REPORTED SELF-CONCEPTS OF SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS VARYING IN LEVEL OF READING ACHIEVEMENT

BY

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REPORTED SELF-CONCEPTS OF SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS VARYING IN LEVEL OF READING ACHIEVEMENT

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Master of Arts

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by

Kathlyn Simon Pardue

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Kathlyn Simon Pardue entitled "Reported Self-concepts of Seventh-grade Students Varying in Level of Reading Achievement." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, with a major in Counseling and Guidance.

Elizabeth H. Stokes

Major Professor

Accepted for the Council:

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Dean of the Graduate School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The relationship between self-concept and academic achievement has been a subject of increasing concern during the past ten years. Although perceptive teachers have probably always sensed the relationship between a student's self-concept and his performance in school, recent research has provided empirical evidence that a significant positive relationship does exist between these two variables.

Many researchers have reported a significant positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement (Brookover, 1969; Bruck & Bodwin, 1962; Caplin, 1969; Farls, 1967; Fink, 1962; Irwin, 1967). Although some researchers have reported findings which do not support this relationship (Butcher, 1967; Kunce, Getsinger, & Miller, 1972; Valenzuela, 1971), or which indicate only a low positive one (Bledsoe, 1967; Campbell, 1967), contradictory results comprise a relatively small proportion of the published data in this area. Purkey, in an extensive review of the literature, concludes that "overall, the research evidence clearly shows a persistent and significant relationship between self-concept and academic achievement" (1970, p. 15).

Evidence of this relationship appears even greater in the specific area of reading achievement. Reported research involving self-concept and achievement in reading is almost conclusively in favor of a significant positive relationship between the two variables (Andrews, 1971; Gardner, 1972; Glick, 1972, Hebert, 1968; Lamy, 1962; Swartz, 1972; Toller, 1967; Wattenberg & Clifford, 1964; Williams & Cole, 1968).

The implications of these findings can be of value to educators and psychologists, particularly in their work with underachievers and disabled readers. In the area of reading, it is essential to understand the problems of the unsuccessful student. Because the ability to read has become a prerequisite for success in many areas of life, a student who does not read adequately has a special need for understanding and assistance. An important area to be understood is the self-concept of the disabled reader.

Self-concept Theory

Self-concept theory has its origin in the phenomenological approach to understanding human behavior. Phenomenological psychology theorizes that all of an individual's behavior is a function of his own perceptions, his "phenomenal field." How one behaves in a given situation is determined by how he perceives himself and how he perceives the situation (Combs & Snygg, 1959, p. 122).

The development of Rogers' non-directive, client-centered approach to psychotherapy was based on the phenomenological theory that the individual's behavior is consistent with his own self-perceptions, and that therefore he must be understood in terms of his own frame of reference (Rogers, 1951).

Phenomenologists, or self-theorists, postulate that persons with negative self-perceptions generally perform less adequately, are less popular, have greater anxiety, and are more maladjusted than are persons with positive self-perceptions. Many self-theorists believe that since behavior is consistent with self-perceptions, then knowledge of how an individual perceives himself should contribute to a better understanding of his behavior (Alberti, 1971).

Self-concept Research

Since Raimy (1948) developed the first method for measuring changes in self-reference during psychotherapy, the subject of self-concept research has been a controversial one. Because the self-concept is not open to direct observation, information about an individual's self-perceptions must be inferred. One basis for making such inferences is what the individual says about himself (Caplin, 1969).

Perhaps the most controversial problem in self-concept research is the question of whether an individual's reported

self-concept (the way he says he feels about himself) is a valid indication of his true self-concept (the way he really feels about himself). According to Wylie (1974), self-concept and self-report are not identical, and to assume they are is a grossly false assumption. Combs, Soper, and Courson (1963) agree that the two constructs are by no means the same and so cannot be used interchangeably. Combs and Snygg (1959) maintain that the degree to which a subject's self-report resembles his true self-concept is determined by several factors:

1.) The clarity of the subject's awareness
2.) The lack of adequate symbols for expression
3.) The social expectancy
4.) Cooperation of the subject
5.) Freedom from threat and the degree of personal adequacy
6.) Change in field organization (pp. 440-442).

Combs et al. (1963) conclude that on the basis of these factors, self-concept cannot be directly measured by self-report.

Other researchers are not so willing to dismiss self-report as an invalid measurement of the self-concept. Strong and Feder (1961) contend that everything an individual says regarding himself can be considered a sample of his self-concept. Caplin (1969) agrees that what the

subject has to say about himself is one basis for making inferences about the self-concept, thus providing insight into the self-concept. And Coopersmith (1967) claims that many of the questions of validity which have made self-concept studies unacceptable appear to be more critical in theory than in reality.

