

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 040 223

UD 010 093

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TITLE Relationship of Self Esteem of the Disadvantaged to School Success.  
PUB DATE Mar 70  
NOTE 7p.; A shorter version of a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association Minneapolis, Minn., March 1970  
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Academic Achievement, Disadvantaged Youth, \*Grade 6, \*Grade Point Average, \*Negro Students, \*Reading Tests, \*Self Concept, Test Results  
IDENTIFIERS Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

ABSTRACT

This study shows that there is a positive correlation between self esteem and academic achievement for inner city black children. Seventy-eight grade 6 black students were divided into the following categories: upper one-third and lower third based on intelligence test scores, standardized reading test scores, and grade point average (GPA) from the last three semesters. The scale used to measure self esteem was an adaptation of the Self Esteem Scale developed by Rosenberg (1965). The results showed that children who had a high degree of school success, as measured by GPA and reading level, scored significantly higher than did less successful students. These data support the theory that good performance in school is associated with a high self esteem. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (KG)

ED040223

RELATIONSHIP OF SELF ESTEEM OF THE DISADVANTAGED  
TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Lack of success experiences in school is a central concern for the education of inner city blacks. Backman and White (1968) state... "The most important factor in educational achievement is that the child must repeatedly experience success in his school endeavors (p. 47)." Evidence shows that a positive self image is associated with the degree of school success of children of middle class whites. It was found that the self esteem and academic achievement of fourth and sixth grade boys were shown to be positively correlated to a significant degree as reported by Bledsoe (1966).

The relationship between self esteem and school success of educationally disadvantaged blacks is of increasing interest and concern. A considerable amount of the research and discussion of black self esteem is focused on comparing blacks with middle class whites on this factor. Soares & Soares (1969) found that the underprivileged living in low social class areas have higher self perceptions than their middle class counterparts. This report suggests that the disadvantaged are functioning satisfactorily for the adults with whom they have contact; whereas, the middle class youngsters are working under great pressure to perform well in a very competitive framework. Long (1969) strongly challenges these results. In addition, findings by Levine (1968) indicate that when inner-city children are placed in integrated schools, they develop lower self images.

UD010093

This article is a shorter version of a paper presented at the 1970 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting.

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The children may find it more difficult to achieve academic and social success in the midst of the more highly competitive academic middle class environment.

Unfortunately, a paucity of research exists on how self esteem level affects school success of black youth. This article reports a pilot study that investigated this issue. The purpose of the study was to find whether self esteem level of sixth grade black children living in a low social class neighborhood was associated with certain factors related to academic success. Self esteem was defined as the degree to which a person perceives himself in terms of what he and other persons important to him consider socially desirable.

The subjects in the study were 78 black second semester sixth graders living in the Chicago core city area. This was the total sixth grade population of the school except for those absent the day the scale was administered. They attended a neighborhood elementary school and practically all the children were from lower social class homes. Social class was defined to include income level of the neighborhood, occupation of the breadwinner and general educational level of the adults in the area. It was decided to test sixth grade children for several reasons. They have completed the grade levels in which youngsters have clearly developed patterns of school success. The youth are in a critical age for they are now entering the adolescent subculture. They are beginning to search for an identity in the midst of rapid physical change, and their need for widening interrelationships is an increasing apprehension for them. The children may face these many changes in schools that are not equipped to meet their

academic needs, and this frustrating environment may lead them to give up trying to achieve.

The scale used to measure self esteem of the children was an adaptation of the Self Esteem Scale developed by Rosenberg (1965). The scale was originally developed for high school youth so the language and vocabulary used in the test was modified to meet their reading and understanding level. Three school related factors were used. First, IQ test scores were collected. Second, the standardized reading test which was administered during the second semester of the sixth grade was used. It was decided for the analysis of this pilot study to use only the reading scores as this is a most critical area for school success measured by standardized achievement tests. Grade equivalent scores were used to determine the reading scores for this study. The last school related factor used was grade point average (GPA) compiled by the children during the previous three semesters. The mean average of the three semesters for the GPA was the time span of this measure. The GPA was computed on a four point scale with 4.00 being the highest possible average.

