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## The Relationship between Self-esteem and School Performance

Trina M. Ward<sup>4</sup>

*Self-esteem is what some may define as self-confidence. School performance is what society may define as participation in the classroom or how much effort you put forth into learning. This research was designed to see if a correlation between school performance and self-esteem exists. Participants were recruited at Lindenwood University and chose to take the study for extra credit in a particular class. Thirty-three participants were assigned to complete a single survey, with questions asking for their views about themselves, their participation in school activities, and demographic questions which included age and sex. Results showed that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r = .339$ ) between positive self-esteem and school performance. There was also a weak positive correlation ( $r = .073$ ) between positive self-esteem and G.P.A. However, there was a statistically significant correlation ( $r = .365$ ) between G.P.A and overall school performance, showing that being an active school participant can better your grades. This research should be useful for further investigation into the benefits of studying and how it affects a student's grade point average.*

*Keywords:* Self-esteem, performance, self-actualization

Self-esteem is defined as the ways in which people view themselves. Self-esteem is how about confidence and feeling like a person of worth. People who view themselves favorably have high self-esteem, whereas people who view themselves negatively have low self-esteem. Self-esteem affects a person's behavior dramatically (Walker, 2012). Kokenes (1974) stated that self-esteem became a household word; people were concerned about their self-esteem and strived to achieve high self-esteem. Teachers, parents, therapists, and others focused efforts on boosting self-esteem on the assumption that high self-esteem caused many positive outcomes and benefits, one being an affective and positive school performance. Kokenes (1974) conducted a study to investigate the role of self-esteem and how it affected the way teenagers viewed themselves. The students were in grades four through eight. Kokenes (1974) used the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, which was widely used at that time to measure self-esteem. One factor Kokenes

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(1974) found was that most of the grade levels generated a factor describing positive perceptions of school success, except in seventh graders. This negative factor may have had something to do with new school settings and a course schedule that students deemed much more challenging.

If self-esteem has affected pre-adolescence and adolescence, could self-esteem affect emerging adults (age range from 18-25 years old), as well? Undergraduate school is a time where students start to experience the working world and build on their independence. There are many factors that contribute to stress during this period of life, schoolwork being one of the biggest factors. Could self-esteem play a role on school performance? Morrison, Thomas, and Weaver (1973) conducted research to see if they could support their hypothesis that college students with low self-esteem would predict getting lower grades on an exam or test than high self-esteem students. They used three different measures: Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI), Ziller Social Self-Esteem scale, and Subscale of the Coopersmith inventory. Morrison et al. (1975) was able to support his hypothesis through the CSEI. Although they were unable to support their hypothesis through the other studies, they still found evidence that supported their hypothesis through one inventory. Morrison et al. (1975) were still unsure if college students with low self-esteem could predict getting lower test scores, but CSEI showed that low self-esteem does predict self-confidence

Another study Leib and Snyder (1967) tested the effects of group discussions on underachievement and self-actualization. Self actualization was defined as someone who is achieving his or her potential and underachievement had been defined as an individual not accomplishing what he or she aspired to do (Leib & Snyder, 1967). In this study, 28 underachieving college students withdrew from a class and participated in a discussion or lecture-based class. The results from changing classroom settings (typical classroom to

discussion group class) showed a rise in grade point averages. Leib and Snyder (1967) believed that special attention rewarded the students and gave them a better understanding of the research and a boost of confidence. This research led me to the hypothesis that students who participated in group lecture had higher self-esteem and earned better grades. This would have lead back to my school performance section of my survey when I asked about study groups and if he or she asked questions in class.

Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, and Chase (2003) looked at the impact of grades on daily self-esteem and how it affected the participant and their confidence level. There were 122 participants in this study and they were all categorized in the major of psychology or engineering. There were three components to this study: self-esteem, affect, and major the participant identified with. All three of these components increased on days students received good grades and decreased on the days they received bad grades (Crocker et al, 2003). For example, if the student received an A on the test, then he or she would feel good about the grades and about themselves, they would feel confident for the next test, and they would feel confident about the major they are in. Perhaps self-esteem and academic competence moderated the effect of bad grades. The researchers of the study did not state that self-esteem affected good grades, but that good grades affected self-esteem. Could there be an opposite effect?