Another problem involved in self-concept research is the lack of a consistent, precise definition of self-concept. Wylie speaks of a "bewildering array of definitions" (1961, p. 2); and Kubiniec (1970) objects that the same measuring devices are used for different constructs and the same constructs are measured with different devices.

From their more optimistic viewpoint, Strong and Feder (1961) assert that considering the complexity of the personality, it is reasonable to expect many approaches to the measurement of self-concept. Stanwyck and Felker (1971) caution that with this problem in mind, use of self-concept measures requires knowledge of the instrument used and of the definition of self-concept from which it is derived.

Ambiguity of test items is a problem in self-concept measurement. Piers (1969) points out that self-report instruments contain many items which are open to variable interpretation by the respondent. She maintains that considering this and other problems involved, the reliability

and validity of self-report inventories is greater than one might expect.

Controversy regarding the self-concept and its measurement continues, and many questions in this area remain unanswered. In spite of these unresolved problems, self-concept research also continues, frequently using self-concept report as a measuring device. According to Vernon (1964), more has been learned about the weaknesses than about the potentialities of self-concept measurements because research has concentrated mainly on proving or disproving their validity as measures of specific constructs. He considers it foolish to discard the self-report as an assessment tool and suggests that we recognize its weaknesses and regard it simply as one method of approaching a person's concept of self. Wylie (1961, 1974) cautions that any study of self-concept should be approached with an awareness of the problems involved.

Self-concept and Academic Achievement

Self-concept research was originally used most extensively in the field of psychotherapy. In recent years, however, it has been applied to other areas, and many researchers have attempted to determine the relationship between self-concept and other variables of human behavior. One of these variables is academic achievement.

Jersild states that "the learner perceives, interprets, accepts, rejects, or resists what he meets at school in the light of the self-system he has within him" (1952, p. 14). According to Brookover (1964), the relevance of the self-concept in academic achievement lies in the student's perceptions of his ability to learn the accepted academic tasks. After several years of research on the self-concept and school achievement, Brookover (1967) concluded that ability is not necessarily the most important factor in achievement and that the student's attitudes limit the level of his achievement in school.

Marston (1968) suggests that low self-confidence may be evident in many aspects of a student's behavior. As a behaviorist, Marston believes that often a student possesses certain skills, but these skills fail to develop properly because of anxiety about, and avoidance of, behaviors which would lead to an evaluation of performance. Other behavioral researchers (Williams & Cole, 1968) suspect that differences in academic motivation may be attributable in part to differences in self-concept.

Diggory (1966) concluded that when an ability is important and highly rated, failure in that ability lowers one's self-evaluation of other abilities as well. Likewise, success in an important and highly-rated ability raises one's self-evaluation of other abilities.

Self-concept and Reading Achievement

Diggory's conclusion may have relevance in the area of reading achievement. Smith and Dechant (1961) have suggested that since reading in our culture has become an essential developmental task, failure in reading can block a child's attempts to satisfy the need for self-esteem. Glock (1972), considering one's self-concept "a boundary which defines the limits of his actions" (p. 406), proposes that the way a child views himself is one of the most important factors in determining whether or not he will become a successful reader.

Review of research

Lamy (1962) studied the relationship of young children's self-concepts with their initial success in learning to read. She measured the self-perceptions and IQ scores of children in kindergarten and one year later in first grade and correlated these scores with measures of reading achievement in the first grade. She found that the self-concept scores of these children gave as good a prediction of later reading achievement as did their IQ scores. According to Lamy, this evidence suggests not only a relationship, but a causal relationship between self-concept and reading achievement. In a similar study, Wattenbery and Clifford (1964) found that measures of the

self-concept taken at the beginning of kindergarten were significant predictors of reading success two and one-half years later, while the relationship between IQ and reading achievement was not significant. Wattenberg and Clifford concluded that even in early childhood, self-concept may be antecedent to and predictive of reading achievement.

Glick (1972) studied the relationship between self-concept and reading in the early grades, but his concern was directed toward the effects that reading failure might have on the social-emotional characteristics of young children. He compared the self-concepts of children at the beginning and then at the end of third grade and related these measures to measures of reading progress. He reported that reading failure at this grade level affected negative social-emotional consequences which were significant for poor male readers, though not for poor female readers. Swartz (1972), also studying third-grade children, correlated self-esteem inventory scores with informal reading inventory scores. She obtained significant positive relationships between the two variables for both boys and girls and for both remedial and non-remedial readers.