For the analysis of this report, it was decided to have two groups of the population divided into the following categories: 1) upper one-third and, 2) lower one-third on the basis of each of the above three school related factors. The mean score and range of each of these distributions are shown in Table I. Twenty six students were in each category, except 27 were in the low GPA group due to a score tie at the top category.

Table I

Mean and Range Scores of the Three Pupil Categories

	<u>School Factors</u>		
	<u>IQ</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Top one-third			
Mean	108	3.12	6.65
Range	97 to 142	2.67 to 3.67	6.14 to 10.89
Bottom one-third			
Mean	80	1.67	3.94
Range	61 to 86	1.40 to 2.00	3.00 to 4.41

The difference between each of the three high and low groups (see Table I) as to their mean scores on the Self Esteem Scale was measured by a two-tailed t-test. The Scale scores could range from a high of 6 to a low of 0. Children with a positive self esteem would score high on a Scale.

Findings

The findings of the differences between the three groups are listed in Table II.

Table II

Mean Self Esteem Scores of the Three Categories of Pupils

<u>Groups</u>	<u>Mean Self Esteem Score</u>	<u>t-Score</u>	<u>P</u>
High GPA	4.55	3.468	0.01
Low GPA	3.37		
High Reading	4.50	2.53	0.02
Low Reading	3.65		
High IQ	3.97	1.401	N.S.
Low IQ	3.81		

The results show that the youngsters who had a high degree of school success as measured by GPA and reading level scored significantly higher on the Self Esteem Scale than did the less successful students. Interestingly, the Scale scores didn't significantly differentiate between the high and low IQ groups. IQ scores measure general experiences as compared to the more specific school-oriented GPA and reading levels. Also, IQ scores aren't as visible to the youngsters. On the other hand, reading plays a central role in school learning, and teacher marks are clearly evident throughout the school year.

It was decided to compare the children who were in both the high GPA and reading groups with those in both the low GPA and reading categories on the basis of Self Esteem Scores, and the IQ category was not used due to the low number of subjects. Again a two-tailed t-test was used to measure the difference between the two groups (See Table III).

Table III

Self Esteem Scores of Combined GPA and Reading Groups

<u>Groups</u>	<u>Mean Self Esteem Score</u>	<u>t-test</u>	<u>P</u>
High GPA -- High Reading	4.47	2.79	0.0
Low GPA -- Low Reading	3.42		

Nineteen students were in each group. The difference between the two categories was statistically significant at the  $\alpha$ .01 level. This emphasizes to an even greater degree that good performance in school is associated with high self esteem.

### Conclusion

This study supports the research that shows a relationship between a positive self esteem and school success. The need for children to have a strong self esteem is all the more urgent when it is well known that to change an established negative self image is exceedingly difficult (Roman, 1967). Two very critical school factors - teacher grades and reading level - were closely associated with the level of self esteem of the children. Both of these factors are subject to change if the schools and the public are willing to exert some effort in this direction. Instructors are reluctant to evaluate their grading procedures, but this area needs closer study. Teacher marks are constant reminders to the youngsters about their success or failure in school. It appears reasonable that disadvantaged children are also receiving parental pressure on grades for everyone knows the worth of A, B, C, and D on report cards. The reading problem in inner city schools is a well publicized scandal, and this report just adds to the depressing list of evidence that surrounds reading instruction and materials for the disadvantaged.

The findings of this report lends support to the idea that education is a means of developing pride and self worth among the disadvantaged blacks. This study may indicate that blacks from a homogeneous inner city neighborhood can achieve a high degree of self esteem if they know they are academically successful in school. It also indicates that the academically successful disadvantaged black children perceive themselves in a positive manner, just as their white suburban middle class counterparts do. The problem is that the black children who are not successful in school face such over-

whelming odds when compared with the more affluent children. Yet, greater school success is needed for all disadvantaged if the black community of the future is to have the strong sense of worth and pride to cope with the rapidly changing American society.

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