

## **A Study of Self-Esteem and Grade Point Average (GPA)**

### **Among College Students**

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*The study examined the possible relationship between self-esteem and grade point average (GPA) held by college students. One hundred forty college students completed a survey, through the Human Subject Pool, as well as at the end of five separate classes, to determine their level of self-esteem as well as to obtain their permission to view their GPA anonymously. Results suggest that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and grade point average*

Some researchers have suggested that how well a student does in school is related to how the students feel about themselves (Saunders, Davis, Williams, & Williams, 2004). This would imply that there is a relationship between a student's self-esteem and their grade point average (GPA). Is it true that self-esteem has a causal impact on academic performance, or is the main causation in the other direction, from higher grades to enhanced self esteem? Possibly the correlation at any one time is mainly coincidental, for both are the result of experience over the course of time (Hoge, Smit, & Crist, 1994). Concerning the possibility of the relationship between self-esteem and GPA, Hoge *et al.* (1994) said a "possibility is that the two are the result of past reciprocal causal influences over a long period of time."

While there are some who believe that the relationship between self-esteem and GPA is weak, if not nonexistent (Hoge *et al.*, 1994), there are others that feel that the

relationship between self-esteem and GPA is quite strong (Saunders, Davis, Williams, & Williams, 2004). Research shows that while it may be weak or strong, a relationship between self-esteem and GPA exists.

Several studies have been done to find a relationship between self-esteem and GPA. Saunders, Davis, Williams, and Williams (2004) studied 243 African American high school sophomores. It was found that there was a strong association between higher GPA and a sense of greater self-efficacy. Hoge, Smit, and Crist (1994) did a longitudinal study of 363 students with questionnaires being given to the students four times – at the beginning and end of both sixth and seventh grade. They found the relationship between self-esteem and GPA to be quite weak. Lane, Lane, and Kyprianou (2004) conducted a repeated measures study investigating the relationships between self-efficacy, self-esteem, previous performance accomplishments, and academic performance with 205 postgraduate students. The students completed a baseline of their self-esteem before a fifteen week course. Their self-esteem and self-efficacy were measured during the course period, and then at the end. It was noted that grade level at the end of the course correlated strongly with perceived academic success and the self-esteem measures. Garzarelli and Lester (1988) conducted a study of a group of 36 male and 43 female students, in the age range of fourteen to seventeen years. They measured three types as self-concepts such as identity, self-satisfaction, and behavior, along with an overall measure of self-esteem. The results showed a significant relationship between self-esteem and GPA, but only for the females. Alves-Martins, Gouveia-Pereira, Amaral, and Pedro (2002) studied 838 students (429 girls and 409 boys) in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade classes with an age range from thirteen to fifteen years of age, with an average age

of fourteen. The study was conducted to find what strategies were pursued in order to protect self-esteem when threatened by a negative evaluation of school competence. The results showed that while there was a relationship between self-esteem and GPA for the seventh grade students, such results were nonexistent for the eighth and ninth grade students. Wiggins and Schatz (1994) conducted a study of students from grades five and six to find a relationship between self-esteem and academic performance. Results showed a strong correlation between self-esteem and grade point average.

The purpose of this study was to find a positive relationship between a student's self-esteem and their GPA. One hundred forty undergraduate students completed a questionnaire relating to self-esteem. Scores from the survey were then matched anonymously with participants' GPA.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 140 undergraduate students attending Lindenwood University. Participants were both males and females of varied races and backgrounds and ranging between the approximate ages of 18-23. Recruiting was done through the Human Subject Pool of Lindenwood University's Psychology department, as well as the researchers classes. Nine participants came from the Human Subject Pool, and 131 participants came from the researchers' classes. As incentive to participate in this study, students from the Human Subject Pool earned bonus points towards their specified classes, while students recruited from classes earned Tootsie Roll Pops. Due to the inability to get information because of students transfer status, illegible identification, duplicate names, or non-consent to release of GPA, only 87 surveys could be used for analysis.

### *Materials*

In addition to the instructions (see Appendix A), two forms (A and B) of a 30 item survey were administered to assess the self-esteem of the participants. Form B contained the same questions as Form A (see Appendix B) in reverse order. Each item on the survey was answered by ranking the statement on a Likert scale of 1-5, 1 indicating “never”, 2 indicating “rarely”, 3 indicating “sometimes”, 4 indicating “frequently”, and 5 indicating “almost always”. An example of a statement from the survey is “I am not able to appreciate my own accomplishment” (see Appendix B). Human Subject Pool participants completed informed consent and feedback forms with their own writing utensil in the library at library tables. Class volunteer participants completed informed consent and feedback forms with their own writing utensil in school classrooms upon school desks. Tootsie Roll Pops were available for the class volunteer participants as incentive to complete the survey.

### *Procedure*

Participants recruited through Human Subject Pool met experimenters at the specified time in the specified room in which they signed up for on the participant sign-up sheet. After all participants were seated and accounted for, the experimenter then handed out the informed consent forms. After participants read, signed and returned these forms to the experimenter, the experimenter passed out the survey. Participants were given Form A or Form B depending on the order they signed up on the sign-up sheet. Participants who signed up on odd numbered lines will receive Form A and participants who signed up on even numbered lines will receive Form B. After all

surveys were completed and collected by the experimenter, feedback letters were given to the participants and participant receipts were signed.

Participants recruited from the researchers' classes met experimenters at the end of the class. After all participants were seated and accounted for, the experimenter then handed out the informed consent forms. After participants read, signed and returned these forms to the experimenter, the experimenter then distributed the survey. Participants were given Form A or Form B depending on the order in which they were seated. After all surveys were completed and collected by the experimenter, feedback letters were given to the participants and participant receipts were signed. Surveys were then scored and then given to the experiment supervisor to be anonymously matched with the participants' grade point average.