In a study of healthy elementary school boys with IQs of 110 and above, Toller (1967) found that those who read two or more years below expected grade level evaluated themselves significantly lower than those who read at or above

expected grade level. Gardner (1972) studied fourth-grade Pima Indian children and found a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and reading achievement. Zimmerman and Allebrand (1965) studied fourth- and fifth-graders of Mexican descent and discovered that those who were deficient in reading ability also were significantly lacking in their sense of personal worth, freedom, stability, and adequacy.

Lumpkin (1959) matched fifth-graders for age, intelligence, sex, and ethnic background, and found that those who achieved in reading revealed significantly more positive self-concepts than those who did not; and Williams and Cole (1968) reported a significant positive relationship between self-concept and reading achievement among sixth graders.

Andrews (1971) studied the self-concepts of Australian pupils achieving at varying levels of reading competence in grades five through seven. His findings indicated that poor readers perceived themselves in significantly different and more negative ways from good readers. At the ninth-grade level, Hebert (1958) found a significant positive relationship between self-concept and reading achievement; and among college students, effective readers have been found to view themselves in significantly more positive ways than ineffective readers (Brunkan & Sheni, 1968).

Very few researchers have published results which are contradictory to these. However, Hatcher, Felker, and Treffinger (1974) reported finding no significant relationship between self-concept and reading achievement among fourth- and fifth-graders in a lower-middle class, mostly white, urban setting. These researchers did find a significant difference between girls and boys in the relationship between self-concept and reading, and this finding led them to conclude that it is important to analyze for sex differences in a study of this relationship.

Statement of the Problem

Most studies involving self-concept and reading achievement have used measures of the overall or global self-concept. Few of these studies (Andrews, 1971; Swartz, 1972; Zimmerman & Allebrand, 1965) have obtained measures reflecting specific aspects of the self-concept. Several researchers (Andrews, 1971; Godfrey, 1970; Piers, 1969; Wylie, 1974) have stressed the need for more research using differential measures of the self-concept. Andrews (1971) states that "the differential measurement of self-concepts is ... likely to give further insights into the relationship between this important variable and reading" (p. 161). Andrews also emphasizes the need to investigate the differences in self-concepts between good and poor readers.

The importance of analyzing for sex differences, mentioned by Hatcher et al. (1974), has been demonstrated by other researchers as well. Glick (1972) and Gardner (1972) reported significant results for boys but not for girls in the relationship between self-concept and reading achievement. Swartz (1972), however, obtained significant results for both boys and girls. The conflicting findings in this area indicate the need for more research. Purkey (1970) states that "the question of the influence of sex on the self-concept is a rich field of exploration and needs much more research" (p. 15).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to obtain both global measures and differential measures of the self-concepts reported by seventh-grade students and to determine whether any significant differences existed in these measures for girls and boys varying in level of reading achievement.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested, using the $p < .05$ level of significance.

1. No significant differences exist in the global self-concepts reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

2. No significant differences exist in the self-concepts of behavior reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

3. No significant differences exist in the self-concepts of intellectual and school status reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

4. No significant differences exist in the self-concepts of physical appearance and attributes reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

5. No significant differences exist in the self-concepts of anxiety reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

6. No significant differences exist in the self-concepts of popularity reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

7. No significant differences exist in the self-concepts of happiness and satisfaction reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers.

8. No significant differences exist between the global self-concepts reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

9. No significant differences exist between the self-concepts of behavior reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

10. No significant differences exist between the self-concepts of intellectual and school status reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

11. No significant differences exist between the self-concepts of physical appearance and attributes reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

12. No significant differences exist between the self-concepts of anxiety reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

13. No significant differences exist between the self-concepts of popularity reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

14. No significant differences exist between the self-concepts of happiness and satisfaction reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

CHAPTER II

Method

Subjects

The population for this study included all the seventh-grade students at one junior high school in Knoxville, Tennessee. The school selected was considered by school authorities to be representative of the junior high school population in urban Knoxville.

The seventh-graders at this school are randomly assigned to reading classes one semester and health classes the other semester of the school year. The 110 students enrolled in the second semester reading classes were the subjects for the study.

Instruments Used

Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale. The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was used to assess reported self-concept. This scale, published in 1969, was constructed to meet some of the criticisms of self-concept measures. It is a multi-dimensional inventory suitable for grades three through twelve. Piers and Harris (1964) claim that their inventory was the first standardized instrument developed to measure the general self-concepts of children over a wide age range.

The inventory, entitled "The Way I Feel About Myself", was derived from Jersild's (1952) collection of statements about what children like and what they don't like about themselves. It contains 80 items, written as simple declarative statements at the third grade reading level, to which the subject responds by circling "yes" or "no" according to whether or not it fits his view of himself. The statements have been classified as reflecting high (adequate) or low (inadequate) self-concept.

