
Everett Levison and Jonathan Santo
Department of Critical and Creative Thinking, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182

Abstract

This project utilized a structural approach to explore two developmental components of general self-worth (perceived social competence and perceived physical competence) and how they are associated. The specific objective was to determine the extent to which, if any, a child’s perception of their physical competence moderates the association between their social competence and their general self-esteem. 571 young adolescents (mean age = 11.01 years, SD = 1.24) were recruited from three distinct cultural locations: Baranquilla, Colombia; Curitiba, Brazil; and Montreal, Canada. The children completed a questionnaire which assessed their general self-worth. The data was then analyzed using SPSS. Multivariate analysis of variance revealed that participants’ self-worth related to their social competence and their self-esteem. Specifically, the results showed that children who perceived higher levels of social competence also reported higher levels of self-esteem. This study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between social competence and self-esteem during early adolescence, highlighting the importance of fostering positive perceptions of self in developing a strong sense of self-worth.

Methodology

Participants

- 571 participants (mean age = 11.01 years, SD = 1.24) were recruited from three distinct cultural locations: Baranquilla, Colombia; Curitiba, Brazil; and Montreal, Canada. Respondents attended mixed-sex schools in each country.
- Each participating child was “nested” into a group that included all of his/her classmates who were taking part in the study.
- Females = 56.5%, Males = 43.5%

Procedures

- All measures were translated from English into a language appropriate for each sample by local collaborators. Spanish was provided for the Colombian sample, and Portuguese for the Brazilian sample.
- The original English measures were used for the Canadian students. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. In Canada, parents provided written consent. In Colombia, parents provided either written or verbal consent. In Brazil, school principals provided consent. On the day of data collection, written consent was obtained from the participants. All data were collected at schools during regular class time (60–90 minutes).

Measures

- Participants completed a revised version of the Harter (1982) Perceived Competence Scale for Children, which assessed general self-worth (e.g., I feel good about the way I look), as well as sub-scales: perceived cognitive competence (e.g., I feel that I am very good at school); social competence (e.g., I am popular with others my age), and physical competence (e.g., I do very well at all kinds of sports). The social competence subscale consisted of 8 items (α = .83), the physical competence subscale consisted of 5 items (α = .81), and the cognitive subscale consisted of 3 items (α = .72).

Results

- SPSS was used for the statistical analysis. All the correlation coefficients for the correlation matrix were statistically significant, suggesting that these variables have a significant relationship with each other.
- General self-worth (GSW) was positively correlated with all three predictors: social competence (r = .67, p < .01), physical competence (r = .42, p < .01), and cognitive competence (r = .42, p < .01).
- To test the main effects, general self-worth was regressed on social and physical competence.
- The results supported the first hypothesis and showed a significant positive relationship between the dependent variable (GSW) and the two predictors (social and physical competence).
- Hierarchical multiple regression showed that the final model accounted for an additional increase of the variance in general self-worth from 48% to 54%. Social competence b = .247, SE = .024, F(1, 567) = 17.81, p < .001; physical competence b = .142, SE = .024, F(1, 567) = 5.97, p < .001; and the interaction product b = -.143, SE = .018, F(1, 567) = 7.91, p < .001.
- The results confirm a significant moderating effect of physical competence on the association between social competence and self-worth.
- At low levels of social competence, high physical competence was associated with an increase in general self-worth.

Discussion

The structural approach of this study provided a way to explore whether perceived physical competence may work on self-esteem in more complex and nuanced ways than has been investigated thus far. The moderating effect that physical competence has on the association between social competence and general self-worth is evidence of that complexity. From a clinical standpoint these results support findings that suggest involvement in athletics can have a positive effect on self-esteem, especially in shy children with low social competence. If a child is shy, then improving his or her physical competence through physical activity can work to moderate the effect of shyness on their overall self-esteem. In general, shy adolescents who participate in sports tend to feel better about themselves than shy children who do not. Physical competence (as a component of self-esteem) was previously thought to play a minor role in overall adolescent self-worth. The findings of this study suggest that this may not be the case, and that the potential of physical competence to act as a compensator for low social competence warrants further study.

References