant positive correlations between the scores on the self concept scale and the following variables: conception of school, social status at school, emotional adjustment, mental ability, reading achievement, and mathematical achievement.

Brittain (1973) administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale to two groups of children attending New Providence Junior High. Each group was composed of 56 subjects; one group had attended an ungraded elementary school while the other was made up of children who had attended graded schools. A t test for correlated samples revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the self-concepts of the students with nongraded and graded elementary experience.

Chickering (1958) tested two groups twice with a Q sort technique. One group was composed of 59 while one was made up of 48. Each group was asked to describe

themselves "as you really are right now," and later, "as you would most like to be." He concluded that there was no evidence which indicated a stable relationship between self-discrepancy and effort in school or school absence.

Sears and Sherman (1964) used a case study approach in attempting to increase understanding in the development of children in their middle years. Eight fifth and sixth graders were studied over two years. The children were essentially normal students in a moderately well-to-do suburban community. They felt that by studying real children with normal problems, one can better understand the causes of and remedy for individual and social problems.

In Jersild's study (1952), written compositions were obtained from 2,893 students from the fourth grade through college. They were to describe "What I like about myself" and "What I dislike about myself." He found that the younger people in the study, more often than the older, spoke of relationships with their parents and their brothers and sisters in describing what they liked and disliked about themselves. In grades four through eight, girls mentioned home and family relationships more than boys did in describing what they liked and disliked about themselves.

Taylor (1953) used a set of 120 self-statements to 40 undergraduates. The methodology was Q-technique. He concluded that traumatic or euphoric experiences may alter the self concept.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Pupil Population and Sample

The sample in this study included 31 seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students who attended New Providence Junior High, Clarksville Montgomery County School System, Clarksville, Tennessee. This group was composed of 18 girls and 13 boys. The students were chosen because information on file in the guidance office indicated that they were from parent-deprived homes. They were given the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself) during the spring of the 1973-1974 school year.

Description of the Instrument

The Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself) was designed by Piers and Harris (1964). To complete it, the subjects respond to statements like "I am happy," with a "yes" or "no." Nearly half of the statements are worded to indicate a positive self concept; slightly more than half indicate a negative self concept.

The test is a quickly completed self report instrument. It takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete the test. A third-grade reading knowledge is required if the test is administered in a group. Administered individually, it

may be given orally below the third-grade reading level. The test manual (1969) states that the test may be administered by an educated non-psychologist, but that it should be interpreted only with the aid of someone who is knowledgeable in measurement and statistics, psychology of adjustment, and self theory.

The instrument was derived by using a pool of items developed from a collection of children's statements of what they liked and disliked about themselves (Jersild, 1952). Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 was employed to assess the homogeneity of the test; the resulting coefficients ranged from .78 to .93. Since this appeared to be an underestimate, the Spearman-Brown odd-even formula was used as a check. It was applied to half the Grade 6 and Grade 10 sample, yielding coefficients of .90 and .87 respectively.

Using the longer form, coefficients of .72, .71, and .72 were obtained in a retest after four months. The revised 80-item scale proved to be more reliable. It yielded test-retest coefficients of .77 for 244 fifth graders after a two and a four month period.

Content validity was attempted by including qualities that children had reported to like or dislike, as illustrated by Jersild. The Piers-Harris scores were compared to scores obtained on Lipsitt's Children's Self Concept Scale. A correlation of .68 was obtained from a sample that contained 98 special education students who were 12 to 16 years old.

Scores from the Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale were compared to scores on the SRA Inventory. The sample included 97 children in Grades 6-9. Correlations of $-.64$ were obtained and $-.48$, on Health Problems (Piers-Harris, 1969).

Research Procedures

The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself) was administered in small groups or individually to the students. The school guidance counselor or the researcher administered the test. The tests were given in the school's conference room.

The examiner discussed the value of knowing our feelings toward ourselves. It was emphasized that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers. Since they were the only ones who could answer these questions for themselves, it seemed obvious that there could be no right or wrong answers. It was mentioned that the results as a whole were needed, rather than each score being analyzed individually. The students did not have to put their names on the tests, and the tests were numbered to increase their confidentiality.

After making certain all subjects had pencils and the test materials, the instructions were read aloud. It was emphasized that the subjects should circle either "yes" or "no." No omissions or double circles were to be counted.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF STUDY

The findings of this study are reported as a table and the discussion that follows relates to the following hypothesis:

There will be no significant difference at the .05 level of confidence in the scores of the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale norm group and the sample of 31 seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students from parent-deprived homes.

Table I illustrates the results of the self concept scale scores of the norm group as compared to the sample drawn from parent-deprived children at New Providence Junior High School. The t ratio for the groups was 1.06; this is not significant statistically. The null hypothesis was accepted.

TABLE I
Self Concept Scores

Self Concept	Norm Group \bar{X}	Sample \bar{X}	t Ratio
1214 ss	51.84	54.09	1.06

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study attempted to assess the relationship between the self concepts of a norm group and a group of parent-deprived junior high students.

Several limitations are inherent within this study. They are: (a) Temporal Limitations - the self concept, as revealed by tests, is only representative of the individual's opinion of himself at that particular instant; (b) Methodological Limitations - pencil and paper tests indicate only that which the subject wishes to reveal; (c) Other Limitations - it does not establish a casual relationship, and it cannot isolate the influence of others who might be significant to the subject.

Although there have been many studies and books written concerning the self-concept, an overview and longitudinal studies are lacking. Neither is there much information about replication of previous studies.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept (The Way I Feel About Myself) was the instrument used to measure the self concepts of the subjects; it was designed by Ellen V. Piers and Dale B. Harris. This objective test contains

eighty items. There is a direct correlation between the scores on the scale and the subjects' self concept.

The sample was drawn from the seventh, eighth, and ninth graders at New Providence Junior High School in Clarksville, Tennessee. It was composed of 18 girls and 13 boys from parent-deprived families.

The mean scores of the sample were compared to the mean scores of the test scores of the test norm group; the test norm group was composed of 1183 subjects. The t test was used to determine statistical significance at the .05 level of confidence. It was not statistically significant and the null hypothesis was accepted.

Conclusions

Based on the information obtained from the study, one can conclude that: (a) For this particular sample population, there was no statistically significant difference between the self concept scores of the sample population as compared to the scores of the test norm group; (b) The mean scores in the study were 54.09 for the parent-deprived sample and 51.84 for the test norm. The authors of the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale state that the norm should be used with caution because it is based on data collected from one Pennsylvania school district; generalizations should be limited to similar populations. Other studies have reported means ranging from 50.4 to 60.40.

Implications of the Study

Due to the impact of the self concept upon behavior, as asserted by many researchers, it is suggested that persons in the field of education and guidance and counseling obtain as much information about the student's/client's background and attitudes as possible. Teachers should be cognizant of the classroom atmosphere and should strive to make it conducive to the enhancement of the student's self concept. Also, the school could use a self concept scale to screen those who might be in need of group counseling or guidance.

As an educator or counselor, we should be wary of forming generalizations about parent-deprivedness. The students in this study were from homes defined as parent-deprived. Still, they need not have been without parent-surrogates. Some may have had adult relatives, other than a parent, living in their home. Others may have had close relationships with adults not living in their home.

The role of peers of parent-deprived students should not be discounted. Since adolescence frequently is a time of rebellion against adult or parental authority, the absence of a parent may not be critical. Adolescent friends may help fill the chasm caused by the loss of a parent.

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