The Piers-Harris Scale yields two types of scores: 1.) a total score, indicative of overall or global self-concept; and 2.) six cluster scores, indicative of self-concept in the areas of (a) behavior; (b) intellectual and school status; (c) physical appearance and attributes; (d) anxiety; (e) popularity; and (f) happiness and satisfaction.

This inventory has been standardized using data collected from a variety of school systems throughout the country. It has been favorably reviewed in Buros' Seventh Mental Measurements Yearbook (1972) and has received one of Wylie's few favorable reviews in the revised edition of The Self Concept: A Review of Methodological Considerations and Measuring Instruments (1974).

In 1971 Stanwyck and Felker conducted a study to determine 1.) the appropriateness of the Piers-Harris Children's

Self Concept Scale for use with different population types; and 2.) whether the dimensions measured by the scale were consistent enough across samples to be useful in providing information about the nature of self-concept in children. They concluded that the inventory was an appropriate and reliable instrument for measuring the self-concepts of children from somewhat different populations.

Stanford Reading Tests. Scores from the Stanford Reading Tests were used to determine reading level. These tests were administered to the subjects at the end of the sixth grade as part of the Stanford Achievement Test battery.

The Stanford Reading Tests provide reading achievement scores in areas of word meaning and paragraph meaning. They are considered one of the best standardized series available for making periodic surveys of reading achievement in the elementary and junior high school grades (Buros, 1972).

Procedure

The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was administered to four seventh-grade reading classes, in their regular classrooms, on two consecutive days. Six absentees were given the inventory the following day in a room adjoining the guidance counselors' offices.

The inventory was administered by the researcher, according to the authors' instructions (Piers, 1969), in as

uniform a manner as possible. Although the inventory is written at the third grade level, the items were read aloud to insure that even the poorest reader could understand and reapond to the statements. The examiner attempted to communicate a warm and friendly, though serious, attitude toward the students. An effort was made to establish a degree of rapport with each class, in hope that this would help the subjects feel at ease and would encourage cooperation and candor in their response to the inventory.

Using stanine scores from the 1974-75 administration of the Stanford Reading Tests, the subjects were classified as below-average, average, and above-average readers. Those with stanines of 1, 2, or 3 were classified as below-average; with 4, 5, or 6 as average; with 7, 8, or 9 as above-average.

Data Analysis

Twenty-one of the 110 subjects were eliminated from the study because of insufficient data. The remaining 89 subjects were identified as male or female and as below-average, average, or above-average readers. Of 89 subjects, 42 were males and 47 were females. Nineteen were identified as below-average, 58 as average, and 12 as above-average readers. The self-concept inventory, scored manually, provided a total score and six sub-scores for each subject.

the total score indicating overall or global self-concept report, and the six sub-scores indicating self-concept report in the areas of: (1) behavior; (2) intellectual and school atatus; (3) physical appearance and attributes; (4) anxiety; (5) popularity; and (6) happiness and satisfaction.

The data was analyzed at the University of Tennessee Computing Center (UTCC) using an IBM 360-65 computer. A Statistical Analysis System (SAS) utilizing the ANOVA option associated with regression procedure was employed. According to the researcher's statistical consultant at UTCC, this option is especially suited for unbalanced ANOVA designs.

CHAPTER III

Results

Hypotheses 1 - 7

Analyses of variance computed on the total scores and on each of the six sub-scores of self-concept report indicated no significant differences ($p < .05$) in the reported self-concepts of below-average, average, and above-average readers (See Table 1). Therefore, null hypotheses 1 - 7 were retained.

A mentionable, though not significant difference ($p < .11$) occurred in the self-concepts of intellectual and school status (sub-score #2) reported by subjects varying in level of reading achievement. Examination of the mean scores on this measure (See Table 2) reveals that above-average readers reported a somewhat higher self-concept of intellectual and school status than did average and below-average readers.

Hypotheses 8 - 14

Multi-variate analyses of variance computed on the total scores and on each of the six sub-scores of self-concept report indicated no significant differences ($p < .05$) in the reported self-concepts of boys and of girls varying in level of reading achievement (See Table 1). Therefore, null hypotheses 8 - 14 were retained.

