

SELF CONCEPTS OF CHILDREN AND THEIR INTELLIGENCE, ACHIEVEMENT, INTERESTS, AND ANXIETY^{1,2}

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This is a study of the self concepts of 4th and 6th grade boys and girls in relation to their intelligence, academic achievement, interests, and manifest anxiety.

METHOD

From a random sample of 271 4th and 6th grade boys and girls from 4 schools in Clarke County, Georgia, the scores on the following instruments—as measures of the above traits— were used in the present study: (a) A Self Concept Scale consisting of a checklist of 30 trait-descriptive adjectives which the subject checked as characteristic of himself “nearly always,” “about half the time,” or “just now and then.” The scale was slightly modified from Lipsitt’s adaptation (6) of Bills’ Index of Adjustment (2). The scale as adapted assigned scores of 3, 2, or 1 points for each item, reversing the values for the five “negative” traits—lazy, mean, selfish, etc. The higher score, then, indicates higher self-esteem. (b) California Test of Mental Maturity. (c) California Achievement Tests. (d) What-I-Like-to-Do Inventory (4). (e) The McCandless and Castaneda adaptation (7) of the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (9), consisting of 53 items such as “I blush easily.”

RESULTS

The self-concept scores (SC) are presented in Table 1. There was no appreciable difference between the SC of boys in the two grades, or of girls in the two grades. But the girls in both grades scored significantly higher (at the .01 level) than the boys in the corresponding grades.

Table 1 presents also correlations between SC and the other measures. Relationships with intelligence were mostly low to moderately positive. But whereas the correlations for boys were significant and positive, ranging from .278 to .421 for total IQ, for girls they were not significant.

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TABLE 1. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF SELF CONCEPT SCORES, AND CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SELF CONCEPT AND INTELLIGENCE, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, INTERESTS, AND MANIFEST ANXIETY FOR 4TH AND 6TH GRADE PUPILS

	Boys		Girls	
	4th grade (65)	6th grade (76)	4th grade (60)	6th grade (70)
<i>Self concept</i>				
Mean	73.05	73.83	78.31***	78.41***
SD	10.05	7.96	7.44	6.51
<i>Intelligence r</i>				
Language IQ	.306**	.394**	.179	.004
Non-language IQ	.376**	.346**	.113	-.038
Total IQ	.278**	.411**	.154	-.009
<i>Achievement r</i>				
Rdg. vocabulary	.328**	.296**	.144	.091
Rdg. comprehension	.396**	.414**	.285*	.111
Arith. reasoning	.317**	.280*	.209	-.019
Arith. fundamentals	.281*	.269*	.190	.035
English	.525**	.341**	.039	.101
Spelling	.211	.327**	.076	.107
Total battery	.430**	.390**	.189	.063
<i>Interests r</i>				
Art	.213	.050	.444**	-.006
Music	.301*	.002	.308*	.057
Social studies	.094	-.020	.363**	.096
Active play	-.021	-.131	.392**	-.045
Quiet play	-.066	-.100	.412**	-.107
Manual arts	.025	-.121	.366**	-.090
Home arts	.125	-.143	.305*	.034
Science	-.132	-.167	.310*	.023
Total interest	.047	-.119	.412**	.010
<i>Anxiety r</i>				
	-.354**	-.458**	-.299*	-.216

*Significant at .05 level.

** Significant at .01 level.

***At both grade levels differences between boys and girls are significant at the .01 level.

Correlations of achievement and SC were similar to those for intelligence and SC: significant positive r 's for boys, nonsignificant r 's for girls. All except one of the 14 r 's for boys were significant, ranging from .211 for SC and spelling for 4th grade boys to .525 for SC and English for 4th grade boys. Only one of 14 correlations for the two girl groups was significant, that of .285 with reading comprehension for 4th grade girls.

Correlations between SC and interests were mostly negligible. Exceptions were in the case of 4th grade girls, where all correlations

were positive and significant, ranging from .305 for home arts to .444 for art.

Manifest anxiety and SC correlated negatively, ranging from $-.216$ for 6th grade girls to $-.458$ for 6th grade boys. Except for 6th grade girls, all r 's were significant.

DISCUSSION

The significant differences in mean self concepts of boys and girls at both the 4th and 6th grade levels would seem to indicate that at these levels girls have greater self-esteem than boys. These findings are in general agreement with those of previous investigations (1, 3, 5, 8). Such differences may be a function of maturation, since girls of ages 9 to 11 are on the average more developed than boys. Another reason may be that the more frequent contacts with women teachers and with mothers (as compared with fathers) enables girls to develop a more satisfying self-image at these developmental stages. The elementary school in the United States tends to be a woman's world, and often the values which are stressed are neatness, conformity, docility, and similar traits more generally associated with the feminine role. Boys may be less successful in measuring up to these values and therefore show less self-confidence. In countries where more men are employed as elementary teachers, particularly for boys, the same patterns may not prevail. Still another reason may be that boys may have a different set or attitude in the test situation. Boys may be more ready and willing to admit their faults than girls. In our culture, men and boys are usually regarded as more objective and impersonal than women and girls.

The consistently significant positive correlations of self concept with intelligence and achievement for boys but not for girls, would seem to indicate that boys perceive the traits and abilities measured by the intelligence and achievement tests as more important in their self-esteem than do girls. An additional possibility is that due to their relatively greater maturity and sophistication (at these age levels) some of the girls may have rated themselves higher on self concept than they really believed was correct. They may have learned somewhat more quickly than boys that in our culture it is best to "accentuate the positive" and to "put one's best foot forward." This explanation is related to the test-taking attitude and to the "honesty" hypotheses previously given to account for the higher self concept scores of girls.

With respect to interests, the author is unable to explain why these should be so consistently correlated positively with self-esteem for 4th grade girls but not for the other three groups. The norms given in the test manual (4) and the results obtained in the present investigation indicate that mean scores decline at each succeeding grade level, but this general trend would not account for the correlations reported herein.

The negative relationship, significant except for the 6th grade girls, between anxiety and self-esteem is logically consistent with the contention that self-esteem is made up in part of freedom from anxieties. The greater the number of threats, the lower is the expected self-esteem score.

SUMMARY

On a self concept scale 4th- and 6th-grade girls rated themselves (significantly) higher than boys from the same grades. Self concept correlated positively with measures of intelligence and academic achievement; but only in boys were these r 's significant. Self concept and manifest anxiety correlated negatively, and significantly for both groups of boys and 4th-grade girls. Significant positive r 's between self concept and interests were found for 4th-grade girls. Interpretations of the results are offered.

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