### Results

Correlations between self-esteem and the participants' GPA showed that there was a relationship between the participants' self-esteem and their GPA. A significant positive correlation emerged from the people who had high GPA and a high level of self-esteem ( $r = .21, p < .05$ ).

Surveys scores ranged from 30 points representing very low self-esteem up to 150 points representing very high self-esteem. GPA has a range of 0.00 to 4.00. Results indicated that students who scored moderate to high on the self-esteem survey ( $M = 72.61, SD = 15.11$ ) would also have a high GPA ( $M = 3.02, SD = .66$ ).

### Discussion

This study noted the positive correlation between self-esteem and grade point average (GPA) in college students. The results noted that significant differences in GPA

exist between students who had high self-esteem and those who had low self-esteem. This is not to suggest that there is causality between the two in either direction.

Limitations of this study include that the directions given were not clear enough to prevent the loss of information. Out of 140 surveys, only 87 could be used for analysis. Polling several thousand students rather than several hundred would possibly yield a greater significance. Another aspect of the study that could be improved would be the use of a better survey. The survey used contained many questions that were double-barreled.

Further research to find a connection between self-esteem and GPA is recommended. While we could not make any causal assumptions about one variable affecting the other, future research may be able to uncover a causal relationship. This finding could be valuable in assisting students to understand how their view of themselves could affect or be affected by their academic performance.

#### References

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## **Appendix A**

### **Instructions**

DIRECTIONS: Please put your name on the line provided. It will be used to match your GPA to your survey by the faculty advisor and then detached to ensure your anonymity.

For the statements below, circle the rating which is most true of your level of exhibiting these behaviors in your life. Use the following rating scale:

1 = never

2 = rarely

3 = sometimes

4 = frequently

5 = almost always



## Appendix B

### Survey

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

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Survey (J.J. Messina, 1999)

1 = never

2 = rarely

3 = sometimes

4 = frequently

5 = almost always

( 1) 1 2 3 4 5 I seek approval and affirmation from others, and I am afraid of criticism.

( 2) 1 2 3 4 5 I guess at what normal behavior is, and I usually feel as if I am different from other people.

( 3) 1 2 3 4 5 I isolate myself from and am afraid of people in authority roles.

( 4) 1 2 3 4 5 I am not able to appreciate my own accomplishments and good deeds.

( 5) 1 2 3 4 5 I tend to have difficulty following a project through from beginning to end.

- (6) 1 2 3 4 5 I get frightened or stressed when I am in the company of an angry person.
- (7) 1 2 3 4 5 In order to avoid a conflict, I find it easier to lie than tell the truth.
- (8) 1 2 3 4 5 I have problems with my own compulsive behavior, e.g., drinking, drug use, gambling, overeating, smoking, use of sex, shopping, etc.
- (9) 1 2 3 4 5 I judge myself without mercy. I am my own worst critic, and I am harder on myself than I am on others.
- (10) 1 2 3 4 5 I feel more alive in the midst of a crisis, and I am uneasy when my life is going smoothly; I am continually anticipating problems.
- (11) 1 2 3 4 5 I have difficulty having fun. I don't seem to know how to play for fun and relaxation.
- (12) 1 2 3 4 5 I am attracted to others whom I perceive to have been victims, and I develop close relationships with them. In this way I confuse love with pity, and I love people I can pity and rescue.
- (13) 1 2 3 4 5 I need perfection in my life at home and work, and I expect perfection from others in my life.
- (14) 1 2 3 4 5 I seek out novelty, excitement, and the challenge of newness in my life with little concern given to the consequences of such action.
- (15) 1 2 3 4 5 I take myself very seriously, and I view all of my relationships just as seriously.
- (16) 1 2 3 4 5 I have problems developing and maintaining intimate relationships.

- (17) 1 2 3 4 5 I feel guilty when I stand up for myself or take care of my needs first, instead of giving in or taking care of others' needs first.
- (18) 1 2 3 4 5 I seek and/or attract people who have compulsive behaviors (e.g., alcohol, drugs, gambling, food, shopping, sex, smoking, overworking, or seeking excitement.)
- (19) 1 2 3 4 5 I feel responsible for others and find it easier to have concern for others than for myself.
- (20) 1 2 3 4 5 I am loyal to people for whom I care, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved.
- (21) 1 2 3 4 5 I cling to and will do anything to hold on to relationships because I am afraid of being alone and fearful of being abandoned.
- (22) 1 2 3 4 5 I am impulsive and act too quickly, before considering alternative actions or possible consequences.
- (23) 1 2 3 4 5 I have difficulty in being able to feel or to express feelings; I feel out of touch with my feelings.
- (24) 1 2 3 4 5 I mistrust my feelings and the feelings expressed by others.
- (25) 1 2 3 4 5 I isolate myself from other people, and I am initially shy and withdrawn in new social settings.
- (26) 1 2 3 4 5 I feel that I am being taken advantage of by individuals and society in general; I often feel victimized.
- (27) 1 2 3 4 5 I can be overresponsible much of the time, but I can be extremely irresponsible at other times.

(28) 1      2      3      4      5      I feel confused and angry at myself and not in control  
of my environment or my life when the stresses are great.

(29) 1      2      3      4      5      I spend a lot of time and energy rectifying or cleaning  
up my messes and the negative consequences of ill-thought-out or impulsive actions for which I am  
responsible.

(30) 1      2      3      4      5      I deny that my current problems stem from my past life.  
I deny that I have stuffed-in feelings from the past which are impeding my current life.

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL SCORE