Table 1

Analyses of Variance of Reported Self-concept Scores of Boys and Girls Varying in Level of Reading Achievement

Self-concept measure	Source of variation	df	SS	F	p
Total score (Global)	Sex	1	255.990	1.498	0.22
	Achievement	2	194.199	0.568	0.57
	Interaction	2	482.043	1.410	0.25
Sub-score #1 (Behavior)	Sex	1	0.176	0.014	0.90
	Achievement	2	5.630	0.238	0.79
	Interaction	2	33.560	1.418	0.25
Sub-score #2 (Intellectual & school status)	Sex	1	35.208	2.076	0.15
	Achievement	2	77.587	2.287	0.11
	Interaction	2	26.185	0.771	0.53
Sub-score #3 (Physical appearance & attributes)	Sex	1	71.379	8.486	0.01
	Achievement	2	2.134	0.127	0.88
	Interaction	2	32.849	1.953	0.15
Sub-score #4 (Anxiety)	Sex	1	12.447	1.687	0.20
	Achievement	2	23.788	1.611	0.20
	Interaction	2	42.825	2.902	0.06
Sub-score #5 (Popularity)	Sex	1	7.478	0.800	0.37
	Achievement	2	4.147	0.221	0.80
	Interaction	2	18.455	0.987	0.62
Sub-score #6 (Happiness & satisfaction)	Sex	1	7.201	1,696	0.20
	Achievement	2	3.174	0.374	0.70
	Interaction	2	8.100	0.954	0.61

Table 2

Mean Scores of Reported Self-concepts of

Below-average, Average, and Above-average Readers

Self-concept measure	Below-average readers (n=19)	Average readers (n=58)	Above-average readers (n=12)
Total Score (Global)	53.26	54.24	58.42
Sub-score #1 (Behavior)	14.37	14.12	14.92
Sub-score #2 (Intellectual & school status)	10.11	10.90	13.33
Sub-score #3 (Physical appearance & attributes)	6.32	6.09	6.50
Sub-score #4 (Anxiety)	7.47	7.79	9.25
Sub-score #5 (Popularity)	7.58	7.76	8.33
Sub-score #6 (Happiness & satisfaction)	6.42	6.79	7.08

A difference which closely approaches significance ($p < .06$) occurred in the self-concepts of anxiety (sub-score #4) reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement (See Table 1). The interaction effect obtained on this measure is illustrated in Figure 1.

A high score on the anxiety factor of the Piers-Harris Scale indicates that the respondent views himself as manifesting a low level of anxiety. Examination of the mean scores on this measure (See Table 3) reveals that girls who are above-average readers reported a considerably higher self-concept of anxiety (indicating that they view themselves as less anxious) than do girls who are average or below-average readers. Boys varying in level of reading achievement differed very little from each other on this measure. However, boys and girls differed from each other, with high-achieving girls obtaining higher scores than high-achieving boys.

Additional Findings

The statistical analyses revealed one significant difference. This difference, significant beyond the .01 level of probability, was in the self-concepts of physical appearance and attributes (sub-score #3) reported by girls and by boys (See Table 1). Examination of the mean scores on this measure (See Table 4) reveals that boys reported