The study that I conducted had to do with finding out if having high self-esteem correlated with better grades. I hypothesized that there was a positive correlation between self-esteem and school performance among emerging adults. The intention of this study was to survey students at Lindenwood University (undergraduate students).

## Method

### Participants

For this research I recruited my participants through the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP) at Lindenwood University. All of the participants were undergraduate students. Students who wanted to receive extra credit for a class chose to participate in a study through LPP. The students knew what classes they could receive extra credit for because of the professor's approval or notification through the LPP. They would receive a receipt showing what study they participated in and what class the extra credit was going towards. The LPP had their own bulletin board on the fourth floor in Young Hall at Lindenwood University where all of the researchers post sign up sheets.

In this research, I had 33 participants ( $n=33$ : 19 women (57.6%) and 14 men (42.4%). The age of the participants ranged from 18-24. The participants were also asked to give their ethnical identity and the results showed 81.8% Caucasian, 9.1% Hispanic, and 9% Other). The participant's G.P.A was also asked to be used as a variable (18.2 % of the students had a 3.0 G.P.A).

### Materials and Procedure

Prior to my study, I found the Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale that was found appropriate and influential to my study. I created the demographic survey and the school performance section of the survey (see Appendix A). To keep the theme of the survey, I made the school performance questions into a scale like the Rosenberg's survey. Once I had all of my materials created and ready for research, I posted my sign up sheet on the bulletin board on the fourth floor in Young Hall. Attached to the sign up sheet was the recruitment description (see Appendix B) which gave a brief insight into what my study was about. On the day of my

research I meet with the participants in a classroom/lab that the LPP assigned for me. The lab/classroom had desks, chairs, and a professor's desk where I was able to keep all my materials organized. I supplied the pencils for the participants.

Once the first participant arrived, I offered him or her a desk and immediately had him/her read the informed consent (see Appendix C). The informed consent stated that the participant was 18 or over, if the participant felt uncomfortable at any time that he or she could leave the study and still receive the extra credit, and if the student had any emotional fall outs after the study that he or she should feel free to speak with one of the counselors on the Lindenwood University campus. I had the participant sign two copies. I had the participant keep one copy and I kept the other one with my files. Once they signed the informed consent, I had them fill out information on the Experimenter's List of Participants sheet.

Once the participant filled the experimenter's list of participants sheet I handed him/her the self-esteem survey (see Appendix A). There were three parts to the survey: the school performance section (which asked the student if they attended any study groups, etc.), the self-esteem section (an example of one of the questions was "I feel I am a person of worth"), and the demographic section (age, ethnicity, G.P.A, sex, and semester completed). Once they were done with the survey, I handed them the feedback later (see Appendix D) which informed the participant about what the study was trying to test and if they have any questions, they should feel free to contact me. The participant also received their participant receipt which they handed to the LPP for extra credit.

### **Results**

Data were entered through a system called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is a statistical analysis that I used to correlate my data. After scoring the positive

and negative self-esteem and the overall school performance, I used bivariate statistics and to find the Pearson correlation coefficient I also used SPSS to find the frequency of all demographic information. The purpose of this study was to find a correlation between positive self-esteem and G.P.A. The end result was weak positive correlation ( $r = .073$ ).

The only significant correlation that I found in my study was between G.P.A ( $M = 3.15$ ;  $SD = .484$ ) and overall school performance ( $M = 10.39$ ;  $SD = 1.89$ ). The results showed the participants who attended study groups and asked questions during class obtained a higher G.P.A, ( $r = .365$ ). This supports the belief that the more you put forth effort in your academic studies, the higher your G.P.A will be.

### **Discussion**

Although there was a weak positive correlation between school performance and self-esteem, research still revealed some very informative material that should be used in later studies. Although there is no correlation between school performance and self-esteem, there is a correlation between school performance and G.P.A. As already stated earlier in this paper, these results showed that active participation in class room discussions and asking questions can relate to your G.P.A in a positive way.

There are many things that I would have liked to do differently and perhaps in the future I will try to extend this research. I would have liked to collect more data. There were 33 participants, but that is a rather small number considering how many students there are at Lindenwood University. I would have liked to have had at least 60 participants so perhaps in the future I can try to collect much more data. Another preference that I may take into consideration is collecting my data from a younger demographic. Once you have reached a certain age, you have become a mature adult who is no longer affected by peer pressure or finding acceptance.

