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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 hierarchical multiple regression to determine if perceived physical and social competencies statistically interact with each other in more complex ways than previously assumed, and what those interactions mean for adolescent general self-worth. The analysis results supported two of the project’s three hypotheses. First, as expected, physical, social, and mental competencies were found to have significant and positive association with general self-worth. Second, as expected, there was a significant mediation effect of physical competence on the association between social competence and self-worth. But contrary to expectations, the effect did not vary across gender.

Project Overview

Old or young, rich or poor, liberal or conservative, majority or minority, most people agree that the world we live in is one of drastic and often disruptive change. Likewise, educators, sociologists, and psychologists agree that in an environment of such uncertainty, a strong sense of one's self, one's abilities, one's goals, and one's place in the world are more important than ever. As our digital environment exponentially grows and permeates every aspect of modern life, the increasing number of decisions required by young people today, and the increasing pressure that must accompany these decisions, present levels of identity crises that according to Heine, 2016, are beginning at earlier ages and ending later.

As a result, the 21st century and its rapidly transforming social landscapes demand that education push toward a greater understanding of the cultural and psychological elements involved in adolescent development. Research has already demonstrated that an ability to weather the unique challenges of the digitization of information age is enhanced by the development of a strong self-esteem. Moreover, that low self-esteem in adolescence is a reliable predictor of a problematic adulthood.

Hypotheses

1. That social, physical, and mental competencies will have significant and positive association with general self-worth.
2. That there will also be a significant mediation effect of physical competence on the association between social competence and self-worth.
3. That this effect will vary across gender.

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 (three 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 = 65.6%, Males = 34.4%

Procedures

• All measures were translated from English into a language appropriate for each sample by local collaborators. Spanish 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 written verbal consent. In Brazil, school principals provided consent. On the day of data collection, written assent 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 act), as well as subscales: 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 = .85), 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 analyses. 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 = .47, p < .01).

• To test the main effects, general self-worth was regressed on social and physical competence.

• The result supported the first hypothesis and showed a significant and 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 = .427, SE = .024, t(567) = 17.81, p < .001; physical competence b = .142, SE = .024, t(567) = 5.97, p < .001; and the interaction product b = -.143, SE .018, t(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 have been investigated thus far. The moderation 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 that 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