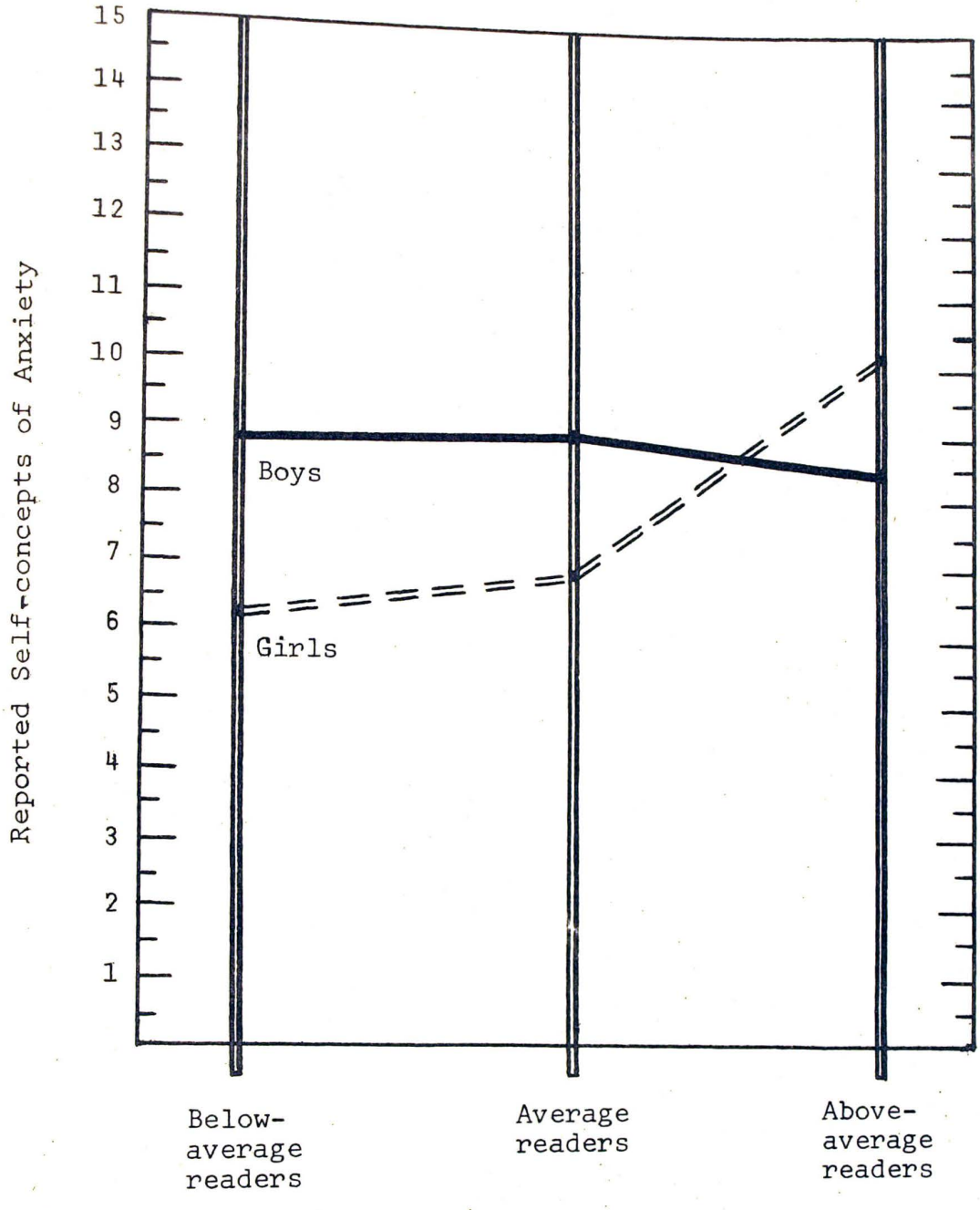

Figure 1

Mean Scores of Reported Self-concepts of Anxiety of Boys and Girls Varying in Level of Reading Achievement

Table 3

Mean Scores of Reported Self-concepts of Girls and Boys Varying in Level of Reading Achievement

Self-concept measure	Boys			Girls		
	Below-average readers (n=9)	Average readers (n=27)	Above-average readers (n=6)	Below-average readers (n=10)	Average readers (n=31)	Above-average readers (n=6)
Total score (Global)	59.56	56.78	56.33	47.60	52.03	60.50
Sub-score #1 (Behavior)	14.89	14.93	13.83	13.90	13.42	16.00
Sub-score #2 (Intellectual & school status)	11.78	11.15	13.83	8.60	10.68	12.83
Sub-score #3 (Physical appearance & attributes)	8.56	6.81	7.00	4.30	5.45	6.00
Sub-score #4 (Anxiety)	8.78	8.93	8.33	6.30	6.81	10.17
Sub-score #5 (Popularity)	8.56	7.56	8.67	6.70	7.94	8.00
Sub-score #6 (Happiness & satisfaction)	7.22	7.37	6.83	5.70	6.29	7.33

Table 4

Mean Scores of Reported Self-concepts

Of Boys and Girls

Self-concept measure	Boys (n=42)	Girls (n=47)
Total score (Global)	57.31	52.17
Sub-score #1 (Behavior)	14.76	13.85
Sub-score #2 (Intellectual & school status)	11.67	10.51
Sub-score #3 (Physical appearance & attributes)	7.21	5.28
Sub-score #4 (Anxiety)	8.81	7.13
Sub-score #5 (Popularity)	7.93	7.68
Sub-score #6 (Happiness & satisfaction)	7.26	6.30

significantly higher self-concepts of physical appearance and attributes than girls did. This difference, however, was not hypothesized.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The higher self-concepts of intellectual and school status reported by above-average readers lend support to Brookover's (1964) statement that the relevance of the self-concept in achievement lies in the student's perceptions of his ability to learn. This finding is also somewhat supportive of Swartz's finding that a significant positive relationship exists between reading achievement and self-esteem pertaining to school.

The indication that girls who are above-average readers view themselves as less anxious than do girls who are average or below-average readers supports Sarason's (1957) statement that the less successful the child is in whatever he undertakes, the more likely he is to be anxious. Differences in reported self-concept of anxiety did not occur, however, for boys varying in level of reading achievement, which resulted in the interaction effect illustrated in Figure 1. The difference between girls and boys in this respect may be related to Glick's (1972) conclusion that girls in our society receive significantly favorable positive reinforcement for achievement in reading, whereas boys in our society do not. According to Glick, it is for this reason that girls who are good readers

experience significantly more positive social-emotional consequences (such as low level of anxiety) than do boys who are good readers.