Sixth, seventh, and eight graders are going through a time in their life where they are affected greatly by acceptance, so perhaps I would be able to collect interesting results through the adolescent demographic. One last change I may take into consideration is not focusing so much on whether self-esteem is related to school performance, but if receiving a good grade is related to your self-esteem. There are contributions to self-esteem and perhaps being an amazing student related back to self-esteem. I believe I would find a correlation between those two categories if I just re-word the questions in the survey.

My research did not retrieve the results I expected, but there was still some correlation between certain data. More research needs to be conducted concerning this particular topic. I am sure anyone who is trying to find research concerning the self-esteem of college students or whether being an active student outside of the classroom would find this study very informative.

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## APPENDIX A

### Main Survey

#### Survey

Directions: Please circle the number for each question that best describes your agreement with each statement.

0: Strongly Disagree    1: Somewhat Disagree    2: Agree Somewhat    3: Strongly Agree

1. I am the type of student who attends class regularly.

0    1    2    3

2. I am the type of student who asks questions in class.

0    1    2    3

3. I am the type of student who attends study groups and try to gain as much from the experience as possible.

0    1    2    3

4. While in a new class, I feel optimistic that I will pass the course.

0    1    2    3

5. I usually feel confident that I have done well on a test.

0    1    2    3

6. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal par with others.

0    1    2    3

7. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

0    1    2    3

8. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I'm a failure.

0    1    2    3

9. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

0    1    2    3

Directions: Please circle the number for each question that best describes your agreement with each statement.

0: Strongly Disagree    1: Somewhat Disagree    2: Agree Somewhat    3: Strongly Agree

10. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

0    1    2    3

11. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

0    1    2    3

12. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

0    1    2    3

13. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

0    1    2    3

14. I certainly feel useless at times.

0    1    2    3

15. At times I think that I am no good at all.

0    1    2    3

#### Demographic Information

1. Are you: Male Female

2. What is your age?

3. What is your ethnicity?

4. What is your cumulative G.P.A.?

5. How many semesters have you completed at Lindenwood?

## **APPENDIX B**

### Recruitment Description

#### Description:

In this study, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire asking about your school performance, self-esteem, and simple demographic information about yourself. The entire procedure should take no more than 15 minutes of your time.

#### Sign-Up Schedule

**APPENDIX C**

## Informed Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), understand that I will be taking part in a research project that requires me to complete a short questionnaires asking about my school performance, self-esteem, and simple demographic information about myself. I understand that I should be able to complete this project within 15 minutes. I am aware that I am free to skip any questions in the unlikely event that I feel uncomfortable answering any of the items on any of the surveys. I am also aware that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I should not incur any penalty or prejudice because I cannot complete the study. I understand that the information obtained from my responses will be analyzed only as part of aggregate data and that all identifying information will be absent from the data in order to ensure anonymity. I am also aware that my responses will be kept confidential and that data obtained from this study will only be available for research and educational purposes. I understand that any questions I may have regarding this study shall be answered by the researcher(s) involved to my satisfaction. In the unlikely event that I feel uncomfortable or concerned about the topic of the study, I understand that Lindenwood University offers counseling services that I can turn to. Finally, I verify that I am at least 18 years of age and am legally able to give consent or that I am under the age of 18 but have on file with the LPP office, a completed parental consent form that allows me to give consent as a minor.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of researcher obtaining consent)

Student Researchers' Name and Number:

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## **APPENDIX D**

### Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. The questionnaire was used in order to find a correlation between self-esteem and school performance. Is it possible that people with higher self-esteem do better in school, or does self-esteem have nothing to do with person's academic studies? Those are some of the questions that will be addressed in this study.

Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, I am only interested in the results of a large group of consumers, of which you are now a part of. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to bring them up now or in the future. In the unlikely event that you feel uncomfortable or concerned about the topic of the study, please understand that Lindenwood University offers counseling services that you can turn to. My contact information is found at the bottom of this letter. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of the findings of this study at a later date, please contact me and I will make it available to you at the completion of this project.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

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