The significant difference in the self-concepts of physical appearance and attributes reported by girls and by boys may be attributable to maturational differences at this age level. Most of the subjects were 13 years old, an age at which most girls are experiencing the pronounced effects of puberty changes. Most 13-year-old boys are not yet experiencing these effects so profoundly. Studies of changes in the self-concept indicate a deterioration in self-perceptions during early adolescence, especially with respect to physical appearance and attributes (Hurlock, 1964). The significant difference between the sexes on this measure may reflect the inferior self-perceptions of girls due to the effects of early adolescence. This effect may also account for the overall higher (though not significantly higher) self-concepts reported by boys than by girls in this study.

The absence of expected significant differences in this study lends itself to several possible interpretations. One interpretation is that there may, in fact, be very few significant differences in the self-concepts of below-average, average, and above-average boys and girls in the population studied.

Another possible interpretation is that for statistical purposes, the sample may have been too small. The UTCC statistical consultant who assisted in the data analysis suggested that a larger sample, providing for at least 20 subjects in each group, might have obtained more statistically significant differences. As can be seen in Table 3, two groups (above-average boys and above-average girls) contain only six subjects. Because the results of this study are not in agreement with the published results of many other researchers, the need for a replication of this study using a larger sample of subjects may be indicated.

The results of the present study do support the findings of Hatcher et al. (1974), who reported no significant relationship between self-concept report and reading achievement. Since the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was used in both of these studies, there is the possibility that the Piers-Harris inventory is not a suitable instrument for a study of this type.

Finally, the findings in this study may indicate a need to re-examine some of the problems involved in self-concept research. Observations made by the researcher, both in the behavioral responses of the subjects during administration of the inventory, and in some individual response sets which appeared in scoring the inventories,

indicate that the problems in self-concept assessment may well be a plausible interpretation for these findings.

According to Combs and Snygg (1959, pp. 440-442), the degree to which an individual's self-report resembles his true self-concept is determined by several factors. These factors, enumerated in an earlier section, will be discussed as they apply to the present study.

1. The clarity of the subject's awareness. Combs and Snygg state that "the adolescent's slowly emerging concept of himself ... may be quite unclear for very long periods of time. Attempts to report such undifferentiated perceptions to others may well prove impossible." Since the subjects of this study were seventh-grade students, most of them 13 years of age, the lack of clear perceptions may have been a problem in self-report.

2. The lack of adequate symbols for expression. As Combs and Snygg point out, "We always run the risk that the words we use may not mean the same things to others as they mean to us." The problem of words and their meanings was the most obvious and consistent problem in the administration of the inventory. For example, one statement on the inventory is "I am smart." Several subjects in each class questioned this statement; they did not know whether to interpret the word "smart" to mean "intelligent" or "smart-aleck." Apparently the word "smart" frequently has more

than one connotation to students at the seventh-grade level. The statement "I am strong" was also ambiguous to students in each class. "Does strong mean just physical or can it mean more than that?" was a typical question.

Although the inventory was read aloud, at least one student in each group did not know the meaning of "obedient" in the statement "I am obedient at home." "I am unpopular" was a problem because of the negative direction of the statement. In every group confusion regarding this statement was expressed.

The statement "I am popular with boys" elicited laughter, whispering, and humorous facial expressions from boys in each class. Perhaps with Gay Liberation in the news and the worldly-wiseness of 13-year-olds today, "popular with boys" connotes a different meaning from the one the authors intended! The statement "I have a good figure" evoked similar responses among the boys, although the examiner suggested that boys interpret this statement as "I have a good build." Obviously this is a poorly-worded statement on an inventory designed for both boys and girls.

The examiner answered relevant questions and attempted to eliminate confusion regarding these statements. However, it seems that such frequent confusions might interfere with effectiveness of response on an inventory such as this.

3. The social expectancy. Combs and Snygg believe that "In our society it is ... practically necessary for the individual to hide his true concepts of himself .... We are always aware of the approval and disapproval of others .... Our perceptual fields are seldom free from such societal expectancies." The problem of "social expectancy" was obvious among this group of subjects. There were several comments like "I'll sound conceited if I answer these questions the way I really feel;" "You might not like me if I tell the truth on some of these things;" and "Are you sure my parents won't ever see this?"

The problem of social expectancy may have unwittingly been reinforced by the examiner's informal approach to the students. As mentioned in a previous section, an effort was made to establish rapport with each class, to convey a warm and friendly, though business-like, attitude. It was believed at the time that this approach would help the students to feel at ease and would therefore encourage cooperation and candor in their response to the inventory. In retrospect, it seems that this approach may have had just the opposite effect. Perhaps a more impersonal, anonymous approach would have been more conducive to candid response. Wylie (1963), in administering a self-report instrument to junior high school students, read the inventory aloud over the school intercom system to students seated in their

homerooms. This procedure, though not so humane, may be a more "scientific" approach.

4. Cooperation of the subject. Combs and Snygg point out that "Subjects who are asked to cooperate in an exploration of their perceived selves have complete control over any attempt to approach the problem by way of self-report." Although no students outwardly refused to cooperate with the examiner, a few students in each class manifested behaviors which indicated they were not taking the matter very seriously. "Silly" behavior was observed more frequently in boys than in girls; in general, the girls exhibited a more serious attitude. It may be noteworthy that the differences in self-concept reported by girls varying in level of reading achievement was greater than the differences in those reported by boys varying in level of reading achievement.

5. Freedom from threat and the degree of personal adequacy. Combs and Snygg believe that "The more adequate the individual feels, the more likely his self-report will approach an adequate description of his phenomenal self .... The more threatened and inadequate the personality, the less is the likelihood that he will be able to give an accurate report of his concepts of self." An examination of the mean scores presented in Table 3 reveals that boys who are below-average readers reported relatively high self-concepts on every measure, including intellectual and school

status. Girls who are below-average readers did not respond in this fashion.

According to Glick (1972), boys in our society who do not succeed in reading suffer significant negative social-emotional consequences, whereas girls in our society who do not succeed in reading do not suffer these consequences. Perhaps for this reason, boys in our society feel more threatened and inadequate than girls do when they are not successful in reading. This might result in a defensive mode of response on an inventory of reported self-concept.

6. Change in field organization. Combs and Snygg state that "the very act of turning attention to self requires a reorganization of the perceptual field and this, of course, changes the character of what can be reported." Many of the subjects in this study appeared embarrassed and self-conscious about some of the statements, especially those pertaining to physical appearance and attributes. Statements like "I am good looking" and "I have pretty eyes" elicited behaviors which indicated strong feelings of uneasiness. Attention drawn to their physical appearance, especially in the presence of their peers, may cause early adolescents to feel discomfort to a degree which might interfere with effective response on an inventory of reported self-concept.

CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusions

This study investigated the reported self-concepts of seventh-grade students varying in level of reading achievement. The purpose of the study was to obtain both global measures and differential measures of reported self-concept and to determine whether any significant differences existed in these measures for boys and girls varying in level of reading achievement. Null hypotheses stated that no significant differences ($p < .05$) exist in the self-concepts reported by below-average, average, and above-average readers, nor in the self-concepts reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was administered to 110 seventh-grade students at a junior high school in Knoxville, Tennessee. A total score and six subscores were obtained for each subject as measures of reported self-concept. The subjects were identified as male or female; and using 1974-75 Stanford Reading Tests scores, they were classified as below-average, average, and above-average readers. For the 89 subjects with sufficient data, statistical analyses were computed using an IBM 360-65 computer.

Results indicated that no significant differences existed in the reported self-concepts of below-average,

average, and above-average readers, although the self-concepts of intellectual and school status reported by above-average readers was somewhat higher than those reported by average and below-average readers. In addition, no significant differences existed in the reported self-concepts of boys and of girls varying in level of reading achievement, although a difference closely approaching significance ($p < .06$) occurred in the self-concepts of anxiety reported by boys and by girls varying in level of reading achievement, indicating that girls who are above-average readers reported a lower level of perceived anxiety than did the other students. An unhypothesized difference, significant beyond the .01 level, was found to exist between boys and girls in their reported self-concepts of physical appearance and attributes, with boys reporting significantly higher self-concepts than girls on this measure.

On the basis of this study, it cannot be concluded that there are no significant differences in the self-concepts of seventh-grade students varying in level of reading achievement. Several problems were apparent in the process of conducting this study, problems which have been noted by other researchers in the area of self-concept assessment (Combs & Snygg, 1959; Combs, Soper, & Courson, 1963; Wylie, 1961; Wylie, 1974). The question of whether one's self-report provides a valid estimate of true self-concept seems to be

pertinent to this study, especially in light of several behaviors which were observed by the researcher.

Perhaps a more reasonable conclusion based on this study is that because of the physical, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of early adolescents, it is extremely difficult to obtain a valid measure of their self-concepts using a self-report instrument. Embarrassment concerning physical characteristics, desire for social approval, and defensive modes of response were evident during administration of the inventory, as was confusion about several statements on the inventory.

Because the results of this study are not in agreement with the findings reported by many other researchers, further research is implied. For statistical purposes, a larger sample should be used, allowing for at least 20 subjects in each sub-group. In addition, a more formal procedure might be used in administering the inventory. A less personal, more anonymous approach on the part of the examiner, in a more formal, structured setting, might tend to elicit greater cooperation and candor from the subjects.

Further research using self-concept report should be approached not only with an awareness of the problems involved, but also with well-planned methods for possibly eliminating some of these problems.

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